CONSTRUCTING TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCES THROUGH PROBLEM POSING IN A HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH RESEARCH PROJECT

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This dissertation chronicles my search to engage high school English students in inquiry as part of a formal research process. The perspective of critical literacy theory is used to describe the four phases of the problem posing process in shaping student research and action. Grounded in Freire’s approach and consistent with Dewey and others who advocate inquiry, action and relevance, Wink’s process is built into the instructional plan described in this study. Because of the real-life context of the classroom and the complex social phenomena being considered, a case study methodology was utilized in which multiple sources of data converged to develop the themes. Data sources included the work and artifacts of ten students in a tenth grade English class during the spring semester of 2008. The analysis focuses on the supports, the constraints and the impact of problem posing on the high school research assignment. The analysis, findings, and conclusions contribute to the literature in three areas: audience, reflection and grading.
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We don’t accomplish anything in this world alone ... and whatever happens is the result of the whole tapestry of one’s life and all the weavings of individual threads from one to another that creates something. – Sandra Day O’Conner

As the threads that hold this dissertation were woven together, I felt the helpful and artistic hands of many people assisting in the completion of this tapestry. First, I would like to thank Dr. Mary Harris for being both an honest and supportive major professor. Her steadfast attention to detail in our multitude of drafts, and her faithful belief in my abilities encouraged me to complete this process. I would also like to thank Dr. Gloria Contreras, Dr. Leslie Patterson, and Dr. Ron Wilhelm for serving on my committee. As my minor professor, Dr. Patterson provided the foundation for my studies in literacy, and Dr. Wilhelm showed me, in his research courses, how to capture and interpret various forms of information. I am a better researcher, but I am also a better person because of my experiences with the members of my committee.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Outside the university, we don’t find the subject – it finds us. And the way that the subject finds us is as a problem that needs to be solved. I would say, then, that out there, research is very much problem driven… the research is oriented to solving a problem, and the purpose of the research document is to present the solution to this problem. Thus, the focus is on research, and not the paper (Shook, 1988, p. 5).

With a clear focus on bringing rigor and relevance to the English classroom, teachers expect students to produce work, as described by the International Center for Leadership in Education, in “real-world unpredictable situations” (2006). To make the research paper relevant in the secondary English classroom, teachers include the use of technology to gather and present information (Ballenger, 2007; Guinee & Eagleton, 2006; How to Write a Great Research Paper, 2004; Hunt & Hunt, 2006; Liepolt, 2005), increase the frequency of research in classroom projects (Pfaffinger, 2006), and change the look of the research paper itself by allowing the use of first person and multigenre products (Borsheirm & Petrone, 2006; Dickson, DeGraff, & Foard, 2002; Luther, 2006; Lyman, 2006; Mancina, 2005; Perry, 2003; Styslinger, 2006). However, as Shook explains, students must relate their research to personal experiences, and the topics should be problem driven to be more applicable in the real world because in the real world, research serves a purpose (Shook, 1988).

It was my desire to “create the conditions under which we can develop democratic voices at all levels of schooling so that together we can engage in an active public life” (Shannon, 1993) that first led me to consider the research paper as a potential vehicle for social action. This problem found me in my English classroom, and I pursued it for my students and for myself as a researcher. I enlisted the assistance of
Wink’s problem posing process which encourages teachers to engage their students in problem posing to “[bring] interactive participation and critical inquiry into the established, prescribed curriculum” (Wink, 1997, p. 48).

This dissertation chronicles my search for a way to engage my students in inquiry as they participated in a school-based, formal research process. Using the perspective of critical literacy theory and an instructional plan that follows Wink’s (1997) problem posing process, my students and I embarked on a journey to participate in a meaningful research assignment. As the students sought out problems in their environment to research and eventually pose solutions, I conducted research by collecting and analyzing their work and artifacts to determine what were the supports and constraints to the process and how the process supported their research assignment.

Theory

Critical literacy is a distinct theoretical and pedagogical field focused on “identifying authentic social problems and ways of addressing these problems through language and action” (Knobel, 2007, p. vii). The goal of critical literacy is to “use and teach oppositional discourses so as to remake ourselves and our culture.” In this sense critical literacy is both reflective and reflexive: reflective when the student questions knowledge and reflexive in the reaction of challenging and acting against inequality (Shor, 1997).

According to Shor, critical literacy is the dream of a new society “against the power now in power”(1997, pp. 128-129). Feminist scholar, Rich, defined critical literacy as “language used against fitting unexceptionably into the status quo” (1979, p. 14).
Anderson and Irvine determined that critical literacy is “learning to read and write as part of the process of becoming conscious of one’s experience as historically constructed within specific power relations,” (1993, p. 82) while Aronowitz and Giroux said “critical literacy would make clear the connections between knowledge and power (1985, p. 132). Kfrertovics explained that “Critical literacy… points to providing participants not merely with functional skills, but with the conceptual tools necessary to critique and engage society along with its inequalities and injustices… made practical” (1985, p. 51), and Knobel described critical literacy as “concerned with critiquing relationships among language use, social practice, and power” (Knobel, 2007, p. vii). However the best definition for connecting this field to the problem posing process at the heart of this project is probably the one provided by Ohmann, who called critical literacy “literacy from below,” where participants actively question the status quo and imagine solutions (1996). This is what students are asked to accomplish when they begin with their own experiences and work together to end with an action resulting from earlier phases of problem posing (Wink, 1997).

Research Questions

In problem posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in progress, in transformation” (Freire, 1970, p. 83). In problem posing, the instructional model chosen for this study, actions take place after the problems are named. Students then work toward solutions by moving outside the classroom into the world (Wink, 1997). So problem posing is recursive because it starts with inquiry and ends with actions that often lead to new questions and
new actions, and through language, the students generate new knowledge (Wink, 1997).

The purpose of this study was to develop a case to confirm, refine, or elaborate the supports and constraints to learning and the possible learning of the participants in this single case study as they worked through Wink’s (1997) problem posing process that was embedded in their research assignment. The research question for this study were *What were the supports and constraints to problem posing as evidenced by the work and interviews of my students participating in this secondary research project? And What did the work of participants suggest that they learned from this experience?*

To answer these questions, data were analyzed using the following guiding questions:

1. What elements supported the problem posing process as evidenced by the work and interviews of my students participating in this secondary research project?

2. What elements were constraints to the problem posing process as evidenced by the work and interviews of my students in this secondary research project?

3. What did students learn as evidenced by their work and interviews in this secondary research project in which the critical problem posing process was utilized?

These questions were used to frame the analysis and develop the themes in the data for the analysis, findings, conclusions and recommendations.

**Methodology**

Because of the real-life context of the classroom and the complex social phenomena being considered, this study lent itself well to a case study. According to Yin (1994), a case study is a comprehensive research strategy that incorporates data collection and data analysis that move beyond a systematic design for conducting
research. For this study, the single case study design was chosen to “determine whether a theory’s propositions [were] correct” (Yin, 1994, p. 13). In addition, a case study protocol was designed to define procedures for the study.

Because of the case study approach, the use of multiple sources of data that converge to develop the themes was important for improving the quality of the study. Fortunately, case studies often contain a variety of evidence that is not present in other strategies. An important advantage was the “[development] of converging lines of inquiry, a process of triangulation … Thus any finding or conclusion in a case study [was] more likely to be much more convincing and accurate if it [were] based on several different sources of information” (1994, p. 92). In this study, triangulation was accomplished by tapping a variety of data sources that corroborated the same theory. This study included data from multiple sources including: participant journals, participant writing, participant projects, participant reflections, participant interviews, class instructions, lessons, and teacher notes.

Definition of Terms

A list of terms and their definitions as the words pertain to this study was developed to improve the understanding of this study.

- Authentic audience: Different from an audience that can be a classmate or the teacher, an authentic audience is the real world recipient of the action in the problem posing process. The authentic audience is selected by the participant as a person or group that could influence a change that could improve or solve the problem identified.
- **Constraint**: Used in the second guiding question, it is identified with a cause of restraint or an identified area for improvement in participant work.

- **Naming**: “[N]aming is talking honestly and openly about one’s experiences with power and without power. … Naming is when we articulate a thought that traditionally has not been discussed by the minority group, or the majority group. Naming takes place when the nondominant group tells the dominant group exactly what the nondominant group thinks and feels about specific social practices. To name is to take apart the complex relationships of ‘more’ and ‘less’ between the two groups” (Wink, 1997, p. 53).

- **Participants**: The students in this study who both acquired a parent consent form and completed a student consent form to participate in this study.

- **Problem posing**: A process in which students have the opportunity to analyze their environment critically and address identified problems through inquiry and action. In this study, a specific problem posing process, developed by Wink (1997) is utilized.

- **Praxis**: The practice of theory in a practical setting and the results of the practice on theory. In this study, the practice of the theory of critical literacy is achieved by using the phases of problem posing while teaching the student research assignment. According to Wink, “Praxis is the constant reciprocity of our theory and our practice. Theory building and critical reflection inform our practice and our action, and our practice and action inform our theory building and critical reflection” (Wink, 1997, p. 48).
- **Research**: To help prevent the confusing use of the word *research* used to represent the research done by the principal investigator in comparison with the word *research* completed by my students as they proceed through the phases of problem posing, the use of a descriptive adjective(s) occurs when there is questionable text. The research of the students is referred to as student research, secondary research, or high school research depending on the requirements of the text. When *research* is used as a verb, care is taken to identify the researcher.

- **Reflection**: The act of reconsidering an experience for the purpose of connecting learning to the world beyond the classroom, reviewing a change in beliefs, or modifying a process for better results on the next attempt.

- **Secondary**: Traditionally used to represent students in grades six through twelve, in this study, secondary specifically refers to students in high school, grades nine through twelve. The more specific use of the term *high school* is also utilized in this document.

- **Student**: Used as a noun, this signifies students in a general sense, not the students in this study who are referred to instead as participants. Used as an adjective, it describes work created by students, such as student research.

- **Support**: Used in the first guiding question, it is identified with a cause of success in participant work.

- **Transformation**: The goal for the students in this study was that they experience a personal change as they saw that their social actions could change the world.
Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

There are several limitations on the generalizations that can be made from the findings in this study. The participants for this study were the students in my tenth grade class that returned the signed consent form \( n=10 \), and the experience of this study was bound by their unique characteristics. The use of a case study methodology and the sample size indicate that the analysis, findings, and conclusions contribute to the literature of critical literacy theory but cannot be generalized to other settings. Current events and the personal experiences of the participants influenced the problems they chose and their interactions with the research in unique ways. Although this produced variety that cannot be replicated, the process that the participants followed and their interactions with the chosen subjects and audiences revealed themes that are reported in Chapter 4.

Also, this study was conducted in my classroom. The benefits of this site, where I am a teacher, included accessibility and the established rapport with the campus administration. The arrangement was suitable for me because the close proximity reduced the amount of time needed to build relationships and to travel. Glesne called this type of situation “backyard research” (2006). A teacher doing research in her own class with the goal of improving the experience of students is productive because this becomes a type of personal knowledge that improves a teacher’s performance, but Glesne warned of potential ethical and political dilemmas (2006). She encouraged care in understanding the parties that have a vested interest in the topic being researched (Glesne, 2006). A political dilemma in this study was that the English department at this school had a vested interest in the assignments they had previously developed and may
have perceived instructional deviation as a threat to the school’s curriculum. Care and effort were made to assure that the students participating in this study fulfilled all of the preexisting curricular requirements for the research unit used in the other teachers’ classes by what seemed to be common agreement. Care was also taken to have a similar number of grades and similar grading standards to those employed by other teachers. These considerations were embedded into the instructional design.

Since my primary role in this study’s setting was classroom teacher, there was a barrier to collecting field notes from observations. My goal was not compromise instruction for data collection, so the methodology used information collected from student work as the primary source of data. Care was taken to assure that all student artifacts were copied, collected, photographed, and recorded. Each of these artifacts was converted, if possible, to a digital format by having the participants email their work or through transcription. The digital copies were maintained in a case study database.

This led to another possible limitation of this study, the fact that the participants were aware that their work would be evaluated for this study because of the signed consent forms. This may have had the effect of improved performance with participants who understood that their work would be considered by a larger audience. However, the expectation of an authentic audience was an element of the problem posing process used in this study, so in some ways this limitation was addressed by the methodology of the study. However, as the participants came to realize that this study is the product of their own teacher’s dissertation, it is unrealistic to expect that they were not more careful with their work. Though a limitation to the study, this also acts, as described by Miles and Huberman, as an opportunity for the participants to “act on the world instead
of being acted on” (1994, p. 9), so from this perspective it offers both challenges and benefits.

Researcher Assumptions

As a researcher and participant in the classroom, I brought several assumptions to this study. One starting assumption was that my value was centered on my role as the teacher of all eighteen students in the classroom. Therefore, my first obligation was to provide the best learning environment possible for my students. I was concerned equally for those represented in the study and those who were not participants. Although the lessons taught during the unit were written to highlight the problem posing process, I would not have included any step of this instructional plan if I had not believe that it would be a successful strategy for supporting student learning.

With this in mind, as a teacher, I had to assume that the problem posing process itself would improve student engagement with research skills. I believed that when the students had authentic opportunities to choose their topics and address a real audience, as required by the problem posing process, they would have a successful learning experience. I assumed that the students would all choose good topics and complete each step as I supported their learning in the classroom with a clear instructional plan and with my support as a classroom facilitator.

In addition, I had some trepidation about completing this research in my own classroom. I assumed that by departing from the unit plan for my grade level provided by the tenth grade team leader, I would jeopardize the support of my department and have to defend my decision to diverge from the prescribed curriculum if challenged by a
parent or colleague. I was concerned about not being viewed as a team player.
Although the series of lessons that I rejected were created before I came to the school, I
understood that they were viewed as the standard curriculum. For the study, I tried to
assume an instructional stance that placed problem posing leading to social action on a
par with the established curriculum.

Significance of the Study

The analysis, findings, and conclusions of this study contribute to the literature of
critical literacy a description of the problem posing process framework used to guide the
research process in a secondary setting. There is limited research on the secondary
research paper (Ballenger, 1992), so the data collected and analyzed in this study
provide a unique glimpse into the participation of students in a research process, guided
by problem posing. This study also casts the topic in a theoretical framework that is
attractive to other English teachers (Boomer, 2000; Borsheirm & Petrone, 2006;
Caillouet, 2006; Christensen, 2000; Derrico, 2006; Fairbanks, 1989; Kaszyca &
Krueger, 1994; Luther, 2006; Mancina, 2005; McColley et al., 1988; Pegram, 2006;
Ruggieri, 2007; Shafer, 1999; Steineke, 2002; Williams, 1993). The results have some
potential for finding an audience in the English and language arts field as it contributes
to the literature of teachers working in the classroom as a case study of practice. The
classroom studies of teachers working in their classrooms are valued to the
practitioners in the English and language arts field (Burke, 2003; Gallagher, 2006; Jago
& Gardner, 1999; Steineke, 2002; Wilhelm, 2007).
Structure of the Report

The next four chapters address the literature that informed the study, the research and instructional methodology employed, the findings, and the conclusions and recommendations. The literature review begins with an introduction to the high school research paper and is followed by a section on problem posing praxis that connects the work of the high school research paper to critical literacy theory. Chapter 3, Methodology, is divided into two major sections. The first section describes the application of the methodology chosen for this study, and the second section lays out the instructional plan for implementing the problem posing process in the classroom. Next, Chapter 4, Findings begins with an introduction of the participants followed by an analysis organized around the three guiding questions that framed this study. The final chapter, Conclusions and Recommendations is divided into three parts. The first part shares the summary of the findings from the analysis, the second part shares the conclusions drawn from the analysis, and the recommendations are made in the final section of the chapter.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter presents literature whose topics fit like nesting dolls into a wider and interconnected body of literature and theory. It begins with the “Introduction to the High School Research Paper,” a review of literature on the high school research paper with a focus on student research as social action and its implications for the research assignment. The chapter then situates the body of literature about student research into a section called “Student Research and Problem Posing Praxis” where the literature concerning problem posing and praxis as understood in Freirean and Deweyan contexts and by more modern theorists is shared. The discussion of problem posing praxis is then set within a review of critical literacy theory in the final section of the chapter titled “Critical Literacy Theory.”

Introduction to the High School Research Paper

Ballenger (1992) traced the history of the research paper as an assignment to the American Civil War period. Before the Civil War, colleges were small and attended by the upper class. Professors were religious leaders instead of specialists, and oral rhetoric was preferred over writing. However, after the Civil War the enrollment in colleges increased, and the American schools followed the German model of professors who were specialists and researchers in a specific field. This led to the development of departments in the colleges and to the increase of the assignment of the German
research report, complete with footnotes. With an objective and neutral tone, the research paper became the standard for demonstration of knowledge among university professors, then undergraduate students, and eventually, high school students (1992).

The research assignment first appeared in freshman composition books in the 1920s as an expository essay requiring note cards and library references. By the 1930s the assignment had its own chapter in textbooks, which reflected elements of a progressive educational approach by addressing utilitarian needs such as interviewing and occupation surveys (Ballenger, 1992).

Ballenger discovered what he described as “a bibliography of over 200 articles on teaching the research paper published between 1923 and 1980. Its compilers noted that while the vast majority explored various approaches to teaching [a research paper], ‘few were theoretical in nature or based on research, and almost none cited even one other work on the subject’” (1992, p. 4; Ford, 1982, p. 84). His own survey of literature since 1980 suggested that little had changed since then (Ballenger, 1992). Ford (1982), reflecting on the 1980s bibliography, concluded that there was a need for experts in the field of research. Ballenger challenged English teachers to confront the problems found in the student research assignment, including the common complaint that the instructors seem more concerned about citation than content. He also sympathized with the plight of English departments which are expected to teach the skills of conducting research for all of the other departments in the institution (Ballenger, 1992).

Valuing the importance of teaching research, Ballenger called on his colleagues to consider the selection of student generated topics and audiences as occasions for encouraging students to produce better research papers. Ballenger determined that “the
confusion about the objective and subjective is one of the reasons research papers are such a [problem]... It ignores the reason why someone would want to research anything in the first place: curiosity” (Ballenger, 1992, p. 11). Reminiscent of Dewey (1938), Ballenger (1992) saw that the best way to teach research essays was to connect education to personal experiences by encouraging students to look for research topics that make a difference in their lives.

Students who discover that research, and the ideas it generates, can make a difference in their lives will have learned why most people do it in the first place: to examine things that matter to people. Students are obviously most likely to see the worth of research if they ask questions that grow from their own experience. And they’ll also discover that it can change their minds about what they’ve seen or will see, a process that grafts new opinions on the old. (pp. 20 -21)

The benefits of successfully completing English research essays include meeting the demand of an extended essay, the understanding of library skills, the ability to collect information on a topic, and the opportunity for students to write on topics outside themselves (Ballenger, 1992). As Dewey explained, the research process is “a prolonged interaction of something issuing from the self with objective conditions, a process in which both of them acquire a form and order they did not at first possess” (1938, p. 65). Participating in research supports student learning when students make a meaningful connection (Shook, 1988).

Coexisting with the goal of providing a meaningful research assignment for student researchers, English teachers are pressured by other departments to teach the skills of the research paper with an emphasis on finding relevant sources, embedding them into papers, and including correct citations and bibliographies (Ballenger, 1992). Ballenger explained that emphasis on form is the reason why many English teachers value format over content (1992). A format driven emphasis in grading posits the
teacher as subject and student as object, so Shor suggested “narrative grading rather than only number or letter grades, to encourage serious dialogue between student and teacher about the quality of the work” (1992, p. 132). However, Shor recognized the challenges of working in a school system that is centered on textbooks, standardized tests, and a numeric grading system. He explained that “these traditional practices restrict student-centered, dialogic, and participatory education” (p. 144). Elbow (2000) explained that grades actually “undermine” the learning in the following ways:

- They lead many students to work more for the sake of the grade than for learning.
- They lead to an adversarial atmosphere; students often resent or even fight us about grades; many students no longer feel the teacher as ally in the learning process and try to hide what they don’t understand.
- They lead to a competitive atmosphere among students themselves. (p. 400)

Elbow added that the use of numeric grades is “untrustworthy” as “descriptors for complex human performances” (p. 407). Instead he suggested using criteria because “it helps students to engage in valid and productive self-evaluation…and it makes grades more informative and useful” (pp. 714-715). As relevant grading strategies inform the process, social action provides meaning to the research assignment.

*Student Research for Social Action*

Literature on the student research paper acknowledged that providing a critical purpose for student researchers makes the assignment meaningful. According to Shor, “the critical-democratic teacher invites and expects students to do research” (1992, p. 169). Shor proposed the research assignment be designed as a vehicle for social change instead of following the traditional approach that utilizes a teacher selected topic.
often tending, as Giroux (1997) explained, to disconnect students from their personal environments and experiences. According to Shafer (1999), this disconnect between school assignments and the students’ personal lives and experiences

... comes from writing assignments that fail to value the lives, cultures, and interests of the writers. Traditional research tends to subordinate these issues to lofty topics like ‘gun control,’ or ‘capital punishment,’ while the crime and domestic chaos in the writer’s community are curiously ignored. (p. 46)

Often ignored as well are the research skills that students bring to the classroom from their personal lives. This can be developed into what Ruggieri (2007) called information literacy. When the students are information literate, they have the ability to “[identify] potential sources of information, [evaluate] and [organize] the information for practical application, and [use] the information in critical thinking and problem solving” (Coleman, 1994, p. 16). Information literate citizens are lifelong learners who have the ability to use these skills to “meet job related and personal needs” (p. 17). In 1992, the English Journal shared exercises to involve students in their civic responsibilities to combat the perception of “apathy and passivity among adolescents... with present involvement” (“Research with a Purpose,” 1992, p. 59).

In a pedagogy of social action, teachers engage their students with their subject in a meaningful way, meeting the needs of their self-discovered topic by developing proposals for solutions and implementation (Shafer, 1999; Slack, 2001; Williams, 1993). Students need a reason to research (Shafer, 1999; Slack, 2001; Williams, 1993) and an opportunity to interact with the community for social reasons (Ballenger, 1992; Shook, 1988). In social-action research assignments, students are encouraged to find their research topics in their own communities (Shor, 1992). In the United Kingdom, a
program called Six Approaches to Post 16 Citizenship (2007) has developed a curriculum for teachers and students to engage in citizenship research projects [that] are about having a positive effect on the quality of people’s lives. They are about seeking improvements, both for the individual and for public and political reasons. …It is especially important that citizenship research involves action of some kind, with the aim of bringing about change for the better. (p. 7).

This program encourages research assignments that both engage the students as citizens and involves them in problem-solving that results in action. Social action provides a purpose for completing student research. There are also benefits for completing research including the increased ability to work with the chaos of real-world problems.

*Student Research for Form Finding and Form Creating*

The challenge and work of the research assignment prepares students for the unique and ambiguous challenges in life. Berthoff (1982) encouraged embracing variety in instructional goals when she explained, “What we need to learn to teach are the uses of chaos and the delights of form finding and form creating”(p. ix). Her position was that students lived in a world of ambiguity, and the teachers provide the students an opportunity to recognize this and apply it to their work in the classroom. The student “plunges into an assignment, uses all of his resources, makes errors where he must, and heeds the feedback” (Moffett, 1983, p. 199).

Cognitively speaking, a research assignment may be the most challenging assignment given to the students each year (Wirtz, 2006). A task is cognitively complex when it is not a routine task and requires two or more cognitive functions that are not
automatically performed (Marzano, 1991). To approach this challenge, students are invited to embrace the chaos of the assignment to compose their products. The word “composing,” conveys the idea of putting things together. Just as a musician puts together music for an orchestra, just as an artist puts together colors and brush strokes to create a masterpiece, so too an author puts together ideas in complementary and contrasting ways to compose a piece of writing. For Berthoff (1982), “making sense of the world is composing” (p. 10) and for the writer, composing requires “the mutual dependence of language and thought, all the ways in which a word finds a thought and a thought, a word” (p. 48). Motivation and relevance improve writing because authors write better when they write their reality, and “Skills are learned – really learned – only when there is a reason to learn them” (Berthoff, 1981, p. 28). Moffett (1983) supports this by saying that a student will “get interested in the subject to the extent that he can make it relevant to his current needs” (p. 7). With an interesting play on words, Berthoff (1990) called for writers to consider “thinking about thinking, for interpreting interpretations, for knowing… knowledge” (p. 9). This metacognitive focus requires students to write to a variety of forms, to express a range of emotions, and to explain the chaos. Indeed, writing “produces an external result, [so] it is a natural testing instrument” (Moffett, 1988, p. 32). Reading and writing are communicative devices, “at once personal and social activities: we can no more separate the individual and the general aspects of meaning making” (Berthoff, 1990, p. 108). This description of the imaginative classroom is in sharp contrast with the “reduced learning and living [in] quantifiable components devoid of the aesthetic and narrative” (Pinar, 1998, p. 5). The
next section of this chapter introduces problem posing praxis as an approach to transformation of the research assignment.

Student Research and Problem Posing Praxis

The personal and social activities of students provide engaging topics for their research. Shor (1992), a composition and rhetoric professor who collaborated with Freire on the topic of critical pedagogy, argued that it is important for school teachers to interact with students on research projects organized around student culture and learning because the more “students research knowledge and their conditions, the more developmental the class can become” (p. 171). Indeed, Shor encouraged “Freire-based programs” such as problem posing because it would help “the curriculum avoid becoming teacher-centered or academically abstract” (p. 171). Christensen (2000), an English teacher and author of several books on critical literacy, shared that students should be working with large social issues that are personally meaningful. Boomer (2000) argued that teachers either help students to find the social action topics in their daily lives, or we do not help students find these issues. A decision to ignore social issues is a decision not to engage. Such a decision represents a rejection of the students’ need to work with these issues.

The next three sections of this paper summarize the literature on three areas of praxis. The first section explains the what of problem posing praxis. The second section,” The Praxis of Critical Literacy”, offers the why of problem posing praxis, and the third section, “The Third Idiom”, describes a goal of problem posing praxis.
The Problem Posing Praxis

Problem posing, developed by Freire for adult literacy and by Dewey in progressive education, is a method of communication that leads to social interaction. The teacher begins by listening to the students to determine their concerns. This is followed by a directed code or prompt, so the students may look objectively at their own experiences and concerns on a specific topic (Freeman & Freeman, 1992; Roberts, 2000; Shor, 1992). Problem posing “responds to the essence of consciousness – intentionality – rejects communiqués and embodies communication. It epitomizes the special characteristic of consciousness: being conscious of, not only as intent on objects but as turned in upon itself... consciousness as consciousness of consciousness” (Freire, 1970, p. 79).

“In problem posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in progress, in transformation” (Freire, 1970, p. 83). Therefore education is remade through the practice of applying this problem posing process with the students with the explicit goal of helping students to recognize the world as dynamic instead of static, so students may have transformative experiences. Educational praxis cannot serve an oppressive society because oppressive groups could never allow students to use the word why (Freire, 1970). Wink (1997) agreed stating, “Problem posing causes people to ask questions many do not want to hear” (p. 48). Moreover “it considers the social and cultural context of education” (Shor, 1992, p. 31). So the goal of the problem posing teacher is “to diversify subject matter and to use students’ thought and speech as the base for
developing critical understanding of personal experience, unequal conditions in society and existing knowledge” (pp. 32-33).

In addition, problem posing encourages the asking of questions that leads to the revelation of the hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum is rarely grounded in a traditional syllabus or established curriculum because it requires the interactive relationship between the students and their environment (Wink, 1997). An important tenet of progressive education is the use of purpose to guide instruction. To gain a purpose, Dewey (1915) suggested: (a) observe the surroundings; (b) have an understanding/knowledge of recent history, and (b) use judgment to put together the pieces of what was observed and understand what it signifies.

To clarify the goals and objectives of problem posing for teachers, Freeman and Freeman (1992) developed a codification model with six phases to clarify problem posing for teachers:

- Code the whole story, picture, or film.
- The code is based on the learners’ lives.
- Learners identify and solve real-life problems.
- The goal is literacy for the learners.
- The goal is for teachers and students to empower themselves.

From this model, Wink (1997), an associate professor of education at California State University and a former Spanish and reading teacher, developed a four phase model for problem posing that reflects her position that “problem posing always ends in action” (p. 109). In her book, Critical Pedagogy: Notes from the Real World, Wink sought to “provide access to the theory and practice of critical pedagogy” (p. xvi). She encouraged teachers to engage their students in problem posing to “[bring] interactive participation
and critical inquiry into the established, prescribed curriculum” (p. 48). These four
phases, grounded in Freire’s (1970) problem posing and Freeman and Freeman’s
(1992) codification model, are presented here and are elaborated in chapter 3.

Figure 1. The problem posing process.
(Wink, 1997, pp. 108 - 109)
Wink’s model is closely linked with Freire’s (1970) problem posing. In Pedagogy of the
Oppressed, Freire described problem posing as a three step process. First the learners
would name the problem, and then would reflect critically before acting on the problem.
Freire’s process is diagramed here in a parallel structure with Wink’s for comparative
purposes.

Figure 2. Freire’s problem posing.
(Wink, 1997, p. 129)
Freire supported problem posing by calling on education to include the
opportunity for action. Following these phases, students observe and analyze their
world, and through their actions they become educated (Ardizzone, 2007). Students
recognize problems related to themselves “in the world and with the world” (Freire,
1970, p. 81), and they naturally want to address the problems in their context with the authentic complexity and chaos found in real problems instead of isolated simplicity. Because of these complexities, one problem leads to the next and students find themselves committed to working through the problems.

Wink (1997) also developed models of transformative pedagogy, critical literacy, and critical pedagogy. Figure 3 shows Wink’s model of transformative pedagogy. This model closely resembles her problem posing process.

![Figure 3. Transformative pedagogy.](pp. 122-123)

In problem posing, the model chosen for this study, actions take place after the problems are named. Students then work toward solutions by moving outside the classroom into the world. Wink (1997) suggested that these actions may take the form of a “letter to the editor, governor, legislators, or presidents; cleaning up a community;
beginning an environmental, social, cultural, or political action group” (p. 109). So problem posing is recursive because it starts with inquiry and ends with actions that often lead to new questions and new actions, and through language the students generate new knowledge.

**Praxis in Critical Literacy**

To bring praxis into the classroom, students act on their environment, reflect on it, and plan for transformation (Mayo, 1955). So, praxis exists between theory and practice and is the heart of Freire’s conception of critical literacy (Mayo, 1955). In this sense, the practice of critical literacy occurs in a classroom where students become critically thinking citizens by questioning knowledge, experience, and the impact of power relationships in society. Here the use of language is examined and analyzed beyond usage and mechanics. Instead of the unnatural use of language in repetitive lessons, students are led to struggle, to understand, and to learn the language of their birth (Freeman & Freeman, 1992). The language of praxis supports the “real desire to communicate vital impressions and conviction” (Shor, 1997, ¶ 25) by “[looking] again and [seeing] in new ways” (Wink, 1997, p. xv).

According to Shor (1997), using critical literacy in a classroom includes risks. Because the student occupies the center of the educational experience the results are unpredictable. A critical teacher expects breakthroughs or resistance because “All participants in a critical process become redeveloped as democratic agents and social critics” (Shor, 1997, ¶ 30) as they engage in a reflective and reflexive process. The social practice of language use in education is examined and then the insights are used
to study critically all social practices. This helps the student connect educational experiences and observations to those in society and vice versa.

In addition to preparing for these risks, the teachers need to plan to provide time for students to think (Krashen, 2001; Wink, 1997), and unfortunately, from the perspective of those who value accountability above other educational goals, the results of thinking are not always clear and measurable. It even appears that nothing is being done (Wink, 1997). Thinking is encouraged through critical reflection and is observed in the actions taken by the students. This leads to conscientization (Freire, 1970). Conscientization is “a power we have when we recognize we know what we know” (Wink, 1997, p. 26). As conscientization develops in students with time to think, students and communities gain a voice to question themselves and society (Freire, 1970; Wink, 1997). For a critical teacher, theory and practice have a reciprocal relationship, so theory reflects the practice in the classroom, and the classroom practice informs theory building (Wink, 1997).

The act of reflection is an essential phase in transformative pedagogy. Reflection serves two major purposes. It gives the students time to think and it creates patterns and connections for students between what they are learning and the world beyond the classroom (Wink, 1997). Reflections are accomplished either independently or with a group. When students reflect, they learn on a transitional level “[reflecting] on reality and on our received values, words, and interpretations in ways that illuminate meanings we hadn’t perceived before. This reflection can transform our thought and behavior, which in turn have the power to alter reality itself” (Shor, 1992, p. 22). Reflection allows students to be aware of their participation, not as a “consumption of ideas but rather a
product of action” (Freire, 1970; Hasbrook, 2002). It is important to give students an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of their learning because “human beings are capable of overcoming limits if they can openly examine them” (Shor, 1992, p. 23). Moreover, according to Hasbrook (2002), the reflective process allows students the opportunity to “equitably [re-position] one’s relationship with others.” Hasbrook included three possibilities for improving reflection in a problem posing praxis.

1. [Take] steps to connect students with the community.
2. [Follow] students’ initiative on issues of their concern.
3. [Harness] reflective writing toward a publication that resembles the product of action envisioned by Freire. (pp. 3-8)

The Third Idiom

In praxis, critical teaching may start with student generated themes. When this teaching includes students connecting the familiar to the unfamiliar between the local and the global, this discourse, called the third idiom by Shor, is “invented anew in each classroom, situated in the students’ language and developmental levels, in the specific subject matter, and the political climate of the school” (1992, p. 256). As shown in Figure 4, the progression of the third idiom moves from the student generated theme, to unfamiliar reflection, and then to unfamiliar connection of the local to the global. Starting narrow it broadens as the students moved through the process.
Through this process, students come to speak in their own voices about their own concrete experiences, and the teacher uses colloquial language instead of academic language to help students overcome their reluctance to participate in genuine dialogue. This transforms both the discourses of the teacher and the student to a new type of discourse, the third idiom, and in the dialogue the students are able to move from the concrete to the critical. The teacher and student transactions in the classroom are equal, giving the same value to each. Social and intellectual empowerment evolves, replacing teacher talk and student silence (Shor, 1992). Shor summarized, “In the third idiom, traditional knowledge becomes what it has always been, a historical product reflecting inequality and needing critical perspectives and multicultural reconstruction” (p.257).

The next section of Chapter 2 includes the literature support from critical literacy theory. This section begins with a general review of critical literacy followed by a historical section that recognizes the contributions of critical literacy theorists. This
Critical Literacy Theory

Literacy itself comes in many forms: functional, academic, constructive, emergent, cultural, and critical. Functional literacy includes the common language needed to participate in daily life. Academic literacy is language used in schools and universities. When literacy is described as emergent, it is often preschool and early childhood teachers talking about the literacies of students before they learn to decode words and read. Cultural literacy is the language that is from the perspective of the dominant culture (Shor, 1997). Lastly, critical literacy as described earlier helps to develop a complex understanding of the word and the world (Freire, 1970). It is through literacies that we understand our world, and through critical literacy, students and teachers interact with the world through experience and observation naming and reflecting what they know and what they see. This enables students to understand the construction of power. So, literacy in a traditional sense is reading the word, decoding, whereas critical literacy invites the reader to read the world and learn to understand the messages found in social, cultural, political and historical contexts (Wink, 1997).

Critical literacy is a distinct theoretical and pedagogical field focused on “identifying authentic social problems and ways of addressing these problems through language and action” (Knobel, 2007, p. vii). The goal of critical literacy is to “use and teach oppositional discourses so as to remake ourselves and our culture” (Shor, 1997, ¶3). In this sense critical literacy is both reflective and reflexive: reflective when the
student questions knowledge and reflexive in the reaction of challenging and acting against inequality (Shor, 1997).

According to Shor (1997), critical literacy is the dream of a new society “against the power now in power” (pp. 128-129). Feminist scholar, Rich, defined critical literacy as “language used against fitting unexceptionably into the status quo” (1979, p. 14).

Anderson and Irvine (1993) determined that critical literacy is “learning to read and write as part of the process of becoming conscious of one’s experience as historically constructed within specific power relations,” (p. 82) while Aronowitz and Giroux (1985) said “critical literacy would make clear the connections between knowledge and power (p. 132). Kfrertovics (1985) explained that “Critical literacy… points to providing participants not merely with functional skills, but with the conceptual tools necessary to critique and engage society along with its inequalities and injustices… made practical” (p. 51), and Knobel (2007) described critical literacy as “concerned with critiquing relationships among language use, social practice, and power” (p. vii). However the best definition for connecting this field to problem posing praxis is probably the one provided by Ohmann (1996), who called critical literacy “literacy from below,” (p. 54) where participants actively question the status quo and imagine solutions because this is what the students are asked to accomplish when they begin with their own experiences and work together to end with an action phase in problem posing (Wink, 1997).

Critical literacy as a term is recent. Shor and Kretovics used it in the 1980s, but it wasn’t printed in a book until the 1993 publication of Lankshear and MacLaren’s Critical Literacy: Politics, Praxis and the Postmodern (Knobel, 2007). Though not the theme of
this dissertation, it is also important to recognize that an important theme in critical literacy includes attention to language learners in a pluralistic society and the importance of providing students the opportunity to learn in their own language (Wink, 1997).

**Important People in Critical Literacy**

Both Dewey and Freire believed that progressive education was a more humane educational experience than traditional educational experiences, and individual purpose and direction served as one of the most important tenets of progressive education (Ardizzone, 2007; Dewey, 1902; Freire, 1970). Additional voices that influenced the development of this theory include Vygotsky who emphasized the “fundamental importance of context and culture on language and learning” (Vygotsky, 1962; Wink, 1997, p. 81). Vygotsky’s connection to critical literacy includes the significance of context, the zone of proximal development in context, and the connection between thoughts and the use of language in context (Vygotsky, 1962; Wink, 1997).

Critical literacy is also influenced by Krashen who developed the Idea Generator based on cognitive psychology. This five stage model describes thinking and the generation of new ideas.

1. Gather information
2. Prepare ideas
3. Incubate
4. Illuminate

This can be compare to Freire’s guideline for learning critically.
Krashen’s five steps are present in the first two steps of Freire’s guideline for learning critically. However, Freire continued to include action as a final step. Freire’s and Dewey’s contributions to critical literacy were significant. The next two sections will consider each of these theorists and their individual connections to critical literacy theory and the instructional use of problem posing.

**Dewey and the Progressive Movement**

“There is all the difference in the world between having something to say and having to say something” (Dewey, 1915, p. 35). Critical literacy was grounded in the work of John Dewey and the Progressive Movement, and theorists were heavily influenced by Dewey’s belief that educational experiences should be purposeful, not contrived.

There is, I think, no point in the philosophy of progressive education which is sounder than its emphasis upon the importance of the participation of the learner in the formation of the purposes which direct his activities in the learning process, just as there is no defect in traditional education greater than its failure to secure the active cooperation of the pupil in construction of purposes involved in his studying. (1938, p. 67).

Dewey (1938) described traditional schooling as transmitting knowledge and skills that are previously developed by experts of the past but not connected to the current lives of the students. Instead, Dewey proposed a scientific curriculum where students’ research and experiment with what was close at hand and readily available instead of beginning with the abstract, distant, and academic materials framed in teacher discourse.
According to Dewey (1915), thinking and reflection do not occur without a purpose. “A person who has gained the power of reflective attention, the power to hold problems, questions, before the mind is in so far, intellectually speaking, educated” (p. 93). When thinking occurs, it happens to meet a difficulty, to solve a problem, or to plan a project. Following a problem solving method, as described previously, leads to a more logical and clearly thought-out solution than speculating with abstract or random thoughts.

Dewey described the disconnected, unauthentic instructional practice as “forever tasting and never eating; always having his palate tickled upon the emotional side, but never getting the organic satisfaction that comes only with digestion of food and transformation of it into working power” (1902, p. 112). The better alternative is to develop the lessons built on past experiences that can be turned into interests instead of moving from one concept to the next. Through self-generated questions, students judge, reason, deliberate and are actively engaged in the materials that will lead to answers. Students should voluntarily self-direct questions and problems (Dewey, 1915).

Freire and Critical Literacy

Like Dewey, Freire (1970) found that a purposeful education would move beyond the transfer of knowledge. Freire said “Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information” (p. 79). What Dewey described as traditional education, Freire called banking. Banking has the educational goal of deposit making (Roberts, 2000; Wink, 1997). Extending this metaphor, Wink and others have written about cultural capital, and described it as “the behaviors, values, and practices that are valued
by the dominant society” (p. 33-34), and though these are real practices, they are often unspoken and unconscious concepts and actions that promote the success of the dominant members of a society. The central bank is exclusionary instead of inclusionary, and the knowledge held in the bank is not neutral; it works to “promote and protect its position” of power (Shor, 1992, p. 34). Mayo (1955) cautioned teachers to be aware that students have participated in banking for years, and they may initially perceive the teacher’s approach as incompetence and become resistant. He recommended community and group assignments initially with the teacher posing questions, problems and issues to students. When educational approaches stress the activities of the student and teacher together, instead of the teacher-leader role, the teacher learns to work at the side of the students. The teacher and students in the class work together to answer the questions that have been posed (Freeman & Freeman, 1992).

Shor (2000) described Freire’s critical literacy as pedagogy that invites students to think critically by having them question the status quo when they are working with any content. Education is an inquiry into the social and personal consequences and contexts of that content where “Critical thought… is oppositional knowledge-making focused on self in society and oriented toward alternatives for change” (p. 1). Through dialogue students confront uncomfortable topics and relearn. This “can move people to wonderful new levels of knowledge; it can transform relations; it can change things” (Wink, 1997, p. 36).
In Freire’s later works, hope became a central theme. He believed until his death that critical analysis of the world and politics would lead to positive social change (Bartlett, 2005).

*The Reason for Critical Literacy*

As explained in the preceding sections on Dewey and Freire, critical literacy provides a purpose for learning, and it provides equitable social interactions between the students and the teachers. According to Shor (1997), when education serves to maintain the status quo, it promotes tradition, hierarchy, patriarchy and elitism. Examples from the literature include the acceptance of the resegregation of the United States school system (Shor, 1997), and the use of torture disregarding the Geneva Convention (Pipher, 2006). As conceived by critical literacy, reflective and cooperative learning experiences offer students and teachers opportunities to extend their learning from the classroom to the world. According to Goldstein (2007), by engaging students and showing students how to transcend worksheets and textbooks, critical literacy enables students to think more democratically with the specific goal of action. To initiate this process, according to Wink (1997), a critical teacher must look at power and social forces that affect schools.

When it is part of the curriculum, critical literacy is seen as offering solutions for major problems in schools. From this perspective, in schools, as in society, those who are doing without are silenced by those with more; Eastern European American culture dominates non-European cultures; girls are not only silenced by boys, but often by the wealthy, European Americans and the boys who do not even know they are doing this.
Many of those who are silenced do not know they are silent (Wink, 1997). As the oppressed, students are taught to be passive instead of creative; they become conditioned to remain compliant and silent, the object instead of the subject; they wait to be told what to do (Mayo, 1955; Shor, 1992). From a more traditional perspective, Goodlad, in *A Place Called School*, Goodlad concluded that:

1. Most of the schools... were oriented to some generally accepted concept of what school is and not to an ongoing inquiry into either group or individual learning needs of specific children in particular communities.

2. [It] would appear that neither pre-service nor in-service teacher education programs have provided [teachers] with the precise pedagogical understandings and skills required for diagnosing and remedying the learning programs and needs of individual pupils.

3. [Teachers] are very much alone in their work. It is not just a matter of being alone, all alone with children in a classroom cell, although this is a significant part of their aloneness. Rather, it is the feeling – in a larger measure the actuality – of not being supported by someone who knows about their work, is sympathetic to it, wants to help and, indeed, does help. (1984, p. 366)

Freire and Macedo (1987) stated that teaching readers while excluding the social and political dimensions of the interaction, leads to cultural reproduction where the reader is an object. They would address the issues raised by Goodlad through the critical literacy problem posing process for both the students and the teachers. When citizens, in this case, teachers and students, are encouraged to build and share power relationships, opportunities for emancipation emerge. However, democracy in education has been recently narrowed into a political agenda of specific social interests (Giroux, 1993). As Shor (1992) explained,

In sum, the subject matter, the learning process, the classroom discourse, the cafeteria menu, the governance structure, and the environment of the school teach students what kind of people to be and what kind of society to build as they learn math, history, biology, literature, nursing, or accounting. (p. 15)
Giroux (1993) identified three important approaches to critical literacy as a vehicle of social reform: (a) Teachers’ tasks should be redefined as cultural workers to increase the possibility of democracy; (b) Popular culture must be framed in the struggle without romanticizing it; and (c) “Pedagogy must be viewed as the deliberate attempt to produce knowledge, forms of ethical address, and social identities” (p. 39). These approaches could be accomplished with Freire and Macedo’s literacy programs.

The new literacy programs must be largely based on the notion of emancipator literacy, in which literacy is viewed as one of the major vehicles by which oppressed people are able to participate in the socio-historical transformation of their society. In this view, literacy programs should be tied not only to mechanical learning of reading skills but, additionally, to a critical understanding of the overall goals for national reconstruction. Thus, the reader’s development of a critical comprehension of the text, and the socio-historical content to which it refers, becomes an important factor of our notion of literacy….The reading of a text now demands a reading within the social connect to which it refers. (1987, p. 157)

Critical literacy challenges the status quo to connect “the political and the personal, the public and the private, the global and the local, the economic and the pedagogical, for rethinking our lives and for promoting justice in place of inequality” (Shor, 1997, p. 1). As an English content-area researcher, author, and instructor, Moffett (1983) encouraged teachers to provide just such a wide range of situations for students to write beyond the audience of a single teacher and simple purpose. As Mayo (1955) pointed out, there is a “sense of political militarism… fighting a good and just fight with a clear purpose” (p. 40) found in the writings of students who participate in critical literacy.

It was Freire’s wish that Western educators work with his theory of liberation within the struggles in their own countries and with the understanding that there is a clear connection between conditions within a specific environment and the wider society. This can be extended to the school as a representation of society. His intention
was that even though the students would be involved in change, the movement would be framed in hope, struggle and a pedagogy of transformation (Roberts, 2000).

**The Teacher in Critical Literacy**

Wink summarized, “We do not do critical pedagogy; we live it” (1997, p. 103). The mindset of the critical literacy teacher invites students to participate and question power and relationships with the goal of developing action. Instead of a class of “teacher-talk,” the classroom experience is guided by student “needs, conditions, speech habits, and perceptions” (Shor, 1997, ¶ 30) from which the teacher plans lessons and creates activities that encourage student inquiry (Wink, 1997). Though teachers bring knowledge and expertise to the classroom, the teacher maintains the role of a resource for the students, intentionally holding back information to prevent one-way discussions and an inflexible syllabus. The teacher encourages a collaborative, safe environment where the teacher and the students learn and teach each other without risk and where students take ownership of their own learning (Shor, 1997; Wink, 1997).

Freire’s conception of a critical teacher was one who “[engaged] in dialogue with the students, also being taught by them while the students [were] also teaching while being taught” (1970, p. 80). The teacher learns and relearns through the engagement with students in a generative instructional model (Mayo, 1955). According to Wink, there are three models of instruction that include: the transmission model, the generative model, and the transformative model. In the transmission model, the teacher lectures and the students take notes to be tested. The generative model allows students to
engage actively in their learning through activity and inquiry, and the transformative model generates knowledge like the generative, but it transforms to the world beyond the classroom. In this model, also referred to as critical pedagogy, students come to expect that their actions may make a difference in the world (Wink, 1997).

According to Shor (1997), the technical skills required to teach critically are not difficult, but it is challenging to create this new attitude toward teaching in the current school atmosphere of teacher accountability and mass standardized testing. Even in schools where students pass the tests, teachers understand their worth is tied to student performance, so they choose to rely on lecture and recitation to cover more material efficiently (Costigan, Crocco, & Zumwalt, 2004). However, the teacher may rest assured that the critical literacy approach maintains rigor through the critical analysis of texts, language, and society through a balance of classroom power by providing all students an opportunity to make their voice heard instead of the narrow and trivial curriculum designed to cover the material of standardized tests (McNeil, 2000).

However, contrary to traditional expectations, a teacher cannot expect to remain neutral in class discussions. Realistically, the act of education is never neutral (Bruner, 2006).

As previously described, the critical literacy teacher considers how the subject connects to the students’ experiences and negotiates the curriculum with the students based on their language, themes, and understandings, so that students are oriented toward democracy through student culture, course transparency, and student input (Mayo, 1955; Shor, 1992). To orient instruction, Dewey (1902) suggested these questions:

- What is there in the child’s experience that is usable?
- How can these elements of experience be used?
• How does the teacher’s understanding of the content assist the students in their learning?
• What medium would provide growth if properly directed? (p. 117)

**Critical Literacy in the Classroom**

According to Wink (1997), the better the teacher uses critical literacy in the classroom, the quicker students will stop listening because they become engaged independently in their work. As Shor (1997) explains, it is important for students to maintain critical involvement in the class to improve learning and discipline in the classroom. He explains that when “students are trained to be authority-dependent, waiting to be told what things mean and what to do, a position that encourages passive-aggressive submission and sabotage” prevails (¶ 34). This student attitude is not present in classes where the students are critically engaged.

According to Moffett (1983), student motivation is improved when students are communicating with real audiences. Today’s schools turn out Advanced Placement students who can identify and write about all of the literary and syntactical devices used by authors, but without their own purposes, their writing may not transcend theme or plot summaries. In addition, English teachers often feel compelled to have students write about *English*, so that students are composing essays on literary styles, themes, and authors. Instead, Moffett suggested writing to real purposes and real audiences. He identified four ways to reach an audience beginning with the self and moving out to the public.
There are real audiences for writing and real reasons to write. Comfortable with multiple points of view, contradictions, unresolved questions, and nuance, change writers can deal with complexity and participate in democracy (Pipher, 2006). For the purpose of a research assignment, Wink’s four phases of problem posing represent the most comparable structure in a high school classroom to the problem-solution structure necessary for a meaningful research assignment. The four phases end in action, and a complete action requires an appropriate audience to receive this action.

According to Ardizzone (2007), schools focused on discipline create a culture of silence that removes student voice and authentic experiences. Sometimes youths are
scapegoats turned into stereotypes instead of valued potential contributors to the political arena and their own educations. However, few opportunities are provided for students to participate in this type of reflection. In schools where discipline is the focus, students must recognize that student silence is not permanent, but a temporary limit, so that the pedagogy can be liberatory and transformational. School improvement must be accompanied by a change in attitude toward students.

...young people are agents of change... they have a voice and they want the world to hear it. Education can and should serve as a means to foster this transformation. Teachers can be part of this transformation if they are willing to engage in the critical pedagogy necessary. (Ardizzone, 2007, pp. 59-60)

Acknowledgment of Bias

Pedagogy, education, and curricula are political (Mayo, 1955; Shor, 1992). Critical teachers must analyze their intentions in relation to the society where a privileged, white, young, well-educated, well-employed, straight, and suburban homeowner is participating in, and indeed benefiting from, the status quo that teachers are encouraging students to be critical toward. Many teachers understand that they bring bias into the classroom when they work with students, but through this acknowledgement, teachers must become committed to equity and social justice (Goldstein, 2007). The goal for the teacher must be to “[listen] and [hear] all sides, carefully considering and equally critically evaluating those sides no matter what their seemingly positive or negative effects are or will be” (Pascarella, 2007, p. 39). This goal is well explained by Moffett (1983):

If we construed public education as personal liberation, it would hardly mean more than fulfilling the already professed goal of teaching the young to think for themselves. But truly free inquiry had conflicted so much with the old goal of
cultural transmission and identity maintenance that we have sabotaged our own noble aim. This is unnecessary and unwise. If we educate youngsters to transcend their heritage, they will be able to transform it and lead other cultures to do the same. (p. 32)

As Bier (2007) reminded teachers, no matter what school or what group of students taught, there is always a heterogeneous group. It is not always what they look like and where they are from; it is sometimes about the way that they learn, so it is imperative that all teachers are prepared to meet students as individuals. How the teacher maintains a hopeful, transformative attitude is part of this approach.

Transformative Optimism

In his book Engaging Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of Possibility: From Blind to Transformative Optimism, Rossatto (2005) employed Freire’s Pedagogy of Possibility to analyze student optimism. Hope is required to nurture dreams, and hope is developed through a belief system. However, these belief systems are shaped by the limits of the environment and society. In his research, Rossatto worked in both Brazil and the United States with high and low achieving ninth grade students describing their ability to see transformative possibilities using four distinct forms of optimism: blind, fatalistic, resilient, and transformative.

- **Blind optimism** indicates a condition of oblivion that prevents consciousness or self-determination.
- **Fatalistic optimism** shows beliefs and attitudes in which events are fixed in time, promoting feelings of powerlessness to change these events.
- **Resilient optimism** reveals conformation to normative order as a means to achieve an individualist future goal.
- **Transformative optimism** sees the formation of a collective resistance against social processes that produce alienating realities, with the hope of achieving a liberating future. (pp. 23-24)
The individuals’ construct of optimism can be mapped using Freire’s descriptions.

![Constructions of Optimism Diagram]

**Figure 6.** Levels of optimism.

(Rossatto, 2005, p. 47)

Framed in Freirean pedagogy, the goal is for students to determine their own actions by developing and transforming the world where they live. Because “hopelessness tends to immobilize people, leading them into fatalism, and thus blocking their acquisition of the indispensable strengths required to recreate their worlds” they can only train instead of participate in education (Rossatto, 2005, p. 24).

Jackson (2007) defined Rossatto’s work as a well-developed thesis that sought ways to use Freire’s perspective in a case study of students’ experiences of school. Though she recognized that personal transformation is possible, she was critical of the
idea that transformation of the self will lead to a transformed world. For example, educators may choose to construct an educational experience that is developed from daily life, but the ruling groups still control the how and the what is taught, so they still promote hegemonic control.

Rossatto’s study used Freire’s model of optimism to provide a clear framework for identifying optimism and the potential for recognizing transformation in learners, and Wink’s model of problem posing supports both the students’ personal transformation and the possibility for a social transformation (Freire, 1970; Rossatto, 2005; Wink, 1997).

Summary
Following the German model of researchers in specific fields completing writing reports, the American tradition of the research paper began shortly after the Civil War and continues to be practiced in the same form today in English classes across the country. Ballenger (1992) and Shook (1988) argue that the paper should be purposeful, so students can connect their topics to their lives beyond school as a form of informational literacy. Both Shor (1992) and Elbow (2000) are concerned about the focus on the grade over the process in report writing. This misguided effort has the effect of minimizing student voice and editing skills above the critical thinking skills needed to complete research. To improve the assignment, the purpose of research for social action was supported in the literature (H. Giroux, 1997; Lawrence, 1999; Mancina, 2005; McKenna & McKenna, 2000; Shafer, 1999; Shor, 1992; Slack, 2001; Williams, 1993).
Wink’s (1997) problem posing praxis, based on Freire (1970), connects the theory of critical literacy to the student research paper. Starting with their own experiences, students develop as they critically analyze their environment (Freire, 1970; Shor, 1997). Freire’s purpose in problem posing is to solve a social problem, in contrast to Dewey, whose educational process uses a purpose to guide instruction. Wink achieves a purposeful education by requiring that “problem posing always ends in action” (1997, p. 109). This complements the praxis of critical literacy that supports the students looking at their environment with a critical eye, so they can “read the world” (Freire, 1970; Shor, 1997; Wink, 1997). When this occurs in an equitable classroom, it creates the third idiom where student and teacher interact in colloquial language, and intellectual empowerment grows (Shor, 1992). This classroom setting is a goal in this study.

Ohmann calls critical literacy “literacy from below,” where participants actively question the status quo and imagine solutions (1996). Based on this literature, the problem posing process as described by Wink (1997) will be utilized in the research process in a tenth grade class setting to determine if the English class research experience is facilitated by a critical problem posing process as evidenced by the work and interviews of my students in this secondary research project. The work of the students will be analyzed to determine the supports and constraints of this process that begins with the student experiences and ends with an action phase (Wink, 1997). Based on the literature, the students working in this process will learn to think more democratically with the specific goal or action (Goldstein, 2007) and be involved in
change and learn in an environment with hope, struggle and a pedagogy of transformation (Freire, 1970; Roberts, 2000).

To conclude, Wink’s process, grounded in Freire’s approach, and consistent with Dewey and others who advocate inquiry, action, and relevance is the framework for the research process described in this study. This description will fill a void in the literature that connects the relevance and engagement of students participating in Wink’s problem posing process to the high school research paper. This study contributes to the body of knowledge about inquiry, critical pedagogy and high school English instruction.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to develop a case to confirm, refine, or elaborate the supports and constraints as the participants in this single case study worked through Wink’s (1997) problem posing process embedded into the participants’ research assignment. The problem posing process described by Freire encourages students to “come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in progress, in transformation” (1970, p. 83). This process allows students to have transformative experiences resulting from recognition of the world as dynamic (Shor, 1992). For this study an instructional plan was developed that used Wink’s four phases of problem posing with the explicit goal of allowing students to recognize and work on problems “in the world and with the world” (Freire, 1970, p. 81).

To bring a praxis of critical literacy into the classroom of this study, I invited the participants to act on their environment, to reflect on it, and to plan for transformation (Mayo, 1955), engaging in praxis in the classroom. Critical instruction started with the student generated themes. As the teacher, I brought knowledge and expertise to the classroom, and I worked to maintain the role of a resource for the students intentionally preventing one-way discussions and encouraging a collaborative, safe environment where the students and I learned and taught each other without risk, and where students took ownership of their own learning (Dewey, 1938; Freeman & Freeman, 1992; Roberts, 2000; Shor, 1992, 1997; Wink, 1997). I began by listening to the students to determine their concerns, then followed this with a research plan, so the participants could look objectively at their own experiences and concerns about their
Dewey (1915), Freire (1970) and Wink (1997) have all devised a variety of plans for a problem posing process. This study followed the phases of Wink’s (1997) problem posing process as represented in Figure 1.

The research question for this study was *What were the supports and constraints to problem posing as evidenced by the work and interviews of my students participating in this secondary research project?* To answer this question, data were generated and analyzed using the following guiding questions:

1. What elements supported the problem posing process as evidenced by the work and interviews of my students participating in this secondary research project?

2. What elements were constraints to the problem posing process as evidenced by the work and interviews of my students in this secondary research project?

3. What did students learn as evidenced by their work and interviews in this secondary research project in which the critical problem posing process was utilized?

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section provides the information relevant to the study’s methodology. The second section shares the instructional plan used to provide a sequential framework for understanding the setting where the data were collected.

**Case Study Methodology**

According to Yin (1994), studying contemporary events in a classroom provides many challenges including: the struggle to manipulate behaviors, the variety of student work, and the teacher as a participant-observer. Because of the *real-life* context of the
classroom and the complex social phenomena being considered, this research lends itself well to a case study. Yin defines a case study as

1. an empirical inquiry that
   - investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when
   - the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident

2. inquiry
   - copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result
   - relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result
   - benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis. (p. 13)

Therefore a case study is a comprehensive research strategy that incorporates data collection and data analysis that moves beyond a systematic design for conducting research. For this study a single case study design was chosen to “determine whether a theory’s propositions [were] correct” (Yin, 1994, p. 13). It should be noted however that case studies offer additional challenges beyond other studies because the steps are not routinized, so care was taken to have a clear protocol in place for the analysis of these data (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Yin, 1994).

According to Yin (1994), case study methodology works well when the data are collected from a real-life context when the events being studied and the setting are intertwined. The next section will describe the setting and the participants from this study.

Population and Sample

This study is about a single implementation of problem posing in a classroom but also includes a deeper analysis of ten participants. This design provides an embedded
structure, or multiple units of analysis, in this single case study of the implementation. (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Yin, 1994).

The Setting

The statistics that describe the community and school’s setting have been approximated to provide confidentiality to the school district and the study participants. These observations took place at a high school in a North Texas community known locally for its wealth and high academic expectations. With a median annual household income of more than $100,000, a median home value of more than $250,000, and almost 70% of citizens with a baccalaureate degree or higher, this community was economically stable and generally valued education ("Community Profile City of [Name], Texas: Demographics," 2006). The statistical profile of the school demonstrated the high academic achievements and expectations of the district and community. The median grade point average for the 2007 graduating class ($n=700$) was around 3.3. Results of SAT testing showed these students scored 50 to 70 points higher than the national average in reading, mathematics, and writing. Last year, more than 700 students took at least one Advanced Placement test (The school offered 25 AP courses), and more than 90% of the graduates attended college after graduation. However, even with these positive indicators of academic success, this high school’s ranking from the state of Texas was Academically Acceptable because of low performance in one subpopulation. Ethnically, the student body was approximately 70% white, 10% Hispanic, 5% African-American, and 15% Asian ("[School Name] Demographics," 2007).
Permission to conduct this study was provided by the University of North Texas Internal Review Board, the principal of the school; all of the participants, the parents of the under-age participants, the dean of students, and my student teacher signed consent forms to take part in this study. Not every student in the class signed the consent form, and the work of these nonparticipating students was not utilized in any way in this study.

The Participants

The participants (n=10) for this study included eight males and two females in an on-level English II course taught by me, the principal investigator. The participants studied were white (n=6), African-American (n=1), Asian (n=2), and Hispanic (n=1). On-level English for tenth grade was a general English course that follows the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) as its curriculum. It was not an advanced or honors course, nor was it a remedial course. Because of the high academic level of the coursework at this school, these on-level courses are sometimes chosen by students who might otherwise qualify for an advanced or honor course but either do not want or have time to do homework. In addition, some students lack the skills to keep up with the speed of the advanced course, so they enroll in an on-level course such as the one in this study. Though special education students were often present because of the inclusion philosophy of the district, this was not true for this group of participants. None of these participants were identified with an individual education program (IEP) or a 504 plan. Only one participant was being monitored, according to state guidelines, as an English language learner.
**Participant Demographic Characteristics**

Both the Informed Consent form (Appendix B), signed by the parents of the participants, and the Student Assent Form (Appendix C), signed by the participants, assured the students and their parents that “reports from this study [would] replace student names with pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.” These forms were collected two months before data collection began. Table 1 presents the participant pseudonyms, gender and ethnicity.

Table 1

**Participant Demographic Characteristics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bethany</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brett</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neal</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noah</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Asian/Iranian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seth</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Asian/Indian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Race and ethnicity are as identified by the participants.*

**The Case Study Protocol**

The steps for a case study are not “routinized” (Yin, 1994, p. 38), so care was taken to assure that there was a study protocol. According to Yin, “case study protocol
is more than an instrument” (p. 63); moreover, a protocol with procedures and general rules improves the quality of the study. In this section, I will provide the explanation for the type of case study utilized, and I will reveal the protocol used.

To conduct this study of “events in their real-life contexts” in a single unit or bound system, a case study instrument was utilized (Yin, 1994, p. 27 & 66). This was an embedded case study because there were ten participants analyzed as subunits. Each participant’s work was considered, but then all of the subunits were considered holistically to provide final analysis and results of the study.

In place for this study was a case study protocol that included the procedures and general rules for the study. A protocol was important to remind me of what I was studying, and it helped me anticipate problems and plan ahead. This protocol is explained here in four sections: an overview, field procedures, case study questions, and a guide for the report.

**Overview of the Protocol**

According to Yin (1994), the overview assures that clear objectives are determined and that relevant literature has been considered. In this study I set out to see how students would participate in problem posing during a secondary research assignment, given the perspectives and prior knowledge established in Chapter 2. Following the study’s guiding questions, participant work was systematically analyzed for evidence of the benefits and constraints to problem posing. To provide a problem posing situation in this class, lessons were constructed around a traditional research paper assignment. The participants completed the research assignment with a problem
posing focus, and all of their writing and artifacts were archived for analysis in a research database.

*Field Procedures of the Protocol*

According to Yin (1994), the field procedures include permissions to visit research sites and the collection of general sources and procedures for the study. As previously described, the setting of this study was in my own classroom in a north Texas high school. This provided maximum accessibility to the participants, but difficulties arose in the documentation of observations. The nature of case study data is different from data collected in a laboratory; a balance must be achieved between the needs of the participants and the needs of the study (Yin, 1994). Because I was actively teaching and participating with students in the role of the teacher, notes were written after class instead of during class, and because I was often working with an individual student, my perspective was often distracted from the group as a whole, focusing instead on one sub unit of the case at a time. Although notes were taken about the progress of the teaching, the primary data for this are the actual words of the participants as they wrote in their journals, completed their assignments, and participated in interviews. Care was taken to preserve all of the work completed through this process. Work that could not be saved on paper such as interviews and presentations was digitally recorded on an audio device and transcribed.

To be a participant observer in this process, I also had to be well-organized. To assure that time would not become a constraint, materials for the unit including journals, books, movie clips, and advertisements were acquired over the summer before I began
working with participants; plans were written and a power point developed to facilitate the movement and the unity of the problem posing in an environment fraught with distractions and unscheduled interruptions. In addition, special attention was given to collecting the work of participants when it was completed, so it could be copied and returned quickly so as not to interrupt their progress. Because of a new state law that moved the start of school back to Labor Day, the curriculum schedule was fragmented, and these early plans served me well by keeping the unit cohesive even though it was interrupted during the state assessments.

*Case Study Questions of the Protocol*

According to Yin (1994), the research questions should be kept in mind to assure that the data collected answers the questions. He recommends matching the data collected to the questions in a table. Table 2 below was used to determine which phases of problem posing would best be utilized to answer the three guiding questions stated at the beginning of this chapter.
Table 2

Use of Sources to Answer Guiding Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Question #1 / Supports</th>
<th>Question #2 / Constraints</th>
<th>Question #3 / Problem Posing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer Journals</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Board</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Summaries</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Products</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal Reflections</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


According to Yin (1994), outlining and formatting for the analysis should be deliberately organized. Using the protocol, the data were collected and analyzed with the expectation that the report would be composed to answer the research questions and the three guiding questions. The analysis in Chapter 4 is divided by the three guiding questions, and the findings in Chapter 5 are explained in relation to the questions. This structure was determined before the analysis of the data to provide a clear analytic focus, which resulted in a clear report of analysis and findings.

Quality in the Research Design

Because the application of the theoretical basis of this study is complex, two methods were used to try to ensure the integrity of the research process. One was using Yin’s (1994; 2003) criteria for establishing quality in case study research and the other was conducting a pilot study.
Establishing Quality

Four concepts for criterion were used to establish quality in the research design. They included:

- construct validity
- internal validity
- external validity
- reliability

To assure construct validity, operational measures from Yin’s *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (1994) were utilized to provide the authority for the research design. Yin provided two steps to assure construct validity:

1. Select the specific types of changes that are to be studied (in relation to the original objectives of the study) and
2. Demonstrate that the selected measures of these changes do indeed reflect the specific types of change that have been selected. (p. 34)

The specific types of changes were clearly described and assessed through the use of the three research questions, and the analysis of the data derived from the questions demonstrated the changes reflected in the participants.

For internal validity, a linear chain of sources, or data points, was constructed to establish the relationship between Wink’s (1997) problem posing process in the participants’ work and the final outcomes that were measured by the data revealed by the third research question. The data sources were chosen to show the convergence of the evidence through multiple sources that included writing, interviews and artifacts.

External validity is supported in the literature review that describes critical literacy as the foundation of Wink’s (1997) theory and supports the guiding questions. A case study is not generalizable to a population but should instead “[strive] to generalize a
particular set of results to some broader theory” (Yin, 1994, p. 36). Thus, I sought to share the results of this study in support of Wink’s (1997) problem posing process as situated in critical literacy theory.

Finally, reliability was assured with this clear description of the study operations that may be replicated in later studies. It was my intent to provide very clear procedures that could be easily followed in the protocol and analysis description.

Pilot Study

Yin (1994) described the pilot study as a “laboratory for investigators, allowing them to observe different phenomena from many different angles or to try different approaches on a trial basis.” He recommends using the pilot study “formatively” to help develop the guiding questions and clarification of the research design. The pilot study should be utilized with the literature review to develop a robust research protocol (Yin, 1994, pp. 74-75).

A pilot study was completed during the 2006-2007 school year at the same school as the dissertation project, but with the tenth grade students from the graduating class of 2009. In the pilot study, I was looking for participants who showed signs of agency to help them to participate actively in democracy (Bandura, 2006). An instructional plan was designed and utilized for the pilot study, and the student work was analyzed and reported. These data informed the theoretical foundation and the instructional plan utilized for this study.

From the pilot study, I learned that the concepts of agency and democracy were too broad for a focused study. I turned for this second study to problem posing (Freire,
because it provided specific phases of participation for participants to have the type of transformative experiences they needed to become active citizens. To improve the transition from a formal research assignment to problem posing research assignment, models from books, movies and even a former participant (from the pilot study) were utilized as student examples.

At the end of the pilot study, five recommendations were made for improving participant agency.

1. Include live sources during the topic investigation.
2. Require live audience of final product instead of offering it as an extra-credit opportunity.
3. Encourage topics that are local.
4. Provide more peer review throughout the process.
5. Return research summary for revision until the participant has a plan for action.

Data Collection Procedures

According to Yin, the study design should use the data to connect the research questions logically to the conclusions. To make this a high-quality case study, these principles were considered: (a) the use multiple sources of evidence that converged in the findings; (b) the assurance that a case study database was developed for the systematic maintenance of the data, and (c) a chain of events was utilized to enable connections to be made, data to be collected efficiently, resulting in insightful conclusions (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Yin, 1994).

Because of the sequential nature of Wink’s (1997) problem posing process, a chain of events was constructed for the data collection following the phases of problem posing. In Figure 8 below, the linear phases that represent the chain of events are
represented on the left with the sources of evidence to be gathered at each phase represented on the right. As each phase was completed, the participant work was collected and stored in the case study database for analysis.

Figure 7. Problem posing data collection.

As the participants worked through the problem posing unit, the writing and artifacts they produced were collected as data. The collected data, primarily participant work, were transcribed into data files when possible, but some of the data, artifacts in particular, were kept in their original form for analysis.
During the transcription process, real names were replaced with pseudonyms and unique identifying markers were either removed or replaced with generic markers. Figure 8 presents the framework for the sequential phases of the data collection process. There were eight phases of data collection in the study. The first bullet of each phase represents the pedagogical activity, and the second bullet of each phase describes the method of collection for each unit of datum.
| Step 1          | Instruction: Peer Journals  |
|                | Data Collection: Journals transcribed. |
| Step 2         | Instruction: Brainstorming    |
|                | Data Collection/Preparation: A picture will be taken of the completed board and transcribed. |
| Step 3         | Instruction: Question Development |
|                | Data Collection/Preparation: Copies of participant work will be kept |
| Step 4         | Instruction: Investigating Sources |
|                | Data Collection/Preparation: Copies of participants’ sources and notes will be kept. |
| Step 5         | Instruction: Research Papers/Reports |
|                | Data Collection/Preparation: Digitally saved. |
| Step 6         | Instruction: Research Products |
|                | Data Collection/Preparation: Record of artifact kept using media means appropriate to type of project. |
| Step 7         | Reflections/Member Check      |
|                | Data Collection/Preparation: Journals Transcribed |
| Step 8         | Instruction: Interview        |
|                | Data Collection/Preparation: Interviews recorded and transcribed. |

Figure 8. Framework for data collection.

The final interviews (phase eight) were recorded and then transcribed. The interview questions included:

1. Tell me about your research product.
2. Who was your audience?

3. What was your audiences’ response?

4. How did your work on this assignment change ____________ (insert topic)?

5. Are you going to continue to pursue this topic? How?

6. What is it like to [______________](have a certain experience)? (van Manen, 1982, p. 296)

These questions are explicitly open-ended in nature, so that the respondent’s role is “one of an ‘informant’ rather than a respondent” (Yin, 1994, p. 84). Each transcription was kept in a separate text file and entered into the database. These interviews took place in an alcove off of the library. The students were called over one at a time to answer these questions with me, and the interviews were about five minutes each as described in the student consent form signed by the parents and the students. Other pieces of data, though not primary sources, included my daily notes and my teaching materials. As reference materials to this study, they were included in Appendices B - H.

As previously discussed, my role in this study was as participant-observer engaging in the events that I was studying. Because of this close role with the participants, Yin (1994) suggests a clear description of my approaches for gathering evidence. These included: observation of participants, reading of participants’ writing samples, assessing participants’ projects, and the recording and transcription of participant interviews. I have intentionally weighted the participant writing, interviews and artifacts, choosing to rely on field notes only to fill in gaps and clear up confusion in this study to help offset the teacher bias I may have felt for the participants.
Each participant produced several written documents. These included copies of notes from their sources, early drafts, research papers, research products and their journals that were used as peer journals at the beginning of the process and then as a place to reflect and member-check at the end of the problem posing process.

In this study, multiple source data triangulation was accomplished by collecting a variety of data sources with the potential for corroborating a claim or fact. Figure 10 presents Yin’s convergence of multiple sources of evidence (single study).

![Figure 9. Convergence of multiple sources of evidence.](Adapted from Yin, 1994, pp. 92-93)

To assure that the sources were preserved accurately and available for analysis, it was important to keep a case study database. This was first accomplished during the data collection phase with an accordion file with a file for each participant, and a file for teacher documentation. After the data were collected, some of the artifacts were
transferred to a digital format. This was necessary first to remove the non participants’ work from the collected data and to provide a clear copy for coding. At the end of the development of the database, all of the items were available digitally through transcripts, pictures, and text files, so that the evidence was available for review and thus more reliable. The research papers, transcripts of the journals, and reflections were kept in Word documents that were then coded using the comment features available in the software.

Data Analysis Procedures

It is important to understand that “case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes” (Yin, 1994, p. 10). The goal for this study is not to make statements about participants, but instead the focus is on developing the theory of critical literacy through problem posing (1997).

To define the case and determine the unit of analysis, Wink’s (1997) problem posing process served as a guide in this study. To clarify, for this study, the unit of analysis included a group of ten students from my sixth period English class. The findings from the data collection and analysis was compared to the literature related to Wink’s (1997) theory. In addition, the literature provided key terms and definitions used to organize and analyze the data. Although the use of multiple sources strengthens the research design, it was still important that the analysis come together at the end to focus on the overall theoretical purpose of the study (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Yin, 1994). In this case, the purpose was to develop a case to confirm, refine, or elaborate
on Wink’s (1997) framework for problem posing instruction, as applied in the specific context of a high school research paper assignment.

In this case study “the questions and answers… [served] directly as the basis for the final case study report” in an “attempt to integrate the available evidence and to converge upon the facts of the matter or their tentative interpretation” (Yin, 1994, p. 97). The answers to guiding questions rely upon the evidence in the sources with generous citing. With this format, the goal is to achieve a “chain of evidence” (Yin, 1994, p. 98). Not only does this clarify the direction of the study, it also allows the reader to trace the logic of the study both forwards and backwards using the evidence to support the findings linking them to the study’s questions (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Yin, 1994).

**Coding**

Before the coding began, the data were assembled into the research database, so they could be accessed either by subunit, in this case a single student, or they could be accessed in chronological order. Because of the great care to preserve the work of the participants, many data points existed in the database. When these data points were read, potential themes emerged. These potential themes were captured as codes and entered into the coding dictionary. When the data were coded, the codes revealed themes that ran through the data. In the analysis, the themes were revealed, and evidence from the data was included as support for the analysis.

To answer the first and second guiding questions:

1. What elements supported the problem posing process as evidenced by the work and interviews of my students participating in this secondary research project?
2. What elements were constraints to the problem posing process as evidenced by the work and interviews of my students in this secondary research project?

The data were kept in sequential order and coded twice. The first coding identified the phase of problem posing the participants’ work represented, and the second code was related to the themes of support and constraint developed from the data themselves.

The third question:

3. What did students learn as evidenced by their work and interviews in this secondary research project in which the critical problem posing process was utilized?

was analyzed by dividing the data into subunits representing individual participants. The coding for this question was conducted on the participant work at the beginning of the problem posing process in the work of the peer journals, and coding was completed at the end of the problem posing process by reviewing the action project, reflective journals, and interviews. This provided comparative sets of data for each subunit that could be utilized to answer the third question.

For the program logic model, “These immediate outcomes [will] in turn produce … final or ultimate outcomes” (Yin, 1994, p. 118) as the supports and constraints are analyzed holistically. So the data are analyzed at every phase of problem posing to identify supports and constraints, and these points are considered when determining how the overall class research experience was facilitated by a critical problem posing process.
Instructional Methodology

This section provides a description and rationale of the instructional methodology referred to throughout this dissertation. The plan for this research unit was based on the phases of problem posing (Wink, 1997), and will describe the expected outcomes of participant engagement. This unit was organized to provide an opportunity to embed the problem posing process into a student research assignment that meets the district’s and state’s requirements. Though the state requires student participation in the research process in the English II curriculum, the district requires a paper as a final product.

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)

The public school curriculum of Texas is directed by the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). The TEKS strand on research for English II includes:

(13) Reading/inquiry/research. The student reads in order to research self-selected and assigned topics. The student is expected to:

(A) generate relevant, interesting, and researchable questions;

(B) locate appropriate print and non-print information using text and technical resources, including databases and the Internet;

(C) use text organizers such as overviews, headings, and graphic features to locate and categorize information;

(D) produce reports and research projects in varying forms for audiences; and

(E) draw conclusions from information gathered. (Chapter 110. Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for English Language Arts and Reading: Subchapter c. High School, 1998)
Problem Posing Phases in Student Research

This section has been divided by the sections of Winks’ (1997) problem posing phases, so that for each phase is connected directly to the classroom activities used to provide the students an opportunity to engage in that phase.

Begin with Students’ Experience – Phase 1

To facilitate the students’ work with their experiences with social justice, a peer journal activity was utilized. In these journals, students responded to their choices of literature, prompts, or their peers as the journals rotated to the members of each peer journal group. There were a total of six groups in the classroom; since each group had four members, there were a total of 24 journals in which the students recorded their responses over four days. Here are the instructions provided to the students.

Peer Journal Instructions:

- Respond to the literature or prompt for five minutes.
- Rotate the journals. Respond to the literature, the prompt, or your peer for five minutes.
- Rotate the journals. Respond to the literature, the prompt, or your peers for five minutes.
- Rotate the journals. Respond to the literature, the prompt or your peers for five minutes.
- Return the journal to the original writer.

Following these instructions, the students responded first to the literature or prompt and then responded three more times in their peers’ journals either to the literature, the prompt, or to their peers’ responses. The process allowed the students to engage in
conversations in the journals about the social issues that were presented through the literature and prompts. The literature and prompts are presented in Table 3:

Table 3

*Peer Journal Literature and Prompts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literature</th>
<th>Prompt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demi – <em>The Empty Pot</em></td>
<td>Is cheating a problem at this school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Langston Hughes “Theme for English B”</td>
<td>Does this school teach all of the students what they need to know?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice Childress “Mrs. James”</td>
<td>What are the jobs in American that American’s aren’t willing to do, and what does that say about America?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Meyer “Waiting for the World to Change”</td>
<td>What are you waiting for?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Childress, 1999; Demi, 1990; Hughes, 1951; Mayer, 2006)

The choice of these pieces and these prompts was made to encourage the students to look critically at their environment and engage in a meaningful discussion with their peers about issues that are relevant in their community. The expectation was that the students would complete the first phase of Winks’ (1997) problem posing when the students used their own experiences as the foundation for their work.

*Identify, Investigate, Pose a Problem within Your Life – Phase 2*

For the second phase, the goal of problem posing was for students to identify, investigate, and pose a problem within their lives. This phase is important, as Greene
(1988) explained, because, “When people cannot name alternatives, imagine a better state of things, share with others a project of change, they are likely to remain anchored or submerged, even as they proudly assert their autonomy” (p. 9). Several steps were used to accomplish this goal. First, the students read through their peers’ journals and completed note cards with topics that they discovered in their writing. Then the students were divided into groups, issued hall passes, and instructed to spend the first half of class on a walk about in the high school building. Their job was to take their journal around the building and take notes on things that they thought might make good research topics. They were instructed to write down anything they thought might be interesting, even if they did not want to pursue the topic themselves because it might give another classmate an idea or suggestion for their topics. The students toured the campus in groups, and returned at the designated time. When they arrived in the classroom a long piece of butcher paper was stretched across two tables and labeled the problem board. The topics from the peer journals, as identified on the note cards were already written on the paper. As the students took turns sharing their ideas for topics, they were added to the problem board as possible research topics.

For two more days, the students continued to bring in topics for the problem board based on their observations in the hallways, their classes, at home, in the community, and in the news. This initial part of the process affirmed the notion that the best topics come from the students’ communities and their personal experiences (McKenna & McKenna, 2000). They filled the butcher paper with topic choices, and the problem board was taped to the frame of the window for use by the class. All of the topics belonged to the class community.
With the problems identified, the students needed to make a decision about the topics they would pursue. The class was offered the opportunity to pursue one single topic as a whole class, or they could divide into groups, or they could work individually. The class decided that they would prefer to work in groups or individually.

Ballenger (2007) posited that a good topic and question are significant, have the potential of being answered, and present new questions. The students completed a research question checklist (Appendix A) that asked for a topic, the names of the students who were working on the topic, and a checklist to establish interest and expectations. Time spent to assure that students had an engaging topic improved the their success as they gathered information (McKenna & McKenna, 2000). With a topic selected, the students then worked to find their research questions and potential audiences. The expectation at this point was that the students would have chosen their research topic and started to think about what resources they would need to present a solution to live audiences. The students were told that they had a few days to think about their choices and do some preliminary research. They could change their topic selection up until the point we started collecting research.

As the students considered their topics, the first research model was introduced to the students. The students viewed the film Supersize Me (Spurlock, 2003) and completed a video guide (Appendix D) that required them to analyze the Spurlock’s research methods as presented in the film. The students took notes on Spurlock’s use of statistics, testimonials, surveys, and interviews. They considered what Spurlock’s research question might have been, and they evaluated his use of film to reach his audience using the film guide and in-class discussions. Another model was provided
when a student from the pilot study came to the class and shared her research product from the year before. The students had the opportunity to ask questions. The film and the student example offered students opportunities to see models of research (Luther, 2006), and they had an additional opportunity to see a student model that had accomplished the assignment.

It was my expectation that at the end of this phase the students would have a clear picture of what they needed to accomplish to complete a successful research assignment that reached an audience beyond the classroom. The goal of these models was to provide a clear description of what the students needed to do (Luther, 2006), and to encourage them to reach their intended audience.

_Solve the Problem Together – Phase 3_

After the presentation of the models, students went to the computer lab to begin their information search. In short lessons, students were shown how to determine the credibility and reliability of sources using a reliability checklist (Appendix E) or use the school’s databases for sources that were already reviewed and determined credible (Derrico, 2006; Ruggieri, 2007; Steineke, 2002). The students also received some simple instructions on conducting surveys and interviews. These primary sources would count as one of the five required sources to encourage their use (Lyman, 2006). Also, to encourage collaboration in the groups, the students were allowed to share a source with another member of the group (Fairbanks, 1989). Even students who were working individually were placed into groups to support questions and provide feedback (Fairbanks, 1989).
A day in the classroom during the research collection phase was used to provide a refresher on paraphrasing and to teach the students how to take notes using a double column note format (Appendix F) that was created for this research assignment. This organizer was built around a dialectical (Adelstein & Pival, 1994; Ballenger, 2007) or double-column note format but was modified to meet the needs of student-researchers. The template contained a box in which the students completed the bibliographic citation before they started taking notes, so they did not misplace their source information. The two columns below the box were used for tracking the information obtained in the search. In the left column, students recorded quotes. In the right column, students changed their quotes to paraphrases, and they added additional paraphrases of the text as they moved through sources. A thin column between the two columns provided a place for pages numbers for both quotes and paraphrases for later use. At the bottom of the page, students completed a summary of the information collected from a given source and stated how it would be used in their research.

Each day, as the students waited for their computers to log in, another model of research was shared with the student participants (Luther, 2006). These included excerpts from the books *Nickel and Dimed on (Not) Getting by in America* (Ehrenreich, 2001) and *Fast Food Nation* (Schlosser, 2001), the got milk marketing campaign ("got milk?," 2008), and testimony presented to the State Board of Education and a subsequent interview (Hu, 2008) published on the KVUE Website. Through these models, I sought to help the students see how research is used beyond the classroom and to provide them ideas for their own work.
When the students finished collecting their sources, they were required to turn in the copies of their articles, surveys, interviews, or other sources with a double-column notes sheet attached to the top. They were also expected to create an annotated bibliography using the citation and summary from each of the notes pages. These were turned in and scored as the first test grade of the unit.

With the research completed, the students began working on their research summaries. The students were instructed on thesis development, and they began writing their papers. The participants were asked to review their notes and their sources with their partners. Then they put all of their source materials away and wrote freely about their topic following a set of guided questions. When these drafts were completed, they revised and supported their knowledge with the research they had obtained after they had written the first draft of their papers.

There were many benefits to this approach. First it helped the participants find their own voices in their writing. In addition, this approach also helped prevent the need for participants to plagiarize (McColley et al., 1988; McMurtry, 2001; Szentkiralyi, 1996). Because they could write in a narrative, first-person point of view (Ballenger, 2007; Lyman, 2006; Steineke, 2002), they found their writing more fluid, and the experience more personally satisfying. Finally, they referred to their sources to provide the textual evidence and citations when they had a free-written first draft to support their research summary (Ballenger, 2007).

The students structured their papers into a what, so what, now what format that started with what led them to their topic and ended with a proposal to reach an authentic audience. Each day as the students wrote their drafts, they spent part of the class
reading their writing and talking through their writing plans with other group members (Fairbanks, 1989).

With completed drafts, the students went to the computer lab to type, revise and edit their research summaries. Before the students began, the class as a whole, set up the papers using MLA formatting, and a MLA guide was provided to help them check for accuracy. To help prepare them for internal documentation and creating a works cited page, the students had encountered another assignment early in the year where they practiced these skills in a structured, all-class exercise (Northrup, 1997; Pfaffinger, 2006). The students were provided the research articles that they would need to support a short essay on *The Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1954). In this assignment, they practiced citations, and they were reminded of the consequences of plagiarizing, and encouraged to double check their citations in their document.

Once the research documents were digital, the students participated in revision activities to improved research paragraphs as developed by Ballenger (2007). Ballenger (2007) also suggested research revision by increasing active voice, varying sentence length, checking clarity, and including transitions, and the students made revisions that addressed these areas as well. Finally, the students completed an editing checklist, considered common mistakes in their own work, rechecked their citations and MLA formatting before they printed the final copy of their research summary.

The students were graded using a rubric (Appendix G) that was provided at the beginning of the writing process. The rubric was created to closely resemble the rubric used by the other teachers in the department who were teaching the same course to assure grading equity. The district encouraged shared assessments to improve equity in
grading. The expectation at this point was that the students would have completed a research summary that explained and then offered a solution that was developed with their peers in their group. An additional expectation was that students would show competence in the mechanical skills required in research writing.

**Action – Phase 4**

Upon completion of the action proposal as part of their research paper, the students were ready to complete their action steps. They were provided three days to work with their group (Fairbanks, 1989) to prepare a presentation that would reach an authentic audience. Before they went to their audience, the students presented to the class. On the presentation day, the students behaved as if they were talking to their audience beyond the class. This provided an opportunity to practice their presentations before a live audience, and it provided the class an opportunity to give some last minutes suggestions to assure that the presentation was appropriate for the intended audiences (Steineke, 2002). In addition, the students completed self-evaluations (Appendix H) on their presentations.

At this point it was up to the students to complete their action. Students who wrote letters brought them to the class and posted them in the school mail. Students who were presenting to the administration were able to leave class to set up appointments and give the presentations. Students who had letters for district administrators or school personnel used the school interoffice mail system. The students working with the school newspaper, media class, and announcement facilitator were provided class time to approach and present their research (Burke, 2003; Slack,
2001). For students with audiences beyond the school, the action was completed on the students’ own time, and they brought back evidence in the form of a signed note and a copy of an email was sent to the audience and copied to the instructor.

**Reflection**

After the action phase of problem posing, the students had two opportunities to reflect on their engagement with problem posing. First the students were asked to write a reflection about their work with the research and their actions. After they completed their reflection, the student responses were compared to the actual student work completed. Below the student reflections, I asked the students questions about their work and asked them to explain any discrepancies that I saw between what they reported in their reflection and the work I had collected. The students then responded to the questions or discrepancies in a final journal entry. In addition, the students completed a short interview at the end of the process in which they orally answered general questions about their participation in problem posing.

**Project Timeline**

This basic timeline (Table 4) in this section provides the actual dates that the participants were engaged in the study. The comments were included to help explain gaps of time or provide details to help situate the setting of this study in the classroom. This timeline is followed by the findings of this study organized by the guiding questions.
Table 4

Assignment Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Student Participation</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December 17, 2007</td>
<td>Peer Journals</td>
<td>Two of these weeks were Christmas break.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 22, 2008</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 22, 2008</td>
<td>Participant Walk About,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 28, 2008</td>
<td>Brainstorming, Problem Board</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 29, 2008</td>
<td>Topics Chosen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 30, 2008</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 31, 2008</td>
<td>Participants gathered</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 8, 2008</td>
<td>information from sources.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 21, 2008</td>
<td>Participants analyzed research model.</td>
<td>The model was <em>Supersize Me</em>. (NOTE: Participants worked with a substitute).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 22, 2008</td>
<td>research model.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 10, 2008</td>
<td>Participants used their research to complete research summaries.</td>
<td>From February 22\textsuperscript{nd} until March 10\textsuperscript{th}, the participants left their research activities to prepare for the annual TAKS test.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 25, 2008</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 25, 2008</td>
<td>Participants worked to prepare their research for a live audience.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 28, 2008</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Collection of data throughout the research unit enabled the research questions to be addressed.

*Instructional Methodology Summary*

In this section the research assignment was described to provide the reader with an understanding of the class assignments given to the students. This section also serves to provide the expectations set for the students as they participated in the Wink’s (1997) problem posing process and the research assignment.

The students began with their own experiences as they participated in the peer-journal activity with the social justice topics. Then the students worked together to identify, investigate, and pose a problem within their lives as they did the walk about in the school and contributed possible topics from their lives to the class problem board. Then they supported each other as they solved their problems together with their groups. These groups shared sources, listened to ideas, provided feedback, and helped peers achieve their goals. Finally in the action phase, the students took the work they completed together and presented their solutions to an authentic audience.
Summary of Methodology

The purpose of this study was to develop a case to confirm, refine, or elaborate the supports and constraints as the participants in this single case study worked through Wink’s (1997) problem posing process embedded into the participants’ research assignment. A group of participating students were identified in a north Texas high school for this case study. Ten participants represented the subgroups for a single case study that explained the causal relationship between the problem posing activities and transformation gained through participation in critical literacy in a chronologically linear approach with multiple sources and data points.

The research question for this study was *What were the supports and constraints to problem posing as evidenced by the work and interviews of my students participating in this secondary research project?* To answer this question, data were analyzed using the following guiding questions:

1. What elements supported the problem posing process as evidenced by the work and interviews of my students participating in this secondary research project?

2. What elements were constraints to the problem posing process as evidenced by the work and interviews of my students in this secondary research project?

3. What did students learn as evidenced by their work and interviews in this secondary research project in which the critical problem posing process was utilized?

As the participants engaged in the problem posing activities, the data were collected stored in a database to improve the reliability of the analysis. The analysis focused on the guiding questions and the final report was organized to address each of these questions specifically using the data collected. The data were accessed both in
sequential order and by individual student to answer the guiding question. The final results of the study depended on the data collected from the linear model and from the collection of information from the subunits considered holistically. The instructional methodology followed the problem posing process and provided a framework for the students’ work.

The instructional methodology was followed in the classroom, and the students produced the data required to complete the study methodology as described in this chapter. In Chapter 4, Findings, the participants will be introduced and the analysis of the data will follow. The analysis is organized into three sections that address each of the three guiding questions from this study.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

Student Research in the Classroom

The data for this study were collected in a tenth grade, English II classroom at a north Texas high school during the spring semester of 2008. The class consisted of eighteen students; ten of whom agreed to participate in the study. Each of these participants will be introduced in a short vignette to establish the personal context of their experiences in the study. These vignettes and a brief statement about the timeline for conducting the study preface a presentation of the findings related to the three research questions of the study. This chapter ends with the presentation of the findings for the third question as reflected by the individual students who are introduced here.

The participants worked on a student research unit that was aligned to Wink’s problem posing process as described in Chapter 2. The instructional plan and expected outcomes are provided in Chapter 3. The student research assignment is a traditional multi-step assignment within the English curriculum of the school in which the study was conducted. The assignment is completed in the spring semester of English II, and it is the largest assignment of the school year in both scope and grading weight. The assignment continued over six weeks and led to student production of many artifacts. The traditional multi-step assignment for this study was embedded into Wink’s problem posing process. The work produced by the participants and the interviews conducted at the completion of the assignment make up the data for this study.
The Participants

Ten students participated in this study. In an effort to introduce them in ways that reveal their personal attitudes and beliefs, I will utilize their own words from in-class writing and interviews in these individual vignettes. The student quotes are represented as they appeared in their work without any grammatical or structural changes. Each vignette starts with my personal reflection on the student based on classroom observations.

Mark

Mark is very quiet in class. He completes all of his work but rarely goes beyond the requirements of the assignment. He has a strong bond with several other participants in the class as they have a long history of participating in athletics together. At the beginning of the unit, a journal assignment had the participants listening to the song “Waiting for the World to Change” by John Meyer. In response to the question “What are you waiting for?,” Mark responded, “I am waiting for the new semester to end and I am waiting for summer to begin.” However, in response to his peers’ journals he added:

People who value money and are powerful won’t find love because some chick will just want that guy for his money. [Bethany] is right because you have to go change your life because the world’s not going to change your life for you. I don’t think Americans are waiters. I think some are spoiled and have everything handed to them. Until that one day when there’s no one but themselves they will be waiters.

At the end of his research paper, Mark set as his goal for action to combat the problems of academic dishonesty. Working with two other participants, James and Justin, Mark stated his goal as:
Now I plan to get the word out in my school. I plan to make a brochure showing our audience that which is teacher’s information and statistics of school cheating that goes on in our school at [School Name] and schools all over the nation. I will also provide tips on how to prevent cheating in the classroom. To reach our audience my partners and I will put our brochures in all the teacher’s mail boxes and have a meeting with Mr. [Hook],[principal].

Mark and his partners were successful in reaching their audience of the school teachers with the permission of the principal. In his final reflection Mark wrote:

I used my literacy and communication skills to solve cheating by discussing the situation with Mr. [Gomez] and I used literacy and made a brochure of cheating research to try to solve the cheating problem at this school… My work made a difference because every little bit helped our project.

Justin

Academically very strong, Justin has very good oral and written communication skills. He enjoys controversial topics and is open to new ideas presented by his peers during discussions. He is thoughtful in his work and seems to enjoy challenging assignments. In response to Meyer’s song “Waiting for the World to Change,” Justin responded that he is waiting for

...all wars to end. War is very devastating and hardly any good comes out of it. This earth would be a much better place w/o war. Countries would not fight over land, or oil, or power and this would make everyone friendlier. …We shouldn’t just go out and blow someone up for not helping us in our own war. That would just make everyone sure that Americans are horrible people.

Justin planned with Mark and James to complete a group research project, and in his individual paper, he identified his goal for the project as

When I have completed this brochure, I plan to share this source of information with the teachers of my school by putting a copy of the brochure in each of the teachers’ mailboxes inside the office. If this plan goes according to plan, I believe that this school could see a significant change in the cheating happening within the school. …If these new methods of preventing cheating are applied consistently, I think that schools will start to see drastic improvements within their systems and they will no longer have to worry about cheating. I think that lowering the cheating rate can be done as long as we take baby steps at first.
Taking huge long strides at it won’t work because people will make huge alterations only a few times and then they will give up. … I believe the true key to this plan is consistency.

In his reflection after he completed his project, Justin shared how he used tools and communicated his ideas to his audience. In addition, he incorporated an idea from the dean of students by encouraging participants to get involved in taking action against student cheating too.

I used internet resources to do my research to obtain helpful information about my topic. I communicated with my group members to formulate a presentation to show to the classroom and to put together an interview with the dean of students. ... I think I will use these skills numerous times throughout my life and my time in high school. ... I think that students are more capable of changing a topic like this because students can catch other students easier than teachers can.

James

Though James is very quiet in class, often appearing almost listless, his writing is strong and his arguments are well supported. James applies instruction quickly and correctly to his work with ease. He also works well in his cooperative groups, rarely taking a leadership role, but still making meaningful contributions to the group product. When James responded to Meyer’s song “Waiting for the World to Change,” he said, “People are always waiting for other people to go out and change the world. They think someone will do it, so they don’t take the initiative to make an impact.” In response to his peers he added,

I agree with [nonparticipant]. I don’t think we should blow up France. Just because they didn’t back us in Iraq doesn’t mean we should wipe out their entire country. …War is a disastrous event that I hope to never participate in. The thought of being out in a battle field is a scary thing. If there were no war, the earth would be a much better place.
In his group with Mark and Justin, James had the most extensive plan for dealing with cheating in his research paper. It went beyond the product and addressed school and classroom policies.

In order for cheating to be prevented, there must be a team effort. School must enact successful policies and throw out old ones that have not been working. Teachers must take the responsibility of reporting any known instances of cheating. ... Different test forms should be used and teachers should never ever leave the classroom when tests are out. ... Also, teachers must be notified of new cheating techniques and the signs of cheating. ... Students need to realize how dishonest cheating is and the integrity problems that are involved. ... Teachers need to be informed about the cheating epidemic occurring throughout our nation and in our very own [School Name] High School where a survey found that 20 out of 20 people surveyed had cheated. This scary statistic along with many others will be placed in a comprehensive brochure. Optimally, I hope that a committee is created to work to stop and prevent cheating in our high school.

James worked with his team to create the brochure. Though James was quiet through most of the meeting with the principal, his work was central to the discussion. In reflection on this unit, James said,

...I read the research sources and then applied the research to my paper. I used research to try to solve my problem by finding statistics that supported my solution to the problem and to provide evidence that the problem existed. I used communication skills with presenting my ideas to Mr. [Gomez]. Persuasive communication skills were used in order to get my ideas and solution approved.

...We got approval to distribute it. I think it could make a difference if teachers respond to the brochure. I would follow this plan to deal with another issue that I care about.

Noah

Though Noah struggles cognitively to organize his ideas, he puts forth a tremendous effort on all of his assignments and exhibits a high level of confidence. However, his disorganized thoughts are prevalent in the confusion of his writing. In response to Meyer’s song “Waiting for the World to Change,” Noah wrote that he was
“waiting for [his] life to change into something better. But for some people, the only thing that they are waiting for something within their life to change.” In response to his peers, he said,

Exactly you have to be patient and wait, because the time will come and it will change before you know it. The reason why I’m patient is b/c and I don’t hurry into everything and if I do it will be bad b/c it will be lack of patience. …I totally agree with [Morgan] and [nonparticipant]. Nothing ever goes your way until you make your future with what your starting and keep on going. … But know studying means that you are not going to have a good job or good life.

Noah chose to work on his own to complete a project on parking incentives. Though it was clear that he thought the school should have incentives, he did not know why we needed them or who would be getting them. In the end, I had to provide guiding questions to organize his work. In his research paper, Noah identified his action.

I might have an interview with Mr. [Hook] who is the principle of our school and with Mrs. [nonparticipant] who is the head or responsible of the parking areas and even with some of the seniors and see what their point of view is and their opinion about the school’s parking lot because it tells me what we should do for our school and how we should use the student’s incentives.

Noah worked hard on this project, and he was proud of his action. He followed through with his project and met with the dean of students to request support for his action plan. Here is how he described it in his journal.

I use some library resources and searched for what I need for my assignment. I had an interview with one of the assistant principles. My research was about students with incentives for parking spots. … Mr. [Gomez] said that they will think about it and they will talk to the staff of the parking lot. …I can have researches improve in my world if I have more interviews and talk to different people.

Seth

Academically, Seth is successful because of his hard work, but he does find writing assignments challenging. Seth is socially awkward and not confident with his
peers. He is reluctant to speak up in class because he is uncomfortable at the center of attention. However, one-on-one, Seth is easy to talk to and has dreams of becoming a movie producer. He looks forward to college and the world beyond. He looks at high school as an obstacle to overcome, so he can get on to what he wants to do. In his peer journal he responded to Meyer’s “Waiting for the World to Change” with

I’m waiting for summer vacation to come. Also for the time I become an adult & get a job. ... I’m waiting to graduate from school, pass out of college, get a good job, and when I get enough times’ money I’ll make a movie. ...What do you want people to remember you as? Do you want people to remember you in a bad way, or a good way?

Concerned about the music played over the intercom system during passing periods (the time period between classes), Seth’s action was to talk to the administration about diversifying the soundtrack. In his research paper, he described his goal.

If they played different stations every day, it would probably be better. ...I think we ought to play some other music... but at least for variety. ...I am not sure who is in charge of the music, but whoever it is, I want to talk to him or her about this. ...They should probably put up a survey on Blackboard as to what their favorite music is and they should play the most popular music in school, if it's “good” music.

Seth wrote a letter to the dean of students requesting consideration of his ideas, and in his project reflection he said that he “looked up many articles to support [his] research” and he “put the letter in Mr. [Gomez’s] box.” However at the date of the entry, he had not received a response although he did note that the music on the loudspeakers had stopped entirely, and he wondered if there was a connection between his voiced concern and the end of the passing period music.
With a good attitude toward his school work, Brett takes his assignments to heart and puts his best foot forward. In addition to a healthy approach to academics, Brett is the only participant who came into this assignment with experience in service work. As a member of student council, Brett has worked on the school turkey drive and teacher appreciation activities. He also participated in service work in his middle school where he was active in a school garden project. Though he is somewhat shy, he seems to be able to push through this when he feels it is important to speak up. In response to Meyer’s song, Brett wrote that he is waiting for the “world to change. I am waiting for my life to be changed in some way. That my life will impact the whole world. I need to stop waiting and get into the action.” In response to his peers, he added,

I am waiting for, like Seth said, to finish high school, college, and to find a good job that pays good. But I don’t want it to go too fast and fly by because we only have one life. … I agree with Morgan because not everything does go your way. And when it doesn’t people need to take responsibility for their mistake. They need to take it upon themselves to fix the problem.

Brett’s action project was to present to the local athletic association a proposal to open up some fields in some of the local parks for free play time. He was concerned that citizens could be fined for playing on city fields without permission. He identified his goal in his research paper as

I hope to improve this issue by letting a park be for public use only. I believe that [parks] should be open to the public and for teams to practice. The other parks… should be used for game fields and kept in good condition. I am going to personally confront the City Council of [City Name] or the Parks and Recreation Department and ask if this could be done…

Though Brett did make contact with these organizations when he conducted interviews during his research phase, he did not follow through with the final presentation to these
boards leaving his action incomplete. In his journal reflection, Brett commented that “today is my first day with little homework. I am going to see if I could do it today. I am not trying to avoid it because it’s my opinion and I just hope that they accept it and try to help me out.”

_Bethany_

Formerly identified with dyslexia, Bethany is working towards a successful transition to on-level work. Her academic voice and ideas are strong, but her organization, development, and mechanics are weak but improving at a rapid pace. Part of the reason for this improvement is her hard work, but she has also made a significant change in her attitude toward reading. She was a reluctant reader at the beginning of the school year, and she is now an active reader. The librarian also described her as an active reader at the end of the school year. In response to the song “Waiting for the World to Change” by Meyer, Bethany wrote,

_Weird that your waiting to write about waiting but shouldn’t have to rely on other people in life because for the most part they will let you down. …a great man once said… “When the power of love overcomes the love of power the world will be at peace” – Bob Marley And I believe what he say is true and world would be a better place. You can’t sit around and wait for the world to change on its own, get out there and change it for yourself or you will just be waiting. …I agree with [Nathan] there is not time, we only have one life on earth, why not just start now and change it! I will be interested to see how [Nathan] changes the world._

Unfortunately, Bethany struggled with her work on the research paper. She started off working with a peer, Morgan, on the study hall topic. However, Bethany initially struggled with finding sources. Though I was working with her, when the first due date came around Bethany showed up with a completed set of notes on a topic that we had not developed in class, marijuana. A problem board had been developed by the class,
and all of the topics had been approved. This topic was not an eligible topic, but because this participant struggles, and she had clearly worked very hard on her own to complete the assignment, I felt that it would be more of a set-back than she could overcome if I asked her to redo her research. I reluctantly agreed to let her do the assignment with the understanding that she would investigate both sides of the issue. I needed her to present both sides of the issue so that my job would not be at stake for allowing a student to complete research that supported use of an illegal substance. However, by adding this stipulation to her assignment, I pulled her out of the problem posing process which would likely have ended with a persuasive product instead of the comparative product. My limitations on Bethany probably diminished her success. The specifics will be addressed later in this chapter. Bethany still put forward a great effort, and here is the goal she set at the end of her research paper.

I believe this to be an either or situation. Maybe once people read this article on marijuana they will become educated, and that is all that is wanted, so that they don’t make that final decision on just from what you have heard or by the society is incorrect.

Bethany’s frustration was clear at the end of the process when she wrote her final reflection.

Well it’s just that it is such a big controversy, and if I could redo I would not do it again, one because you [Ms. Revelle] have a biast opinion on it, and it just a hard subject fitting so much valuable information in to a small research paper. I’m very disappointed on how bad I did, as in a grade yet I tried so hard. I don’t believe I am changed.

Neal

Best friends with Nathan, these two participants will always choose to work together on class assignments rather than work alone. They are both athletes who play
both football and basketball. Neal struggles academically on complex assignments, but with his good friend Nathan, he is able to keep up with his work. His work is slow and deliberate, but he rarely moves beyond the surface of a concept. To outsiders, Neal seems confident, but in reality, Nathan actually does most of the talking for both of them to the extent that during instruction, Nathan will answer questions posed to Neal. So it was not a surprise that Nathan and Neal worked together on the final project to complete the action of their research assignment.

In response to “Waiting for the World to Change” by Meyer, Neal responded “I’m not really sure what I am waiting for. So I’m just going to wait to read the next person’s writing and add onto that.” After he read his peer’s responses, he added

...I agree with [Bethany], [Nathan], and [Mark], and [nonparticipant] about changing the world. You can’t wait for it to do it by itself. ... Yes, for once [Nathan] makes sense. Oh, and I wasn’t aware that you were change the world? What do you do to change the world [Nathan]?

In his research paper, he pursued the job market to see what jobs were marketable for students getting ready to start college even though he was not really interested in the topic. I suspect that this was Nathan’s topic, and Neal just followed along. In his research paper, his action was unclear.

I need to come up with a way to get all of that information out to kids who are looking for a job to pursuit. I have decided to do that by writing a letter to a company or business asking them certain things about jobs and what it takes to obtain a decent one.

Though this description is unclear, by the time the participants were ready to present their projects for action, Neal and Nathan had planned to write letters to one of their sources who teaches a career course at a local university to come and present a lecture on the hot jobs in the current market, and they wrote an additional letter to the principal
to ask him to make the arrangements for this guest-speaker to come. Though the letters were written, I was never provided evidence that they were sent, even after multiple requests. Here is Neal's final reflection.

I used communication skills by e-mailing Mr. [Audience Name] and asking him to come and talk to our school. … I'm not really sure what problem there was with the topic of jobs, all I did was get research of information off of the web and determined which jobs would be best for young adults. …Yes, I did e-mail him and I thought I copied it to you but I will be sure to take care of that no later than this weekend.

Nathan

Best friends with Neal, Nathan is the most confident of the two. Very self-aware, Nathan was the only participant to recognize the power of change within himself in the early phases of the problem posing process. Nathan maintains a great deal of control over his circumstances, speaking up when he has concerns and planning for his own success. Nathan seems to understand his teachers and the content very well, and he completes his work to an acceptable level without putting much effort forward. His effort is saved for his two favorite pursuits, sports and girls. In this class, Bethany is the object of his affection. In response to Meyer's song “Waiting for the World to Change,” Nathan replied,

Me waiting for something NO, I am not waiting I am changing. I am trying to be the one who takes action in to my own hands. Other people wait for me. I change the world. ...America used to be a bunch of doers now were a bunch of waiters, always letting people choose our paths and like now we always sit and wait for our friends to pick something to do, God just pick something and go with it. You know? … I am waiting for [Bethany] to call me haha, … [Bethany] Those are the most truthful words ever spoken 😊 They are so down to earth and real life I thought that this is the best topic ever, Good job. I agree 100%.

When Nathan was writing his research paper, he still didn’t have a clear goal in mind. At the point he wrote his plan for action he stated, “I would like to try to find a head hunter
organization that would listen to me. When I do find one I want to partner up with them and see if I could help them… help those kids decide a career path….”

Though he wasn’t sure of his path when he wrote up his research, Nathan was ready for the presentations. Nathan blames Neal that the action didn’t happen in his final reflection.

I believe Neal has sent it to him, well he says he has so IDK [I don’t know], you will have to ask Mr. [Neal], every time I ask him he gets mad. I chose this topic because I am in the stages of trying to pick my career path so I thought I should do some research to try and help myself and others out. Yes, I was pleased with the results, but it didn’t affect me that much.

Morgan

A strong voice in the class, Morgan is a doer. She actively seeks the resources she needs for success, coming in for extra tutoring or extra credit if her grade drops too low. Though she sometimes struggles academically, she has set high personal goals for herself and expects to do well. When she does not, she increases her efforts to improve her achievement. At the beginning of the problem posing process, Morgan responded to "Waiting for the World to Change" by Meyer with the following:

What am I waiting for? I’m waiting for people to grow up and realize not everything goes your way and people need to take responsibility for their own actions and to quit blaming others for their mistakes and problems. …That’s good at least you have a plan and you’re not a lazy bum like most kids at our school! … I want to be remembered as someone that did good or helped others…

Morgan decided that the school needed a study hall similar to one at a school she had previously attended, and she researched and planned to make this happen at this school in her research paper. She stated her goal.

What I am planning on doing to help promote the decision of having study hall is I would like to create a visual presentation, PowerPoint, to show the counselors of [School Name] that study hall is highly needed for the higher education of
students. I answered my question by finding information on how study hall benefits a school and how it improves the grades of students. The expected results I hope to notice would be that the principle would consider letting students have study hall as an after school or in school class, and that it would be approved by the [Name of the School District].

When it was time to present, Morgan had made some changes to her plan. Instead of presenting to the counselors, she set up an appointment with the principal and put together a presentation. She argued the need for study hall at the school to the dean of students. When she reflected in the journal at the end of the process, Morgan explained,

Research came from people I surveyed and online articles. And communication by surveying 30 kids at [School Name] and gave a public presentation to Mr. [Gomez]. I was looking for how study hall helps the academic society greatly & I was researching that. I decided on this topic because I would really like study hall at the school.

These ten students were the participants in this study.

Guiding Questions

As the students worked through the phases of the problem posing process within the framework of the research assignment, several factors both supported and hindered the process. These factors will be considered through the first of the two guiding questions for this study.

1. What elements supported the problem posing process as evidenced by the work and interviews of my students participating in this secondary research project?

2. What elements were constraints to the problem posing process as evidenced by the work and interviews of my students in this secondary research project?

A third question addresses the impact of the critical problem posing on the individual students.
3. What did students learn as evidenced by their work and interviews in this secondary research project in which the critical problem posing process was utilized?

Answers to these questions will be explored through systematic examination of specific instances and examples provided from the journals, artifacts and interviews of the participants in order to provide a deep description and triangulation through multiple sources.

Support for Problem Posing

What elements supported the problem posing process as evidenced by the work and interviews of my students participating in this secondary research project?

The data from this study suggest that there were several classroom and instructional elements that supported problem posing. The themes related to support coincide with the phases of problem posing (Wink, 1997). As the students moved through the phases, their needs changed and the themes of support were dependent on the phase of problem posing where the data were situated. Therefore, this analysis is organized around the problem posing process, reviewed in Figure 1. The student quotes are represented as they appeared in their work without any grammatical or structural changes.

Begin with Students’ Experience – Phase 1

The student-experience phase of the problem posing process consisted of peer journaling. Participants responded to a piece of literature, a prompt, and each other to explore teacher provided issues in relation to their own experiences. In this phase, two themes of support were observed in the data:
(a) When participants brought prior knowledge about the topic into their work with the peer journals, it provided a foundation for discussing serious local and global issues.

(b) The nature of the community provided through the peer journals allowed each participant a voice, an interactive audience and immediate feedback that encouraged a deep dialogue and extended connections.

The peer journal activity took place over four days. Four pieces of literature were provided along with coordinating prompts. The participants were encouraged to respond to the literature, the prompt, or each other as the journals moved from student to student. Each student was assigned a “home” journal for the beginning of the activity, and every five minutes the journals rotated around the room. Either four or five participants responded in each journal. Table 3 contains a list of literature pieces and prompts used for this activity.

Prior Knowledge

When participants brought prior knowledge about the topic into their work with peer journals, it provided a foundation for discussing serious local and global issues.

The peer journal assignment started with a topic that all of the participants had experienced firsthand, cheating. In the children's book *The Empty Pot* by Demi, the protagonist is recognized and rewarded for being honest. However, the students’ personal experiences with cheating were different, as pointed out by James. “Cheating causes inaccurate test grades… Unfortunately, cheaters aren’t always caught like in the story, “The Empty Pot,” making participants feel cheating is rewarded,” he said. In the school, Seth reported that “I personally saw one kid in one of my classes during a test,
asking me for the answer to a question.” Nathan reflected that “most see this as a problem but I see it as a way of life…,” and described the evolution of cheating as “they just copy off of a friend’s paper, or use the internet, or whatever. Kids have brought cheating to a whole new level now-a-days.” James added, “Just last week students in an AP history class had to retake a test since they cheated when a sub was there. After 1st period, answers to tests fly around and people look up answers to the question that their friends couldn’t figure out.”

Other participants brought in previous knowledge from outside the school. Justin compared the cheating to steroid use in baseball: “Steroids are becoming more and more prevalent through-out the leagues and athletes are taking the easy way out.” James shared that his mom had struggled with cheating in the workplace, stating “cheating has a domino effect that doesn’t stop once school is over. Cheating in the business world can occur when you say you did the work that your partner did. Taking credit for someone’s work is a problem in business.”

Once the participants had worked through the topic of cheating, a topic that they had all experienced and held opinions about, they were comfortable with the peer journal process and ready to take on the topic of equality in education with the Hughes’ poem “Theme from English B.” Though the goal for this prompt was for participants to consider the school and its curriculum in relation to the cultural and social needs of the participants, they tended to share their personal experiences related to specific content and personal experiences of their courses. For example Mark shared that “The lessons we learn at school have nothing to do with our experiences like when do I need to use radicals or when am I going to use the periodic table, never.” Another participant,
James, recognized a disconnect between a class activity and reality. He wrote, “Just today in physics class we did problems that said [for us] to neglect friction. Friction is always present in our world.” Some participants shared experiences that called for a different approach entirely. Morgan wanted her educational experiences to be more benevolent, sharing that “if school would focus more on trying to help starving children… we’d be 10x better off.” Many participants questioned the importance of the memory work experiences encountered including the date of birth of President Lincoln (Morgan), the Pythagorean Theorem (Morgan), making tiramisu (Mark), and matrices (Neal). Each of these participants questioned the importance of memorizing information without a clear understanding of how the information would be used beyond the classroom. Only Bethany thought that if “we cared about the things we learned or had more interest in it we most likely would have much better grades.” However, it isn’t clear if she meant that the curriculum should be more interesting or if the participants should be more interested.

In response to the third prompt and the short story “Mrs. James,” a story of an African-American house keeper who stands up to her boss when her boundaries are not respected, the participants connected their understanding of immigration and “the jobs Americans won’t do” (Bush, 2005). Some participants chose to respond to this issue by listing. “Some jobs that Americans won’t do consist of garbage man, roof houses, janitor, mow lawns, and stuff similar that are too nasty for us American’s,” said Brett. Morgan pointed out that her experience had led her to believe “people love money and are lazy.” Mark reflected that “Americans need to man up and do whatever is necessary to get money” and Justin recognized the importance of the work done by immigrants
when he shared that “Immigrants do most of the toughest, nasty jobs that American’s won’t do. Immigrants almost make up the backbone of the manual labor in America.”

The last prompt was explicitly planned to move participants away from identifying and discussing issues and toward a place where they could look ahead and plan for the changes necessary to address societal issues and concerns. The literature, a song, and the prompt were abstract. However, participants still built their responses around their previous experiences and knowledge. Bethany warned others off waiting and counting on others because “for the most part, they will let you down.” Mark, still connecting to his discussion about immigration, shared that he did not “think American’s were waiters. [He] think[s] some are spoiled and have everything handed to them.” James also looked beyond himself to state that “people are always waiting for other people to go out and change the world. They think someone will do it, so they don’t take the initiative to make an impact.” Though these answers do not have the specific evidence of earlier examples tying them directly to the participants’ prior experiences and knowledge, they do conceptually capture their experiences, and they mirror the abstract, conceptual nature of the song and the prompt.

Through the peer journals, the participants in the study were able to connect their personal experiences to literature and prompts provided by me in relation to current issues. This background knowledge related to the topic provided a foundation for problem posing. This was supported by the immediate feedback provided by peer response that occurred in the peer journal activity.
**Peer Response**

The nature of the community provided through the peer journals allowed each participant a voice, an interactive audience, and immediate feedback which encouraged a deep dialogue and extended connections.

Peer response provided an immediate audience for participant responses and fueled a deep dialogue and extended connections for discussing serious local and global issues in the peer journals. Participants started by making a statement or sharing a belief, and as soon as the journal rotated, their writing received feedback. The responses of the participants to these journal entries varied with the topics and the claims made by their peers. At times, participants agreed, supported and contributed to a statement, but at other times, they challenged and refuted the claims made by their peers. Some participants even changed their opinions based on what their peers contributed. Together these elements provided a deeper understanding of the issues presented and extended the prior experiences and knowledge of all of the participants.

For example, on the topic of cheating, most participants agreed that the problem existed in the school and provided examples to support their statements. However, some participants used their response opportunities to challenge the problem and the attitudes of others towards cheating. Bethany pointed out that “still you don’t learn your lessons for college and so forth,” and Neal added that the “students spend more time coming up with ways to cheat then studying for the test” adding that “if you do cheat, you’re only hurting yourself.” Additionally, participants responded to cheating experiences by sharing the collective down side of cheating, claiming that “people who actually study and listen in class look like they didn’t because they might get an 82 on a test. The people who cheat, however, get like 97’s on their tests and now it just isn’t
fair to the people who actually did study.” James shared this concern adding that “cheating causes inaccurate test grades and can cause a less of a curve for participant who didn’t cheat.”

Other participants responded to peers with excuses for cheating. Morgan shared the “pressure of wanting to be perfect” while Seth described cheating as “more of a desperate thing.” Only Nathan wrote to support the current practice of his peers’ cheating by responding that “there are tricks to be learned and ways to never be caught” after Bethany and Neal had expressed concerns of being caught. Because of the peer responses, each participant moved beyond their own understanding. They read the opinions and experiences of others and related, confronted or contributed in their responses.

When the participants responded to the prompt from the poem “Theme from English B” by Langston Hughes, they were primarily supportive of each others’ perceptions of school experiences. Neal summed this up best when he replied to Bethany saying,

We don’t care about anything we learn about so we all just blow it off and don’t care or anything. If it were subjects we cared about, then we could all relate what we learn to our own life experience.

There were some exceptions though. James responded to Justin’s discussion of the influence of wealth with the following comment: “A person’s wealth can get them almost out of everything.” Few participants disagreed with their disgruntled peers, but Bethany pointed out to Nathan that he needed to know his history to be prepared for his future, and Justin disagreed with James’ statement about team building activities not being “successful in the real world” with
I also think that participating in the team building activities provides its own lesson. If you don’t learn to interact with the people in your group, then how are you going to interact with the people in your job, who you have never seen before, who may be from different states, not just different middle schools?

“Mrs. James” and the topic of immigration provided an opportunity for participants to challenge their peers’ stereotypes and assumptions. Brett changed opinions based on a peer response, after Brett provided a general description of the levels of food preparation; Mark perceived a negative inference and said, “that’s being racist.” Bret responded saying “I agree with what Mark said. People that come from other countries come to get money for their family at home. They do what they have to do to survive. Nathan took issue with Bethany’s comment that American’s were lazy by saying “I ain’t no pansy… I freaking build stuff and work on roofs and do construction… And Americans get the job done.” Bethany responded again to Nathan saying “but why do a job when you can have someone do it for you, I mean that is how many make a living in American, doing something for someone else.” Mark joined this conversation pointing out that “First off not all people who “roof” a house is Mexican, but some Americans wouldn’t be mentally strong enough to build a house” after Neal said “What? No compreindo. …most American’s do not roof houses, it usually is people of the Mexican decent.” James too had to revoke his previous statement that “Most Americans don’t mow lawns” stating that “I guess now I have found out that a lot of people do mow their own lawns.”

Peer responses to “Waiting for the World to Change” helped solidify the abstract responses initially made by relying on previous knowledge. Once participants engaged together, the context moved from the abstract conception of change to the specifics of
the action needed for change to occur in today’s society. Brett thought it was important for people to “take it upon themselves to fix the problem” in response to Morgan’s comment that “people need to take responsibility for their own actions and quit blaming others for their mistakes and problems.” Morgan congratulated Seth for having “a plan” in response to his goal of making enough money so he could “make a movie.”

After Mark described “Americans as waiters,” Nathan shared with his group that “America used to be a bunch of doers now we’re a bunch of waiters, always letting people choose our paths,” prompting this reply from Bethany, “We only have one life on Earth, why not just start now and change it.” Justin’s and James’ conversation centered on war. James agreed with a nonparticipant that the United States should not “blow up France” and expressed that “war is a disastrous event that [he] hoped to never participate in.” Justin added that “War is very devastating and hardy any good comes out of it… Countries would not fight over land, or oil, or power and this would make everyone friendlier.”

Perhaps because the students received immediate feedback, they were supported and challenged by their peers to be more accurate. In addition, the peer responses added new perspectives to each participant’s perspective on the issues at hand. The students worked together to create a collective personal experience. In the next phase of the problem posing process, the students work collaboratively to identify, investigate and pose problems within their own lives.
Identify, Investigate, Pose a Problem within Your Life – Phase 2

In this phase of the problem posing process, participants engaged in several instructor-led activities to explore potential topics. The peer journals, as described in relation to this experience, provided a foundation for the participants to build their own problems and gave them the opportunity to interact with teacher provided issues before they explored their own. At this point in the process, participants needed both to identify and to start their investigations, and they were provided an opportunity for a walk about where they walked around the school with their peers to make a list of problems in and around the school that could be potential topics for their research and action. After the walk about, the participants brainstormed a list of problems and were instructed to continue their search at home and in the community. The class continued to add to the problem board for several days. From the problem board, participants chose their topics and began checking for resources to support their study. This phase of the problem posing process seemed to be supported in two ways:

(a) The opportunities for students to collaborate seemed to support them as they identified their problem

(b) Participants were able to clarify their focus and define issues for investigation based on the information provided from surveys and interviews.

Collaboration of Ideas

The opportunities for students to collaborate seemed to support them as they identified their problem. Idea generating occurred in the class with involvement from all of the participants. All participants contributed to the problem board and the board was the property of every participant. Though some participants decided to use a problem they had personally posed to the board, others chose topics of interest that were posed
by others. The participants used several sources to identify their problems. First, they were instructed to review their peer journals for ideas. These generated the obvious issues: cheating, school curriculum, immigration, and American jobs. The participants then took a *walk about* in the school to search for more topics. On their *walk about*, participants found problems with the upkeep of the school bathrooms and a discrepancy in the facilities of different athletic departments. Also, the participants looked for more concerns at home and in the community. Community problems included the availability of parks and increased pollution. Table 5 contains the complete list created by the participants on the problem board.
Table 5

Problem Board List

- Gangs
- Nap Time
- Pessimism
- Football Lounge
- Cheating
- Holidays
- Cameras
- Apathy
- Parking
- U.S. Jobs
- Post H.S. Options
- AP Testing
- Preferential Treatment
- Homework
- Bathroom Facilities
- Activism
- School Supply Inventory
- Alcohol
- Differentiation
- School Lunches
- Drug Abuse
- Cell Phones
- Economy
- Birth Control
- School Fines
- Registration Fees
- Wages
- Athletic Budget
- Abstinence
- Academic Schedules
- Block Scheduling
- Racism
- Box Over Porch
- Pollution
- Homophobia
- Standardized Testing
- Sexism
- Drop Gate
- Solar Panels
- Dress Codes
- Jobs
- ½ Days
- Immigration
- Athletic Facilities
- Learning Styles
- Chewing gum
- Student
- Microwaves
- Swimming
- Budgets
- Air Conditioning
- Turf Room
- Iraq War
- Computer Labs
- Low Wage jobs
- “Max” Wage Jobs
- Study Hall
- Public Play
- Places
- Cliquets
- Literacy Rates
- Variety of Music Selection During Passing Period
- Longer Passing Periods
This is a picture of the completed board as it looked in the classroom during the identification and investigation phase.

Figure 10. Completed problem board.

Clarified Focus through Surveys and Interviews

Participants were able to clarify their focus and define issues for investigation based on the information provided from surveys and interviews. Participants were encouraged to incorporate live sources through interviews and surveys, and several participants advanced their issue through these live sources. Participants who spoke with live sources were able to focus their study and were more likely to complete the process all the way through to an action presented to a live audience.

Working together, Matt, Justin, and James surveyed their peers to identify the extent of the cheating problem on their high school campus. They surveyed the
students of the class. Besides the obvious benefit of having current, live responses to their research questions, this group also benefited from the activity of creating a survey. When they created the survey, they narrowed their focus. Their research questions, though simple, provided a clear focus for their investigation. Their survey questions included:

1. Have you ever cheated academically?
2. If so, what have you cheated on?
   - Major Test Grade - Quiz Grade - Homework/Daily Grade
3. Why did you choose to cheat?
   - Didn’t Study - Don’t Care - Worried About Class Rank
   - Other: ______________

Morgan’s survey was completed on a chart in the classroom. It simply asked whether the school should have a study hall period and then asked the participant to respond to a why question. Though Seth did not conduct a formal survey, his research summary showed that he spoke with peers about his concern, and he reported their responses in his paper, stating that some of his friends disliked the songs played during passing period “They think that the songs are stupid, or ‘retarded’.” He called for a survey of the participants in the school as part of his solution in his action plan.

Only Brett utilized the opportunity to conduct an interview. Brett reported in his summative interview with me that his father had warned him that playing on the fields near his home could result in a fine, and this news had instigated his study. Brett called the city parks and recreations department to investigate the rules and the fines. Then, Brett conducted a survey to see whether other participants wanted to play on the fields that were restricted from public use. His survey included the following two questions:
1. Would it benefit you if you got to play on the fields at [Park Name] park?
2. Do you know that if you play on fields that say, “Game Field – no unauthorized practices or games.” You could be fined up to $500?

The responses to Brett’s investigation led him to investigate the different rules for the different parks and develop a plan for sharing the space, so that the city could have nice fields for games and practices, and the youth could have a place to play pick-up games.

Like Brett, the participants who utilized live sources clarified their focus for their research. They clearly identified their problems and, through this investigation, were able to proceed toward solutions. The way participants worked to solve their problems will be discussed next.

*Solve the Problem Together – Phase 3*

The collaborative efforts of the participants of this study extended from the beginning, when participants were exploring their experiences, to the end, when the participants acted on their problems. As they worked to solve their problems, they shared ideas and worked together to collaborate on possible audiences and solutions. Some participants worked in research teams. Five of the ten participants of this study worked on group projects. Nathan and Neal worked as a pair on the topic of “Hot Jobs,” and James, Justin, and Mark worked together toward a solution for student cheating. These participants worked together and independently because the curriculum required individual research papers, so these participants were instructed to divide the topic. Each participant researched a different aspect that would support the overall solution for
the problem. As the participants worked, either as a team or individually, to support their solution with research and create a plan of action, a clear theme emerged: Participants were supported through models, clear examples of problems and potential solutions.

As the participants progressed through this challenging phase of the process, I provided a daily warm-up example of research used to attack a problem through media. These examples included an advertisement from the American Milk Council sharing the benefits of drinking milk, a Drug Abuse Resistance Education Website that provides free research for parents, teens, and children on drug abuse, and, my own testimony to the State Board of Education regarding new state English Language Arts standards and a subsequent interview that resulted from a press conference after the testimony. These models were intended to help students visualize their own problems, solutions and potential audiences for action.

Another model, provided to the participants, was the film *Supersize Me* (Spurlock, 2003). Participants spent two days viewing the film and completing an analysis of how the author used research skills to work toward a solution for an identified problem. The guide asked the participants to identify the statistics, methodology, sources, credibility, use of interviews and testimonials, and then asked the participants to compare the film to their own study. Finally, the participants responded to the film by answering questions about the audience for the film and the impact of the film on American culture.

Bethany, who had struggled with her audience for her comparative paper on marijuana, decided that her audience could be the constituency of Ron Paul and decided to ask the presidential candidate to post her paper on his Website after seeing
the D.A.R.E. example. Brett decided to include both the interview and survey in his presentation on local parks. At the end of their research summaries, each participant was required to present a plan of action, explaining how their problem and solution would be presented to a live audience. The provided models supported the participants by providing ideas for potential audiences and an understanding of the content needed to persuade an audience.

The models also provided examples for the use of sources. Participants were required by the curriculum to find five sources for their research. To encourage collaboration, I allowed participants to share a single source as a group, and live sources from interviews and surveys could be included in the five. The models showed how to use the research to support claims and discover their audience. Though I encouraged participants to be creative in their possible solutions and audiences for their problem, many participants found their solutions when they explored the related literature while they were completing their research requirements.

For example, Mark, Justin and James were exploring student cheating, and through their survey, they discovered an alarming rate of cheating in their own school. In their research, they also discovered that teachers rarely enforce cheating rules and that few schools had specific policies regarding cheating. This group used the examples of schools that did have policies to make recommendations to the teachers at their own school. The recommendations included:

- Honor Codes could be enacted
- Individual desks, not table groups (separate students grouped in more than two to a table)
- Have students turn off all electronic devices with them and have them stored in container on the teachers’ desk
- Patrol the classroom periodically
- Never take your eyes off the students
- Try to refrain from doing other work while students are testing
- Typed and online assignments should be checked for plagiarism

Brett used his research to discover the number and location of parks in the city and to determine which fields could be made available to the public. He even received positive feedback from the person he interviewed who indicated the city was very interested in knowing what the youth of the city wanted from the parks. Morgan found examples of schools with study halls and statistics that supported her argument for the class, and she even developed alternative schedule options to offer during her presentation. And Noah discovered schools that offered parking incentives, and recorded how the students earned them and why the schools provided this parking.

Together the students and I were able to work to solve the chosen problems. I supported the students with multiple and extended models of the use of research in the real world, and the students were able to support each other by working in groups, sharing their sources, and responding to surveys of their classmates. When the students completed their research papers, they were ready to perform their action.

*Action – Phase 4*

The action phase of problem posing was a totally new experience for the participants because their previous experiences with school research projects ended with a paper or presentation to the class. At one point, a participant asked me, “Are we
really going to talk to these people?” In the post-project interviews, Seth expressed his surprise that he was expected to take action on his research.

At first I thought we were just doing it... I thought it was just a normal assignment. This actually was a real research project. I mean, I thought it was just a thing for English class, that's about it. I thought that... I was actually like ‘Oh, we are actually going out and doing something.' I didn’t expect that... It was kind of surprising.

In the action phase of problem posing, participants were successful when the following two things occurred:

(a) A clear focus and purpose was identified early in the problem posing process.

(b) The audience was close in proximity.

Clear Focus Identified Early in the Process

A clear focus and purpose was identified early in the problem posing process. Data to support this theme were located at the end of the research summaries where participants were required to write an action plan. All of the participants who correctly identified their audience completed the action phase of the problem posing process.
### Table 6

*Early Purpose Identified*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Early Purpose Identified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seth</td>
<td>Request a survey on Blackboard on passing period music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noah</td>
<td>Interview with school principal about school parking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan</td>
<td>Present the importance of study hall to school principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Make a brochure on school cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin</td>
<td>Put a brochure on school cheating in the teachers’ boxes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Create new meetings to discuss school cheating</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seth identified his problem as the lack of diversity in the music during passing periods. His plan of action was to request “a survey on Blackboard as to what’s their favorite music.” Noah desired “an interview with Mr. [Hook] who is the principle of our school… and see what there point of view is and there opinion about the school’s parking lot….“ Morgan hoped that “the principle would consider letting students have study hall as an after school or in-school class.” Mark planned to “make a brochure… with information and statistics of school cheating.” Justin, his team mate extended this by adding that he planned to put “a copy of the brochure in each of the teachers’
mailboxes inside the office.” James clarified the goal further saying, “Hopefully, this brochure will open the eyes of our staff and create new meetings and conferences that will be held to only discuss cheating.” These participants with clear purpose and a clear audience at this point of the process completed their action by presenting their research to the live audience they described.

_Audience was Close in Proximity_

The audience was close in proximity.

Close proximity with their audience improved the opportunities for participants to complete their action. Table 7 shows the participant, the audience sought, and whether participants completed their action plan. Note that some participants only determined their action plan at the project stage, after the research summaries were completed.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Audience Sought</th>
<th>Location of Audience</th>
<th>Action Complete</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>High School Teachers</td>
<td>Front Office (with permission from principal)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin</td>
<td>High School Teachers</td>
<td>Front Office (with permission from principal)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>High School Teachers</td>
<td>Front Office (with permission from principal)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brett</td>
<td>City Council or City Recreation Board</td>
<td>City Offices or Recreation Office</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noah</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Principal's Office</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan</td>
<td>Local Professor &amp; Students in the School</td>
<td>Local University</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neal</td>
<td>Local Professor &amp; Students in the School</td>
<td>Local University</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethany</td>
<td>Ron Paul</td>
<td>Campaign Headquarters (never specifically identified address)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Principal’s Office</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seth</td>
<td>Principal – via letter</td>
<td>Principal’s Office</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
By design, the participants began the problem posing process by identifying their research issues close to home, subsequently resulting in audiences that were also close to home. Students met with the audiences located within the school, but the further from the school the audience was located, the less likely students were able to complete the planned action. Brett's action, located in the community but away from the school, was almost completed. Although he made the recreation department aware of his concerns and discussed the possibility of making the change he desired, he did not follow through at the end to present his final product formally, even though, Brett reported, the recreational board expressed interest in knowing what they could do to meet the needs of the local youths and were interested in his research.

Moreover, all of the participants and all of the projects did complete some action, represented by a formal class presentation. This activity gave participants an opportunity to practice their presentation before approaching their live audience, and it gave the other participants in the class a chance to respond and make recommendations on each plan. Below is a graph with the proximities of audiences available to the participants.
Figure 11. Audience proximity.

For the most part, the participants in this study chose audiences that were close. Six of these projects were presented at the school level, and they were all completed.

Bethany’s project had a national audience and was not completed. Nathan and Neal’s action involved both the national and local community, but it was not completed, and Brett’s was community and only partially completed.
Summary

The work and interviews of the participants revealed several elements supporting the problem posing process. In regards to student experiences, the students benefited from the peer journal activity as it allowed them an opportunity to bring forward their prior knowledge and receive an immediate response from the peers. When the students worked to identify, investigate and pose problems within their lives, they were best supported by investigating live sources and collaborating on ideas with their peers. With the support of models from literature and instructor provided models, the participants were able to solve the problems and create plans of action. Finally, a clear focus and purpose, identified early in process and an audience close in proximity supported student completion of their actions to finish the problem posing process successfully.

Although there were elements that supported problem posing during this class unit on problem posing, there were also constraints to problem posing. These will be shared in the next section.

Constraints to Problem Posing

What elements were constraints to the problem posing process as evidenced by the work and interviews of my students in this secondary research project?

In response to the second guiding question, the data from this study suggest that there were several classroom and instructional elements that were constraints to problem posing. The constraints can be represented as themes that align with the phases of problem posing. As the students moved through the phases, their needs changed and the themes of constraint were dependent on the phase of problem posing where the data were situated. Therefore, this analysis is organized around the problem
posing process reviewed in Figure 1. Student quotes are represented as they appeared in their work without any grammatical or structural changes.

*Begin with Students’ Experience – Phase 1*

Peer journals were utilized to provide the students with an opportunity to explore their personal experiences in relation to several issues initiated by my introduction to the unit. The students responded to the following four issues previously described: cheating in schools, immigration and the job market, relevance of the school curriculum, and the idea of waiting for the world to change. Evidence of several constraints was present during this phase:

(a) Participants included vague identifications instead of specifically naming the people and the problems involved in the issues.

(b) The peer audience impacted the way students framed their ideas. Because of a heightened awareness of their peers, students qualified controversial statements and some students insulted each other.

(c) Limited personal experiences with the topic led to inaccurate information that was shared between group members.

*Vague Identifications*

Participants included vague identifications instead of specifically naming the people and the problems involved in the issues. The code of vague identification was given when a student used nonspecific nouns such as *people, students or teachers* in their peer responses. It is likely that students used these vague terms instead of specific names because they did not want to report bad behavior or make offensive statements to their peers or to me. This became a constraint because the inability or refusal to
identify specifically the issue limited the meaning and the depth of a conversation that could have included a deliberate exposure of underlying issues.

When Brett responded to cheating with “I think that it is wrong for people to cheat, but people don’t think it matters if they cheat or not because they think it won’t matter or change the fact they got a better grade than someone who worked their butt off,” he is clearly frustrated by a personal experience, but instead of naming the cheaters, he generalizes the experience using “people” instead of specific names. Realistically, students are unlikely to own up to or name the cheaters in a journal that will be read by their peers and me, their teacher, and though students separated themselves from the cheating prompt, some students included themselves in the wrongdoing. Morgan was frustrated by the “kids” who cheated to make better grades, but when she shared, she added, “Sad thing is as much as we hate people cheating off us, we cheat off other people.” By using the personal pronoun we, she included herself, making a personal connection. Talking about jobs, Morgan excluded herself when she stated that “everyone wants money and quick and they don’t want to have to work” and then later “People need to take responsibility for their own actions and to quit blaming others for their mistakes and problems.” Here “everyone” could be the students in the class, but she implies that she does not include herself in this everyone with the use of the word people here instead of the we she used before when she talked about cheating.

Seth shared Morgan’s concern about the desire for wealth when he wrote “The world is revolving around money and people can never get enough of it.” The students recognize the social problems caused by the desire for wealth, but he relies on people
to identify an unknown selfish being, he also generalized to the world to describe the place where this offense occurs. This could be because he does not want to offend others, or it could be because Seth does not personally know. Though Nathan included himself using the word we in the response “If we weren’t so lazy everybody would have something to do and there wouldn’t be time for people to do drugs and so much trouble could be avoided,” he returned to the word people when the topic of drugs showed up. Bethany was additionally vague “…people wouldn’t have time to do some of the wrong things that they do.” Not only are the people unidentified, the wrong doing is so vague that it is difficult to connect meaning to her comment. She expects her audience to understand a cryptic message when she goes on to warn them that they “shouldn’t have to rely on other people in life because for the most part they will let you down.” This statement implies that Bethany has been let down by someone she was counting on, but she does not share the specific experience that makes her believe this statement. Her reasons may be too personal for this journal.

Certainly the students do not want to offend each other. Mark seemed additionally concerned about offending his instructor, or breaking an unwritten code of silence, when he wrote “…some people don’t study and they want to pass so they cheat. Some teachers use different tests to stop the cheating but some teachers are lazy and don’t make the separate tests.” It could be risky to call a specific teacher lazy, and additionally, it is not in Mark’s nature to be disrespectful or unappreciative of the teachers who work to educate him.

Neal’s vague identification was especially poignant when compared to the specific description he included when he shared that
People who actually study and listen in class look like they didn’t because they might get an 82 on a test. The people who cheat, however, get like 97’s on their tests and now it just isn’t fair to the people who actually did study.

The details here include a situation and specific grades, but still no names are shared. Even when it seems clear that Neal is talking about the city and his high school, he doesn’t name them, “For example people throw their trash all over the city, don’t clean up in the bathroom, and just don’t care about anything.” In both cases people represents offending parties that Neal would be uncomfortable naming.

Political issues are minimized by generalities. James shares that “Most people when they think about our economy don’t think about the minimum wage jobs,” and, “If we didn’t have other people doing the dirty jobs who would do them.” These statements paired show the oppressor and the oppressed both represented with the word people. Justin does the same thing by using three peoples that represent both parties. “Many people are mistreated daily, just because of their color. I think more people should treat other people the way they want to be treated.”

Though in many of these cases, the identification of the vague terms could be implied, the fact that the students did not feel safe enough with their peers or their instructor to name these issues and people specifically represents a constraint to a full recognition and understanding of their shared experiences. The next section will connect this to the way the participants framed their responses for their peers as they interacted with peer pressure.
Framing Ideas for Peer Responses

The peer audience impacted the way students framed their ideas. Because of a heightened awareness of their peers, students qualified controversial statements and some students insulted each other. The students worked in groups of four during the peer journal process. As described before, the peer response provided support for exploring the students' experiences; however, there were also occasions when the students' awareness of their peers impeded full disclosure, and conversely, there were times that students were hostile toward another group member. These peer obstacles had some patterns. First, when some students made controversial or political statements that they were concerned peers might find offensive, they often qualified their writing with a side remark that would diminish the seriousness of the topic at hand. The reason for this was apparent when some students responded with hostility to comments that they did not agree with or comments that they found offensive.

I have observed as a high school teacher that teens can be quite hard on each other. Near the beginning of this activity, Seth corrected the grammar of one of his peers: “‘their’ not ‘there,’” showing that he could be critical, but when he had a conflict with a peer on an issue, he said “I kind of disagree with your perspective.” He qualified his disagreement with the words “I kind of,” minimizing the impact and confrontation with his peer. Noah on the other hand was straightforward with his disagreement, but his comment was abrasive when he called Brett “racist” after Brett described advancing from Taco Bell to Macaroni Grill.

Nathan spoke with the firmest voice but still used a wide range of qualifiers as he progressed. For example, on the topic of cheating, he wrote “…the only way to make
them stop is to bust them and bust them hard. Be mean with punishment, MEAN!!!.” He followed this comment with the following symbol: “☺.” Then, when he called out his friend Neal for cheating, he said “I think [Neal] cheats and he is just trying to just look good. Haha JK [Just Kidding]… and [Neal] really cheats hah wow I am in a bad mood…” Then to offset his own bad behavior, he recounted a time when he was in trouble for calling another student “gay.” He shared “…I got ISS [In School Suspension] for calling someone gay last year, very stupid they said was a lesson, my butt, I just turned around and called them gay haha hasn’t changed my experiences in life.” Then, when Nathan insults Bethany he says “And [Bethany] she for sure doesn’t pay attention in class all she is thinking about is like, guys, [Noah] and stuff like that haha haha JK [Just Kidding].” Later he tells her “…please [Bethany] shut up.” Then moving to a seemingly opposite extreme, he claims that he’s “waiting for [Bethany] to call [him] haha” and “[Bethany] Those are the most truthful words ever spoken ☺.” Then he used *haha* and ☺ in combination to off-set this comment: “…Americans should be less lazy but we really do have someone for every job even if they aren’t real Americans. Haha ☺.” After Bethany commented that “…men need to man up,” Nathan said “…please [Bethany] shut up… Yeah fool! I have roofed a house before.” Interestingly he ended this journal entry: “… yeah I love up to [Bethany] she is so smart.” Nathan, Neal and Bethany seemed to be negotiating the uncomfortable content at the same time they were negotiating peer relationships. Maintaining social standing in the students’ peer groups required that students participate in this balance between insulting peers and dismissing the insults as jokes.
Bethany worked to keep Nathan honest in the journal and asked Nathan, “What did the quote have anything to do with roofing houses,” and, “I am waiting for [Nathan] to stop writing about himself haha.” Neal added to Nathan’s comments on immigration with “What? No compiendo This says about America? … but yeah most Americans do not roof houses, it usually is people of the Mexican decent.” However, Mark really took the issue of Mexicans roofing houses to task when he told Neal “First off not all people who ‘roof’ a house is Mexican, but some Americans wouldn’t be mentally strong enough to build a house but some are.” Nathan’s comments were misguided and needed a rebuttal, but in the end, Mark lessened the strength of his words with “but some are.” Neal stereotyped “most Americans” and “Mexicans,” and Mark, one of two Hispanic students in the class, stepped up to address this without replicating the generalization.

This group, made up of Nathan, Neal, Bethany, and Mark, worked to have a serious discussion, but because they often insulted each other, they developed a pattern of release from the intent, using side comments of *JK, just kidding, ☹, and haha* to diminish the impact. Unfortunately, these phrases also diminished the strength of their arguments and the students’ ability to develop ideas cooperatively in a safe environment free of insults.

The students alternated back and forth between insulting each other and praising each other. When they needed to say something, they often deflected the focus of their message with a comment that would release them from the responsibility for what they had said. The next section will show how students perpetuated misinformation as they developed their shared personal experiences.
Limited Personal Experiences

Limited personal experiences with the topic led to inaccurate information that was shared between group members. The students reported their personal experiences, but some of the students did not bring accurate information into the conversation because of their misconceptions. This difference can be particularly noted among the four different prompts for the peer response journals found in table 3. The students had a wide range of personal experiences dealing with school cheating and most of the personal knowledge shared was based on observations they had made. However, other prompts were more limiting for the students because the students did not have related experience, and in several cases, students inadvertently worked with misinformation provided by a peer.

Few participants made erroneous statements regarding cheating, but one was made when Brett claimed that when “baseball players got caught with steroids, they just get kicked out of the MLB league. When we get caught with steroids, we get thrown in jail” because we know that Barry Bonds was able to continue in the MLB (Major League Baseball) until he broke the homerun record, even though the MLB knew he had used steroids (Mitchell, 2007; Quinn, 2007). The only other incorrect piece of information provided during the responses to this prompt was made by Bethany when she said, “Everyone gets caught eventually.” Not everyone is caught and punished for cheating. However, this statement was likely a generalization perhaps used to avoid a disagreement.

In response to the prompt, “Does this school teach all of the students what they need to know?” in connection to the Langston Hughes’ poem “Theme for English B,” the
students primarily took this opportunity to complain about their classes instead of looking more deeply at the purpose of school and the curriculum. This question may have been better phrased, “How does what is taught at this school show you what the school expects of its graduates?” However, based on the prompt used, several students made misconceived statements that challenged the development of an accurate and meaningful textual conversation. Some of these comments included: “like when do I need to use radicals or when am I ever going to use the periodic table, never.” “Every single lesson is pointless because we are not going to be needing any of it later in our lives,” and surprisingly,

I agree with [nonparticipant] about the fact that the team building activities don’t really work. In the teams, friends talk to their own friends and people whoever rarely met never interact. If I don’t know anyone in my group, I can’t wait for the activity to end. The team building activities are not successful in the real world.

These responses are immature in that they lack the experience beyond school to see where these content areas fit into the world beyond the classroom. However, these statements may represent truth for these students based on their life experiences.

In response to the immigration topic, most of the inaccuracies were built on generalizations and stereotypes. They included:

- People come from other countries come to get money for their family at home. (Neal)
- Would you rather beg for money out in the streets, or at least, work at a McDonald’s and get some money? (Noah)
- America used to be a bunch of do’ers now were a bunch of waiters. (Nathan)
- Well it is not normally required for most women to get our hands dirty, normally the mens… (Bethany)
- A lot of the smart jobs are worked by Asians and Indians… they work harder in school. (Morgan)
- Americans have other countries do their dirty work for them. Americans can be very lazy, but at the same time, we have never lost a war and neither have we fought a war in our own country. So I think Americans show great patriotism, (Justin) and

- America won’t make their own clothing because everything we wear today says ‘made in China.’ America does all the ‘smart’ jobs. We program things like computers and we design things like video games, but we never make them, we just ship the parts off to their countries and they do the dirty work for us. (Justin)

From a critical pedagogical stance, I would judge that these students needed to question their own and their peers’ assumptions constructively, but they did not do so. Critical questioning and providing support for these blanket statements could eliminate some the mistakes. However, this activity was designed to bring forward the students’ experiences and to help them engage in conversations about critical issues before engaging in their own research. These mistakes and generalizations were a constraint to meeting that goal because misinformation was not challenged, and students accepted what they heard and built on it in their own writing.

Part of the purpose of grounding this activity in literature was to provide good background knowledge for the students to build their responses. But as already established with the cheating prompt, there are topics about which some students have more experience than others. Though misinformation is a constraint to the problem posing process, the information shared by the students was still a representation of their experiences.

The next section of this chapter will explore a constraint to identifying, investigating and posing a problem from within the participants’ lives.
Identify, Investigate, Pose a Problem within Your Life – Phase 2

At this phase of the problem posing process, participants engaged in several instructor-led activities to explore potential topics. The peer journals, as described in relation to experience, provided a foundation for the participants to build their own problems and gave participants an opportunity to interact with the issues provided by me before they explored their own. Moreover, at this point in the process participants needed both to identify and start their investigations. They were provided an opportunity for a walk about around the school with their peers to make a list of problems in and around the school that could be potential topics for their research and action. After the walk about, the participants came back and brainstormed a list of potential topics and were instructed to continue their search at home and in the community. The class continued to add to the problem board for several days. From the problem board, participants chose their topics and began checking for resources to support their study.

If the goal of problem posing was for students to investigate, identify, and pose a problem within their own lives, apparently the choices of two of the groups (cheating and jobs), to pursue investigations into previously explored topics, was an unintentional endorsement of several issues. The students chose topics that were developed by the class and were interesting, but could have posed constraints to problem posing because they originated from me, so the theme emerged: Although the participants identified topics from their own lives, many students still chose topics that were proposed by the me.
The development of this theme is revealed when the student generated list of topics is compared to those actually used by the students. Table 6 contains the list that the participants generated on the class problem board.

Table 8 contains the list of topics that the participants chose.

Table 8

*Participant Topic Choices*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Topic Chosen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bethany</td>
<td>Marijuana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brett</td>
<td>Park Availability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Cheating in Schools – Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin</td>
<td>Cheating in Schools – Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Cheating in Schools – Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan</td>
<td>Study Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan</td>
<td>Hot Jobs – Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neal</td>
<td>Hot Jobs – Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noah</td>
<td>Parking Incentives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seth</td>
<td>Music During Passing Periods</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two groups, representing fifty percent of the participants, chose “cheating in schools” and “hot jobs” as their topics. Both of these topics can be directly traced back to topics that were given in the peer journal activity. The “cheating in schools” topic was first explored based on Demi’s book *The Empty Pot*, and the “Hot Jobs” topic was first
explored through Alice Childress’ short story, “Mrs. James.” The discussion that followed this work connected to immigration.

The first group that chose “cheating in schools” initially picked “school bathroom facilities” as their topic, but after their initial exploration of sources, they changed topics to “cheating in schools.” Students were encouraged to look for sources before committing to their topic. Also the students were given a week to add topics to the problem board, but once the week was over, the students were obligated to choose only from the board of topics. This group may have felt limited and fallen back on the safe topic of school cheating which was not a student generated topic because school cheating was added to the problem board on the first day when the groups looked for possible topics in their peer journals.

This constraint could be a “casualty” of the very successful peer journal activity. The participants were engaged by this topic and wanted to pursue it further. However, with 50% of the participants returning to the prompts provided by me instead of choosing issues of self discovery on the student produced list, this should be considered as a possible constraint at this phase of the problem posing process. The next section will explore the constraints to solving the problem together.

_Solve the Problem Together – Phase 3_

As described earlier in the chapter, the collaborative efforts of the participants in this study extended from the beginning, when students were exploring their experiences, to the end, when the students acted on their problems. As they worked to solve their problems, they shared ideas and worked together to share resources. Some
participants worked in research teams. Five of the ten participants worked on group projects. Nathan and Neal worked as a pair on the topic of Hot Jobs, and James, Justin, and Mark worked together toward a solution for student cheating. The participants worked together and independently because the curriculum required individual research papers so these participants were instructed to divide the topic. Each participant researched a different aspect that would support the overall solution for the problem. As the participants worked to support their solutions with research and to create a plan of action, a constraint to success emerged: The curriculum requirement of an individual research paper was a constraint to students solving the problem together.

The students were encouraged to work together to share sources and to talk out their research and solutions in teams. Time in class was provided for them to share before they wrote the research reports. For the groups that created a unique singular product, this worked well, but for students who pursued individual solutions to their proposed problems, the collaboration sometimes caused awkward connections or inaccurate claims in the actual research paper as shown below.

Noah tried to connect his research on parking incentives to the research collected by two nonparticipants who were working on the topics of school naps and athletic budgets. He attempted to connect with his peers when he wrote:

With the research that I have from the people in the group that I’m in say that napping can be an incentive. Or some people say that, if you perform your best during the athletic time. For your incentive that you have, the department can get a lot of athletic budget.

Still other students who were working individually did not have enough research to support their writing without the shared resources of a team. Seth and Bethany relied
heavily on personal knowledge to complete their papers and often used broad
generalizations to support their arguments. Seth’s paper started off with support, but
once he completed the numbers of quotes and paraphrases required in the grading
rubric, he relied on his personal experiences with the music in the school and his
friends’ general comments, remembered as hearsay, on the selections.

Some people might think that this research is pointless, but, I do not think so. I
think that we should change the music, as I said before; it becomes very boring,
and makes some of the students that I had surveyed, like different types of music
instead of the songs being played on the loudspeakers. But I do admit, some of
the kids do like the songs being played over the loudspeakers during the passing
periods at school.

Morgan, too, relied on her personal experiences to support her position in her paper
with limited references from research.

If there was an after school study hall program, then kids could attend if they
didn’t understand something that was taught in class, also if there was an after
school (kids out of trouble). So my overall point is that, if kids had study hall
before or after school, then a majority of the students attending would raise their
grades because their doing their homework, they would also do well in class
because they asked questions during the tutorial sessions and they would have
more time to do what they want to do.

Though Bethany’s paper on marijuana was well supported with substantial research
both for and against the legalization of marijuana as I requested, she chose to make a
personal connection in her introduction, claiming “an uncle dealing with chemotherapy.”
This claim turned out to be creative support when she later admitted that she did not
have such an uncle.

Of the five students who worked in teams on group projects, overreliance on
personal knowledge was not a problem. The students working in teams clearly and
effectively wove into their essays strong support for their positions. So, the constraint in
this case was a consequence of pursuing a topic of choice independently without the community of the class.

In the next section, the constraints to completing action will be presented.

**Action – Phase 4**

The action phase of problem posing began at the end of the research papers, when the students were required to create a plan of action and to choose an authentic audience for solving the problem they had identified and researched. Then, the students were expected to complete their action plans. In this phase of problem posing, four constraints were revealed through data analysis:

(a) For some students a clear focus and purpose was not identified early in the problem posing process.
(b) If students receive a low grade on an early assignment, they were reluctant to follow through on their action.
(c) A student struggled to complete the action phase if the audience was far in proximity.
(d) In peer groups, loyalty to a friend prevented a student from completing the action.

**Focus and Purpose Not Identified**

For some students a clear focus and purpose were not identified early in the problem posing process. Finding a focus early in the problem posing process supported a successful action stage. Consequently, those students who were slow to identify a clear focus struggled to complete their action. To guide the students as they developed their essays, they were provided guiding questions. *What?*, *So what?*, *Now what?* were the primary questions, and each of these was broken down into additional questions to help students understand expectations.
Table 9


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What?</th>
<th>What is the problem being investigated?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How did you identify the problem?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So What?</td>
<td>Why is it important to study this topic?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What did the research tell you about your topic?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Now What?</td>
<td>What can you do to work toward solving this problem?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is your action plan?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Who is the audience for this solution?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The four students who did not complete their actions all lacked a clear *Now what?*. Their plans were vague, or they did not have a plan. For example, although Brett’s research had put him in personal contact with the head of the city recreational department, he did not identify that contact as the target audience for his action. Instead, he wrote, “I am going to personally confront the City Council of [City Name] or the Parks and Recreation department and ask if this could be done or anything could be done.” The use of the word *or* indicates a lack of assurance in his plan and his audience.

As described previously, Bethany’s marijuana project was not structured for problem posing, since she was exploring both the advantages and disadvantages of legalizing marijuana at my request. However, in her attempt to meet the expectations, Bethany shared,
I believe this to be an either or situation. Maybe once people read this article on marijuana they will become educated, and that is all that is wanted, so that they don’t make that final decision on just from what you have heard or by the society is incorrect.

When we worked on presentations, Bethany verbally explained that it was her goal to send her essay to Ron Paul, candidate for president of the United States, to post on his Website. However, after multiple offers to help her prepare and send her paper, she did not follow through on the action and send her essay to Ron Paul. Bethany did not have a clear plan to reach her audience, and she did not complete her action phase.

As a group, Nathan and Neal also failed to complete their action, and their audience was vaguely identified in their papers. Nathan wrote,

I would like to try and find a head hunter organization that would listen to me. When I do find one I want to partner up with them and see if I could help them searching out to find people that are in high school and have them help those kids decide a career path that would fit them and be a benefiting job.

Waiting to find this organization at the end of the problem posing process contributed to his inability to complete his action. Neal’s paper was similar.

I have decided to do that by writing a letter to a company or business asking them certain things about jobs and what it takes to obtain a decent one. I’m not quite sure which business I am going to choose to write too, but I am leaning towards my mothers, which is the American Heart Association.

In the end, neither student identified the audience he eventually chose to approach, a local college professor who had written a recent article on the job market. Neal mentioned the American Heart Association, but working for a non-profit organization was not identified as a “hot job” in Nathan or Neal’s papers.

**Bad Grades**

If a student received a low grade on an early assignment, they were reluctant to
follow through on their action. Two of the students revealed a second reason for not completing their action in their journal reflections at the end of the problem posing unit. In addition to providing the students an opportunity to reflect, these journals were also used as a member check. The students reflected on what they had done in the problem posing process, and then I responded by explaining what I had observed in their work. I then asked the students to respond to my observations.

Clearly, Neal’s grade discouraged him from presenting his research to an audience because he wrote:

About doing it on my own, I'm not that convinced that I could because seeing as how I tried and thought I did decent on that paper, but got a 67 on it, In my opinion I don’t really think this is my strong suit.

This comment indicates he would have put forth more effort to contact his audience if he thought he had a quality product to share. Bethany, whose project structure already made it difficult to complete an action, was also discouraged by her grade. She explained “I’m very disappointed on how bad I did, as in a grade yet I tried so hard.”

In reality, both students had good points to share from their research papers. However, for the research paper, there were additional requirements for correct MLA style and correct documentation. These skills are important, but in this case, they were a constraint for students in the problem posing process because they led to low grades.

*Proximity*

A student struggled to complete the action phase if the audience was not in close
proximity. The last constraint was proximity. The closer the student was to the physical location of the audience, the more likely they were to complete their action. Table 8 shows the participants and their audiences.

The students who did complete their action plans worked with an audience on campus, and the students who did not complete their action plans were working with audiences beyond the campus. Patterns revealed in data analysis suggest that audiences that were on campus were concrete and real to the students, so it made the process easier to imagine and finish. Students looking beyond the school were targeting an unfamiliar audience, an audience beyond their own experiences. The more distant the audience was from the school, the less likely it was for the students to identify them during the process and to approach these audiences to complete their actions. See figure 12.

Figure 14 illustrates that, Brett, who only partially completed his action during his interviews, found his audience in the outer rings. His audience was at the community level. Nathan and Neil chose audiences between the community and the national level. They had identified their audience as the author of a journal article, but he happened to be located in the extended community. Bethany’s audience was a national audience because she sought the assistance of a presidential candidate to publish her essay.

*Loyalty to a Friend*

In peer groups, loyalty to a friend prevented a student from completing the action.

For the group made up of Nathan and Neal, their friendship became a constraint in completing their action when Nathan relied on Neal to send the email to their
audience. Though Neal was asked multiple times to provide the evidence that he reached his audience, he did not provided the evidence. When he was first questioned about the email that he sent, Neal responded that he sent it from home, so I asked him to pull up his sent mail and forward a copy to me. I also, sent him several email reminders. When the students reflected, Neal said again that he would get that to me. In the member-check, I asked Nathan if the email was sent, and his response was that “you will have to ask Mr. [Neal], every time I ask him he gets mad,” Though Nathan and Neal are best friends, they are still negotiating their relationship. Nathan asked Neal about the email, but to preserve his friendship, he would not proceed any further toward completing the group’s action.

Summary

Several constraints influenced the success of students participating in the problem posing process. At the beginning, when the students relied only on their previous life experiences, they often lacked relevant examples or provided mistaken information when they shared together. Also, because the students were working together, they struggled to name specifically some problems in this social context, sometimes relying on vague descriptions or offsetting controversial comments. A possible constraint to identifying, investigating, and posing a problem was that half of the students ultimately chose a topic that was first introduced by the instructor instead of using germane topics initiated from their own lives. An additional constraint to this problem posing process occurred because of a mandate in the curriculum that all students must write an individual research paper. Although some students still worked
together to solve their posed problem, many students left the group to work individually on their topic and did not receive the support of shared resources and insights. Finally, students failed to complete the action component of their project when they did not clearly identify a focus and purpose early in the process, when they received a bad grade on an early assignment in the unit, and when the audience was located off campus.

The Facilitated Research Experience

What did students learn as evidenced by their work and interviews in this secondary research project in which the critical problem posing process was utilized?

The data from the study suggest that the critical problem posing process facilitated the students’ individual development during the English class research assignment. This section is organized in individual student vignettes similar to those used at the beginning of the chapter to introduce the participants. Looking at the students individually may reveal their development by comparing their writing in the early stages of the problem posing process to their later writing and interviews conducted at the end of the process. Student quotes are represented as they appeared in their work without any grammatical or structural changes.

Mark

At the beginning of the process, Mark worked in his peer journal with Nick, Nathan, and Bethany. He often started with a general comment, but when his peers made statements with which he disagreed, he would become more assertive and speak
out. For example, on the topic of jobs, Mark chose to respond to the literature instead of the prompt. He started with a general topic about a character in the story that spoke in the third person, and wrote that “People who talk in the third person about themselves are usually jerks because they’re all into themselves.” However, he engaged deeper in response to Neal who said that Mexicans roof houses. Mark wrote, “First off not all people who ‘roof’ a house is Mexican, but some Americans wouldn’t be mentally strong enough to build a house.” This showed how Mark initially avoided confrontation with his peers, but he was still willing to stand up to his peers when they made generalizations.

After completing his research, Mark wrote a research report with an urgent tone expressing the need for students, teachers and administrators to address the cheating problem in today’s schools. He ended his research report with “Cheating needs to and can be stopped with the help of teachers, staff and most importantly students.” In his reflection, Mark shared how working collaboratively helped him complete his project.

My research skills helped by giving stats and tips to help the audience realize what was going down. My work made a difference because every little bit helped our project. Working in a group helped our presentation because I knew I wasn’t all by myself.

In the final interviews, Mark was optimistic about the success of the completed project. He expressed that the teachers would “make honor codes,… separate form tests,…and they can watch more carefully the students.” Mark eventually folded and distributed the brochures to the teachers after the group obtained permission from the assistant principal.

Mark’s growth during the problem posing process was enhanced because of his peer interactions in both the peer journals and the group project. In addition, he benefited from the immediate audience of the peer journals and the real audience of the
school administration and teachers. He was motivated to remind me to make the copies, so he could complete the final action even when his peers were not available to help him.

Justin

Justin began this project as an insightful student. With each piece of literature and prompt, Justin offered well reasoned answers and responses to his peers. A few examples of some of Justin’s responses in the peer journals illustrate his ability.

Teachers don’t try to prevent cheating and this makes it hard for student to succeed in the long run. When students get out of high school and into college, they won’t know how to do things on their own because they have been cheating their whole lives.

I also think that participating in the team building activities provides its own lesson. If you don’t learn to interact with the people in your group, then how are you going to interact with the people in your job, who you have never seen before, who may be from different states, not just different middle schools.

I think that the equality of people in this nation differs from person to person. I think that some things that cause this could be the person’s occupation, their salary, the race, and maybe where the person lives.

Immigrants do most of the toughest, nasty, jobs that Americans won’t do. Immigrants almost makes up the backbone of the manual labor in America.

We shouldn’t just go out and blow someone up for not helping us in our own war. That would just make everyone sure that Americans are horrible people.

Like Mark, Justin’s research clearly showed the growth of the cheating problem in the school and nation, but unlike his peer, Justin knew that there was not a simple fix for the problem. He recognized that several changes needed to be made, and that it would take time eliminate the problem. He wrote,
More than just the honor codes alone must be used to stop the cheating because just one attempt to stop cheating will never work. You must use several attempts over time. Cheating will not just go away over night. You must widdle away at it until it finally becomes a minor annoyance.

Justin’s research report expressed distain, but patience to work on a systemic solution.

When Justin reflected on his action, he was critical of the group’s presentation to Mr. Gomez.

I felt nervous when I found out that I had to present to Mr. [Gomez] instead of Mr. [Hook]. I think that Mr. [Gomez] is not as friendly as Mr. [Hook] nor is he as open to new ideas. I believe an interview with Mr. [Hook] would have been more friendlier and he would have engaged in our presentation more. I also think that he would have been able to build onto our ideas too.

Justin held a higher expectation of the presentation, and he felt rejection as the principal took another appointment and passed off their presentation to the assistant principal. However, he thought the group was able to make their case to Mr. Gomez because “… He was kind of shocked about it… he was kind of questionable about this, … and toward the end I think he supported our idea…” Justin’s progression was subtle, but the problem posing process moved him from insightful comments to ongoing action. Justin planned to follow through with his action plan to see that it was implemented. In response to my question about his project being completed, Justin said, “If there needs to be like a student-teacher meeting, then I guess we could arrange that.” In addition to seeing the inequalities of his environment, Justin now feels equipped and motivated to work towards a change.
James

Though James points out that “People are always waiting for other people to go out and change the world… so they don’t take the initiative to make an impact,” James’ responses show that at the beginning of the problem posing process he does not believe his work can make a change. For example, on the subject of cheating, James wrote,

Cheating is a serious problem at our school. Not only do people copy each other’s homework; they also cheat on tests. I have heard stories where the teacher has turned around and students start exchanging answers. Just last week students in an AP history class had to retake a test since they cheated when a sub was there. After 1st period, answers to tests fly around and people look up answers to the question that their friends couldn’t figure out. Cheating is nearly impossible to stop, even if there are different test forms.

James gives a clear description of his observations. However, he discounts the possibility for change. In fact, based on this next entry, he does not choose to engage unfamiliar people. “I agree with [nonparticipant] about the fact that the team building activities don’t really work. In the teams, friends talk to their own friends…[and] never interact. If I don’t know anyone in my group, I can’t wait for the activity to end,” he wrote. James explains the way things are without a desire to engage or improve on society because as he explains, “Treating people differently is human nature.”

After James completed his research with his group, the first paragraph of his research report provided another description of the “cheating epidemic,” but this time, he followed the description with a specific action needed to eliminate cheating. He wrote,

Something must be done to eliminate this epidemic sweeping through schools across the nation. Principals and school leaders must advise their staff about cheating. Teachers should be informed about new cheating techniques and the
preventative measures. It should then be the job of teachers to apply this knowledge.

At the end of the report, James wrote his plan of action that included a “comprehensive brochure” for teachers. He believed that teachers were on the “front line” in the defense against cheating, and that they could make the changes that could curb cheating at the high school. At this point, James showed that he did not just accept the problem, he wanted to address it. This is a clear change from his initial entries. In James’ reflection he said that he “would follow this plan to deal with another issue [he] cared about.”

Noah

Though Noah struggles academically, he values education and is counting on a good education to bring him the future he has planned. He wondered, “Why would [a student] cheat threw [his] whole school career while [he] can study and learn?” He believes that his work today will lead to success tomorrow, and that if he works really hard he will “become the next Bill Gates.” He wrote to his peers that they should “know that studying means that you are [going] to have a good life.”

In his research report, Noah struggled. He turned in a report that was difficult to read and incomplete. His research told him that “most of the students are getting prizes for their grades.” So he proposed that he would go to the principal and his secretary to talk about bringing parking incentives to our school. He also thought it might be a good idea to get some student input.

Before Noah could present his project to Mr. Gomez, I helped Noah by having him answer a few questions to narrow his focus. He answered these questions:

1. Who will get the parking incentives?
2. Where are the parking places in the lot?

3. Why should the school do this?

It was clear after his presentation that he needed direction, and we practiced together. When Noah presented to Mr. Gomez, he was asking for two specific parking spots to be used in a rotation for students in the National Honor Society. When Mr. Gomez asked why the National Honor Society students should get these spots, Noah replied,

Because in the National Honor Society, these, you know, these students obviously they’re… they have good grades and they are doing really good in school. Their GPA is high. They’re… they’ve passed TAKS every single year. They’re the… They’re the smartest students in our school and with them you know, having some kind of prize or, um, or like a present from y’all. I think they should deserve something like this.

Though not well articulated, notably the tape recording of his presentation picked up the sound of someone typing on a keyboard, and with only two people (Noah and the assistant principal) present in the office, apparently Noah was presenting to an only partially interested audience.

In our final interview, Noah was still excited about his plan. When asked if he was finished with this project, he replied, "Right now, I’m just waiting for a really good response from the AP to see what their plan is going to be, and if I see it’s not going really well, I will go back and do some more research, or to prove my research.”

Because Noah values hard work, he connected evidence in the form of research to making requests of the administration.

Noah’s academic growth from this process is clear. Though his research report was incomplete, he included his goal and the research from the sources to support his ideas. In addition, Noah is eager to continue working on his action with his audience. The work is graded, but he has moved beyond working for a grade.
At the beginning of the process, Seth seemed to be aware that there is a bigger point to the work at school than just getting good grades. He had a goal. He shared it in response to the question *What are you waiting for?* “I’m waiting to graduate from school, pass out of college, get a good job, and when I get enough times’ money I’ll make a movie,” he wrote. Then he asked his peers, “Do you want people to remember you in a bad way, or a good way?” showing that he understands that the work of our lives can be measured.

Seth completed his research report on the music selection played over the intercom system during the passing periods. At this high school, music is played to facilitate the students’ transition to their next class. When the bell rings for dismissal, the music starts. One minute before the tardy bell rings for the next class, the music stops, so the students know they need to hurry so as not to be late. Seth did not like “the blend” music that was played and thought the school should put up “a survey on ‘Blackboard’ as to what [the students’] favorite music is and [the administration] should play the most popular music in school.” When Seth got an opportunity to have a voice, he chose to share it with his peers by allowing students an opportunity to have a vote for the music played.

Seth completed his research action by mailing a letter to Mr. Gomez requesting a Blackboard survey, so the students could choose the music for passing periods. When I asked Seth in his interview what music he would choose, he replied that he “would put the station 104.9, It’s the Baliwood music station.” Only when I asked at the end, did he
reveal his own choice. His work on this project was not for just his choice, but the choice of all of the students in the school. Most of Seth’s work was done individually. He sought his own sources for the research project and wrote an individual research report. This is probably why he chose to send a letter instead of presenting his action to the administration. Seth only participated in the collaboration in the peer journal activity and when he presented to the class. However, he benefitted from a real audience. His concrete audience was the administrator to whom he sent his letter, but he had an additional abstract audience of the student body that would have participated in the school-wide survey and heard the change in the music during the passing periods.

Brett

Brett was observant and noticed at the beginning of the problem posing process that things were not fair in this world. In response to the prompt on student cheating, Brett wrote, “I think that it is wrong for people to cheat but people don’t think it matters if they cheat or not because they think it wont matter or change the fact they got a better grade than someone who worked their butt off.” He was also aware that society is not fair. In response to “Theme from English B,” Brett wrote, “I think that the story. Theme For English B, is a good story about ‘not the same freedom’ We all have different standards in life because we all come from different backgrounds… Not everybody is treated the same.”

In his research report, Brett shared the reasons it was important to have parks available in the community. They include: the increase of property values, the health of the youth in the community, the environmental advantages, and the pride of the
American park system. In his research, he conducted a survey at the school to check the citizen awareness of a specific city park ordinance that fined unauthorized persons caught playing on the game fields. He also conducted an interview with the city parks and recreation manager to find out what fields were available to the public. This interview resulted in a positive response from the official, and though he was anxious to get a final product, Brett did not complete his action project. Brett’s goal was to ask that one of several parks “be open to the public and for teams to practice.”

At the time of the reflection, Brett still planned to “set up an appointment today because today is first day with little homework.” In the interview, Brett responded that this experience “Helped [me] see what can we can do better in the community. Because I’m in student council so I really don’t look past the school.” At the time that these projects were being completed, Brett was participating both in soccer and cross country. He shared that he wanted to complete the action, but that he could not fit it into his schedule. However, he felt good about the contact that he had already made with the city, and he believed the city was receptive and willing to hear and respond to his concerns.

Brett benefited from working in the problem posing process. He was already active in the student council work and had previous experience working to make changes at the school, but this process was different for him. When he made his requests for this project, he needed to have the support of research and in his case a survey to make his argument for change. Brett too worked alone at the end of his project. Had he worked in a collaborative group, the completion of the final action could have been shared instead of his shouldering the burden of trying to do one more thing.
in his very busy schedule. However, Brett did realize that his audience was eager to talk to him, and that until he had called, they did not realize a problem existed. Brett shared with me that they seemed eager to receive feedback from citizens and to work with community members.

Bethany

As explained previously in this chapter, Bethany struggled with her work on the research paper. She changed topics from study hall with Morgan to marijuana, and I asked her to write a comparative paper instead of following the problem posing process to assure her completion of the project.

At the beginning of the problem posing process, Bethany shared that “cheating does happen, you just have to be good at it not to get caught,” but she also recognized the negative impact of cheating when she added, “Cheating changes test grades, which can make there no curve for the people who studied which is a bummer.” In response to the jobs that Americans will not do, Bethany asked, “Why do a job when you can have someone do it for you?” and then “That is how many make a living in America doing something for someone else.” Though Bethany was working on an assignment that did not fit into the problem posing process, she worked individually to complete a successful research report according to my specifications that she needed to balance the two sides of her issue.

Her research report gave both sides of the marijuana issue. She started with the advantages of legalizing marijuana and ended with the disadvantages. In her reflection,
Bethany shared that she regretted her topic decision and was disappointed in her grade.

It's just that it is such a big controversy, and if I could redo I would not do it again, one because I can [tell] you have a biast opinion on it, and it just a hard subject fitting so much valuable information in to a small research paper. I'm very disappointed on how bad I did, as in a grade yet I tried so hard.

Bethany did try hard, and when I interviewed her, I asked her if she thought she could change people's opinion of marijuana. She answered, “I'm not going to be able to change it. I'm just a kid.”

Bethany’s growth was limited. Not only did she come away from this experience with a sense that she did not have a voice in society, she also failed to meet the academic standards of the assignment that led to her poor grade. Though she was able to find resources and weave them successfully into an engaging research report, she did not provide the internal citations for her sources. This was a major curricular goal for this assignment. Had she had worked collaboratively with a group, she would have had more support during the writing process, and she would have had a better product that she would have felt confident sharing. However, I offered to sit with her to edit the piece and make the corrections necessary to send it to her audience, but she believed she was finished with the assignment and did not want to work on it.

Neal

Neal’s academic interactions consisted of his completion of all of his assignments on time. As previously mentioned, Neal and Nathan are very good friends, and their passion is sports. Neal is an outstanding athlete, but struggles to find meaning in his academic pursuits. “We don’t care about anything we learn about so we all just blow it
off and don’t care or anything. If it were subjects we cared about, then we could all relate what we learn to our own life experience.” Neal needed a connection to care about his work. If he understood the purpose of his assignment, his performance would improve. In sports the purpose is clear, practice today for the game tomorrow.

Neal grew through his interaction with his partner Nathan. The two completed a thorough search of the jobs that will be in high demand in the future, and they came up with good recommendations. In the event that he “doesn’t make it to the NBA,” Nick found that there was a demand for “electrical jobs.” Though his research report was well researched, Neal, as Bethany, did not use internal citations in his paper, and he received a failing grade for this assignment. He did not mention that this was a problem in the final interview. He told me that he had sent an email to his audience requesting a presentation at the school, but he never provided the email as evidence to me. However, when he wrote his reflection, he revealed a concern. When I read his reflection, I realized the impact of the failing grade on his action. He wrote, “I'm not that convinced that I could [change things] because seeing as how I tried and thought I did decent on that paper, but got a 67 on it, In my opinion I don’t really think this is my strong suit.” Though Neal told me that he sent the email request to his audience, I don’t believe the action was completed on this project.

Neal’s growth, as Bethany’s, was hindered by the grade he received on his research report. However, Neal still benefited from collaboration with Nathan and had a product that was ready for his audience. Even when I offered him a way out of his lie by telling him that he could send the email again, Neal did not follow through. He not only
prevented his own success, he also impacted Nathan’s work since they were working together.

*Nathan*

Best friends with Neal, Nathan is the most confident of the two. Nathan was the only participant to recognize the power of change within himself at the beginning of the problem posing sequence.

Me waiting for something NO, I am not waiting I am changing. I am trying to be the one who takes action in to my own hands. Other people wait for me. I change the world. ...America used to be a bunch of doers now were a bunch of waiters, always letting people choose our paths and like now we always sit and wait for our friends to pick something to do, God just pick something and go with it.

In his research report, Nathan determined that the best course of action for the job topic was to have a “head hunter… to partner up with people in the high school [to]… help kids decide a career path.” Neal wrote the letter to the guest speaker, and Nathan wrote a letter to the principal. The letter to the principal was intended to facilitate making the arrangements for the guest to come to the school. Because Neal did not mail his letter, Nathan’s was not used either. Nathan, as did I, knew that Neal did not send it off, but he was reluctant to confront his friend. Instead he chose to leave his action incomplete. Contrary to what Nathan wrote at the beginning, he did wait for Neal, and when Neal did not follow through, he let it drop.

This collaborative partnership was productive for collecting research for the project and writing the letters for the action, but in the end, their friendship prevented Nathan from standing up to Neal when he did not follow through on the action phase.
Morgan

At the beginning of the process, Morgan complained about the work at school as “useless crap” that is learned for “8 mo then once 3 months of summer [come]… knowledge will get thrown away by the average teen.” Instead Morgan wanted her school experience to be purposeful. She wished that “school would focus more on trying to help staving children or donate money for kids who cant afford treatment for cancer.” Morgan was actively engaged in this lesson, and she took on a topic that was important to her, the need for study hall. For Morgan, school does not come easy, but she works hard to do well, and she is often in a race against the clock to get everything done for her classes.

For her research project, Morgan found several examples of schools that offered a range of study hall options and the positive results of study hall implementation. In addition, she surveyed students at the school to see if there was interest. For her action, she proposed adding a study hall to next year’s schedule to the principal. Instead she presented to the assistant principal who was interested in her proposal but questioned the logistics in a seven period day, especially with the new four by four requirements from the state. Morgan was ready with alternatives. As she offered to Mr. Gomez, “study hall can also be an after school thing.” Fortunately, she had been part of a successful program in middle school that had helped her pass the TAKS tests, and she wanted to bring this program to the high school. This was very likely the positive experience that Morgan wanted to replicate.

In her interview, Morgan shared that she wants to continue pursuing her issue. She reported that she was,
Just happy that [she] could work on something that meant something to her [her] because [she really would like to have study hall in this school and it was a help because [she] was thinking maybe if [she] worked on this hard enough maybe [she] can really get this to happen.

Morgan grew from wishing that the school would do something meaningful in her classes to taking the initiative herself. As do her peers, she now knows how to gather information and support for an argument to make changes in her environment. Indeed the problem posing process was an answer to her wishes expressed in the early entry of her peer journal.

Summary

The critical problem posing process provided a framework for the English class research experience as evidenced by the work and interviews of my students. Although not all of the students experienced measurable growth in their critical awareness and desire to act on societal issues, every student did show that they had learned. This can be attributed to the careful instructional plan that included opportunities to collaborate with peers, the use of clear models of successful research projects, and the projected plan of publication to a real audience.

The problem posing process facilitated not only the academic demands of this project, but it also supported the critical growth of the students. Each student defended their own views and challenged the writings of their peers in the peer journals during the early stages of the process. The engagement dropped off for Bethany when she was asked to change her persuasive focus to a comparative focus, and then failure to grow occurred after grades were distributed for the research reports. Bethany’s and Neal’s
growth appeared to be halted by their grades, and ultimately, Nathan’s development was cut short because of his collaborative ties with Neal.

The purpose of Chapter 4 was to analyze the data collected in the problem posing process. The participants were introduced with vignettes that utilized their own words and descriptions based on in-class observations. This was followed by a specific discussion that described the supports and constraints to the problem posing process in response to the first two study questions. The chapter ended with a return to the individual students to measure the growth in the narrative process as an answer to the third study question. The use of the students’ writings, artifacts, and interviews were combined to create triangulation of the data in the reported findings. The next chapter will be dedicated to drawing conclusions and making recommendations based on the findings of this study.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter reviews the rationale for the study and summarizes the findings as organized by the three research questions. The chapter begins with the rationale for the study, followed by the summary of findings, a conclusions section, and the recommendations.

Rationale for the Study

The rationale for undertaking this study was to provide a description of a classroom practice in which the problem posing process was used as part of an English research assignment in a secondary setting. The problem posing process as described by Freire (1970) encourages students to “come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in progress, in transformation” (p. 83). This process enables students to have transformative experiences as a result of recognizing the world as dynamic instead of static, and it offers them opportunities to engage authentically with a real audience.

For this study an instructional plan was developed that used Wink’s (1997) four phases of problem posing with the explicit goal of allowing students to recognize and work on problems “in the world and with the world” (Freire, 1970, p. 81). This goal allowed a natural address of the problems in the students’ context, with the authentic complexity and chaos found in real problems. Because of these complexities, one problem leads to the next, and students find themselves committed to working through the problems (Freire, 1970).
This study’s theoretical base is set in critical literacy. Through literacies we come to understand our world, and through critical literacy, students and teachers interact with the world, naming and reflecting on what they know and what they see. This approach fosters student understanding of the construction of power. So literacy, in a traditional sense, is reading the word or decoding, but critical literacy invites the reader to read the world and learn to understand the messages found in social, cultural, political and historical contexts (Wink, 1997). Knobel (2007) identified critical literacy as a distinct theoretical and pedagogical field focused on “identifying authentic social problems and ways of addressing these problems through language and action” (p. vii).

Through reflective and cooperative learning experiences, students and teachers extend their learning from the classroom to the world by engaging and transcending worksheets and textbooks so that they may think more democratically with the specific goal of action (Goldstein, 2007). This approach counters teaching the oppressed to be passive, so that they remain compliant, the object instead of the subject; waiting to be told what to do (Mayo, 1955; Shor, 1992).

To bring a praxis of critical literacy into the classroom of this study, participants acted on their environment, reflected on it, and planned for transformation (Mayo, 1955), thus creating a praxis between theory and practice. As praxis, critical teaching started with the student generated themes. As the teacher, I brought knowledge and expertise to the classroom, and I worked to maintain the role of a resource for the students, intentionally preventing one-way discussions. I encouraged a collaborative, safe environment in which the students and I learned and taught each other without risk and in which students took ownership of their own learning (Shor, 1997; Wink, 1997).
In critical pedagogy, I began by listening to the students to determine their concerns. I followed this with a research plan so the participants could look objectively at their own experiences and concerns issuing from their topic (Freeman & Freeman, 1992; Roberts, 2000; Shor, 1992). Dewey (1915), Freire (1970) and Wink (1997) have each separately devised a variety of plans for a problem posing pedagogy. This study followed the phases of Wink’s (1997) problem posing process presented in Figure 1 on page 24.

Summary of Findings

For this study, data were collected from the artifacts of the class, the writing and products of the participants, classroom observations, and the final interviews with the participants. The data were then analyzed using the following guiding questions:

1. What elements supported the problem posing process as evidenced by the work and interviews of my students participating in this secondary research project?

2. What elements were constraints to the problem posing process as evidenced by the work and interviews of my students in this secondary research project?

3. What did students learn as evidenced by their work and interviews in this secondary research project in which the critical problem posing process was utilized?

Research questions one and two were systematically answered following a process in which the data for each phase of problem posing were coded and analyzed independently. Each phase’s data generated themes for the analysis. The analysis for question three was conducted using the work and interviews from the beginning and end of the problem posing process and described for each individual participant so that
there were ten descriptions used as evidence for responding to this question. For this summary, the findings related to each of the three questions will be discussed holistically. However, a detailed description of the analysis was presented in Chapter 4.

**Support for Problem Posing- Research Question One**

In an analysis to determine what elements supported the problem posing process as evidenced by the work and interviews of my students participating in this secondary research project, several themes of support emerged.

Supports for problem posing as evidenced by the work of the students:

(a) Previous experience and a peer audience supported insightful and extended peer journal entries as the students began problem posing within their own experiences (phase 1).

(b) The students were supported by collaboration, live sources and the concrete activities of the *walk about* and *problem board* as they identified, investigated and posed a problem within their lives (phase 2).

(c) Research models and a collaborative class environment supported the students as they solved the problem together (phase 3).

(d) The students were more likely to complete their action (phase 4) step in problem posing if they identified a clear audience in an early phase and if the audience was close in proximity.

At the beginning of the problem posing process, students’ work was supported by their own previous experiences and the presence of a peer audience. The work at this stage of the process was conducted in peer journals in which students responded to literature, quotes and each other as the journals were passed from student to student. Student responses were both insightful and extended when they were writing about issues with which they had previous experiences. In addition, students engaged actively with each other as a natural and real audience for their discussions.
This peer audience provided a springboard for students working collaboratively to pose problems for their research. Students reviewed their journals, participated in a walk about in the school, and looked to their world for issues to share with the class as potential topics for research and action. The group worked together and produced a substantial list, called the problem board, of possible topics. This problem board belonged to the class, so any student or group of students could choose freely from the entire list. Some students took the topics and conducted informal surveys to investigate further the issues surrounding assorted problems from the class problem board before they settled on their final choices.

To find and complete the research necessary for the students to address their problems of choice and to complete the required research report, several models were presented to the class. The students looked to the models to help them find sources, both primary and secondary, give credit to their sources, and create action plans for their audiences. Most students worked with other students to find their resources. Even students who were working on individual reports would share expertise to help another student out, if asked. This was a truly collaborative experience in the class where the students relied on each other to use the school’s databases, sort through sources, complete surveys, and offer opinions or responses to questions posed by their peers.

When the students were ready to present their findings to their audiences, they first proposed to the class for feedback. The participants with a clear focus also possessed a clear message and a clear audience. This, and an audience that was close in proximity to the participants, supported the completion of the problem posing process.
To be complete, the students needed to present their findings to an audience that could impact the issue in a positive way.

The work and interviews of the participants revealed several elements that supported the problem posing process. In regards to student experiences, the students benefited from the peer journal activity as it allowed them an opportunity to bring forward their prior knowledge and receive an immediate response from the peers. When the students worked to identify, investigate and pose a problem within their lives, they were best supported by investigating live sources and collaborating on ideas with their peers. With the support of models from their literature and models provided by the instructor, the students were able to solve the problem and create a plan of action. Finally, a clear focus and purpose, identified early in process, and an audience close in proximity, supported students’ completion of their actions to finish the problem posing process successfully.

These were elements that supported problem posing for the participants in this study. However, there were also constraints to problem posing. These will be shared in the next section.

**Constraints to Problem Posing – Research Question Two**

In an analysis of constraints to the problem posing process as evidenced by the work and interviews of my students in this secondary research project, several themes emerged.

Constraints to problem posing as evidence by the work of the students:

(a) The lack of previous experience and the negotiation of peer relationships were constraints that prevented students from engaging fully in peer journaling as they began problem posing based on their own experiences (phase 1).
(b) The curricular focus on formatting for the research paper was a constraint to problem posing as the students were working together to solve the problem (phase 3).

(c) The low grades that two students earned contributed to their failure to complete their action (phase 4) for problem posing.

(d) Choosing a plan of action late in the process led to one student’s failure to complete an action (phase 4).

(e) When some students chose an audience that was abstract and not immediately accessible on campus, they did not complete their action (phase 4).

At the beginning of the problem posing process, several constraints were revealed during the peer journal activity. First, just as previous experiences supported this stage of the process, the lack of previous experience and background knowledge often led to superficial, brief, or inaccurate exchanges. When the students were familiar with the issue at hand, they were able to participate fully, but when the issue presented was unfamiliar to the students, they understandably struggled to make a meaningful contribution to the peer journal activity.

In addition to this struggle, there was another complex issue regarding peer interactions. The students seemed to be negotiating peer relationships as they worked through the topics. When they feared they were stating an opinion that might offend a peer, they would sometimes qualify their statements. Yet at other times, they seemed to disregard feelings as they insulted each other personally. This negotiation of personal relationships was also evident when the students seemed to be looking for a way to name the issues without “naming names.” Clearly some of the issues addressed were present in the school, but the students carefully avoided stating specific instances and the people involved. They relied instead on general pronouns to represent people and places where these offences occurred.
One constraint to problem posing occurred during the topic identification phase, and although it was a constraint to the problem posing process, it is questionable whether it was a constraint to the research process or even the success of the final product. In problem posing, the second phase requires students to “identify, investigate, [and] pose a problem within your life” (Wink, 1997). When the students filled in the problem board with issues to consider, they found ideas in several places. The first ideas came from the peer journals. These journals were used because they recorded discussion of at least four potential topics. The journals were intended to get the problem board going before we searched for new topics. The constraint occurred when two of the groups, representing five of the ten participants, chose topics from these four prompts. Arguably these issues might have been present in their individual lives, but they originated from the peer journals. When the students chose these topics, they did not independently find an issue in their own lives. However, if I am seen as part of the collaborative group, this argument is weakened. I had seen the issues present in the students' lives, or I would not have presented them for discussion in the peer journals. Thus, student selection of teacher-suggested problems did not appear to impede the problem posing process over time.

Another constraint was the expectation that each student complete an individual research paper that had five sources, five quotes, five paraphrases, ten internal citations, and was five pages long. These expectations represent an orally communicated department policy. Teachers may go beyond these minimal expectations, but the research assignment must culminate in a research paper completed by each individual student that meets these requirements. At the end of
Phase 3, in the problem posing process, the students focused on solving the problem together, and for the most part, the students worked collaboratively to complete the research papers. Students who worked in a group divided up the research tasks and approached the same topic from multiple perspectives. Five students completed their research assignments in this way and then submitted individual research papers to be graded. The constraint occurred because the students had to compose individual papers that met required criteria, and although some students excelled at this structure, others struggled with the format, and earned low grades.

This grading was seen as contributing another constraint because two of the students who earned failing grades on this particular product did not complete the action phase of problem posing. Both students were discouraged because they had worked hard on their assignments and received low grades. They believed low grades reflected on their message and their ability to affect change. In addition, although I had participated collaboratively throughout the process, the act of grading the papers was not collaborative. Based on their written reflections, these two students reacted negatively to my change of role.

Another constraint for students completing their action was a lack of clear focus or purpose for action at the end of the research report. Students who had a clear plan completed their action, and the opposite occurred for students who did not have a clear plan.

A final constraint for completing the action phase of problem posing related to the ease of access to an audience. Students with audiences at the school were successful in completing their action. Conversely, the further from the campus and the more
abstract the audience, the less likely the students were to complete the action. Potential audiences range from the writer composing self-reflection, where the student audience is the self writing for the purpose of a deeper understanding of the content, to a global audience where the writer addresses the world at large. Students who wrote to audiences they already knew, found them easily available for presentations or letters. Students found it harder to prepare a presentation for an audience that was unfamiliar and distant. A distant and generic audience also limited the types of presentations that were possible. Though students could potentially impact and affect these audiences, in this study, remote audiences were a barrier to success of the action phase of problem posing.

In summary, several constraints influenced the success of students participating in the problem posing process. At the beginning during peer journaling, when the students brought forward their previous knowledge; they often lacked relevant experiences, or provided mistaken information when they shared together. Also because the students were working together, they struggled to specify some problems in their own social context, sometimes relying on vague descriptions or offsetting controversial comments with qualifiers. A possible constraint to identifying, investigating and posing a problem was that half of the students ultimately chose a topic that was first introduced by the instructor rather than using germane topics initiated from their own lives. An additional constraint to this problem posing process occurred because of a mandate in the curriculum that all students must write an individual research paper. Though some students still worked together to solve their posed problem, many students left the group to work individually on their topics and did not receive as much
support or share resources and insights. Finally, action was prevented when students did not clearly identify a focus and purpose early in the process, when students received a bad grade on an early assignment in the unit, and when the audience was located off campus.

The Impact of Problem Posing in the English Research Assignment – Research Question Three

The students showed their learning through the secondary research project in which the critical problem posing process was utilized in their work and interviews.

The impact of problem posing included the following:

(a) The students learned relevant research skills as they engaged in the problem posing process.

(b) The students were able to synthesize data and create action plans as they participated in the instructional plan, based on problem posing.

(c) The problem posing process facilitated critical growth when the process was followed.

(d) The student participation in problem posing informed and supported the students’ ability to look for opportunities to act on issues in their lives.

Each of the students showed growth in the ability to complete the multi-step research process. However, not all of the students increased their critical awareness. When two students failed the final assignment because of their use of citations in the text, the grading failed to acknowledge their ability to synthesize and produce a document that was focused and insightful. Thus the grading procedure obscured successes for those students who failed the assignment and did not complete the action phase of problem posing.
Bethany’s engagement in problem posing was cut short when she changed focus because of her topic decision, and Nathan and Neal’s group project did not reach its intended audience. However, all three of these students did complete the academic assignment, and attempted the critical approach until the final action stage. In addition, Brett did not complete his final action phase because of personal time constraints.

Without question, the problem posing process facilitated the learning of all of the participants as they worked through the multi-step research unit that was guided by the problem posing phases, and for the students who completed the final action phase of the process, the success was evident in their reflections and their interviews. Three students, Justin, Morgan, and Noah, expressed interest in continuing to pursue their topics beyond the class assignment.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The use of a case study methodology and the sample size of this project indicate that the analysis, findings, and conclusions may contribute to the literature of critical literacy but are not generalizable to other situations. As described in the literature, the traditional research approach tends to disconnect students from their personal environments and experiences (Giroux, 1997). This disconnect “comes from writing assignments that fail to value the lives, cultures, and interests of the writers” (Shafer, 1999, p. 46). One of the goals attained in this study was to provide a clear purpose and audience for the student research process so that students felt connected to their self-selected topics. Through problem posing, the participants in this study came to conduct “real research” in which they experienced “careful listening and observation, written
notes, background reading, group discussion and collaborative effort, library research, and firsthand experience” ("Research with a Purpose," 1992).

The analysis, findings, and conclusions contribute to the literature in three areas: audience, reflection, and grading. Conclusions and recommendations in each of these three areas are described.

**Audience**

The findings of this study support writing activities that engage students with an authentic audience. According to Moffett (1983), student motivation is improved when students are communicating with real audiences. In this study, the participants communicated with their peers in the peer journaling activity (Cziko, 1996) and with a real audience when they completed their actions. When the students wrote to these audiences, they were motivated by the conversation to engage with each other. Their journal writing became a means for completing conversations not motivated by a grade or by a fear they would be disciplined for not participating because the journals were not graded. For the presentations to an audience, the students received a completion grade. This was to encourage them to write because they had something to say and someone to address. Factors other than grades influenced student success in communicating their work.

In addition to the importance of a purposeful audience, the findings of this study suggest that the proximity of the audience impacts the success of students’ completing action in the problem posing process. Moffett (1988) identified four ways to reach an audience, beginning with self and extending outwards to the public. See figure 5.
In this study, publication occurred in the form referred to as action. For the purpose of this study, the participants were asked to find an audience beyond the classroom. These instructions meant neither they, nor their classroom peers and instructor, could serve as an audience. However, publication included what Moffett considered correspondence. An expansion on his description of audience, based on this study, included a hierarchy of audience in terms of proximity to the student.

Figure 10 illuminates a finding that a barrier exists for students who seek an audience beyond the school campus. This finding adds to the literature because it informs the instruction of students working with audiences. If a student seeks a distant and abstract audience, additional supports should be added to the instructional framework to ensure student success. A deliberate effort on my part might have improved the rate of success. For example, if a student’s chosen audience were a government official, I could schedule time to edit the piece with the students and offer to mail the product for the students. In the case of the student who sought a meeting with the parks and recreation department, class time could have been provided for the student to call the parks department to set up an appointment, so the student would have acted on his commitment to complete the action.

Reflection

Reflection, “the means by which we work through beliefs and assumptions, assessing their validity in the light of new experiences or knowledge” (Cranton, 2002, p. 65), was an important activity for reinforcing learning and assisting in the development of an understanding and framework for the learning that could be put to future use
Reflection encourages thinking (Wink, 1997). When teachers plan time for students to stop and reflect on their work, two things occur: (a) the students gain an opportunity to become aware of their thinking and their actions, and (b) the students connect what they know to themselves and society (Freire, 1970; Krashen, 2001; Wink, 1997). The use of reflection prevents transmission of knowledge where the students merely repeat the facts they have learned at a transitional level of learning. Instead, students reflect on their learning in a meaningful way (Shor, 1992). Reflection allows students to be aware of their participation, not as a “consumption of ideas but rather a product of action” (Freire, 1970; Hasbrook, 2002, p. 3-8).

The findings of this study show that reflection occurred, although this activity was not included in Wink’s description of the problem posing process (Wink, 1997). However, the process of writing the research paper, as students solved the problem together, provided an opportunity to reflect on the problem, consider the ideas of others, and choose a plan to meet the needs of the topic. This was a reflective activity for the students in the research process. In addition, the inclusion of reflective journaling and an interview at the end of the unit provided two more opportunities for students to reflect. These reflections were powerful experiences for the students. They recalled the work that they had accomplished, made plans to continue to pursue topics of interest, and voiced concerns about issues they had identified in the process. As Hasbrook described, the reflection allowed the students to “equitably [re-position] one’s relationship with others” (2002, p. 8).

This research supports the literature that describes the problem posing process as a quality framework for the research process in a secondary setting. However, this
study indicates that the addition of planned reflective activities at the third phase and as a fifth phase would increase the students’ ability to make meaningful connections between the research and their own lives. Figure 11 presents a model of the problem posing process with these changes in place.

![Problem posing process with reflections added.](Modified from Wink, 1997)

**Figure 12.** Problem posing process with reflections added.

(Modified from Wink, 1997)

**Grading**

English teachers are pressured by other departments to teach the skills of the research paper with an emphasis on finding relevant sources, embedding them into papers, and including correct citations and bibliographies (Ballenger, 1992), so it is not a surprise that the rubrics designed to grade research papers emphasize the form over
the content (Ballenger, 1992). However, this format driven emphasis in grading posits the teacher as subject and student as object. Shor (1992) suggested “narrative grading rather than only number or letter grades, to encourage serious dialogue between student and teacher about the quality of the work” (p. 132). However, Shor recognized the challenges of working in a school system whose curriculum is centered on textbooks, standardized tests, and a numeric grading system. He explained that “these traditional practices restrict student-centered, dialogic, and participatory education” (p. 144). Elbow (2000) added that the use of numeric grades is “untrustworthy” as “descriptors for complex human performances” (p. 407). Instead he suggested using criteria because “it helps students to engage in valid and productive self-

evaluation…and it makes grades more informative and useful” (pp. 714-715).

The findings of this study support Elbow and Shor’s concerns regarding grading. The rubrics used for this study were intentionally aligned with the rubrics used throughout the school that emphasized the form and format of the paper over the content. So although all of the students were capable, to some degree, of synthesizing the research on their topics, two of them, because they did not master the skills of citation, failed. Instead of encouraging these students to improve their performance in these skills, low grades caused them to shut down and not progress with the problem posing process. These students would have benefited from an assessment that allowed more opportunities for revision and encouraged ongoing growth. They did not learn the skill, and they received a failing grade. They did not meet the objective, and after the grade was assigned, they were not required to correct their mistakes.
This study casts a long shadow over the current grading practices. The data in this study show that low grades themselves had a negative impact on student engagement and learning. Conversely, none of the students reported feeling more confident because they received good grades. Good grades did not seem to support problem posing. Beyond this, the grades awarded did not adequately capture the growth of the students. Using an objective rubric to measure subjective growth is a mismatch. However, because secondary teachers confront such large quantities of papers and assignments, they often rely on rubrics that capture only a short list of curriculum goals. Colleges request grade point average (GPA) and class rank, parents monitor their students, and schools perform statistical feats of weighting and ranking using numbers that often, as shown in this study, inadequately represent the students’ learning and potential. Assessment should support and inform student learning. It should give the student a voice. Teachers and districts need to support students in a transformative experience with supportive assessments that encourage them to take risks and learn from their mistakes. As an example of supportive assessments, narrative grading could occur at several points in the process, thus allowing the student and the teacher an opportunity to evaluate progress and growth and recognize learning based on the work competed. If the current rubrics had to be used, the ability for students to correct and reassess would not only have supported problem posing, but it would have also have supported the learning of the skills required to format a research paper properly.
Recommendations

In this section, recommendations will be made for further research and policy decisions, based on the findings in this study. Three recommendations for future studies will be shared. In addition, several instructional recommendations regarding the problem posing process, and finally, policy recommendations at the federal, state and local level will be made.

Further Study

When the students completed their research and sought their audiences, several participants addressed their issues with the school administration. However, it seemed that the administration was not equipped to respond to student requests. This started with the last-minute switch of audience from the principal of the school to the assistant principal. Although I doubt it was his intention, the principal diminished student voice by not giving them priority in his schedule. When the assistant principal worked on his computer as the students presented instead of giving them his undivided attention, he belittled the importance of their message. The students came with issues and possible solutions they were willing to work on with the principal, but none of the proposals progressed past the action stage. Although I believe the principals could have been more responsive, there is not a system in place for students to request changes or for implementation of reasonable requests from students. In this case, the requests were reasonable. The request for a study hall could have been accomplished as an after-school activity through the end of the year to see whether it was attended. The school pays for a teacher to monitor morning detentions, so it seems that an after-school study
hall could have been accomplished with the same structure. The participants working on cheating distributed their brochures to the faculty, but they also wanted a committee of teachers and students to work on the problem in the school by developing an honor code. This solution would have been free to the school because it required only volunteers from the faculty and student body, but it did not occur.

Further research that explores the response of the school administrations when confronted with the results of problem posing is necessary to inform practitioners in the field on how to better prepare audiences and to help students achieve a more favorable response. It is likely that administrators do not have systems in place to respond to student requests. After this study, I decided that in the future I would meet with the administrators before their meeting with students to prepare them to listen and respond to the students’ action presentations.

Another study that would support the use of problem posing in the classroom is a longitudinal study of student participants in problem posing. These students could be interviewed or surveyed over the next few years after their first experience to see whether they choose to participate in another problem posing project on their own. When and if they do choose to participate, do they follow the same phases, or do they modify their approach based on what they have learned from exposure to the process? Since this process was intended to lead to a transformative experience, I expect that students would continue to use the process to address social needs in their community.

Lastly, this study has given me new insight into the power of reflection. Working to complete this study, I have started to read the literature on the use, purpose, and the value of the reflective experience. If I were to start this study again, I would recommend
formal reflection at every stage of the problem posing process. The impact of the reflections that I required for this study suggests that student experience of transformation could increase with more attention to making deeper connections to their learning. It would be interesting to duplicate this study with additional reflections to see whether students experience a stronger transformative experience.

Policy

This section will address policy recommendations based on the results, findings and the experience of conducting this study. At the national level a recommendation is made to deemphasize the testing system that focuses on accountability over critical awareness. Next, the focus moves to the state level and the problems with the research strands of the new Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills document. Finally, a recommendation is made at the local level to address concerns with the district assessment policy.

National

This assignment consumed a large quantity of time, time that many teachers feel pressured to use for teaching and reviewing content that is tested on state and national assessments. So, as the concern about the appropriate strategy for teaching the research process grows, teachers struggle to justify the continued practice of teaching research reporting (Jago & Gardner, 1999). National expectations that testing would “focus teachers’ instruction or improve the curriculum” is rejected by teachers, who believe that No Child Left Behind requirements instead “narrowed the curriculum and
focused instruction on the tested subjects” (Sunderman, 2005, p. 96). Problem posing and critical skills that relate to working in a world beyond the classroom are not tested, so increasingly, they are not taught. However, as Dewey explains, students need to acquire basic skills.

That which interests us most is naturally the progress made by the individual child of our acquaintance, his normal physical development, his advance in ability to read, write and figure, his growth in the knowledge of geography and history, improvement in manners, habits of promptness, order and industry – it is from such standards as these that we judge the world of the school. And rightly so. (1915, p. 5)

However, it is also important to remember that an education that serves democracy and transforms its citizens must move beyond this narrow focus.

Yet the range of the outlook needs to be enlarged. What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy (Dewey, 1915, p. 5).

The narrow focus arising from standardized testing does not allow room in the curriculum for transformative pedagogy where “the goal includes generating knowledge, but extends from the classroom to the world” (Wink, 1997, p. 115). Today's students must take their knowledge and extend it to action beyond the classroom in new and creative ways to meet the needs of the global community in which they will need to interact and earn a living (Freidman, 2008; Pink, 2006). The current high stakes testing environment is detrimental to both the students’ future and the perpetuation of democracy when the curriculum is narrowed to the requirements of the annual test. Accountability standards at the national level should be relaxed to provide teachers an opportunity and the time to extend lessons beyond content knowledge to transformative
action and reflection that would allow the students an opportunity to engage in the real world.

The federal government must consider the narrow focus that has been created in the environment of high stakes testing resulting from No Child Left Behind and find alternative ways to encourage growth in schools that support democracy over low level skill development.

State

The new TEKS, recently adopted by the State Board of Education (SBOE), will be implemented in the 2009-2010 school year. The TEKS include four objectives that deal with the research process. However, these objectives fail to connect the research process in a meaningful way to the real world research that is conducted beyond the classroom. For example, the TEKS begin with development of a focus based on the “major research topic” instead of student discovery of a topic of interest or need from their own environment. The final step calls for the student to “provide an analysis for the audience that reflects a logical progression of ideas and a clearly stated point of view…[with] evidence in support of a clear thesis,…[and] graphics and illustrations” (“TEKS Alignment,” 2008). This document does not include an expectation of publishing that would carry analysis to an audience.

Because the research strands of the TEKS are shallow and vague, it will be up to the teacher to extend the assignment to help the students engage in a meaningful way. When teachers will find time is a concern. Another concern is the misalignment of the new TEKS. In tenth grade, the students are expected to complete eleven products
based on the written, research, media and listening and speaking strands ("TEKS Alignment," 2008; Tyroff, 2008) in addition to engaging in reading and learning to identify and utilize literary elements.

Because this document has already been approved by the State Board of Education, my recommendation is for the district curriculum coordinators. District curriculum coordinators will have to work hard to compact these requirements so that multiple objectives can be met by fewer products. Critical pedagogy must be a central goal of the curriculum writing process. If critical pedagogy is not a goal of the English language arts learning process at the local level of curriculum development, it will be lost in the overwhelming task of fitting and aligning this newly created document.

Local

The assessment handbook used in the district where this study was conducted hindered its progression in two ways. The first hindrance was its encouragement of the use of common assessments. The second was the implication verified in oral instructions delivered at the campus level that a summative assessment should be submitted on a single due date. The intent of the handbook was to develop a meaningful assessment framework that “[promotes] consistency and alignment of assessment throughout the school district”([District Name] Local Assessment Handbook,” 2008, ¶ 1). Because of parental pressure for equity in grading in “like courses,” the district encourages the multiple teachers of a single course to plan and assess together using common assessments. This eliminates a possible argument that one course is more difficult than another, which might lead to an unfair advantage for a
student in the easier course when calculating a student’s GPAs. Common assessments are required for semester exams, and grade-level teams generally use the same tests in all of the classes. A teacher who wants to change an assessment must convince the entire team to change or risk an accusation of not working with the team. Changing the expectation for like-assessments will be difficult as this has become part of the school culture. This change calls for recognition that innovative teaching from individuals and teams can produce changes that encourage student engagement.

Also, the district’s zero late work policy implies that assignments are due on a singular date. However, this has been challenged by teachers who have assessed students over several dates in violation of a testing calendar that alternates the dates on which each subject area may be tested. Even when the teachers use only the dates allotted to them on the testing calendar, they must gain specific permission to extend an assessment for more than one day. Major projects, such as the assignments of this study, have a final due date. They are not eligible for a retake if a student fails. Thus, my hands were tied when I realized that I had students who had turned in research reports that needed revisions. The students were prevented by policy from correcting their citations. This policy is in place to prevent students from using the retest policy to turn in late essays and projects. However, students need the opportunity for these projects to be reassessed just as they need the opportunity to retake objective tests. This policy should be rewritten so that students may reattempt any summative evaluation, including long-term essays and projects. This would encourage more revision and ultimately student learning.
Reflections on the Research Experience

From the perspective of critical theorists, the limitations and constraints of “solving problem together” (Wink 2007) are beyond the classroom, and they silenced me as well as the students. Knobel (2007) describes critical literacy as participating in activities that address social problems through literacy. I adopted critical theory and what a critical theorist would say as my stance for this work, but I struggled just as the students did with issues of power.

I held the power for assessing the students' learning, and that process was inequitable. As I struggled to maintain the grading structured utilized in other classes; I release the possibility that the students might have a voice in how they were scored. Together, the students and I were under the constraints of a grading system that is dependent upon tradition and resists innovation. Years of parent complaints influenced the administration and teachers to rigidly control all aspects of grading with objective rubrics and lock-step instructional plans in an attempt to provide equality for all students, but this structure reduces voice of teacher in the measurement of learning in the school and removes the possibility of teachers inviting students to be part of the assessment process.

In addition, as the students chose their topics, I believed at the start of this project that I would be able to support any topic that the students chose. I was prepared for students to choose topics that were politically and socially uncomfortable. However, when Bethany chose the topic of the legalization of marijuana, I was concerned that it would become known that I had empowered a student to seek an audience for legalizing marijuana in a school that was striving to send a clear message
to the students that drug use would not be tolerated. Though it was possible that the student could have completed the assignment, with no one beyond the class and her specific audience learning of her work, it seemed unlikely. Because of the destructive nature of the “parent talk” and teacher gossip that can lead to class assignment changes or non renewal of contracts, I disallowed a student selected topic. Bethany’s voice was constrained, and I oppressed her free speech, her freedom to have independent thoughts, and ultimately her message, with the constraints of her assignment.

Finally, when the students took their research to their audiences in the school, their concerns were not valued by the administration. When the administration changed their appointments and dismissed their work, the students came to see that their voice was not heard. Some of the students were resilient, planning to return to speak again, but others were finished with their assignments. The message to the students: The adults hold the power in this school, and for students to make changes, they must enter the world of adults and make the arguments in adult language and hope for an adult to make the decision to respond positively. The students struggle to adopt this voice because they are students, and they speak in the language from below as Ohmann (1996) explained.

The administrators are busy. As accountability systems strangle their sense of power in the schools, the overburdened administrator does not listen to students’ plans for change that would require additional work on the part of the administrator and others in the school. It may seem to the principals that by controlling the school, they are minimizing extraneous assignments. Instead of sharing the responsibility of the work in
the school with the students and teachers, they maintain the power and the responsibility.

To engage students in the third idiom as described by Shor (1997), all of the members of the school must interact in a common language and an equitable environment. As the teacher, in this process, I believed that the students would be successful in their pursuit of change, but the students, all of them, encountered barriers that prevented their success. However, the students did gain critical literacy to the extent that they began reading the world in addition to the word (Freire, 1970; Shor, 1997; Wink, 1997). Creating the third idiom in our school should be a campus goal.

When students engage in critical literacy, teachers should expect to encounter constraints of power, self censorship, and political risks. In this study, questions of free choice of topics and free speech were raised and were not ultimately addressed. However, as an English teacher, my practice has been enriched by the work of this study. The problem posing process in this study showed the potential for success of clear purpose-setting, the availability of authentic audiences, the analysis of professional models, the engagement of collaborative research teams, and the evaluation of the process through reflection. An extended use of problem posing beyond a single unit in a course has the potential to improve the balance of power in a school setting.

Summary

Following the German model of researchers’ in specific fields completing writing reports, the American tradition of the research paper began shortly after the Civil War
and continues to be practiced in the same form today in English classes across the country. Ballenger (1992) and Shook (1988) argue that the paper should be purposeful, so students can connect their topics to their lives beyond school as a form of informational literacy. Both Shor (1992) and Elbow (2000) were concerned about the focus on the grade over the process in report writing. This misguided effort has the effect of minimizing student voice and valuing editing skills above the critical thinking skills needed to complete research. To improve the assignment, the purpose of research for social action was supported in the literature (H. Giroux, 1997; Lawrence, 1999; Mancina, 2005; McKenna & McKenna, 2000; Shafer, 1999; Shor, 1992; Slack, 2001; Williams, 1993).

Wink’s (1997) problem posing praxis, based on Freire (1970), connects the theory of critical literacy to the student research paper. Starting with their own experiences, students develop as they critically analyze their environment (Freire, 1970; Shor, 1997). Freire’s purpose in problem posing is to solve a social problem, in contrast to Dewey, whose educational process uses a purpose to guide instruction. Wink achieves a purposeful education by requiring that “problem posing always ends in action” (1997, p. 109). This complements the praxis of critical literacy that supports the students looking at their environment with a critical eye, so they can “read the world” (Freire, 1970; Shor, 1997; Wink, 1997). When this occurs in a equitable classroom, it creates the third idiom where student and teacher interact in colloquial language, and intellectual empowerment grows (Shor, 1992). This classroom setting was a goal in this study.
Ohmann calls critical literacy “literacy from below,” where participants actively question the status quo and imagine solutions (Ohmann, 1996). Based on this literature, the problem posing process as described by Wink (1997) was utilized in the research process in a tenth grade class setting to determine if the English class research experience was facilitated by a critical problem posing process as evidenced by the work and interviews of my students in this secondary research project. The work of the students were analyzed to determine the supports and constraints of this process that begins with the student experiences and ends with an action phase (Wink, 1997). Based on the literature, the students working in this process learn to think more democratically with the specific goal or action (Goldstein, 2007) and be involved in change and learn in an environment with hope, struggle and a pedagogy of transformation (Freire, 1970; Roberts, 2000).

To conclude, Wink’s process, grounded in Freire’s approach, and consistent with Dewey and others who advocate inquiry, action, and relevance was the framework for the research process described in this study. This description will fill a void in the literature that connects the relevance and engagement of students participating in Wink’s problem posing process to the high school research paper. This study contributes to the body of knowledge about inquiry, critical pedagogy and high school English instruction.
APPENDIX A

RESEARCH QUESTION CHECKLIST
Research Question Checklist

General Issue Topic: ____________________________________________

Interested Group Members (2-5):

1. _____________________________________________________________
2. _____________________________________________________________
3. _____________________________________________________________
4. _____________________________________________________________
5. _____________________________________________________________

Research Question:
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Question/Topic Checklist:
YES/NO All the members of the group are interested in this topic.
YES/NO Does this question require more than a yes or no answer?
YES/NO Does this topic need a solution?
YES/NO Does this topic address a need to others beyond the members of this group? Who? ____________________________
YES/NO Can you foresee possible ways to address this issue that lead to a possible solution or at least a change to make the situation better?
YES/NO Do all of the members of the group agree with this research question as their guide to the research assignment?
YES/NO Do all of the members of the group agree to work cooperatively to complete their individual assignments on time and share their research to help everyone in the group to produce complementing literary multi-genre pieces?
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Informed Consent Form

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

Title of Study: A Critical Approach to the Research Process
Principal Investigator: Carol L. Revelle, a doctoral candidate in the 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 in which your child’s work in a journal and a research project will be read for evidence of insightful thinking about important social issues in the student’s environment. The purpose of the study is to determine the usefulness of regular reflections through journal writing on your child’s understanding and awareness of social issues.

Study Procedures: The students will be asked to write and respond to peers in a multi-class journal on a critical issue topic prompt. A multi-class journal is a class set of composition books that the students write in each period. The journals rotate and each student creates a dialogue with the students who sit in his/her seat throughout the school day. Critical issue topic prompts are questions or statements provided to the students to encourage writing about a real topic that has real consequences beyond the class setting. Possible topics can include issues such as student cheating, school decision making, or the effects of immigration discussions in the media, but the students may develop their own topic for research based on their own experiences and observations. After the journals are complete, the students will work to complete a research assignment that addresses this issue and attempt to work toward a solution. The journals, research products, interviews, teacher notes, and observation notes will be analyzed for this study. The student work will take place in class during normal class time and will not take any more time in or out of class than the traditional research paper assignment. All students will participate in the assignment, but student work without signed waivers will not be considered for this study. This activity is part of the regular instructional approach and will not add additional requirements that are not a part of a typical instructional activity.

At the end of the project, the student will participate in a short interview, about five minutes long, with the researcher to answer questions about his/her project. There will be an audio recording of the interview.

Foreseeable Risks: No foreseeable risks are involved in this study.

Benefits to the Subjects or Others: I expect the project to benefit your child by providing him/her with an opportunity to have a voice on a critical issue. In addition, this study will contribute to the field of education a description of an authentic research assignment in a regular classroom.

Procedures for Maintaining Confidentiality of Research Records: Reports from this study will replace student names with pseudonyms to protect confidentiality. Signed consent forms will be kept in a locked file drawer with the students’ research materials and products. Research records such as journals and research products will be kept for three years past the end of the study per federal regulations. The confidentiality of your child’s individual information will be maintained in any publications or presentations regarding this study.
Questions about the Study: If you have any questions about the study, you may contact Carol Revelle at ---.----, or the faculty advisor, Dr. Mary Harris, UNT Department of Teacher Education and Administration, at 940-565-4327.

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:

- 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

This research project has been reviewed and approved by the UNT Institutional Review Board (940) 565-3940. Contact the UNT IRB with any questions regarding your child’s rights as a research subject.

_______________________________            Date
Signature of Principal Investigator or Designee
APPENDIX C

STUDENT ASSENT FORM
Student 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. You will be asked to write and respond to peers in a multi-class journal on a critical issue topic prompt. A multi-class journal is a class set of composition books that the students write in each period. The journals rotate and each student creates a dialogue with the students who sit in his/her seat throughout the school day. Critical issue topic prompts are questions or statements provided to the students to encourage writing about a real topic that has real consequences beyond the class setting. Possible topics can include issues such as student cheating, school decision making, or the effects of immigration discussions in the media, but you may develop your own topic for research based on your own experiences and observations. After the journals are complete, you will work to complete a research assignment that addresses this issue and attempt to work toward a solution. The journals, research products, interviews, teacher notes, and observation notes will be analyzed for this study. Your work will take place in class during normal class time and will not take any more time in or out of class than the traditional research paper assignment. You will participate in the assignment, but work without signed informed consent form will not be considered for this study. This activity is part of the regular instructional approach and will not add additional requirements that are not a part of a typical instructional activity.

At the end of the project, the student will participate in a short interview, about five minutes long, with the researcher to answer questions about his/her project. There will be an audio recording of the interview. Your course grade will not be affected by your decision regarding participation in this research study. If you decide to be part of this study, please remember you can stop participating any time you want to. If you would like to be part of this study, please sign your name below.

_________________________          ________________ __                    Signature of
Student     Date

_________________________________      __________________                   Signature of
Principal Investigator or Designee    Date
Supersize Me: Video Guide

The RESEARCHER in this film is ________________________________. (2pts)
______________________________ is the McDonald's Founder. (2 pts)
Where do you think the statistics in the beginning of the film could come from? (4 pts)

1. ________________________________
2. ________________________________
3. ________________________________

What types of RESEARCH SOURCES are used in this film? (2 pts each)
1. ________________________________
2. ________________________________
3. ________________________________
4. ________________________________

In an ________________________________ (research source), the researcher talks to different people, scholars, or experts to find information. (2 pts)
The researcher in this film interviewed some of the following: (2 pts each)
1. ________________________________
2. ________________________________
3. ________________________________
4. ________________________________

In a ________________________________ (research source), people tell their own personal stories to enlighten others and to establish facts in the spirit of research. (2 pts) The researcher in this film gathered stories from some of the following people: (2 pts each)
1. ________________________________
2. ________________________________

“There is ____________ vending machine for every 97 Americans.” (2 pts)
“One out of every ____________ children will develop diabetes.” (2 pts)
Our small size French fry is the ________________________________ size in France! (2 pts)
A calorie is defined as: (4 pts)
How long is the researcher's McDonald's binge? (2 pts)

How is the research done in this video like a research paper? (4 pts)

How did he publish the results of his findings? How do you think his CASE STUDY impacted Americans? (4 pts)

Who is the intended audience of the researcher's study? (2 pts)

In your opinion, what 5 questions began his study? (5 pts each)
1. ________________________________________________?
2. ________________________________________________?
3. ________________________________________________?
4. ________________________________________________?
5. ________________________________________________?
APPENDIX E

INTERNET CHECKLIST
Internet Checklist

An Internet source is a site found on the World Wide Web. BEFORE you use a site as a research source, use this checklist to determine its credibility and reliability. Attach this checklist to your annotated bibliography to prove that your internet site is legitimate. If you cannot find all of the information about the site, DO NOT use it as a source.

- Title of Article/Document/Message: ____________________________
- Author’s/Institution/Organization name: ____________________________
- Author’s title or position: ____________________________
- Date of Web page’s creation: ____________________________
- Author’s contact information: ____________________________
- What is the URL address? ____________________________
- What is the date that you visited the site? ____________________________
- What is the bibliographic citation for this site? ______ For this assignment, your citation goes on the top of the research double column notes page. ____________________________

1. What type of specific facts is in the site that you plan to use for your research project? ____________________________

2. What other source are you using that confirms the accuracy of the facts listed in #1? ____________________________

3. What additional sources (bibliography) listed in the site might you use for your project? ____________________________
**Source Citation** (Use the MLA Style Sheet to format your citation before you begin).

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**Summary of the Entire Article**
APPENDIX G

RESEARCH SUMMARY RUBRIC
# Research Summary Rubric

## STUDENT SCORED

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## Research Summary Rubric – TEACHER SCORED

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<td><strong>Now What?</strong></td>
<td>Content</td>
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Comments:
APPENDIX H

MULTI-GENRE RESEARCH PROJECT, PRESENTATION AND EVALUATION
Multi-Genre Research Project, Presentation and Evaluation

What is a literary multi-genre research project?

It is important to be able to use our communicative skills to affect social change. For this project, each student researcher will complete a literary genre research project using the information gathered on his/her issue. For example, if the research question addresses chewing gum in school, he/she could address the issue with a variety of literary genres such as an oral presentation to an administrator requesting a change in policy, a petition written and signed by students asking for the administration to consider the research, or a short play produced and published on KCBY to share the research with the student body. Develop a project that works to solve or address the issue addressed in the research question. The projects will be presented to the class on ______________ (date) and will then proceed to the intended audience.

Research Project Checklist

_____ I have completed our Research Project Plan of Work __________(Date).
_____ I have presented our plan to the class __________(Date).
_____ I have gathered materials and made a draft of the project __________(Date).
_____ I have completed our final project and checked it against the rubric __________(Date).
_____ I have completed our personal evaluation and the evaluation of the other teams’ products __________(Date).

RUBRIC

Addresses the problem/issue in the research question (10 Points)
Research-based project with information from the research present (10 Points)
Specific audience / appropriate for that audience (10 Points)
Clear understanding of audience (10 Points)
Practical plan to reach audience (10 Points)
Well-done, neat, and free of mistakes (10 Points)
Project does something that isn’t already being done (10 Points)
Completed evaluation form (10 Points)
Presentation – Organized (10 Points)
Presentation – Peer Evaluations (10 Points)
Presented to real audience – Evidence Required (5 Points)

How is the research present in the final product? (Give an example).
Who is the audience and how is this audience appropriate for this topic?

Is there a clear understanding of the audience present in the project? What is directed at the target audience?
Name: ______________________________

Evaluation Form

How does the research project address the problem/issue in the research question?

Is there a plan to reach the audience, and is it practical?

Is the research project well-done, neat, and free of mistakes?

Does the research project do something that isn’t already being done?

What else needs to be said about the project? (Other comments)

How does this project compare to the rubric?
APPENDIX I

CODE GRAPHIC
WORKS CITED


