Exploring Community Through Literature and Life: Adolescents Identity Positioning in Rural Appalachia

DISSERTATION

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Abstract

This paper centers on three adolescents from rural Appalachia who highlight the complex ways in which adolescents negotiate circulating dominant discourses regarding Appalachian identity. The data is drawn from a year-long critical ethnographic teacher-researcher study in a senior English class located within a rural Appalachian high school. The research objective was to investigate how the students and the teacher socially position themselves, others, the local Appalachian community and communities outside of the region through literacy and language practices in the context of the English class. Data analysis indicates that the adolescents in this study constructed local definitions and identity positionings that complicated the dominant discourses of what it means to be from Appalachia. Central to this work was their reflexive positioning as holding epistemic privilege to describe Appalachian communities and to critique non-Appalachian’s assertion of authority in constructing Appalachia. Appalachian and Appalachian-heritage students’ experiences with language marginalization and monitoring of peers’ language variation were significant in defining insider and outsider positions. This study suggests that centering the literacy practices of the English classroom on affords an examination of local and dominant discourses of Appalachian identity supports adolescents' critical understanding of these available discourses, and
their positioning relative to the discourses.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the students, faculty and administration
at Hilltop High School.
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This dissertation process relies on the experience, knowledge, guidance, and generosity of many people. I am deeply grateful for the insights and patience offered by such dear and thoughtful people throughout the process.

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Vita

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    Multicultural Teacher Education

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“When Eastern Kentucky or the Appalachian Region is brought up, the first thing people usually think of is ‘dumb rednecks’, ‘toothless hillbillies’ and things of that nature...Whether they actually know what they are talking about or not, ‘outsiders’, as I like to call them, see us as uneducated.” – Chayla¹

In the one hundred years since the term "hillbilly" was coined (Billings, Norman, & Ledford, 1999), residents of the hills and coalfields of the central Appalachian region² of the United States have found it necessary to fight back against a persistently nagging stereotype of the rural mountaineer (Billings, Norman, & Ledford, 1999; Shapiro, 1978). The residents have had a lot to work against. The stereotype of a hillbilly as an incestuous, ignorant, illiterate and backwards redneck has had wide circulation in popular culture references since the 1800s, and is no less present today (Biggers, 2006; Billings, Norman, Ledford, 1999). These images and discourses in popular media do not circulate without consequence. Not only do they hide the historical and current economic, health, educational and environmental challenges, but they continue to position Appalachian residents in continual need of assistance from institutions outside of the region; indeed, these images and discourses maintain the boundaries of a inside and an outside between Appalachia and the rest of the country.

¹ Pseudonyms are used for all individuals, specific institutions, and communities to protect anonymity.
² Central Appalachia includes portions of eastern Kentucky, southern Ohio, West Virginia, southwestern Virginia, western North Carolina, and eastern Tennessee.
During my experience as a high school teacher in a rural Appalachian community, I witnessed students wrestling with the authoritative discourse of 'hillbilly' and its accompanying characteristics as a feature of their Appalachian identity. Regardless of how a particular person responds to it (i.e., rejects, accepts, modifies), these discourses are ever-present in interactions of daily life in central Appalachia. Given the reality of negotiating such discourses, I am interested in the ways that this talk shaped the language and literacy practices of my students, and indeed of all youth living and learning in this region.

This study examines how these discourses of Appalachia are navigated and negotiated by Appalachian and Appalachian heritage adolescents through language and literacy practices. In this chapter I set forth my use of the term “Appalachia,” provide historical background on the “invention of Appalachia” as “another America,” share examples of how discourse on Appalachia’s difference and deficiency is maintained in media representations, and discuss how Appalachian Studies scholars have been “talking back” to these discourses. Finally, I position myself personally and professionally in relation to these historical and current discourses, and then end with a statement of the problem for the study.

**A history of the discourse of Appalachia as another America**

While this study is not a historiography of the relationship between nineteenth century and twenty-first century discourses on Appalachia, the study does rely on the scholarship of Appalachian sociologists and historians whose work demonstrates the connections. In this section I provide an overview of the “invention of Appalachia” as
discussed in Appalachian Studies literature (Shapiro, 1978). Locating the historical origins of this discourse provides a perspective on the significance of this discourse (and accompanying region) to the nation. It also provides an opportunity to see the dialectical relationship discourse has with “reality.” That is, because “Appalachia” has been discursively constructed as distinct, it has been made distinct in the economic, political, and social policies and interaction regarding the region. These policies and forms of interactions have in turn reinforced Appalachia’s distinctiveness as “real” and material.

Beginning in the mid-1800s, “Appalachia” as a distinct region from the rest of the nation was “invented” (Shapiro, 1978, p. ix). In a popular magazine at the time, the writer Will Wallace Harney named the region and its residents a “strange land and peculiar people” in 1873 in Pippincott’s Magazine. His article exoticized the region and its residents and it initiated a flurry of attention by “local color writers” for the remainder of that century and into the next. These writers sought out the backwoods mountaineer to fulfill the stereotypes flooding popular media of the nation. With accumulating “truth effects”, these narratives successfully laminated together a monologic image of the rural mountaineer hillbilly (Foucault, 1972). So successful is this lamination that a historical definition of hillbilly only varies from modern descriptions in its use of old-fashioned language:

The Dictionary of American Regional English reported that a 1900 issue of the New York Evening Journal defined hillbilly as ‘a free and untrammeled white citizen of Alabama, who lives in the hills, has no means to speak of, dresses as he can, talks as he pleases, drinks whiskey when he gets it, and
fires off his revolver as the fancy takes him.’ (Beech, 2004, p. 174)

In this definition, the image of a poor, drunk and willful white rural person is clear. Included in the discursive construction of the region as different, there are internal discourses of classism, intellectual deficiency and moral corruptness. A part of the relationship between “the rest of the nation” and the region has been in many ways defined by patronizing “service” provided by non-residents to Appalachian communities. Eller (2008) described the relationship as one of need, but not as one might expect:

We know Appalachia exists because we need it to exist in order to define what we are not. It is the ‘other America’ because the very idea of Appalachia convinces us of the righteousness of our own lives. The notion of Appalachia as a separate place, a region set off from mainstream culture and history, has allowed us to distance ourselves from the uncomfortable dilemmas that the story of Appalachia raises about our own lives and about the larger society. (p. 3)

Shapiro (1978) described the way the region became not only a source of fascination to more urban and northern centers, but also a site of northern missionary “aide” in the 1880s, driven by images and descriptions of the region’s “backward” ways, widespread illiteracy and seeming lack of development on par with the rest of the nation. This imagery continued to have significant impact: “The mountains of eastern Kentucky were rather rapidly established as culturally inferior, with this inferiority defined partly in terms of illiteracy. Consequently, by century’s end, Appalachia was vulnerable to an onslaught of social reform efforts….” (Mortensen, 1994, p. 109). Settlement schools
throughout eastern Kentucky were built and run from the end of the nineteenth century until the 1940s. Considered a part of “mission work” by northern middle and upper middle class white women, these schools taught local young people not only basic academics, but also “traditional crafts” brought back north as novelty items (Cunningham, 1987; Shapiro, 1978). Challenged by the reality of higher rates of poverty in the region as compared with “the rest of the nation,” yet also subject to the appeal of the discourse of aiding a downtrodden mountain town, outsiders arrive with “helping hands.” Residents are recipients of help in this discourse; residents are not partners in finding solutions for the real challenges of the communities. This mission movement established a complex relationship between northern Christian service organizations and the region that continues to this day.

Central Appalachia’s status as a national “social problem” continued into the 1960s with the War on Poverty. Led by Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, this federal effort also sponsored the creation of the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) in 1963 and the Appalachian Regional Development Act in 1965, both of which were invested with the responsibility to support economic development in the 13-thirteen state region (Public Law 89-4, as amended, 40 U.S.C. 14101-14704). Ron Eller’s (2008) recent history of the region described the context of concern regarding the economic state of the region at the time of the ARC’s creation:

Poverty rates for the ARC region as a whole were cut in half between 1960 and 2000, and the gap in per capita income between Appalachian and the rest of the country narrowed. “In 1960 nearly one-third of the region’s residents lived in
poverty, compared with one-fifth of all Americans...Eastern Kentucky and southern West Virginia contained five of the poorest twenty-five counties in the United States, counties where one in three residents lived below the poverty level...eighty-five of the counties [in central Appalachia] that were economically distressed in 1960 were still listed as distressed four decades later. (p. 233).

In these records is a tension of real material inequality against the backdrop of the image of widespread poverty becoming synonymous with the region. That significant portions of the residents of the region have experienced significant economic vulnerability and struggle across many generations is without doubt. As the quote above illustrates, some counties have experienced at least four decades of economic struggle. In the community in which this study is located, the per capita income was $16,000 in 2009, and thirty percent of the resident lived under the federal poverty line (U.S. Census, 2010); many more hover around this line. Much of the region is subject to the economic monopoly of extractive industries that are subject to fluctuations in the national and global economies. This reliance led to single industry-centered communities who are then particularly vulnerable to cycles of “boom and bust.” In fact, as I write this chapter, a coal company near the site of this study employing many fathers, uncles, brothers, and former students just announced the immediate lay-off of over six hundred miners. These undeniably challenging living conditions are a part of the social context of the adolescent residents. The persistence of variability in the economic stability in Akers County and the region as a whole have afforded and constrained the construction and utilization of social and cultural resources within Appalachian communities and social institutions. As I
discuss in Chapter Three in the site description, within Appalachian communities, the discourses around being from these discourses is not one of only deprivation and struggle. Rather, there are also strong kinship networks that distribute economic, social, and cultural resources in important ways that belie theories of strict separation between social and economic class strata. The economic, social, and cultural resources, distribution networks, and personal usage by individuals within the communities are central to how residents position themselves within and against the broader discourses around Appalachian identities.

**Media representations of Appalachia: discourse of difference and deficiency**

Central to the maintenance of the cultural border discursively separating rural Appalachia from the rest of the country are media representations of the region. While any representation will be partial and incomplete, the representations of the region and residents in it have remained consistent in their allegiance to discourses of cultural difference and deficiency, and their resistance to diversified discourses defined by local residents. For the past three years, *Saturday Night Live* has had a running comedy sketch *Appalachian Emergency Room* in which bizarre accidents happen to toothless, wild, and hapless characters, inevitably landing them in the emergency room staffed by equally idiotic doctors. Just this year, April 30, 2012, a popular television detective show, *Bones*, in their episode “The Family In the Feud” featured a West Virginian family maintaining a deadly one hundred year old feud with a neighboring family. Horribly inaccurately - accented actors portrayed unreasonable, uneducated, backwards characters like the sexy “Sue Bob” in love with “Junior” from the opposing family and the gun totin’, trespasser-
shootin’ old man “Norbert” in a flannel shirt. The standard characters threw around the word “hillbilly” as ways of describing the deviant Appalachian characters. As I sat down to watch to the show, I was both shocked and exhausted by the tired imagery. How tired, worn and yet persistent are these images!

Every few years another widely distributed documentary is produced by those outside the region highlighting the same storyline of poor white families struggling to survive in the mountains of central Appalachia. These documentaries often operate under the guise of “exposing” or “educating” the broader public about poverty and other hardships in rural Appalachia. In 1999, it was Rory Kennedy’s film documentary *American Hollow* that followed a single eastern Kentucky family that struggled with poverty and drug use over the course of a year; in 2009, it was Julien Nitzberg’s *The Wild and Wonderful Whites of West Virginia*, telling the stories of family violence, drug use, and hard living of the children and grandchildren of the “Dancing Outlaw” Jescoe White. On television, similar images are portrayed. In 1994, CBS aired a *48 Hours* special: *Another America*, highlighting poverty and illiteracy in Floyd County, Kentucky. In 2009, Diane Sawyer hosted a *20/20* special: *A Hidden America: Children of the Mountains* in which she interviewed children and teenagers about their lives. Each child was from a poor family, most of whom had some connection to drug abuse and neglect. With the appearance of a profound accumulation of confirming evidence, these documentaries do not deviate from the discourse that laminates poverty, illiteracy, and various forms of moral corruption with rural Appalachian residents.

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3 This to be clear, this characterization does not include independent films made by filmmakers with long-standing relationships with the communities in the region. A key institution in this vein is Appalshop, located in Whitesburg, Kentucky.
These images are not harmless; they have consequences. While the painfully simplistic fictional portrayals in Bones are easy to dismiss with a groan, the seeming empathy and concern expressed by Sawyers’ and Kennedy’s cameras are more insidious in framing the conversation about what it is to “be Appalachian” with the solemnity and power of “realness” in the non-fictional stance of a documentary. Taken together, these popular shows reaffirm in the mainstream discourse Appalachia’s role as an Other-ed region, full of sad, degenerate children with unstable, drug-ridden families, and no hope for a brighter future. It is because of these shows and others like them that young people like Chayla whose quote opened this chapter feel frustrated with the blindness “outsiders” how desperately they seem to cling to what they want to see and hear, not what is there to see and hear.

Talking back: Appalachian Studies scholars critique the discourse

Continually faced with current versions of the same old image, Appalachian scholars and residents respond daily. In his introduction to Confronting Appalachian Stereotypes: Backtalk from an American Region, Dwight Billings (1999) wrote:

While the peoples and cultures in the Appalachian Mountains are decidedly plural, outside the region in the arts, the academy, and popular culture, many representations of them now, as for the past one hundred years, are often monolithic, pejorative, and unquestioned. But they are challenged in the region. Appalachian scholars have been engaged in the sustained critique of these stereotypes for many years, and the people of the region “talk back” to stereotypes of themselves by who they are and how they live their lives. (p. 3)
Such resistance has had an institutional/academic component as well. Critique of the discourse of Appalachia as a “strange land and peculiar people,” or as a site of depravity in need of saving began in earnest with the rise of the Appalachian Studies movement in the 1970s (Shapiro, 1978). This body of work has deconstructed the seeming naturalness of the historical and current discursive constructions and challenged the victim blaming scholarship popular in the 1960s (Anglin, 2002; Biggers, 2006; Billings, Norman, & Ledford, 1999; Cunningham, 1987; Mortensen, 1994; Locklear, 2011; Shapiro, 1978).

As well, there has been increasing documentation of the efforts within Appalachian communities to resist abuses of the extraction industries, to provide social, medical, cultural and economic services within community by community members (Stephen and Smith 2012; Stephen, 1993). Overall, these efforts are slowly shifting the discourse in communities and nationwide. Social media has provided immediate distribution of community efforts to mobilize. What these scholarly and community organizing efforts also demonstrate is the significance of making available counter discourses for examination and possible participation.

**My positioning in the region**

I am not from an Appalachian family, urban or rural. I am from the coast of Maine and the cornfields of Iowa. My understanding of relationships between the rural Appalachian communities and non-Appalachian communities, the power of Appalachian identity discourses in both non-Appalachian and Appalachian communities, and issues concerning diversity and literacy within rural Appalachia are informed initially by my experiences as a college-aged staff person of in a regional Christian-based home repair
organization, and subsequently as a high school English teacher in rural southeastern Kentucky.

As I described earlier, there is a long-standing missionary relationship between Northern Christian organizations and rural Appalachian communities. It is into this very dynamic that I stepped as an adolescent in my church youth group mission work. Each summer of high school, I headed to a rural Appalachian community with my friends for a week to help make homes “warmer, safer, and drier.” Compelled by a desire to help those who are “less fortunate” and to build cross-cultural relationships, I continued to work with this organization as a staff person in college. As a staff person, I lived for 10 weeks with three peer staff persons in a local school, hosting high school aged youth groups from around the country who continued the work I had participated in years before. In the evenings, my staff led them in “evening gatherings” with activities to process our youth volunteers’ perceptions of the community in relation to their own lives and communities and to build cross-cultural understanding. Throughout these experiences, we who were project staff people positioned ourselves as cultural brokers based on our assumptions of understanding both the local community and our youth volunteers. While many of us built lasting relationships with the families and community members with whom we worked, as a whole, the staff people, including myself, operated in a limited way in the community. We did little to trouble or question our role as cultural outsiders who were there solely in a “helping” role. While I had had a growing sense of frustration with the ways in which we were positioning ourselves within the communities, it was not until I was hired to be a full time English teacher in Akers County that I began to realize
how isolated I had been from community members, and a more complex understanding of my positioning in the region. My positioning within the organization tightly bounded my relationship with the communities in which I lived and worked. I had little sense of the day-to-day textures and dimensions of the many ways of living in the communities across the years, let alone a single year. Everything I thought I had known upon my arrival as a new teacher in a community suddenly seemed desperately inadequate and partial and decontextualized.

Upon entering Akers County, I became sharply aware of my positioning as an outsider. In a community built on familial relationships, I had none. In a community in which one of the most virulent stereotypes is of their dialect, as a Standard American English dialect speaker, I was to be their children's English teacher, a role perceived as ultimate arbiter of what is "correct.” In a community traditionally defined as poor, backward and culturally deprived, I was a middle-class single woman whose only experiences within Appalachia were tied up with issues of poverty within the region. In a community colonized economically, environmentally and politically by northern and multinational corporations, I was a recent college graduate from the North, coming down to teach children in the mountains. Each of these aspects of my identity positioned me as privileged, and it is both inaccurate and arrogant to consider my privileges as inconsequential.

Being both a cultural outsider and a new teacher were positions that afforded powerful questioning for me of the nature of privilege and working across cultural ways of knowing. I was deeply humbled in my position of not being a knower within this
context. Over the course of the five years that I was a community member prior to this study, I was ever reminded that I was a newcomer, and thus there were many practices and values that would take time to learn and understand. Furthermore, it was my ethical responsibility to do so as a teacher within this community. To this end, I made observing my students, their parents, my colleagues and administrators for locally valued and situated literacy practices a priority. In some ways I came prepared to see strengths of the community, having been introduced to a few of those qualities in my earlier experiences in the region, and because of my academic and political activism background in issues of race, gender, class and sexuality.

Thus, I sought out affirming examples, and found innumerable ones. I found networks of community members documenting local history and complex genealogies, local groups uniting to preserve history through restoring Civil War battlefields and historic homes, local musicians teaching traditional Appalachian music in after school and summer programs, a regional arts center and a science center that were brought into being through years of community members lobbying the state government for funding, a widely celebrated outdoor theater program that starred local adults and youths in classic musical productions, a cultural center that sought to record and perpetuate Appalachian culture through documentary film making, community music programs, a locally programmed radio station, and other forms of advocacy. I also found an abundance of entrepreneurial practices that grew from having little economic resources, yet led to a multiplicity of home-based businesses dotting the corners along the winding mountain roads. I learned from my students about the extensive mentoring practices that connected
generations and communities through such activities as hunting, childcare, youth sports, volunteer fire fighting, and engine repair. Within kinship and friendship circles, my students were also actively engaged in online and digital literacy practices. Particularly when more parents kept their children at home because of worries about the safety of roads, and drug use amongst neighbors, many young people kept their social lives connected through texting, instant messaging and social networking websites (i.e. Facebook and MySpace being two key sites). These rich and varied language, literacy and cultural practices constructed life in these mountain communities.

From my positioning, I am a witness to these young people growing up with this social discourse regarding their cultural identity. I understand that these adolescents are challenged to find strength and worth in their own communities. They must do so even as they may also struggle with the very real challenges that come from within and beyond their communities in regards to their other discourses around aspects of their identity positionings. These include, namely those of race, gender, sexuality, class, and religion. As they can only act from their position(s), so must I; as they have agency to position themselves in ways that matter to them, so have I. Thus, after five years of teaching in this school with the commitments I have to providing culturally sustaining, socially just learning opportunities, I have taken seriously my insider/outsider positioning, sought out a teacher/researcher positioning within the context of school (and beyond!), in the hopes that the work I do with these young people deepens our understandings of the possibilities for ourselves, each other, and our communities. I continue to discuss the methodological elements of my cross-cultural teacher-researcher role in Chapter Three.
Intersecting literacy and identity discourses in an English classroom. As a non-Appalachian teacher in a rural Appalachian community, I participated in and observed complex, sometimes contradictory, ways of “talking back” to oppressive Appalachian discourses with my students, colleagues, and community members. In particular, my classroom was often a site of intense negotiations regarding my own, my students’, the community’s, and the “outside” world’s positioning as they related to constructions of Appalachia. Because one of the most persistent stereotypes of the region is one of a hillbilly as both illiterate and nearly unintelligible (excepting quaint storytellers), the high school English classroom can be a site of heightened tension (Locklear, 2011; Puckett, 1992; Sohn, 2006). Ironically, the notion of the region’s ubiquitous and persistent illiteracy circulates alongside its adolescents’ diverse literacy activities (e.g. texting, writing notes, using social media forums, writing music, etc.). This tension was additionally heightened for some students in my classes. As a middle-class Northern white woman who comfortably spoke academic English with a northern flattened accent, I embodied a potentially hostile position.

This threat could operate in two different, but related ways for different students. For students for whom reading print, school-sanctioned texts was a pleasurable and/or easy practice, there is was always the threat of “getting above your raising” or learning to speak “proper” and sound “too educated.” These acts could be perceived by friends and family as judgmental of those who continued to speak in “country” ways and pursued blue-collar work.

To be seen as participating in academic discourses along with me can be a risky
stance. On the other hand, for students for whom academic literacy skills have been challenging or alienating, or for whom a “hillbilly” identity has particular appeal, there has often been an available social position that valorizes “practical knowledge” and disdains “book learning” (Locklear, 2011; Puckett, 1992; Sohn, 2006). With strong social reinforcement, these positions, among many others, can have the appearance of permanence, even though there is movement and multiplicity across the many contexts of a young person’s life. All the same, these positionings have meanings and consequences for Appalachian adolescents, particularly as they navigate formal schooling contexts (Hicks, 2005; Schwartz, 2006). Within this discourse, there is reason to question the purpose and worth of academic literacy practices, and similarly, the teacher. While I acknowledge that these example discourses and positions do not represent the full array of discourses, I also contend that these do represent two significant and popular ones that I negotiated with my students. What is significant here is the understanding of the sociocultural risks and rewards associated with participating in particular discourses and language and literacy practices because their identity position implications. The significance of these will be further explicated in the literature review in Chapter Two. It is out of the tensions within these intersections of identity and literacy discourses that this study arose.

**Research Question**

In this study, I share findings from a focal unit in a one-year study in a senior English class in a rural Appalachian community addressing the question: What happens when Appalachian and Appalachian heritage students are invited by their non-
Appalachian teacher to engage in an English language arts course focused on Appalachian-centered texts?

*Sub Question 1:* What opportunities to explore relevant socio-cultural discourses did the teacher-designed literacy events afford to the students?

*Sub Question 2:* What opportunities to explore, take up, resist, and assign identity positions did the teacher-designed literacy events afford to the students?

To address this question, I draw data from the written work and oral interactions of three focal students from the class. Two of the focal students, Kevin and Chayla, are from Akers County. The third focal student, Tracy, is of Appalachian heritage, and has only lived in this community for two years. As will be further delineated in Chapter Three, in this study, I was the teacher-researcher in the class, and was otherwise a full-time English teacher in the school. Unlike my students, I had no familial tie to Akers County or the Appalachian region. Inspired by earlier work in the region, I began my teaching career at Hilltop High School over a decade ago.

**Statement of Purpose**

This study is intended to bring forward the missing voices of rural Appalachian adolescents in both the field of adolescent literacy studies and Appalachian literacy studies. It also aims to push forward theorization of Appalachian adolescent identities, and to continue to build a case for pedagogies of access and dissent within marginalized communities (Morrell, 2007).

**Missing voices: a gap in adolescent literacy studies.** The field of literacy studies has brought long needed attention to adolescents’ literacies practices across multiple
contexts and within marginalized communities (Blackburn & Clark, 2007; Hull & Schultz, 2002; Kinloch, 2010; Lamont Hill & Vasudevan, 2008; Mahiri, 1998).

Disrupting the narrow perspective that literacy takes place only in schools, sociocultural literacy studies attend to social literacy practices in and out of school contexts (Blackburn & Clark, 2007; Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003; Heath, 1983; Kinloch, 2010; Lamont Hill & Vasudevan, 2008; Hull & Schultz, 2002; Schultz, 2003). Increasingly the linguistic and cultural marginalization Black and Latino youth have experienced, as well as the complex literacy and language practices they engage in schools and communities has been documented (Cazden, 1988; Delpit, 1995; Gutierrez, 1992; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992; Noguera, 2006; Richardson, 2003). Similarly, there is increasing attention to the vibrant, complex literacy practices in which urban and African American youth engage (Campano, 2007; Lamont Hill & Vasudevan, 2008; Hull & Schultz, 2002; Kinloch, 2010; Lamont Hill & Vasudevan, 2008; Mahiri, 1998; Morrell, 2004; Wissman, 2011).

**Missing voices: a gap in Appalachian literacy studies.** While there is a growing body of scholarship on the literacy practices of Appalachian women and children, including scholarship that attends to identity work involved in the engagement of those literacy practices (Hicks, 2005; Jones, 2006; Schwartz, 2006; Sohn, 2006), we have yet to see significant empirical research on the literacy practices and identities of Appalachian adolescents, in or out of school (Heath, 1983; Hicks, 2002; Locklear, 2011; Puckett, 1992; Sohn, 2006). This means that educational scholars do not know which discourses are particularly persuasive or powerful for adolescents, how they negotiate
them through language and literacy practices, and what this means for their identity positioning through the language and literacy practices in an English classroom. Without this understanding, it is also impossible to bring Appalachian adolescents’ voices into the dialogue on adolescents from marginalized communities. It is the intent of this study to begin to address these gaps and affirm Appalachian adolescents’ seat at the table.

**Theorizing Appalachian identities within and against discourses.** This study explores how the three focal students engaged in these acts of positioning through seven significant literacy events within the focal course. When examining the talk and texts of these students, it became clear that they were able to draw on contemporary discourses about the region as well as their growing understanding of historical discourses as a resource for talking back to such constructions while simultaneously asserting their own judgments about the roles of insiders and outsiders in the construction and deployment of those discourses. They demonstrate both vulnerability and agency in living within intersecting contexts of dominant and local relations of power.

**Extending a literacy pedagogy of access and dissent to an Appalachian context.** Ernest Morrell (2007) has argued for a literacy “pedagogy of access and dissent” in which students in marginalized communities “acquire the skills they need to ‘succeed’ while also developing a powerful language of critique of systems of social reproduction” (p. 237). Built upon a powerful line of scholarship in urban education, critical literacy, hip-hop literacy, Morrell’s work has been centered on the implementation and consequence of this pedagogy within urban communities with young people of color. Designing and implementing literacy curricula that take seriously the need for the
dialectic of access and dissent is a central task of educators, regardless of their location.

My study is responsive to Morrell’s (2007) call for this type of pedagogy, and extends it to a rural, white, working-class Appalachian community. In taking up Morrell’s (2007) work in this context, I argue that this broader Appalachian cultural community, defined by deficit discourses of illiteracy, poverty, backwardness, and moral corruption, is a site that requires a similar pedagogical approach in order to fight back from within the community. This pedagogical approach assumes that young people are already capable and are already engaged as consumers and producers of popular media texts. Furthermore, it assumes that students are benefited when they increase their rhetorical dexterity and fluency in the “codes of power” through engaging in academic literacy practices, but particularly for young people from culturally, linguistically, and economically marginalized communities (Carter, 2008; Delpit, 1995).

An Overview of the Dissertation

Chapter Two has two purposes: the first is to review two bodies of relevant literacy research. The first is situated within urban and rural Appalachian contexts to elaborate on the gaps I see in the empirical work on adolescent literacy practices in Appalachian and working-class white communities. The other focuses on cross-cultural teacher-research. From these studies I extract questions of epistemological positioning of the researcher and students, which is particularly important in contexts in which the researcher/teacher is from a dominant cultural community and the students are from marginalized cultural communities. The second purpose of the review is to construct a theoretical framework
on language, literacy practices, discourse theory and identity as social positioning theory so as to support the my analysis of the date and findings, which I present in Chapter Four.

Chapter Three focuses on the methodological commitments and practices I undertook in the construction of this study. As this is a classroom-based qualitative study, I explain my role and the nested context of community, school and class. In these descriptions I attend to the ways in which these contexts impact the lives of students at Hilltop High School. From here, I describe each focal student, drawing from observational data, interviews, and my relationship with them as their teacher. Because this study examines the affordances of an Appalachian-focused curriculum, I add a summary and discussion of each selected text in the focal unit and an overview of the semester of the focal class Finally, I describe my data collection and analysis processes and discuss the limitations of the study.

Chapter Four shares the findings of the study. Findings are organized into two categories of sociocultural discourses that were shown to be highly relevant in the students’ negotiations of identity positions: 1) insider/outsider discourses; and 2) language variation discourses. Within each category, I draw data excerpts to illustrate the negotiations of the focal students.

Chapter Five is a discussion of how I understand the significance of this study. Specifically, I propose that this study affirms the importance of thoughtful cross-cultural teacher research and the development of a “literacy pedagogy of access and dissent” (Morrell, 2007) within rural Appalachian contexts.
Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This study aims to understand Appalachian and Appalachian heritage students’ and my own, as a non-Appalachian teacher, uses of language and literacy practices to negotiate discourses and the role that these practices play in our identity positioning in our English classroom. Therefore, I look to scholars with a sociocultural conceptualization of literacy, language, discourse, and identity. This chapter has two main sections: a literature review and an explication of the theoretical framework for this study. In the first section, I review literacy research in Appalachian communities and cross-cultural teacher-research adolescent literacy studies. Because scholarship in rural Appalachian schools and communities is limited, I review literature as it relates to both urban and rural Appalachian communities, in and out of school, and across multiple age ranges. Because I also understand this study to provide a relevant yet underrepresented voice in the cross-cultural teacher-researcher scholarship on adolescent literacy studies, I also review key studies from this body of work. Following these reviews, I articulate the gaps in the research in order to locate the role of this study in the larger scholarly conversation regarding literacy, language and identity.

In the second section of the chapter I address the significant theoretical traditions informing this study. I begin by sharing the theoretical work from New Literacy Studies scholars’ understanding of literacy as a social practice in order to highlight the sociocultural and historical situatedness of literacy. Such an understanding of literacy is
reliant upon a sociocultural theory of language. Specifically, I draw from Bakhtin’s (1981; 1986) understanding of the relationship between language use and one’s identity positioning through the concepts of dialogism, heteroglossia, and addressivity. With these conceptualizations of literacy and language as sociocultural and historical practices, there is a need for examining the chains of meaning that are constituted and re-constituted through these practices. Thus, the next section addresses theorization of discourse by Gee (1990), Foucault (1972; 1977) and Bakhtin (1981; 1986). I draw from Harré and van Langenhove’s (1999) positioning theory to structure my examination of how, through language and literacy practices engaging sociocultural discourses, my students and I position one another and our communities. Finally, I conclude with a summary of how I pull these theories together into an analytical framework that supports the design and analysis of this study.

**Literature Review: Appalachian Literacy Studies**

In the first portion of the literature review I examine eleven studies located within Appalachian communities and centered on the literacy practices of community members as they engage in their daily life in and out of schools. In the past thirty years, there have been only a handful of studies conducted around literacy in urban or rural Appalachian communities (Heath, 1983; Hicks, 2002; Hicks, 2005; Jones, 2006; Puckett, 1992; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Schwartz, 2006; Sohn, 2006; Webb-Sunderhaus, 2007). Of these, just five were located within a rural Appalachian context (Heath, 1983; Hicks, 2002; Puckett, 1992; Sohn, 2006; Webb-Sunderhaus, 2007). I look across urban and rural Appalachian communities to highlight the shared experiences of those who are positioned by discourses of Appalachian poverty, as well as to demonstrate the porous relationships...
between rural and urban communities (Heath, 1983; Hicks, 2005; Jones, 2006; Schwartz, 2006).

At the center of these studies are how Appalachian residents across childhood and adulthood position themselves within and against language and literacy practices across multiple spaces, including school, home, and community. To look across the life span of childhood through adulthood is to expand an understanding of the significance of the Appalachian discourses pertaining to class and gender in affording and constraining peoples’ relationships with the literacy and language practices associated with their families and communities and those associated with school. Together, these studies indicate that schools are often hostile spaces for working-class and poor Appalachian students starting from a very young age, and continue to have consequence for adults. In this review, four studies attend most closely to the language and literacy practices of elementary aged children (Heath, 1983; Hicks, 2002; Hicks, 2005; Jones, 2006; Schwartz, 2006). Two studies focused on the relationship between the language and literacy practices of adults and children, one from a single parent-child relationship (Purcell-Gates, 2005), and one from a community perspective (Heath, 1983). Finally, five studies focus on the language and literacy practices of adults in communities and schools (Gottlieb, 2001; Locklear, 2011; Puckett, 1992; Sohn, 2006; Webb-Sunderhaus, 2007).

That so few studies have centered on the language and literacy practices and identity work of rural Appalachian youth means that within the field of literacy studies there is a silent acquiescence to the discursively constructed relationship between an Appalachian adolescent identity and illiteracy. As well, it means that as a field we know virtually nothing about how adolescents in Appalachia negotiate the complex messages
about what it means to be from this region.

**Insider/Outsider discourse.** Central to Appalachian identity positions is an understanding of one’s self in relation to others. Specifically, it is an understanding of one’s Appalachian self and community as seen as non-normative in comparison with more metropolitan and middle-class non-Appalachian communities. This division is symbolically marked by the language and literacy practices and constructions of gender associated with white, working-class Appalachian communities.

Derived from this perpetual comparison has grown a sense of an insider/outsider division that supports a self-aware cultural sense of community within Appalachian neighborhoods and families, (Gottlieb, 2001; Puckett, 1992). Simultaneously, this division has been monitored by middle-class institutions like schools that continue to find urban and rural working class Appalachian youth as deviant and less intellectually capable than middle-class and non-Appalachian youth (Heath, 1983; Hicks, 2002; Hicks, 2005; Jones, 2006; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Schwartz, 2006).

Throughout these studies participants exhibit a strong awareness of class divides as a part of their understanding of themselves in relation to non-Appalachian communities. Across rural and urban contexts and across their lives, Appalachian residents have a “history of being scorned and ‘Othered’ by outsiders. Today, several generations of urban Appalachians are still demeaned by ‘trash’ discourses (Hartigan, 1997) as they struggle to make a living, maintain kinship ties, and retain their cultural identity in the face of local, regional and national scorn (Schwartz, 2006, p. 70). For the residents of the rural eastern Kentucky community in Puckett’s (1992) study, the division between insider and outsider is clear. She writes:
Residents are deeply conscious of the negative stereotypes ascribed to "country talk" by most outsiders and many "proper" people in the county, including some local teachers, and recognize that written discourse differs significantly from their "ways of saying things." Such differences become symbolic of differences between "insiders" and "outsiders" (Puckett, 1992, p.138).

This self-awareness of difference and the language practices associated with it are powerful symbols of insider positioning that support a strong sense of cultural community. Similarly, Gottlieb’s (2011) study of the discourses of West Virginian graduate student and high school student participants engaged in comparisons of their home and school found frequent use of class-based insider/outsider discourses. There was a tension between an expressed love for one’s community and state and a self-conscious awareness of being perceived as different by “outsiders.” For example, participants pointed out distinctions that helped “constitute self and regional identities” such as “They ‘ride Cadillacs and limousines’, whereas we ‘drive Fords and Chevies’. They ‘don’t know the meaning of a dollar’ whereas we ‘do know the meaning of sacrifice’.” (p. 351). Gottlieb (2001) argued that participation in these available discourses on a class-based insider-outsider status is an agentive move to define more positively one’s historically maligned community.

**Gendered discourses and practices.** These classed aspects of an Appalachian identity and perspectives on literacy intersect with sociocultural gendered expectations, particularly as they relate to language and literacy practices. The practices and identities of working-class women, and to a lesser degree men, were of central concern for several studies in this review (Heath, 1983; Hicks, 2002; Hicks, 2005; Jones, 2006; Puckett,
1992; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Schwartz, 2006; Webb-Sunderhaus, 2007). The girls and women in the study had built an understanding of themselves within the discourses and practices of their working-class homes and communities. The language practices of white working-class girls and women are often associated with both loud, rebellious, attitude-saturated displays of strength, as well as traditional gender roles of needing to care for one’s male partner and the primacy of family over individual desires (Jones, 2006, Puckett, 1992; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Schwartz, 2006; Webb-Sunderhaus, 2007).

For both urban Appalachian girls and women, language practices that reflect a “tough-skinned, “bad-ass” attitude [were] not only desirable but also absolutely imperative to “shout-back” (as Dorothy Allison puts it, 1998) at a mainstream society that continues to oppress already-marginalized groups of people” (Jones, 2006, 115). Girls’ tough “attitudes” were often taught as a valued trait (Hicks, 2002; Jones, 2006; Schwartz, 2006). “The place of language in the cultural life of each social group is interdependent with the habits and values of behaving shared among members of that group” (Heath, 1983, p. 11). That is, it is in growing up in a community that one begins to embody the values and beliefs of one’s family and community, and these cultural practices are lived out through social interactions, including language practices.

Along with being a cultural expectation of toughness, also seen as being “bad,” within rural and urban Appalachian communities there is a simultaneous expectation that young girls and women know how to be “good” (Hicks, 2002; Jones, 2006; Puckett, 1992). Being a “good” girl or woman meant different things within a middle-class institutional perspective in schools and working-class perspectives in Appalachian families and communities (Jones, 2006; Heath, 1983). In the case of rural working-class
Appalachian women in Puckett’s (1992) ethnography, “Ash Creek women walk a literate tightrope, called upon to assert a certain identity that affirms ‘good’ reading and writing skills but constrained by cultural norms and social practices in the directions and forms their writing can successfully assume to maintain social propriety and their family name” (Puckett, 1992, p. 143). As the sociocultural gendered and classed expectations for men and women inform the language and literacy practices in a community, there are often sociocultural restrictions on the language and literacy practices in which women are permitted to partake in order to maintain a “good” girl or woman position (Heath, 1983; Hicks, 2005; Jones, 2006; Sohn, 2006; Webb-Sunderhaus, 2007).

Likewise, when making decisions about one’s academic future, gendered and classed expectations play a primary role for Appalachian women and girls, especially if they desire to maintain a “good” girl or woman position within their communities. Many Appalachian families perceived a woman’s choice to pursue formal educational goals like college as a woman’s choice between individual and family (Locklear, 2011; Sohn, 2006; Webb-Sunderhaus, 2007). Described as uppity or as abandoning children and partner when choosing to go to college, Appalachian women found academic literacy to be positioned as a “perilous empowerment” (Locklear, 2011). “For Appalachian women, the transformative powers of education and more specifically, literacy, are no doubt empowering, but they can also be perilous” (2011, p. 2-3).

The gendered discourses directed towards young working-class Appalachian boys and men are less well represented in these studies. Hicks (2002) examined the language practices associated with one young boy, Jake, in a rural Appalachian area. As with some of the girls, discourses of toughness and independence were part of the young boy’s
world (Heath, 1983; Hicks, 2002). His father actively sought out opportunities to read following his interests, but otherwise had limited engagement with academic literacy practices, and this pattern is one that Jake followed (Hicks, 2002). Heath (1983), Puckett (1992) and Webb-Sunderhaus (2007) address men less directly. For Heath (1983), boys, like the girls in the white working-class community, were culturally prepared for a limited set of practices expected in schools (e.g. report factually a series of events, use texts matter-of-factly, etc.). Having been brought up to memorize Bible passages, corrected when sharing imaginative tales, and asked to identify basic elements of a story when reading, these young people often found the tasks of schooling outside of their cultural repertoires. Given that for most of the working-class young men schooling was not expected to be a long-term professional pathway, outside of maintaining respectful interactions with authority, there was little investment in school performance. The future of these young men was most commonly in the mills and factories nearby; it was these physical professions that were culturally understood as appropriate pathways for men, and these did not require great fluency with academic literacy practices.

Understanding how gendered and classed discourses call out to young people is critical to seeing how and why young people see themselves in relation to school and the language and literacy practices associated with school. How might gendered and classed discourses compel a young man or woman to participate or to reject the practices of schools? For the case of working-class youth in urban and rural Appalachian communities, formal education was often seen as unnecessarily restricting, culturally alienating and irrelevant, and potentially hazardous to one’s familial connections.

**School as perilous.** School spaces and discourses wield significant power in
constructing dominant discourses about morality, intelligence, capability, and future success. Built on white middle-class practices and expectations, schools are often hostile to students from working-class and poor Appalachian communities (Heath, 1983; Hicks 2002; Hicks, 2005; Jones, 2006, Locklear, 2011; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Schwartz, 2006; Sohn, 2006). Because of this hostility, many Appalachian students and families feel it necessary to question school’s “natural” authority and the education as social uplift discourse in a blue-collar community. Schwartz (2006) described the discursive power of schools on constraining the viable spaces for working-class urban Appalachian girls this way:

Institutional Discourses, such as the written Discourses of school, operate in ways that provide space for a limited scope of relationships and, hence, a limited number of identities to be taken up. Identities ‘Othered’ by the school, i.e. ‘unofficial’ identities, become ‘Othered’ and treated as pathologies when enacted within the institutional context (p. 82).

For some young people in urban and rural Appalachian communities, positioning themselves within these discourses has meant dropping out of school after years of building a resistant, pathologized identity. Even for those to whom school was less directly injurious, the sense of class-based favoritism against their working-class identities established a negative relationship with formal education (Sohn, 2003, 2006). The adult Appalachian women in the studies reviewed found schools to be fraught with class tensions that were constraining on their choices to pursue college (Locklear, 2011, Sohn, 2006; Webb-Sunderhaus, 2006). While outsiders may perceive rural Appalachian communities as wholly working-class or poor, in fact, communities are economically
diverse. The class strata between students from neighboring towns are a salient feature of class struggle in school. Sohn (2006) explained, “Because of poor public school the women had experienced, many had some doubts about higher education and social mobility since they have often seen literacy's promises divide society into ‘masters’ and ‘servants’, and they would choose preservation of mountain values over upward mobility in any case” (p. 433). Refusing to participate in classist, culturally denigrating institutions is powerful assertion of one’s values. These perspectives also impact family members’ perceptions of what schools “do” to students.

In addition to women’s’ own concerns with college, Webb-Sunderhaus (2007) and Sohn (2006) report Appalachian women in tension with their families because of the perception of how going to college has distanced them from their families. Families expressed strong concern for the interference schooling causes in women’s culturally assigned family responsibilities (Locklear, 2011; Sohn, 2006; Webb-Sunderhaus, 2007). There is also a concern for the cultural shifts, marked by changes in language and literacy practices, that participating in formal education may bring about (Locklear, 2011; Puckett, 1992; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Sohn, 2006; Webb-Sunderhaus, 2007). In these working-class Appalachian communities, these shifts can be understood as a choice between cultural practices of the family and community, and those of the school’s middle-class agenda (Hicks, 2005; Jones, 2006; Locklear, 2011; Sohn, 2006; Webb-Sunderhaus, 2007). When schools function or are perceived to function in these ways, yet is also a pathway for accomplishing one’s professional goals, Appalachian residents and communities are positioned in seemingly impossible locations.

**Agency in hybridity.** Sociocultural practices are not frozen in a particular place,
bounded by concrete walls; practices shift and are modified, just as spaces are porous to multiple discourses and identities. For Hicks (2002; 2005), Jones (2006), and Schwartz (2006), carefully attending to the hybrid ways in which children from poor and working-class Appalachian communities navigate middle-class institutions is critical to understanding the sophistication of Appalachian residents’ assertion of agency in their use of resources and practices across spaces and discourses. Hicks (2002) explained, “In school, children can gain or lose power and associated kinds of knowledge as they take up social discourses. They can act, talk, and know in hybrid ways as well” (p. 21). Because of the dominating forces asserting schooling discourses of middle-class morality and literacy, there can seemingly be a clean line distinguishing between “home” and “school” literacy practices, discourses, and identities. Yet, as evidenced by the careful attention of ethnographers and teachers, these spaces can be seen to be quite porous and young people quite adept at learning to navigate the practices and discourses associated with particular domains of their lives all the time.

The porosity of discourses, positions, and spaces played out in the lives of the urban and rural Appalachian girls and women in the agentive ways they variously took up the discourses positioning them in relation to schooling and their communities (Heath, 1983; Hicks, 2002; Hicks, 2005; Jones, 2006; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Schwartz, 2006; Sohn, 2006; Webb-Sunderhaus, 2007). For some, it meant negotiating “good girl” and “bad girl” positioning discourses in ways that met their social needs (Jones, 2006; Schwartz, 2006). The girls in Jones’ study (2006) described the different times in which it was more appropriate to be “good” or have an “attitude,” without disowning one’s feelings of rebelliousness or toughness. Similarly for the students in Hicks’ (2002),
Heath’s (1983) and Schwartz’s (2006) studies, learning how to engage in the literacy and language practices of schooling coincided with learning how to engage at different times in the discourses of the different places. While some girls feel powerfully their right to assert their working-class voices in middle-class spaces, Hicks (2005) explained that, “working-class girls can also learn to speak, read, and reason as bilinguals, in their case in more than one class-specific voice. But in order for such changes in language and subjectivity to occur, girls must first see a place in the classroom for the real as they know it” (p. 227). For the adults in Purcell-Gates (1995), Sohn (2006) and Webb-Sunderhaus (2007), it meant negotiating their roles as parents, partners and community members, as well as their own goals for themselves to develop a community and family identity that integrated their academic language and literacy practices into it.

These studies show the significance of the discourses circulating in families, communities, and schools that too often successfully keep out Appalachian residents. Compelling working-class discourses of toughness and family loyalty, as well as alienating middle-class discourses in school, work simultaneously to push out Appalachian youth and adults alike.

Multiple discourses within schools. Rather than leaving the responsibility of the negotiation of dominating discourses, practices, and spaces up to individual people, these scholars have called for an intentional redesign in the curricular space that integrates multiple class and gender discourses into the language and literacy practices of schooling (Heath, 1983; Hicks, 2002; Hicks, 2005; Jones, 2006; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Schwartz, 2006; Webb-Sunderhaus, 2007). Hicks (2005) called for strategic selection of texts that invite multiple discourses into classroom conversations. She explained, “Carefully
chosen literary texts … created a rich context for girls to move productively between class-specific voices” (p. 227). Similarly, Schwartz (2006) argued that schools need to “address written literacies in classrooms as ways to embrace and enact school and neighborhood identities [that] would allow girls to experience a meaningful sense of belonging in classrooms, and would, eventually, have an impact on reducing the number of urban Appalachian female dropouts” (p. 85). These beliefs are based on the assumption that working-class girls and boys do have rich and complex literacy practices outside of schools, and that these literacies have something to offer to the world of schooling. Furthermore, by inviting in their literacy practices, the more full and complex presence of the Appalachian adolescents’ complex identities will lessen the divide between home and school spaces.

Heath (1983) attended closely to both the education of in-service teachers and their interaction with students when in classrooms that did and did not take up students’ cultural uses of language and literacy, and the relevant discourses in their lives. Drawing from the conceptual and methodological tools of ethnography, Heath worked with teachers to document and understand students’ community and family based language practices, as well as their own practices and those of school. In understanding the cultural nature of language to accomplish similar tasks (i.e. dinner time routines, politeness routines, storytelling, etc.), the teachers were able to see difference as a matter of cultural variation, not a sign of intellectual or moral deficiency or superiority. Furthermore, Heath worked with the teachers to integrate the children’s language practices into the schooling practices, and to be more explicit in their expectations (e.g. use of directives instead of indirect requests, etc.) for students from the working-class communities to participate in
schooling practices. Teachers worked to develop a broader understanding of community cultural practices and uses of texts to find ways of making language and literacy instruction more relevant to the students. Similarly, Hicks (2002) sought to build connections between schooling and family practices for her two young working-class participants who found the practices of schooling alienating and confusing. Like Heath’s teachers and Heath (1983), Hicks (2002) sought to draw examples and redesign the uses of text to more closely resemble text usage and topics from the children’s lives. However, for the children in Hicks’ study, these negotiations did not seem adequate to overcome the history of frustration young Jake had developed with schooling and the ways in which his time and the topics of his reading and writing were controlled within schools. The efforts of Hicks (2002) and Heath (1983), and others in a student-by-student or classroom-by-classroom approach to integrating practices from families and communities into school seem to face the sedimented resistance accumulated over the years of alienation from school and the challenge of maintaining the integrative practices as an individual teacher in a school. Larger scale innovations to bring together hybrid discourses in school were not discussed in the studies, but certainly remain as future opportunities.

**Where are the Appalachian adolescents?** While these studies teach us about the significance of sociocultural discourses on the language and literacy practices and identity positions within rural and urban Appalachian contexts for women and children, left out of this body of work I have reviewed is attention paid to rural Appalachian adolescents, their literacy practices, and their understanding of themselves as literate beings. Furthermore, there has been little work around how Appalachian adolescents
negotiate the discourses around literacy within and about their communities, as well as other discourses related to being an adolescent from a rural Appalachian community. Neither how Appalachian adolescents choose to construct their cultural identities nor the implications of such identifications on their schooling experiences have been empirically investigated.

**Cross-cultural teacher-researcher adolescent literacy studies.** In addition to locating this study within the body of Appalachian literacy studies, I also locate this study within the broader scholarly conversation of critical adolescent literacy studies. The past thirty years have seen the rise of significant literacy scholarship based in marginalized communities in an effort to disrupt the racist discourse around literacy and communities of color (Campano, 2007; Fecho, 1999; Lamont Hill & Vasudevan, 2008; Hull & Schultz, 2002; Kinloch, 2010; Mahiri, 1998; Morrell, 2004; Richardson, 2003; Wissman, 2011). One particular form of this research has been conducted by classroom teachers coming from sociocultural backgrounds different from their students (Campano, 2007; Fecho, 1999; Wissman, 2011). This research has foregrounded the direct discussions of class, race, language, and literacy with students from marginalized communities.

In this section, I review key studies that, like my study, are conducted by teacher-researchers and attend to adolescent language and literacy practices and identities within school spaces. More specifically, scholars who are not from the same sociocultural communities as the student participants conducted these studies as the teacher-researchers. Campano (2007), while Filipino, did not share similar lived backgrounds as his students in the particular urban and working-class community of his study. Both Wissman (2011) and Fecho (1999) identify as white scholars, and in these teacher-
I selected these studies to review here because they pose powerful theoretical considerations. The considerations across them that I found to be particularly relevant and provocative address issues of epistemology in teacher-researcher and student positionality, the intentionality of explicitly critical language and literacy pedagogies in academic literacy contexts, and conceptualization of identities across multiple spaces.

First, each of these scholars situated his or her own knowledge as insider/outsiders as both limited and privileged. From their positions as teachers and researchers from cultural communities that differed from that of their participants, there are limits to their understanding of the lived experiences of their participants (Campano, 2007; Fecho, 1999; Wissman, 2011). For these scholars, they were not the target audience of the same discourses addressing their student participants from different cultural communities. Acknowledging the inherent tensions and limitations in their positioning was critical to their work as cross-cultural teacher-researchers, especially in talking about issues around racialized identities and discourses with students and families from racially and economically marginalized communities. To mediate her positioning methodologically, Wissman (2011) drew from cross-cultural research principles:

My approaches included creating opportunities for students to pursue their own self-representations in the course and the research; engaging in a process of self-reflexivity; pursuing collaborative inquiries with the students in the teaching, research, and presentation of the data; and employing culturally attuned analytical lenses when analyzing the data. (p. 416)
These principles also undergird Fecho (1999; 2001) and Campano’s (2007) work and helped them to navigate their insider/outsider positionality. Importantly, each scholar centered their study on students’ engagement of the discourses shaping their lives, while simultaneously engaged in his or her own self-reflexivity in questioning his teaching and research practices and his location and role as a racially and or class privileged person in this context.

While their position as cultural outsiders produced limitations in understanding the complexities of the discourses compelling their students, from their position as teacher-researchers, the teacher-researchers were also socially located in a privileged position as mediators between various communities and discourses. For example, from their insider position as teachers building trusting relationships with students, they were uniquely positioned to could see and hear (always partially) some consequences of the discourses on their students with a vested interest, and could support students’ negotiations of the educational, white, middle-class discourses (Campano, 2007; Fecho, 1999; Wissman, 2011). Also as teachers they are mediators between administrative requirements (i.e. prescriptive instructional programs and exams) and the academic and social needs of students (Campano, 2007; Fecho, 1999; Wissman, 2011). Finally, between the contexts of knowledge production in K-12 schools and academia, teacher-researchers are capable of generating powerful knowledge of educational contexts and processes (Campano, 2007; Fecho, 1999).

A second shared commitment across these studies was the type of pedagogy these teacher-researchers generated with their students. At the center of each teacher-researcher’s study was an invested interest in the consequence for students’ identities in
the construction of spaces that explicitly acknowledge the “colormute” contexts of schooling and rebut it with culturally sustaining literacy practices (Wissman, 2011, p. 405). These teacher-researchers constructed, with students, spaces intentionally designed for rigorous exploration and self-reflection of discourses circulating in students’ communities. Fecho (1999) engaged his students in explicit and extended exploration of language practices as cultural practices that position all speakers. He continued to support their inquiry through the reading of African American literature, prompting them to consider how language also affects the characters and authors of the fictional and autobiographical texts. He wrote, “for students to learn and to accept standard English, they need to learn about language and to become critically aware of the role language plays in all our lives. What learning about language means is that students need to be invited into the academic conversations about the social and political issues inherent in language” (p. 76). Keeping students’ meaning making at the center of these explorations was also at the center of Campano’s (2007) work with urban Filipino fifth graders as they wrote plays, editorials, personal narratives and other academic and literary texts, and Wissman’s (2011) work with young African American women poets. In doing so, students’ cultural repertoires of practice (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003) are more fully integrated with traditional academic literacies, thereby disrupting the hierarchy of academic versus vernacular literacies and identities.

This type of exploration does not find its sole value in being a bridge to academic literacy practices; rather, academic literacy practices find their value by being used around the culturally relevant topics. Such pedagogies re-position the structure of the learning environment as a porous, dialectical space sharing engagement with
communities. This type of re-positioned space reflects the complexity of meaningful knowledge construction. Wissman (2011) drew from Foucault’s notion of a heterotopia or “Other Spaces” to consider “spaces that acknowledge and affirm difference in ways that also comment upon and contest dominant or official spaces” (2011, p. 410).

Wissman wrote,

> I consider the classroom in which I taught to be actively constructed by the discursive practices, texts, social relations, bodies, and processes within it. This space was therefore made and re-made over time with the introduction of new texts, the evolution of relationships, the development of rituals and routines, and the events of the broader context. (2011, p. 410)

Such attention to the context as a set of shifting relations informed by social practices -including literacy practices - supports a view of classrooms as porous and responsive to the local and dominant discourses. This type of perspective allowed for much greater nuance in understanding adolescents and literacy practices moving across contexts, even though the data collection takes place within a single classroom location.

Furthermore, in line with her epistemological claims on identities and literacies, this understanding of space creates the theoretical claims and urgency for constructing classroom spaces that actively invite culturally sustaining literacy practices.

These pedagogies are not about “saving” young people. They are more similar to community organizing in which citizens already individually have some information and knowledge, some investment in change, have taken some steps towards change, but in a collective build shared knowledge, shared investment and take shared steps as a critical mass (Stephen & Smith, 2012; Stephen, 1993).
Finally, these scholars have a shared understanding of identities as complex and multiple, and simultaneously positioned by “homogenizing forces” (Campano, 2007), “colormute” schools (Wissman, 2011), and “dominant discourses” (Fecho, 1999), and yet also undeniably unique in individual and collective agency. Campano (2007) and Wissman (2011) argued that through their students had epistemic privilege because of their lived experience. Campano explained that immigrant students are "historically situated agents who have the capacity to reflect on their lives. Because of the dissonances of their own marginalized experiences, they are better able to explain social inequality both in their everyday lives, and in the world more generally" (p. 102). This powerful re-interpretation of what young people in marginalized communities are capable of doing flips the typical model of positioning young people in marginalized communities as victims in need of saving by external institutions and individuals. Also like Campano (2007), Wissman (2011) worked from a post-positivist epistemology in order to focus on the “epistemic significance of lived experience” and “[to] contend that theoretically mediated experience can serve as the basis for truth claims and for collective action…” (p. 409). That is, when lived experience is understood through a theoretical lens like Black feminist theories, one’s experience is reinterpreted to be a site of knowledge and power.

Like these authors then, I positioned myself as someone with partial yet growing local knowledge and cultural investment, I positioned my students as holding epistemic privilege regarding local and authoritative discourses around Appalachian identities, and I positioned the literacy and language practices in the pedagogies to be powerful tools for students engaged in speaking back to authoritative discourses of deficiency. This critical
perspective on critical pedagogy is extremely important, and one that resonates with me as a cultural insider/outsider in the Hilltop area. I worked diligently over the years through long conversations with community members and colleagues, personal reflection and careful listening (Schultz, 2003) in order to assess the presence of a patronizing “mission” in my work at Hilltop High School. I hold that the curriculum I enacted with my students is one that was responsive to years of listening, and while it did have an “agenda,” that agenda, like Fecho’s (1999), was to create an academic space to make explicit the complex work my students are already engaged in. However, I also believe that my positioning required constant critical reflection and openness to feedback from community members. Like Campano, (2007), Fecho (1999) and Wissman (2011), in my study, I worked cross culturally in terms of regional, linguistic, and class positioning, and found, like them, significant limitations in my positioning. However, also like them I found that there still was a space for productive and important relationship building across cultural lines.

**Theoretical Framework**

Sociocultural theory provides a framework for seeing the dialectical relationship between social practices and contexts and identity (Vygotsky, 1986; Lewis, Enciso, Moje, 2007). When literacy and language are conceptualized as social practices as opposed to cognitive skills, they can be understood as a part of the process of context and identity construction, as well as being constructed by contexts and social identities. Furthermore, because language and literacy are always about “something,” attending to the discourses they engage is part of the task of sociocultural literacy scholars concerned with identity.
**Literacy as social practice.** New Literacy Studies (hereon referred to as NLS) is a body of scholarship defined by the conceptualization of literacy as a social practice (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000; Gee, 1996; Street, 1995). Theorizing literacy as a social practice leverages sociocultural theory’s understanding of how social practices are embedded within social, cultural, historical, ideological, and political contexts. These contexts and discourses matter in two large interrelated ways: One, these contexts and discourses shape and are shaped by the ways in which people in a set of relations (e.g. students in a class, children at a library “story time,” etc.) engage literacy practices. In Barton and Hamilton’s words, literacy practices are “the general cultural ways of utilizing written language which people draw upon in their lives. In the simplest sense literacy practices are what people do with literacy” (2000, p. 8). Because NLS scholars are grounded in sociocultural theory, they account for the material ways in that the doing always takes place in a particular context, “Practices are shaped by social rules which regulate the use and distribution of texts, prescribing who may produce and have access to them” (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 8). The second interrelated way is through how these contexts and discourses shape and are shaped when people construct understandings of literacy and see themselves and others in relation to one another. In working within this framework, NLS scholars attend to the social consequences of literacy practices. Central questions underlying New Literacy Studies scholarship include in what ways are which literacy practices engaged, where, when and by whom, and with what consequence. With these questions, some scholars left the classroom, once thought

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4 Distinguishing literacy events and literacy practices is important. According to Barton and Hamilton (2000), “literacy events are observable episodes which arise from practices and are shaped by them” (p. 8). The episodes can be understood through Heath’s definition of a literacy event as “any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants’ interactions and their interpretive processes” (1982, p. 93). In this way, a literacy event is an instance of a literacy practice in which there is a patterned way of interacting and making interpretations with a piece of writing integral involved.
to be the home of literacy, to explore literacy practices in communities. For many scholars, engaging in empirical community literacy practice research was done in solidarity with marginalized communities historically constructed as sites of illiteracy (Blackburn, 2005, 2003; Heath, 1983; Kinloch, 2010; Mahiri, 1998; Street, 1995; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Other scholars returned to the classroom and hallways with a set of similar commitments (Campano, 2007; Hicks, 2002; Hull & Schultz, 2002; Morrell, 2006). In each of these studies, attention was paid to the ways in which the literacy practices engaged within a social relation at a time and a place are each mutually constructed / constructive. That is, the use of a literacy practice was a part of the construction of the relations, space, and time. Likewise, literacy practices are constructed through the relations, space and time of their engagement (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 1996; Street, 1995).

**Bakhtin’s Theory of Language.** For this study, language is examined not as a system, but as a social practice. Bakhtin, while primarily considered a literary theorist, also provided powerful theorization of language in use. In contrast to viewing language as a neutral, objective grammatical system, Bakhtin argued, “Language enters life through concrete utterances…and life enters language through concrete utterances as well” (1986, p. 63). For Bakhtin, language is always about *something*, it is also situated *somewhere* at *sometime*, and it is always in dialogue with *someone*. Thus the social context of time and place, the social relations of the interlocutors and the chain of communication they are “stepping into” are all critical elements of understanding language in use. He provided three interrelated concepts crucial to this study’s examination of language in use: dialogism, addressivity, and heteroglossia. These

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5 For Bakhtin, the utterance, a meaningful bit of language as opposed to a formal sentence, is the unit of analysis.
concepts highlight the relationships between language and the social world, self and other, and structure and agency.

**Dialogism.** “Every word is directed toward an *answer* and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 280). The idea that language *is* dialogue, that any utterance is both a response while also anticipates a response is essentially Bakthin’s concept of dialogism. In the dialogic chain of communication in which a speaker selects words and meaning from earlier utterances and constructs one’s anticipation of the expected response, there is clear implication of the speaker’s understanding of the audience. Holquist explained, “Dialogism argues that all meaning is relative in the sense that it comes about only as a result of the relation between two bodies occupying *simultaneous but different* space, where bodies may be thought of as ranging from the immediacy of our physical bodies, to political bodies and to bodies of ideas in general (ideologies)” (2002, p. 21). In this view, how a speaker (who is also a responder) understands the person(s) with whom he/she is in dialogue (and in a situated relationship) will inherently and necessarily impact the way in which the words are selected and spoken. When the speaker makes assumptions about who the person is, it matters. With each utterance, a speaker constructs a self-other relation that is embedded within the sociocultural, historical context (Bakhtin, 1981; Harré and van Langenhove, 1999; Holquist, 2002). The relationships of the interlocuters in this study are particularly important when considering our various backgrounds as (among many aspects of our identities) non-Appalachian, Appalachian heritage, and Appalachian, yet all working together within the context of an English class. We were simultaneously participating in the classroom – reading the same texts, viewing the same films, writing papers according
to the same criteria, etc., but we each did so from our different spaces – physically, politically, ideologically, historically, etc. And this simultaneity – this sharing of place, while in differing space matters.

**Addressivity.** This dialogic relationship between Self and Other is central to Bakhtin’s theory of language and implicates the second central concept Bakthin offers: addressivity. Addressivity is simply the notion that a communication is always directed or addressed to *someone*. Bakhtin’s colleague Voloshinov elaborated:

The word is “oriented toward an addressee, toward who that addressee might be… each person’s inner world and thought has its stabilized social audience that comprises the environment in which reasons, motives, values, and so on are fashioned… the word is a two-sided act. It is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant. As word, it is precisely the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee. Each and every word expresses the one in relations to the other. I give verbal shape from another’s point of view, ultimately from the point of view of the community to which I belong. A word is a bridge thrown between myself and another… it is territory shared by both addresser and addressee. (1973, pp. 85-86)

In this elaboration, Voloshinov (1973) illustrated that in addressing someone, a speaker *must* position him/herself and his/her listener – there is an undeniable dialectical relationship constructed in the act of communication. In other words, in the production of the word there is the production of the positions. Likewise, in engaging in communication with someone, we must recognize his/her positioning in the social context in order to select socially acceptable, contextually appropriate
language.

The directionality of an address implicates both the addressee in their dialogic relationship by asking the question: Who are you to me? And additionally: Who are you to me in the space at this time? In speaking to my students about the purpose of the dissertation study I draw from multiple understandings of myself in relation to my students and in relation to the community at this moment in time, as well as larger relations between my regional identity (i.e. I am a Northerner) and that of my students (i.e. Appalachian and Appalachian heritage) to describe the project. Informed by my relationship as my students’ teacher, but also as a community insider/outsider discussing sensitive identity issues, I carefully frontload my ally status and acknowledge tensions I know my students deal with regarding their Appalachian/hillbilly identities particularly as they may relate to non-Appalachian folks. The discursive choices I make, as with all of us, are made within the web of understanding who we are in relation to others. This very understanding came through our learning of language. That is, it is from my living in relation to my students and community members for five years, and prior experiences living (i.e. listening) as an outsider in small Appalachian communities, as well as my academic understanding of Appalachian history, that I identified the need to foreground particular aspects of who I am when speaking about research on/with my students. It is through language that I learned to live as an insider/outsider, and through living as an insider/outsider, I learned how to speak in culturally appropriate ways. Because these are socioculturally informed and ideological meanings, they exist within the flows of power around identities (i.e. race, gender, class, sexuality, etc.).

From a mother telling her daughter to change her shirt so she does not “look so
trashy” to a teacher saying, “Don’t say ‘ain’t’; you sound like an ignorant hillbilly,” language is used to convey ideological, sociocultural meaning about who one is or is not supposed to be. Importantly, these meanings are specific to a particular time and space so that the teacher from the example above may also say, “You can say ‘ain’t’ at home, but you can’t say it in your school work,” and thereby inform the students present about differing social expectations for language use across home and school contexts.

**Heteroglossia.** The “social languages” (Bakhtin, 1981) the mother and teacher utilized, as with the ones from which my students and I drew, were neither spontaneous, self-created languages, nor were they universal scripts. Rather, within the specific social contexts they were but one or two of many available discourses (Bakhtin, 1981). This polyphony of possible social languages is the third Bakhtinian concept, *heteroglossia.* Because of the heteroglossic nature of our social worlds, we can ask: from which discourses does this speaker draw and to what effect? From this question we can also ask what were the affordances and constraints around the speaker’s engagement of a particular discourse and not another? To this question, Bakhtin might add, “Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear” (1981, p. 272). As all interactions occur within a social world constructed by and constructive of the relations within that context, the same sociocultural forces that provide structure and opportunities for agentive, creative action apply to the language use. Bakhtin was adamant in his recognition of the simultaneity of structuring, constraining forces and creative, agentive opportunities. This tension

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6 According to Bakthin, an utterance and social languages are marked by centrifugal (heteroglossic, socially distinguishing) as well as centripetal (monoglossic, societally unifying) forces (1981).
provided the space for continued diversity in how any individual may respond from their own particular position, and is particularly relevant to this study as I examine three focal students who live in the “same” community, and hear the “same” utterances regarding Appalachian identities and insider-outsider relations, yet as individuals within shared social space, engage in the community/ies from their unique positioning.

**Discourse as Sites of Constraint and Agency.** As stated earlier, language and literacy are always about *something*, they are never free from situated meaning. In order for meaning to be constructed, the utterance must be socially recognizable, and this recognition does not take place at the word level (Bakhtin, 1986). An utterance is located within a “chain of communication” that allows for this recognition to be available (Bakhtin, 1986). Articulating how these ‘chains of meaning’ serve as discourses is the task of this section. In this section, I bring together definitions of discourse through the work of Foucault (1972; 1979), Gee (1990), and Bakthin (1986) so as to establish a focus for this study’s examination of my own and my students’ participation within and against sociocultural talk regarding Appalachian and non-Appalachian identity positions.

Central to each scholar’s definition of discourse is the patterned use of semiotic systems to construct socially recognizable relations. Foucault wrote, “whenever, between objects, types of statements, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations), we will say that we are dealing with a discursive formation” (1972, p. 38). That is, discourses are socially meaningful relationships (i.e. order, correlations, etc.) between genres of speech, ways of thinking, etc., and these relations are required in order to provide coherency in communication. Where Foucault spoke to the regularity or pattern in ways of speaking,
being, etc., Gee (1990) emphasized the “socially recognizable” pattern in his definition: “Discourse\(^7\) is a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting” (p. 143). Consequently, these ways “…can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or ‘social network,’ or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful ‘role’” (Gee, 1990, p. 143). Gee focused on the significant role that the use of discourses plays in the social positioning of oneself (and others), and in the recognition (or not) of someone as a participant in any number of discourses.

There is no clear, precise definition of any particular discourse (e.g. “academic discourse,” “hillbilly discourse”) as they are not static or finite, nor are they completely distinct within or across contexts. Yet, they remain socially recognizable in the midst of their mutability and fluidity, and thus they are socially available. They are for Bakhtin the “chains of communication” of “available discourses” in which a person may be positioned or may step into in shaping their utterance (Bakthin 1981, 1986). Discourses, with all of their multiplicity, intersections, competition, and mutations, operate by shaping our perceptions of what is available to oneself (and others) in his/her (and others’) unique positioning in/of the world (Foucault, 1972; Gee, 1990). In the process of the discursive mediation of available social positions or the construction of new ones, there is a tension between the agentive choices an individual can make within the situated moment, and the limited available discourses within the context and relations of power (Holland, et al., 1998; Ivanic, 1998; Lewis, Enciso & Moje, 2007).

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\(^7\) Gee (1990) distinguishes between Discourse and discourse. For Gee, Discourse is the socially recognizable ways of being; discourse refers to language in use.
Because discourses are constructed and maintained through use in social contexts, the same dialectical tensions any individual experiences as a constrained and agentive participant in the circulation of discourses act on the “centripetal” (i.e. socially unifying, monologic) forces and the “centrifugal” (i.e. creative, dialogic) forces that act on the discourses. Foucault described this tension between constraint and possibility at the point of co-existing and intersecting discourses:

We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it (Foucault 1978, p. 101)

Understanding the flows of power in both constraining and creating is critical to not imbuing dominant forces with a sense of permanence and participants as solely victims within its clutches. Rather, it is important to examine both sides of this tension in how individuals within social contexts at any given time agentively work within constraining forces. To do so, I looked first at how these scholars theorize the ways that power works to constraint (i.e. dominant, authoritative discourses), and then second, how power works within the sites of agency and individual selection (i.e. internally persuasive discourses) (Holland, et al., 1998).

For Foucault, identification of discourses is done in part through the recognition and trace of the regularities constructed by centripetal (i.e. socially unifying, monologic) forces (1972). He paid particularly close attention to the role of power in the
circulation of discourses. He examined the “truth effects” of discourses wielding significant power. Some discourses do become dominant and reified, like that of the ever-present image of a hillbilly as an illiterate fool, despite constant counter-discourses which rarely gain the same powered presence in the national conversation. The dominance of such a discourse Bakhtin (1986) named as “authoritative,” the one that “strives to determine the very basis of our ideological interrelations with the world, the very basis of our behavior” (342). Authoritative discourses transmit monologic cultural “truths” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 344). Because they are not responsive to counter discourses in the social worlds of Appalachia and beyond, these authoritative, monologic discourses do not participate in a dialogue about Appalachian identities; these dominant discourses seek to silence the heteroglossia of intersecting social worlds. In the contexts of rural Appalachia, adolescents face long-standing and continually reproduced messages about what it means to be/not be from “Appalachia,” or to be/not be a “hillbilly.” These monologic messages are produced from within and outside of the communities, and circulate across these contexts.

Yet, because there are always and already multiple, intersecting, competing discourses within a set of social relations, there is always opportunity for creative “disruptions” and new mutations and intersections (Foucault, 1972). Similarly, Bakhtin reminds us that, “The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes “one’s own” only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word⁸, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention” (1981, p. 294). This adaptation – the working within and against discourses – is the site of agentive self-construction. Part of someone’s agency is in positioning themselves within

⁸ In this instance, Bakhtin refers not to a single word, but to an *utterance*. 
particular discourses, and resisting positioning within others. Bakhtin (1986) theorized this agency as responding to an “internally persuasive” discourse which is malleable and in dialogic relationship with the world as it “is developed, applied to new material, new conditions; it enters into interanimating relationships with new contexts” (pp. 345-346).

Importantly, the concepts of “authoritative” and “internally persuasive” discourses are not lived out as binaries. Because of the power embedding social “truths” into authoritative discourses, and/or because of one’s positioning as an apparent benefactor of a particular authoritative discourse, it can be experienced as internally persuasive (Bakhtin, 1986). Participating in particular social languages and not others is a process of aligning oneself with particular social positions and not others (Bakhtin, 1986).

It is thus critical to bring together the roles of language and literacy practices with the concept of discourse, as they serve as tools in the mediation of self, other, and society. Together, they are a “part of a complex landscape that is both global and local, as well as participatory and exclusionary” (Lewis and del Valle, 2009, p. 311). In other words, through language and literacy practices, we draw from, resist, and modify discourses circulating broadly in and across groups and institutions, variously constraining and affording access to power, while at the same time we also draw from, resist, and modify local practices that position ourselves and others in relation to each other (Holland, et al., 1998). That we are in multiple social worlds simultaneously complicates the multiple circulating discourses and opportunities further (Holland, et al., 1998). While I am looking at only one classroom over the course of a semester, the multiple social worlds are still in play, alongside texts and literacy practices and events that hold significance for
how my students position themselves, others, and myself in the context of the classroom. In this study, I am particularly interested in the ways the students engage sociocultural discourses through interaction and literacy practices as markers of identification with sociocultural communities.

**Theorizing Identity as Positioning**

While this study focused on a single classroom, it is not only about these particular focal students in this focal class with me; it is also about what we can learn about cross cultural identity positioning in rural Appalachian academic contexts through our interactions. To set up more specifically the analytical tools that enable this type of examination, I now review the identity positioning work of Harré and van Langenhove, their peers and followers.

Harré & Moghaddam (2003a) defined a position as:

A cluster of rights and duties to perform certain actions with certain significance as acts, but which also may include prohibitions or denials of access to some of the local repertoire of meaningful acts. (pp. 5-6)

McVee (2011) cataloged the definitions of a position coming out of Harré and his colleagues’ work. From this review, she elaborated a list of “seven essential aspects” to defining “position”:

1. A position includes rights, duties, and obligations of an individual in any social context.

2. Rights and duties, and obligations are carried out with respect to an individual’s personal attributes and “moral” orders.
3. Positions not only involve rights, duties, obligations, but also expectations about how an individual will enact these rights, duties, and obligations. They can take up or thwart these expectations.

4. Positions are inherent in the storylines that individuals construct and enact individually and interactionally.

5. Positions are dynamic.

6. In any given social context, numerous potential positions exist.

7. Examining a position requires attending to discursive processes (p. 5-6).

Evident in this list are considerations of the key aspects discussed in the above sections addressing language, literacy, and discourse. One is a person’s relationship to a particular social context (i.e. moral orders), and how that relationship holds particular expectations for participation. Gee’s (1996) theory of discourse has particular relevance here as McVee (2011) attended to the social expectations of how someone meets these expectations, just as the “ways of thinking, valuing, believing and acting” in ways that are “socially acceptable” mark one as a participant in a particular discourse. This theoretical break down also attended to the opportunity for agency in how a person “can take up or thwart these expectations” (Foucault, 1972; Holland et al, 1998). McVee (2011) outlined an understanding of the multiple, fluid, competing and intersecting positions within and across social contexts. Finally, the central role of language and literacy practices was explicitly included in the conceptualization of identity positioning.

McVee, Baldassarre Hopkins, & Bailey (2011) adapted Harré and van Langenhove’s (1999) initial framework to meet their analytical needs in their work on
teacher and student positioning. In the table below, McVee, Baldassarre Hopkins, & Bailey included two previously named positions: role-based and tacit (2011). Role-based positioning is grounded in a “moral order” in which individuals have social roles assigned to them based on their status. “A participant references his or her own role (e.g., as parent, teacher, or son/daughter) and uses this role as one way to position him or herself” (McVee, Baldassare Hopkins, and Bailey, 2011, p. 113). Importantly, although these positions are within a “moral order” they are not considered universal in the sets of expectations applied to the position. That is, when someone is positioned as “teacher” (e.g. “Teacher, may I use the restroom?”) in a particular social context, they will have duties and expectations that are different than in another teacher/student relationship context. The authors described tacit positioning as one of the most common types in which people “are not conscious or intentional about” positioning themselves or others (p. 113).

Based on their research, McVee, Baldassarre Hopkins and Bailey also added static and intertextual positioning to the list (2011, p. 113). Static positioning I understand more as a relevant analytic category for their study rather than a theoretical claim on identity as a static category. That is, in their study, they found that particular participants repeatedly and consistently articulate a particular position. They did not claim that this was a permanent position for the participant, but that within the timeline of the data, this was a “reified” position taken up and reinforced by the participant.

Intertextual positioning, for these authors, “refers to connections, both specific and highly interwoven, and those less well developed and less well connected” (McVee, Baldassarre Hopkins & Bailey, 2011, p. 113). The connections can be to his/her own
experience, experiences with other social participants, narrative characters or authors. Implicit to this understanding of intertextuality is the requirement for the intertextual reference to be socially recognized, itself requiring some shared sociocultural frame of reference.

Of particular importance to their study and to my study was the elaboration on the self-other positioning. A theoretical framework that supports analysis of the ways in which a speaker may position the relationship between his/her self and another individual or group of people is a necessity to this study. As preliminary layer of analysis, there is attention to an initial positioning asserted by one person to another. This assertion is called first positioning (McVee, Baldassarre Hopkins & Bailey, 2011). An example of first positioning is when a community librarian asked me, “When are you teachers at the Hilltop going to get those kids to read more than Facebook?” (Reflective notes 1.20.10). Here, the librarian positioned me as a part of the Hilltop faculty rather than a cultural outsider, which he had on previous occasions. He also indirectly positioned Hilltop faculty as having low expectations and students as superficial readers of social media. When I replied that Hilltop students read sophisticated texts, and that “we” (i.e. Hilltop faculty) had high expectations: “Come on now, you know we don’t spend our days on Facebook! Actually, we’re in the middle of writing analyses of Canterbury Tales, Buddy” (Reflective notes, 1.20.10), I used second positioning to reject the first position for the students as non-readers and faculty as ineffective teachers. I did accept his positioning of me as a faculty member at Hilltop. First and second positioning support attention to the dialogic ways positionings are negotiated in a conversation. While they create a basic framework, they work well with the more developed analytic tool of multiple types of
self-other positioning.

Table 1: Types of Positioning (McVee, Baldassarre Hopkins & Bailey, 2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positioning</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intertextual</td>
<td>A participant reference his or her own experience, experiences of a narrative author or character, non-narrative authors or students, or a group member’s experience. Intertextual positioning refers to connections, both specific and highly interwoven, and those less well develop and less well connected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role-based (b)</td>
<td>Refer to the roles people take up within a moral order (i.e., as a teacher or parent).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Other</th>
<th>All positioning involves positioning of both self and other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Self AS other positioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Participant positions him or herself in the place of the other. I am you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Self IN other a positioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Participant positions him or herself in similar fashion to the other I am like you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Self Opposed to others positioning I am not like you. Participant positions him or herself in opposition to the other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Self ALIGNED with together I am sympathetic to you/your ideas. Participant aligns him or herself with another.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Static (a)</td>
<td>Occurs when an individual expresses beliefs that serve to reify a particular position that is articulated and adhered to over time. Must involve repeated expression of a particular idea, belief or theme. It may have either a negative outcome or a positive outcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tacit (b)</td>
<td>Much positioning is tacit; people position themselves and other and are not conscious or intentional about it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
McVee, Baldassarre Hopkins and Bailey (2011) delineate four types of self-others positioning:

1. Self-As-Other positioning

   In this category a participant positions him or herself in the place of the other person or group: “I am you.” In their study of a novice white teacher in a multicultural teacher education course, the participant wrote a response to a text from the position of being a young black man. Because they saw this novice teacher’s efforts as an act of building empathy across cultural identity positions, they labeled this “Self As Other.”

2. Self-In-Other positioning

   In this category, a participant positions him or herself in similar fashion to the other person or group: “I am like you.” The authors do not elaborate on the selection of the phrase “self-in-other” in light of other options as in “self-like-other.” As I understand it, self-in-other is not meant to suggest that one’s self is subsumed by the other person’s identity position, but rather that they have similar rights, duties, and obligations from their own positions.


   Participants in this category position him or her self in opposition to the other person/group. Seen as conflicting or opposing in their positioning, a participant rejects the possibility of similarity and/or establishes the grounds on which they are not only distinct but also conflicting.

4. Self-Aligned-with-Other

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* In this chapter of the edited volume, the authors do not expound on any of the categories or data analysis excerpts, so it is unclear how they may conceptualize the limitations and significant issues associated with a white teacher enacting the “voice” of a young black man.
In this final category, a participant aligns him or her self with another: I am sympathetic to you/your ideas. In this position, a participant discursively and/or interactionally aligns him her self with the position of the other and supports their successful participation within a particular social context. To this category I add that the participant acknowledges a distinction in their positions (i.e. this is not a “self as other” or “self like other” situation), yet constructs a position as ally

**Summary: Application to Project**

In this final theoretical section, I pull together the reviewed work above together with the addition of identity as social positioning theory (Harré and van Langenhove, 1999; Moje & Luke, 2009; Wortham, 2004). While Harré and van Langenhove come out of the field of social psychology, and the other scholars I draw from (Holland et al. 1998; Lewis and del Valle, 2009; Moje & Luke, 2009; Wortham, 2004) come out of a sociocultural tradition of educational research, their conceptualizations of identity as social positioning intersect and are aligned with the theoretical framework I have established on language and literacy practices and discourse through Bakhtin, Foucault and Gee.

What is clear in this theoretical framework as I build to an understanding of identity is that like language, literacy, and discourse, identity will be understood as situated, socially mediated, dialogic, and creatively responsive (Holland, et al., 1998; Ivanic, 1998; Lewis & del Valle, 2009; Lewis, Enciso & Moje, 2007; Moje & Luke, 2009). In this view, people engage simultaneously in multiple social worlds in which they must mediate the competing discourses circulating within and across contexts that, within relations of power, make available particular discourses that are used to position groups
and individuals. That is to say, the social world is not purely an agentive world without constraint, but neither is it a world without agency and self-construction. Also evident in this view is the on-going nature of the process; there is no static discourse or position (Bakhtin, 1986, 1981; Foucault, 1972; Gee 1996).

Drawing from Bakhtin’s understanding of this constraint/agency tension and its meaning for the discursive construction of identity, Wortham (2004) wrote,

"As Bakhtin (1981) puts it, individuals and groups do not create unique categories de novo, but must instead “rent” categories from the society in order to make sense of themselves and others. These categories of identity often come packaged in larger models that show habitual characteristics, relationships, and events involving recognizable types of people" (p. 167).

Moje & Luke (2009) reviewed recent studies in which theorizing identity was central. Based on this review, they constructed metaphors that would characterize the common ways in which identity was conceptualized. One of the five ways was “identity as positioning” which they described as:

Identity as position allows for people to tell stories about themselves, to represent themselves in narrative, but also to shift positions and tell new stories. At times, identity-as-position metaphors seem to make identities fragmented and in tension, but at other times coherent, dependent on the particular space, time, or relationship in which one is situated, recognized, and named. Finally, positioning metaphors allow for the doing of identity—or identity in activity—to be as powerful a means of self-construction and representation as the narrativizing of identity...(Moje & Luke, 2009, p. 431)
Significantly, they emphasized the complicated ways in which identity as position plays out in social relations: shifting, fragmented, contradictory, but also coherent and seemingly static in its situated context. Like them, I see the analytical work that I do with these data to be incomplete and partial, and that the patterns of social positioning I name in this study to be situated fragments caught within tensions. I acknowledge that any attempt to “freeze” my students’ identities is a problematic one; I understand this project to be one of prolonged engagement, yet also a series of snapshots.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter is a detailed explanation of the methodology of this dissertation study. I begin with a discussion of my role as a teacher-researcher and a return to the research questions driving the study. From there I move to a description of the nested contexts of the study: county, school, and classroom. I then introduce the three focal students in short vignettes. Because this is a teacher-researcher study, I also include in the next section a description of the focal unit curriculum relevant to this study. Next I outline the data collection procedures and data corpus of the study. I conclude with a description of the data analysis process.

My Positionality as a Teacher-Researcher

In Chapter One, I described by personal background as a cultural outsider becoming a teacher and community member with an assets-based vision of the communities and members. In Chapter Two, I reviewed key teacher-researcher studies conducted by a teacher-researcher who came from a sociocultural background different from his or her students. From these studies, I saw four shared understandings: first, the importance of acknowledging simultaneously the societal privileges one brings as a researcher and if one is from a dominant group and the limitations of one’s positioning as an outsider, and furthermore, that this positioning requires methodological counterbalances; second, that the curriculums used are directly aimed drawing young people’s experiences, discourses, and communities into the learning at school in a way
that provides rich opportunities for learning academic literacy practices while not having
to discard cultural literacy practices; and thirdly, that young people from marginalized
communities are uniquely positioned to have insight into the authoritative and internally
persuasive discourses that circulate within their communities (Campano, 2007; Fecho,
1999; Wissman, 2011). Here, I continue to draw from those reflections and reviews in
order to discuss the methodological considerations associated with being the cross-
cultural teacher-researcher in this study.

Drawing from Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1993), I position this study in order to
highlight the knowledge construction of teachers when engaged in a reflexive process of
self and classroom inquiry. Lytle (2000) argued, “the positioning or location of teachers
as researchers interrupts the easy distinctions often made between ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’
and destabilizes the boundaries of research and practice—creating a space where radical
realignment and redefinition may be possible” (p. 699). Similarly, Campano (2007)
contended that while teachers are in a precarious position, it is also a privileged social
location that provides access to important, but often separated bodies of knowledge: the
knowledge of the discourses of white middle-class academy and knowledge of students in
their communities. When teachers take on the additional role of researcher, Campano
explained they do so having an “interested identity,” because of their vulnerability to the
possibility of student failure, and are at the nexus of crucial relationships that
contextualize the work. Thus, they are able to generate conceptual and empirical
knowledge that is unlike that of an outside researcher.

Teacher researchers like Campano (2007), Fecho (1999; 2000), and Wissman
(2011) support teachers utilizing their role as cultural, social and academic mediators
between learners and learning standards by taking on the identity of a learner as well. That is, just as teachers ask their own students to reflect critically upon their lives, so too can teachers be empowered to draw upon the realities of their lives, to call into question taken for granted assumptions, and forge a new, complex identity as a member in the community of teacher-researchers. This call to action is offered not only as a productive way to generate significant conceptual and generative knowledge in the field of literacy research, but also as a way to be reflective on one’s cross-cultural positionality, listening practices, and effectiveness in creating culturally sustaining learning opportunities with students (Schultz, 2003).

In my position as teacher in this study, I was responsible for the design of the curriculum and instruction of this course. My process was informed not only by professional study, but also by my five years as a teacher in this school, as well as my developing understandings of my current students. I was committed to constructing a learning space supportive of my students’ academic success and positive cultural identity. Thus, I carefully selected a range of media texts from a variety of sources to build a curriculum focused on discourses of Appalachia I had heard frequently expressed in my students’ conversation. With these texts I paired academic writing genres (i.e. character analysis essays, extended summaries, etc.) to continue to support their rhetorical dexterity in academic genres (Carter, 2008). Finally, I also designed a community-based research project that would require students to collect and analyze data to answer a question they have about some aspect of life in their community. A more detailed description is included below.
My position as a teacher-researcher held several challenges and limitations for the study overall. First of all, there is the significant challenge for every teacher-researcher in balancing one’s responsibilities as a teacher with the responsibilities as a researcher. As I teacher, I was responsible for the design, instruction and management of five different courses, including being the advisor of the school newspaper and yearbook. As well, I was a mentor to a new teacher in the classroom next door. These important parts of being an educator added opportunities for building relationships with a vast range of adolescents and to reflect on professional practice with a novice teacher. However, they also required a significant amount of after school time.

A second significant way in which my position as a teacher-researcher presented challenges and potential limitations is through my role as the designer and instructor of the focal class. From this position I had the opportunity to establish the focus and purpose of the focal class and bring this vision into being through my selection of texts, design of assignments, and the enactment of them in class. Thus, even though my vision has been informed by five years as a teacher in the school and deep reflection during three years in graduate school, it is still a limited, partial, and non-neutral vision. This is both a central strength and limitation of the study. The study would have been different inherently had someone else designed the course, or had the students generate it with the teacher.

A third strength/limitation is my identity position as a cultural insider/outsider. Had this course shared the same goals, purposes, texts, and assignments, but been taught by a teacher who is an established community member, there is no doubt that the study would be different. Because, as Bakhtin reminds us, our interactions are always a
response and always anticipate a response, when the players are changed, the utterances change. Indeed, which discourses seem relevant to participate in may also change. I knew this in the design of the study and therefore have named specifically in the research question my position as a non-Appalachian participant.

In the design of the focal unit, I asked my students to be vulnerable by explicitly exploring their understanding of themselves in relation to their community and discourses about their community with a cultural insider/outsider in a position of power (i.e. being the evaluator of their English class work). Some students seemed to respond to this request (requirement) for vulnerability in silence. That is, they would find ways to “forget” assignments and participate on the periphery of the course. This silence and passive participation I did not explore in this study, but hope to in future iterations of this work as it is significant to understanding the types of positioning students may employ as a response to critical analysis of familiar discourses through new and potentially threatening academic literacy practices with a non-Appalachian teacher.

Methodologically, this study was challenged by the loss of the audio data for the month of April 2010. This loss, shared above, led to an absence in the data (understood to be always and already partial and incomplete). However, I do not believe that this absence compromised the overall validity of the findings or the significance of the study. This project, as I described in Chapter One, is borne out of inquiries formed in my five years as an English teacher at Hilltop High School. From my position as an insider/outsider, I witnessed my students constantly negotiating complex discourses regarding their raced, gendered, classed identity positions as adolescents in rural Appalachia. These discourses saturated our interactions in the classroom, hallways –
every moment of our lives. As someone who did not grow up with these particular discourses (of course there were others in my own adolescence) aimed at my existence (Bakthin, 1982), from my position, I saw these discourses with a different perspective than my students. I heard a wide range (i.e. overlapping, conflicting, shifting) of perspectives from a wide range of students:

“We’re just hillbillies, Ms. Slocum. Why do we gotta do this?”

“I can’t wait to get out of here so I can make something of myself!”

“Ms. Slocum, you sound so proper, it’s aggravating!”

“Shew¹⁰, Ms. Slocum, is this what you have to do in schools where you come from?”

Questions about how my students voiced particular gendered, classed, raced and regional discourses accumulated in my mind. What does this significant identity work mean for them individually and as a group? How might this work be similar to and different from young people in other marginalized communities associated with discourses of illiteracy? How does my presence as a cultural outsider matter?

Research Question

In this teacher-researcher ethnographic study, I pose the following research questions:

What happens when Appalachian and Appalachian heritage students are invited by their non-Appalachian teacher to engage in an English language arts courses focused on Appalachian-centered texts?

¹⁰ This is a local expression for frustration. It is typically said quickly and under one’s breath.
Sub Question 1: What opportunities to explore relevant socio-cultural discourses did the teacher-designed literacy events afford to the students?

Sub Question 2: What opportunities to explore, take up, resist, and assign identity positions did the teacher-designed literacy events afford to the students?

In the next section of the chapter, I describe the nested research contexts beginning with a description of the county in which Hilltop High School is situated.

Research Context

My prolonged engagement in the field did not take place in an isolated classroom. Because I understand research context as a complicated notion full of discourses and social relationships that intersect through their physical and social location, there are significant contexts important to the data shared here. I begin first with a description of the county, then the school, and finally the focal class. For both the county and the school I include descriptive statistics first and observations of the region based on six years of residency in the county.

Akers County. Given the “mystique” around central Appalachian mountain communities, it is important to provide contextual information for those not familiar with the area. While this brief summary intends in no way to address all aspects of the county geographically, demographically, politically, economically, or historically, I do attempt to provide a mix of information to provide a minimal picture based on statistical data and personal perspective.

Akers County is situated firmly in the coalfields of the region and has little doubt as to its recognition as an Appalachian county. Census data (2010) reports the county
population as just under 40,000 residents with about 5,000 living in the county seat. The county seat was about a fifteen-minute drive from Hilltop High School, and with the next county’s town located more closely to my students’ homes, Akers County’s main town was not a common place of commerce for my students. My students came from a widely dispersed area in the county. Narrow and twisting county roads spun off of broader arteries connecting the counties. By school bus, it took many of my students at least forty-five minutes to get to school, Likewise, by car it took some students thirty minutes to an hour to get to the nearest commercial grocery store (i.e. not a local “mom and pop” shop). This means that having a functioning car and gas money were critical to maintaining a family, let alone participating in extra-curricular activities.

While I believe it is important to disrupt the common perspective that the region is a bastion of whiteness, as this minimizes the experiences of the many African American communities throughout the region, I do acknowledge that this particular county is home to primarily European Americans (97.9% White). The two largest populations of color are African American and Latino individuals (both at about .7% of the population). There are two historical African American communities in the county, both of which were originally associated with segregated coal camps following the 1930s. As the mining jobs have decreased significantly since the 1970s, so to has the population of African Americans in the county. One of the historically African American communities is located in the portion of the county serving Hilltop High School. Even so, in my ten years of a relationship with the school, there are only about four students in a given year with African American heritage in the school of four hundred students.
In Table 1 below are educational attainment and economic data for Akers County. The majority of residents have earned a high school diploma. This proportion is higher with younger populations. While these data indicate only 11% of the residents have a Bachelor’s degree or higher, there is no data on residents with technical training or Associate’s degrees. With a strong statewide community college system, including two sites within thirty to forty-five minutes of many residents, the number of individuals seeking or having already earned an Associate’s degree is likely high. In addition, there are two four year colleges within an hour’s drive of most parts of the county, and another two well regarded four year universities within three hours. The proximity of these institutions has created a context of physical, if not financial, cultural, or academic, accessibility of higher education opportunities.

The county has faced economic challenges beyond that of the nation’s current economic downturn. Responsive to the coal industry’s economic status, many of the county’s residents have struggled financially for generations. This struggle is illustrated by high rates of child poverty. Forty-four percent of the children in the county are living below the poverty line. This puts the county as the 7th highest rate of child poverty in the state. Within the county, there is also considerable variation. There are pockets of more significant wealth, as in the county seat, Burchettville. On the other hand, in contrast to common portrayals of extreme and widespread poverty in mountain hollows, there can be a significant range of economic incomes in a single hollow. Even a particular family’s income is not necessarily representative of their access to financial resources. The distribution of wealth across dense kinship networks makes tracing wealth and income
Table 2. Akers County Demographic Data

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residents over 25 years with a high school diploma</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents over 25 years with a bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household median income (2006-2010)</td>
<td>$27,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per capita income, adjusted to 2009 dollars</td>
<td>$16,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of residents living in poverty</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of children (under 18) living in poverty</td>
<td>43.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate, as of April 2010</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While recognizing the significance of these numbers as representing material realities in the lives of residents, these numbers do not construct the entire picture of life in the county. The county is also home to an active regional performance arts space that is home to not only concerts and conferences, but also performing arts lessons. This institution was brought into existence through the inspiration and work of local residents, including the former band director at Hilltop High School. Similarly, a regional science center has been built through the advocacy of local residents, and now hosts a planetarium and a range of high-quality science exhibits for the school system and community. For over thirty years, there has also been a summer outdoor musical theater house. The theater has provided not only creative jobs for youth, but also opportunities for well-regarded
performances of classical musical theater. The tradition of local residents working as their own advocates for a higher quality of life is also exhibited through a rural medical clinic, the first of its kind in the region, and brought into being almost thirty years-ago by a local woman who was frustrated with the absence of quality health care deep in the county’s hills. Statewide initiatives to support women on welfare earning a college degree, activism for safe water and housing threatened by coal mining all have had an early and strong presence in the county. These efforts, as well as those of hundreds of other residents have created a context of appreciation for regional cultural arts and self-advocacy that belie the statistical data above.

School Context

Location. Hilltop High School, one of four high schools in the county, serves the southeast region of the county that includes hollows spiraling off of the main highway and deep into the county’s network of hills. The school is situated on a carved out plateau near the top of a mountain ridge. There is one narrow road off of the highway that leads to the school. Heavy duty construction equipment sits in the driveways of the small businesses that line the roadway. Just at the top before the school, on the left is an underground mining training facility. On the right is a portable toilets and septic tank storage field. The school property is demarcated by a ten-foot tall chain link fence, encircled with barbed wire. Hilltop is a one-story building shaped like a four-armed starfish with hallways coming out from a central lobby. Behind the building are a softball field, a football field and a bare dirt road leading to gas lines along the mountain ridge that curves around the school property.
Weather. Winter weather in this region is not severe in quantity, yet the consequences of even the smallest amount of snow or ice on a cold, shadowy, narrow mountain road is often severe. Without adequate infrastructure to build, maintain, salt, sand, and plow the county roads, school is frequently cancelled. In my experiences as a teacher there, there is an average of 15 days lost each year to winter weather. In addition there are often autumn and spring floods leading to an additional two to ten lost days.

Efforts to “make up” the days include adding fifteen minutes to remaining school days, which when distributed across a seven period day, amount to approximately two minutes added. As a result, significant instructional time is lost every year. I calculated that in the life-span of an average student in the Akers County School District with approximately 15 days lost each year (not counting individual absences), a twelfth grader will have lost out on 180 days of school. At this point, there is no systematic response to address this issue in the district or region.

Descriptive Demographics. As indicated by Table 2, Hilltop High School is a relatively small school. Each graduating class had approximately one hundred students. Class sizes during the 2009-2010 school year were relatively small, but widely varied. I had class sizes ranging from twelve to twenty-four students. In years past, I had up to thirty-two students in a mainstreamed English class. Recent efforts to keep small class sizes for courses designed for students struggling redistributed class sizes across the small faculty.

In a typical in-coming class of approximately 120 ninth graders, about 100 would graduate from the school. Between ninth and twelfth grade, there was often frequent
transience between the county high schools and neighboring county’s schools. Transient students moved houses, moved out on their own, or lived with friends and relatives, and with these moves came new schools. While the drop out rate was reportedly four percent, because of state law allowing students to be “homeschooled” with no Department of Education oversight, for students who had stopped coming to school and whose parents would sign the paperwork, these students were reported to be “homeschooled.” None of the seniors in my English classes dropped out during the year of the study.

I do not have school-produced statistics on the number of twelfth grade young women who were already mothers or were pregnant during the time of the study. My unofficial count is of ten young women of the fifty women in the graduating class. The school administration supported the young women with material items through the Youth and Family Resource Center in the school, and through a visiting teacher when they were “home bound.” Teachers and students alike ranged in their responses to the pregnant students (the fathers were rarely addressed directly). While there were no baby showers for these new mothers at school (I do not know if this was a policy; in my previous years there, we had held baby showers for the new mothers), there was a general sense of “it is what it is.” In this community where young mothering is not an uncommon part of life, it is also my perception that my status as a single and childless woman over the age of thirty further indicated my “difference” from women who are from the county.

In the year of the study, seventy percent of the students in the school qualified for the federal free or reduced lunch program. Excepting extremes, it was often hard to
determine a student’s family income status based on quick observation. As noted above, because of interconnected family systems, one particular family unit may be financially struggling and family members may help to support nieces, nephews, and grandchildren with access to school supplies, clothing, and extra-curricular costs. Also, because of a localized value of manual skills (i.e. mechanical, mining, construction, horse boarding and hunting work), many young men, regardless of their family income daily wore clothes marking their affiliation with these practices. Girls frequently traded clothing and jewelry in the bathroom before school, allowing for a more diverse daily wardrobe. Because of practices such as these, one could not make immediate assumptions about students’ family income. With close observation and listening, as well as local knowledge of families and particular communities, a teacher could put together a more nuanced understanding of a student’s family financial stability.

**Academic Performance Data.** Because this study is located within an English classroom, I selectively shared the results from the state on-demand writing exam for the graduating class of 2010 (see Table 2). This high-stakes two-day timed writing exam took place in the spring during the study. The results show that over three quarters of the students earned an Apprentice level score, while just under one quarter of the students, many of whom were in the focal class, earned a Proficient score. Only one student in the senior class, Tracy, earned a Distinguished score.

These results, as with the ACT scores show a general pattern of academic under-preparation. As I share below, all seniors in the year of this study had not had a full-time licensed English teacher since their ninth grade year. For many of the students prior to
ninth grade, they had had a mixture of substitutes and full-time teachers during their elementary and middle school experiences due to a high rate of teacher transience and absenteeism. An example of the consequence of this under-preparation was that in the English 101 dual credit course, my most academically prepared students were unfamiliar with the characteristics of identifying and writing a thesis statement, a basic English studies concept.

Table 3. *Hilltop High School Data*

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Size</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher to Student Ratio</td>
<td>1:16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding per Student</td>
<td>$7,974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation Rate</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop Out Rate</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance Rate</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Receiving Free/Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in 10th grade scoring a Proficient or Distinguished score on state reading assessment</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in 12th grade scores on state On-Demand Writing Assessment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proficient and Distinguished</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprentice</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novice</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Students in 12th grade average ACT English Score | 15.7
---|---
Students in 12th grade average ACT Reading Score | 16

**School Leadership and Faculty Context.** From the time of my initial arrival in 2001 to the year of this project in 2009-2010, the school has been led by four different principals. Each principal had been a teacher at the school prior to their leadership role. With the particular insights that a teacher has in how students and the faculty and community perceive a school’s culture, each principal, upon entering their new role, instituted new changes. The principal at the time of the study, Mrs. Honaker, had previously been a special education science teacher and was the girls’ basketball coach for over sixteen years. A serious, driven woman, she sought out grants and initiatives to promote a more positive and rigorous school environment.

Mrs. Honaker challenged the school with four goals: increase the student attendance rate, build stronger faculty-student relationships, increase access to instructional technology, and increase access to higher level academic coursework. One of her first goals was to increase the school’s daily attendance rate. In my first years there, the school hovered around 88% daily attendance. In the year of the study, as reported below, the attendance rate over the year was 91%. In terms of school culture, Mrs. Honaker also engaged the faculty to actively rebuild a positive school atmosphere and reputation. When I had first begun teaching at the school in 2001, the school had a district-wide reputation for being “rough”: weekly fights, high detention rate, low attendance, low academic rigor. To challenge this reputation, teachers and
administrators worked in teams in the morning and afternoon to greet and send off students with positive interactions. Dispersed around the school (i.e. lobby, gym, cafeteria, bus drop off station), our job was as much to build relationships as it was to monitor behavior. In the mornings and in between classes, student selected pop music blared on the school’s speakers. Access to the selection of music was mediated by one’s relationship with the school secretary or through grade-level attendance rate contests.

While from 2001-2006 we had extremely limited access to computer labs and video projectors, in 2008-2009, the district was awarded a technology grant. This grant funded a new iMac computer laboratory, new teacher computers, document cameras, and ceiling mounted projectors in each classroom, which Mrs. Honaker ensured happened in a timely manner.

In addition, Mrs. Honaker sought out funding for teachers to participate in Advanced Placement training, remedial reading training, and SmartEd technology training. She also was a part of a district-wide push for requiring ACT preparation courses, increasing Advanced Placement courses in the core subject areas, and developing a relationship with the local community college to sponsor dual-credit courses. The focal class of this study was a dual credit course. Unfortunately, it was subject to the vulnerability of being the first of its kind at the school that led to some confusion about the nature of the curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

**School Faculty Description.** The school faculty reflected very much the strong sense of connection and family across the community. Out of twenty-four faculty and administrators, six were graduates of the high school, and eleven were graduates of
county high schools. Excluding three of us who were not from the county or region, the remaining four were from neighboring counties. There was a strong sense of loyalty and familial relationships between teachers, particularly for those who graduated from the school and begun their careers there. The high proportion of local teachers meant that students learned from adults who shared familiar last names, spoke with familiar cultural speech patterns, and understood many of the familial contexts of students’ lives. School for most students at Hilltop meant that you would see multiple cousins and neighbors, and even aunts and uncles on the bus and in the hallways and classrooms. For many of the teachers, then, teaching was a task that had familial consequence. This familial context is particularly important to this study as it highlights my initial position as an outsider. At the time of the study, I had taught older siblings, cousins, boyfriends, and neighbors of many of the students in the focal class. Despite having been out of the school for three years, my reentry was eased by my positive reputation built through these relationships with former students and their parents.

Several teachers had spent or finished their entire careers at Hilltop High School. I had left in 2006, and in 2008, two English teachers retired. Prior to their retirement, both had faced on-going illness that caused them to be absent frequently. Thus, for the seniors in 2009-2010, they had not had a consistently present certified English teacher since their ninth grade year. The absence of quality English instruction is reflected in the scores on their ACT and state On-Demand Writing exam. From my perspective as their senior English teacher, I could also see significant gaps in their familiarity with introductory English terminology like thesis statements, argument structures, and literary elements. In
the year following the study, three new English teachers were hired.

The other departments were either experiencing at the time or had recently gone through similar difficult staffing transitions. The science department had been reinvigorated with a Hilltop High School graduate’s return as a highly qualified biology teacher. On the other hand, the math department had seen the loss of two skilled teachers and in their place two novice teachers struggled to construct a learning-centered classroom.

**Classroom Context.**

**Physical Space.** If you were to walk down either of the two hallways with classrooms and look into the rooms, you would see almost every single classroom with the desks in rows oriented in towards the front whiteboard. Students in the school are used to walking in, sitting down in the rows, and waiting to take notes from a power point presentation. To establish a non-traditional classroom environment, I did two simple things: re-arrange the desks and change the lighting. To encourage student-to-student dialogue and de-emphasize the “teaching stage”, I arranged the desks into two sides facing each other with a walkway down the middle. In this manner, rows were only four desks deep, allowing quick movement into small groups. In this focal class, we also frequently arranged a whole class circle. On days when we did not circle our desks, at least one student would ask for us to get back in the circle. From my perspective, it was a physical change that restructured our teacher-student and student-student relationships.

With one window, like all the other classrooms, natural light was limited. Added to this was the florescent lighting and bare white walls, making the room feel stark and
institutional. To soften the lighting of the room, at the beginning of the year I installed four large glove paper lanterns suspended from the ceiling tile braces. I used these instead of the florescent lights, and the students and I both found this to be a much more soothing environment that shifted the space to feel less “classroom” like.

**Focal Class.** The focal class was a unique course in the school. It was initially designated as a dual credit course for students seeking English 101 credit and English IV credit. Students in the course registered for English 101 credit through the local community college. However, the class met during the lunch block, it was the only senior English class at that time, and it was the only time in which the seniors who attended the county technical high school in the morning and who worked in the afternoons were on Hilltop’s campus. Thus, these students also were assigned to the class, but were not enrolled in the English 101 course. This meant there was a distinction in the students who sought college credit and those who were taking nursing or mechanical courses and had little interest in this style of English class. This combination of students was not indicated until the first day of school.

**Autumn Semester Surprise.** In contrast to the original plan that I would be the instructor of the English 101 course in the autumn and the English 102 course in the spring, the community college sponsoring the dual credit program insisted on using one of their instructors. This change meant that this instructor was in charge of the autumn curriculum. This instructor designed this course to be online and hold no instructional support. There was no synchronous or asynchronous support, outside of a static list of generic resources (e.g. MLA citation guidelines). Essentially, students were expected to
learn independently and without clear expectations (i.e. no assessment rubrics were provided for the writing assignments). The content of the course was a blend of the outdated (i.e. rhetorical précis) and the disconnected (i.e. articles from *The New Yorker*). Across the board, students were overwhelmed by the expectations of the quantity and quality of the readings and tasks. Even the most academically prepared students in the class who had attended Hilltop High School and/or Akers County Schools struggled. This is in part due to their under-preparation. Since their ninth grade year, they had not had a full-time, licensed English teacher. In order to support my students’ learning, I set aside my curriculum to dedicate teaching the instructor’s course. For students not enrolled in the English 101 course, I adapted the assignments and readings to be more relevant, while maintaining equity. While all of the students originally enrolled in the course passed, only Tracy chose to enroll in English 102 for the spring semester.

**Spring Semester: Appalachian Literature and Community-Based Research**

Because this is a teacher-researcher study, the design of the course is a part of the methods of the study. Thus, in this section, I describe the selected texts, their purpose and usage in the class, and the purpose of the assignments that are paired with them. This information will be highly relevant to the findings shared in Chapter Four. I will briefly outline the other units in the spring semester, but because unit one is the focal unit, I provide the most detailed description for this one unit. In the following section I describe the data collection procedures and the data corpus.

As only Tracy was enrolled in the dual credit course in the spring semester, I redirected the course to my original goal. Thus, in January, I introduced the Appalachian
literature-focused curriculum for the remainder of the year. The framework began with an examination of and inquiry into the representations of Appalachia’s past through scholarly texts, historical fiction, and documentaries (see table below). Next we examined current representations of Appalachia, primarily with a recent television special on the region and the students’ community based research projects. A more detailed description of the first unit, which was the focal unit of the study, is below.

**Challenges.** During this study, we lost fourteen days of school across January and February. This fell across our reading of *Storming Heaven*, and consequently a great deal of momentum was lost because of the school cancellation.

Another significant externally required element in the spring semester was the state mandated writing portfolios and two-day on-demand writing assessment for seniors. While in previous years the production of these portfolios consumed the majority of the senior English curriculum, in this year, it was no longer “high stakes” and thus the administration determined that only two weeks of spring semester would be dedicated to their preparation. Thus, in the last week of April and the first week of May, senior English classes were diverted to this attention.

Table 4. **Overview of Selected Texts and Student Produced Work Across Spring Semester**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Focus</strong></th>
<th><strong>Course Texts</strong></th>
<th><strong>Student Produced Texts</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unit 1.</td>
<td>Ronald Lewis (1999) <em>The myth of homogeneity and isolation.</em></td>
<td>In-class / Single draft writing:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appalachia’s</td>
<td>Denise Giardina (1988) <em>Storming Heaven</em></td>
<td>• Stereotypes of eastern Kentucky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past</td>
<td><em>Matewan</em> (1999)</td>
<td>• Summary essay of Lewis’ chapter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Review of “Story of Appalachia”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 2. Appalachia’s Present</td>
<td>Unit 3. Appalachia’s Future</td>
<td>Group work:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>•  <em>Harlan County U.S.A</em> (1976)</td>
<td>• Letter to Self in 10 years</td>
<td>• Character analysis, <em>Storming Heaven</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Diane Sawyer (2009). <em>A Hidden America: Children of the Mountains</em>. 20/20 Special.</td>
<td>• Essay on Personal Hero</td>
<td>Multi-draft writing:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Character analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community-based Research Project</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Proposal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Survey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interview Questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Research Paper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Unit 1: Representations of Appalachia’s Past.** In this first unit, I was careful to introduce the structure of the semester to students as an opportunity to continue to refine their academic literacy practices from the autumn while using non-fiction and fictional texts centered around Appalachia.

To begin the class’s exploration of how Appalachia has historically been constructed in literature and other media, I selected Lewis’ chapter (1999), “The Myth of Isolation and Homogeneity.” Lewis (1999) refuted two common perceptions of the central Appalachian region: that historically, it has experienced isolation from the commerce and cultural life of more urban areas, and that it historically had an ethnically
homogenous population. Drawing from documents describing the construction of railroads and the development of extraction industries, as well as census data, Lewis (1999) described the region as key player in the production and transportation of goods critical to national commerce throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Furthermore, he illustrates the strategic efforts of the coal mining industry to recruit miners internationally and interracially. In preparation for the reading, I asked students to respond to the prompt: “What characteristics have you heard people use to describe the region?” and then briefly write what they see as a reality in the region based on their insider position.

In a continuation of our autumn’s work on understanding and building clearly evidenced and warranted arguments, I designed our literacy engagement of Lewis’ text to be centered on peer mediated discussions of his argument. Students were to have read the chapter independently the night before the class discussion. In class, students worked in groups of four to identify these components and construct a flow chart of the relationship between the ideas. Groups worked for about forty-five minutes in their discussion of the arguments. The discussion transcribed includes their oral report to the class on how they understood the relationship between the elements of the arguments. Each group assigned a member the role of spokesperson to share out on the main ideas and supporting evidence that they identified in their discussion of the text. For homework, students independently wrote one page summaries of Lewis’ argument.

**Storming Heaven, historical novel.** Our first book in the unit was Denise Giardina’s (1988) historical novel *Storming Heaven.* I intentionally selected it to come at this time
because it introduces to our academic literacy engagements similar sociocultural positionings as my students use. The novel does so through the heteroglossic structure of the chapters, as a different character voices each. Each character takes on contrasting positions for him/herself and for others across the narrative. In constructing such a narrative, Giardina, herself a child of a coal camp in southern West Virginia, interweaves common discourses about Appalachia through the various voices of characters. In the novel’s narrative, there is a sub-plot that is particularly important to our reading of Storming Heaven. The students encountered the protagonist’s brother, Miles, who goes away to college. Upon Miles’ return, the characters remark on how his language has changed. Indeed, Giardina writes his speech in marked contrast to the language of his family members, intimating his newly standardized pronunciation, word choice, and sentence structure. Throughout the book Miles served as a symbol of a rejection of traditional ways of living and talking, in favor of more “modern” beliefs and northern speech patterns. While he had been resistant to much of the cultural norms of his rural eastern Kentucky homeplace, his language use shift began in college. Giardina constructed Miles to voice this particular sociocultural discourse and widespread concern: children who leave the area for formal higher education not only do not return, but also reject family sociocultural ways of being. As our reading the novel took place over an extended period of time because of a significant loss of schools days due to inclement weather, the students encountered Miles repeatedly across a month. Our discussions of Miles and characters with whom he interacted solicited much discussion on students’ own positionings regarding language use and perceived language change.
Our reading of *Storming Heaven* was significantly interrupted by inclement weather causing school cancellation. This disruption consequently challenged our building understanding of the plot and characters in a fluid and momentum-building way. We accompanied the reading of this text with on-going group work analyzing characters. This group work culminated with groups leading discussions on the characters with the use of a one-page analysis overview of the symbolic significance of the character to “the story of Appalachia.” After each group led a session, students could select the same or another character about whom to individually write a character analysis paper.

*Matewan, historical fictional film.* Following *Storming Heaven*, we examined a fictional account of unionization efforts in the 1920s of Matewan, West Virginia in the film, *Matewan*. In its recounting of the Matewan Massacre, the filmmakers carefully interwove realistic representations of ethnic and racial diversity in the coal mining community. For example, in the film there was an Italian immigrant coal camp, a “backwoods” “hillbilly” family, towns people of northern European descent, and a crew of recently freed African American men brought in as scabs to break the unionization efforts. The union organizer explicitly addressed the use of race as a dividing tool by the coal companies and rallies the miners to overcome racial suspicion for their united cause of workers’ rights. Following our viewing of the film *Matewan*, we read an excerpt of a review on the film. Our overt task was to analyze the argument structure the writer used to evaluate the film. In an intentional move, I had selected this review because the writer, not from the Appalachian region, describes the use of accent with the characters representing local West Virginian residents as “difficult to understand, demanding
attention” and “creates a time and place.”

**Harlan County, USA, documentary film.** We transitioned from this film’s fictional account to a documentary account of similar events fifty years later in *Harlan County, USA* (1975). A woman made this documentary from New York, which surprised the students as they felt she was on the side of the unionizing miners. The basic narrative of the documentary is the coverage of the 1972 coal mine strike in Harlan County, Kentucky. The strike lasted for over a year, and the film accounts for the toll on unionizers and their families. The filmmakers also expand the view to address the scabs, the coal operators and local sheriffs against the strike, coal union politics, and the coal company’s actions at a corporate level. In my understanding of the film, it powerfully repositions the striking miners as a part of a larger system that feels distant and invisible, although influential and consequential on the lives of the miners. Because my students (indeed, most people) were more familiar with local discourse around unions and coal companies, and were unfamiliar with the larger dynamics at work in these efforts, I felt like it was important to offer another more connected view across time-space scales.

*A Hidden America, television documentary.* Finally, we viewed 20/20’s *A Hidden America: Children of the Mountains*, the television documentary. This episode was broadcast in February in 2009, the year before. It focused on children growing up in extremely poor and troubled families in eastern Kentucky. The report has been widely criticized for its negative and limited portrayal by the students and teachers in the school. Several students had already seen the film, and while some had not, all students knew about it.
These print and visual texts are intended to serve as material on the portrayal of the past and present of Appalachia. From these texts and the literacy practices we engaged in relation to these texts, I asked students to consider what the “story” of Appalachia seems to have been constructed to say. At the close of the curricular focus on Appalachia’s past, I asked students to reflect on the texts we had engaged over the course of three months. At the point in the term that this paper was assigned, many of my students, all seniors, were struggling to stay motivated in school. Just a few days before this day, seniors were invited into the cafeteria to pick up their graduation cap and gown and senior packages. Thus, even though this was a single-draft writing assignment, not all students completed the assignment, and others clearly skimmed it before jotting down a few sentences. I asked students to draw examples from the texts and our discussions.

**Unit 2: Community-based Research Project.** This unit was initially designed as the centerpiece of the curriculum. Indeed, it was a powerful experience. However, due to the loss of the audio data, I do not draw upon this unit significantly in the study. Here I provide a short summary in order to contextualize the larger vision of the curriculum.

The project is intended to bring together practical and conceptual tools of academic literacy practices (Grossman, Smagorinsky & Valencia, 1999) as well as explicit discussions and engagement of their communities as valuable places of knowledge. In terms of academic literacy practices, students engage conceptual and practical tools such as the notion of academic writing as a conversation with a generalized audience and research proposals that are commonly found in academic contexts through the design and implementation of their projects, as well as the synthesis
and analysis of their data, and the writing of their research reports. In terms of framing their communities as places of knowledge, students are asked to position themselves as researchers of their own community. One task that highlights the knowledge in the community is to find local residents with experiential or professional knowledge on a subject to be a source of information for their research. Together, these efforts were designed to position students as constructors of knowledge of their community and as academic writers.

Unit 3: Future of Appalachia. This brief unit was substantially reduced in length due to the state-mandated writing portfolio and on-demand writing assessment that took place during the scheduled time for this unit. As a result, this unit focused on how the students envisioned their future through two key writing tasks. The first was to write a college scholarship essay about someone who has motivated them to succeed, and the second was a letter to themselves in ten years. The second writing was intended for the students to reflect on relevant aspects of their current positioning to “speak” to their future self and for them to envision elements of their future life.

Focal Student Selection

Each one of the students in the course is already and always implicated in and is engaged with the discourses around Appalachian adolescent social positioning. From this perspective, any student could be a focal student. My method of case selection is purposeful intensity sampling, (Patton, 1990), that is, “information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon of interest intensely (but not extremely)” (p. 171). As students’ interactions with the curriculum and the relationship of such interaction with
students’ identities construction are of particular focus in the study, variations of gender and academic experiences as social status markers may provide insight into a range of experiences of identity construction. Several students, including those from both the English 101 and the non-enrolled groups, preferred a quieter engagement.

I selected the three focal students for the following reasons: the three had ongoing verbal dialogue in class, positioning themselves as highly engaged with their peers, the texts, and the discourses in their speech and their written texts. The three students had enrolled in the English 101 course in the autumn; only Tracy enrolled in the English 102 course in the spring.

All students had the choice to opt out of the study at any point without any penalty. Furthermore, they had the choice to request that any piece of their writing or oral statement not be used in the study at any point in the study. This choice was made clear on the parental consent form and student assent form as well as during the interviews that I conducted with the focal students.

In the following section, I introduce each focal student in a short vignette.

**Focal Student: Kevin.** Kevin was a engaging young white man who lived within the tensions of being intellectually curious while also being responsive to the working-class discourses of masculinity that circulated in his community. Part of being responsive to the discourses of masculinity meant that Kevin sought to have a dominant presence in the classroom and school by asserting his physical, social and intellectual prowess to his teachers and peers alike. When coming to class, Kevin would often saunter down the hallways in his football letter jacket and in class would casually lean into his desk, finally
sitting with his legs sprawled out. Taking up physical space was an important part of being seen as a powerful young man.

Even thought Kevin’s father had been a coal miner, and Kevin was a strong advocate of the industry, he did not view mining as his future. Likewise, Kevin was surrounded by groups of his male peers who wore heavy, mud-caked work boots and dusty work clothes to school, visually positioning themselves as working-class young men, yet Kevin almost always dressed in clean jeans and a name-brand polo shirt. In not visually positioning himself like many of his male peers to be destined for a life in the mines or working with engines, Kevin had to find other ways to mark his physical masculine status. For Kevin, this display was found through his leadership in the school’s military preparation program. In this role, he leads the inspections of uniforms and other drills of his peers and younger students in the program. The Sergeant Master, a retired veteran from outside of the region, invested responsibility and trust into Kevin, and Kevin expressed loyalty to and respect for “Serg.” Kevin had enlisted in the Marine Corps during the school year, and frequently met with his recruiter to discuss his preparations for boot camp. The summer before his senior year, Kevin traveled to Paris Island, South Carolina to participate in a Marine Corps summer program for high school students in JROTC. The community’s high regard for the military in general and as a respectable profession for talented young men was illustrated through the faculty’s celebration of Kevin’s decision to pursue a military career and his in-school leadership. While his immediate goal was to enter into the Marine Corps basic training after high school, he also hoped to pursue a degree in history and political science.
He had enrolled in the English 101 course to prepare himself for college, and it also positioned him to be with the high status students in his graduating class. Sitting close to and being teased by socially powerful girls was another important aspect of being a young man. In our class, he preferred sitting Chayla and Brittany, and the three often engaged in teasing banter throughout the class (Reflective notes 11.5.09). The only young man in the focal class to engage this practice, Kevin would occasionally ask Chayla to scratch his back or rub his shoulders during class. This gendered interaction was practiced throughout the school across all grades. It was a display of social connection that could increase the social importance of either one of the interactants, if they were more vulnerable in social status.

Another way Kevin asserted his social positioning was through pushing the boundaries on class attendance and tardiness, running errands for teachers and for “Serg” (the leader of the in-school military preparation program) and his academic preparation for class. His leadership position was consistently ratified by faculty’s show of trust in him. While his class attendance was often haphazard, and his academic work demonstrated gaps in his preparation for class, Kevin was often excused for being tardy from a variety of classes to visit other teachers or run teacher errands (Reflective notes 11.5.09 and 3.15.10). In the words of one of the social studies teachers Kevin was “petted”, a common term used to describe a child being spoiled through affection and excessive liberties (reflective notes, 11.5.09).

While Appalachian working-class discourses of masculinity did not often foreground intellectuality as a valued trait, displays of confidence and authority were.
Given his significant intellectual interests in history and politics, Kevin had to find a way to maneuver through the discourses to find a comfortable way to position himself as socially and physically masculine, while also satisfying his academic interests. He worked towards this positioning by being a vocal participant in class discussions, both in the focal class and his other classes (Reflective notes, 3.05.10). The confidence with which he spoke with his teachers and peers alike helped to make his positioning as a social and intellectual leader additionally affirmed. One of Kevin’s frequent social practices was to seek out discussion with his teachers and peers in class and out of class. In these discussions, Kevin did not doggedly pursue an argument; rather, Kevin sought out multiple perspectives from his teachers and his peers. He often posed questions to his teachers and classmates to open a discussion. For example, in the autumn when the class was reading Frank McCourt’s (2005) *Teacher Man*, Kevin asked his peers to reflect on their own educational experiences with teachers and what consequences these held for their futures: “I don’t know about you guys, but I think we really didn’t have strong teachers here all the time. Some were good, but only a few of us were challenged, and a lot of people weren’t. What do you guys remember – were you challenged? Is this something that is only the mountains?” (Reflective notes 10.13.09). Importantly, Kevin, at least in this focal class, asserted his masculinity through being a clear and vocal participant in the class, but not through aggressive or oppressive interactions in the discussions.

In line with Appalachian working-class masculinity discourses, Kevin prized experiential and local knowledge, and often critiqued a reliance on depersonalized,
distant, and theoretical knowledge.

I guess it's just me, but I never really got the point of learning the way they want us to learn through old literature, cause a lot of it doesn't make sense. Like, I'm, like, I don't want to be cocky or anything, I'm a smart guy. When it comes to these literature books, I'm just like, "what?" When we read like Storming Heaven, how it was written kind of accented, we understood it. It translated more, and it clicked, more than [it would] out of a text book (Interview, 5.20.10).

Here, Kevin asserted his gendered authority as a “smart guy” to critique the literary canon typically found in English classrooms. He also drew from the cultural “accented” nature of the Appalachian curriculum of the focal class as the point of connection for himself and his peers. His reflective statement in the interview corroborates his consistent assertion across the year of personal responses to the course texts over the depersonalized writing voice valued in academic literacy practices.

One area of intellectual pursuit available to working-class Appalachian men was history, and Kevin lived into this Kevin’s interest in Appalachian history as a topic was, in part, informed and inspired by his father’s interest in the topic. His father had been an underground coal miner for twenty-six years and in his retirement has sought out collecting local town and coal mine histories. One afternoon after class, Kevin brought in one of his father’s pictorial history book of the county south of Akers County. We sat on the desk tops for twenty minutes flipping through the book, imagining aloud what life
might have been like, and noting the presence or absence of familiar landmarks included in the book (field notes 1.15.10). In this quiet moment, Kevin displayed openly his imaginative curiosity into the historical versions of his communities. This openness was somewhat more limited on the topic of coal mining, as he expressed a loyalty to the tradition of this industry that was his father’s life work, and would also become his own (Notes, 12.11).

Despite Kevin’s love of history in general and of the region specifically, he was not familiar with the versions of regional history shared in the texts (e.g. films, novels, and essays) of this class. He expressed interest and appreciation for learning about these issues and for learning academic literacy practices with these issues at the foreground. In describing what he had learned in the end of the year interview, he explained,

Really, the struggle. I didn't realize the whole coal mining thing. I kind of had a grasp of it before, but not really as strong. And how the mines and the railroads did move in, and how the people there before the mines must have felt with these people invading their lands and taking the land. And they were kind of confused. I think I've learned a lot about the history in general. That's what I took from it. (Interview, 5.20.10).

In his reflective comment, Kevin illustrated a common phenomenon for many rural Appalachian adolescents: to grow up in a community saturated with historical traditions and a pervasive feeling of “naturalness” and timelessness to the coal mining industry’s presence in the region, and yet to have had little extended inquiry into regional cultural history beyond family stories. Without this history, young Appalachian residents
have few tools to respond to the coinciding external discourses of Appalachia’s cultural deficiencies and internal discourses of Appalachia’s complete dependency on coal mining.

**Focal Student: Chayla.** Chayla lived at the intersection of several gendered and classed Appalachian discourses. At times, she drew from middle-class discourses of cultivating a strong, well-rounded academic record to prepare for college and for preserving through social institutions that were culturally damaging, whereas at other times, she drew from local working-class discourses of embracing an Appalachian identity and in being outspoken.

Like the girls with attitude (Hicks, 2005; Jones, 2006; Schwartz, 2006), Chayla presented herself as a young woman unafraid to speak her mind. When it comes to calling out a friend’s rude remark, announcing her own lack of preparation, or her view on the state of a teacher’s outdated fashion or a recent political event, Chayla has not been a person to shy from sharing her thoughts, even as non sequiturs. Likewise, she was an advocate of living in the country. It was common for many middle-class (or aspirationally middle-class) students who were academically successful to speak of their desires to leave the region in hopes of more academic and economic success. Chayla, on the other hand, embraced being from the region, and passionately affirmed her commitment to staying.

One way Chayla lived out this commitment was through celebrating her pronounced regional accent. This was a strategic decision for Chayla and came out of her careful attention to the ways in which people around her spoke. As is discussed in Chapter Four,
Chayla teased both those who sounded more “country” and those who sounded more “proper” or “city” than herself. Her own reactions to speech and the ways in which students responded to Chayla’s pronounced accent reveals local assumptions about language and class. Many of her peers and Chayla herself described her speech as “country” (Reflective Notes 2.19.10). Importantly, members of the community and school understood there to be variations across social groups (e.g. cheerleaders, boys attending the technical high school) that often were associated with one’s social class. Her peers would often laugh when she started speaking excitedly, her accent stretching out and compressing the sound of words.

Like, people here talk about the way I talk. I like the way I talk. So, I'm mean, I guess I take on that one [stereotype]. Or, like, we're the redneck, and stuff, but I mean, I embrace it! (Chayla. End of Year Interview. 6.11.10).

Embracing her “country” speech meant that she was also discursively locating herself as a “country” person, even while she took advanced academic courses in hopes of pursuing a medical degree, and was awarded the opportunity to participate in a highly competitive state-run summer arts program for juniors in the state. At this camp, her awareness of her language as a marker of difference between the Appalachian region of the state and the rest of the state became significantly more pronounced. She described how her peers at the summer program perceived her Appalachian speech:

I had this girl, they called her my interpreter. Because, people would ask me my name, and I would say "Sh-eye-la", I was like, "No, Sh-Aye-
"It's like NO, that is not my name. Melissa, that was her name, she would come up and basically explain what I was saying. Could you seriously not understand me? I don't understand, are you just trying to be mean? Because I know you understand me. Then, other people love my accent! Like, we would do these little index cards and write about everybody in our family groups. Everybody who wrote on mine: I like your accent, I like your accent. And then, talk to the other people, they can't understand what you're saying! Okay!... Maybe you should get your ears checked! (Chayla. End of Year Interviews. 6.11.10).

Illustrated by this experience is the tension Chayla experienced in being the exotic Other girl from the hills to be either “liked” as if to be intriguing, or to be unintelligible to her mainstream adolescent peers. Also evident is her tension in how to respond: to engage her familiar working-class discourse of having an attitude: “You need to get your ears checked!” or to passively accept the positioning by being a “good girl” advocated by middle-class gendered discourses. In our class discussion of language difference, Chayla was full of sharp retorts for non-Appalachians who engaged in Self-Opposed-to-Other positioning, but it also seemed that these retorts were shared with her Appalachian peers rather than in the moment with cultural outsiders.

Chayla was committed to her academic performance, even when she also lived within discourses of gender in which she would at times verbally dismiss her own intellectual abilities: “Don’t mind me! I’m a bit slow!” (field notes, 9.09), and yet perform well in the advanced math and science classes she sought out. She excelled in math and science and
found English to be a challenge. She confessed to anxiety about English, but that her mother insisted that she participate (and excel) in the English 101 course. In her end of the year interview, she commented about her approach to being a student:

I think I do pretty well, sometimes. But I always try to finish everything I start. And, just try to push and get one. I set high goals, really, really high goals, that way, the ones you're not going to get, but there's a possibility, it get's that way, and when I finish, it's still going to like good. My Mom is like, "Chayla, Why is that an A-, why is that not an A?" Always shoot for above a hundred. (Interview, 6.11.10)

These conversations with her mother also illustrate the middle-class commitment to cultivating Chayla’s educational experiences in a way that would position her well for college. School was not something that was “done” because it was compulsory; it was an experience full of opportunities that could be taken leveraged for future success. Her parents knew how to navigate the school systems, and made sure that Chayla, as with her two older brothers, did as well. Her mother had come to every school Open House for her brothers and for Chayla, and always made sure to both compliment her children’s teachers as well as ensure that they were receiving a rigorous educational experience (reflective notes 9. 10.09). Another way that Chayla was cultivating a strong educational experience was through her active involvement in extracurricular academic activities like Science Olympiad and an environmental group, and occasionally helping the academic team. She was also on the school newspaper and yearbook staff. In addition to these time constraints, she worked part-time at a chain department store and was a lauded player on
the school softball team every spring. Beyond academics, most teachers and students knew Chayla as a talented artist. Her drawings were well received at county school arts contests.

With such a commitment to her learning, Chayla was aware of the fact that she had received a less than stellar English education at the school: “I basically didn’t have an English teacher since ninth grade. So, I think if I’d had this all four years, I'd be a pretty awesome writer right now” (Interview, 6.11.10). She was a diligent student and writer, despite the frustrations with the autumn English 101 program. This perseverance through the culturally distant expectations of the English 101 course also signaled her commitment to participating in academic discourses beyond the purposes of earning a high school degree.

In the spring, she found value in having Appalachian issues as the centerpiece of learning academic literacy practices. She explained her perspective, saying,

It actually got you more interested in it, because it took something from where you're at and combine the two. So, it's like you're learning, but you don't really realize it. You just think you're just reading stuff about what people say around here. But really, you're learning. You're learning about social studies, the past, and you're learning how to write papers. How to interpret…(Interview, 6.11.10)

Chayla saw, understood, and valued the intentional blending of topical issues and writing instruction, not just because it was interesting, but because what is learnt is complex, meaningful, and relevant. For someone like Chayla who highly valued local
cultural discourses and also highly valued a rigorous educational experience, the curriculum of the focal class was able to complement the discourses she found compelling.

She went on to explain the value of exploring the historical origins of Appalachian discourses:

It let's you know how we got to where we are today: That it hasn't always been this way; that times have changed. They still possibly might today, cause they want to get rid of the coal industry. If that does happen, will it come back? Will it do the same thing it does now? Or, what it did then? (Interview, 6.11.10).

What her reflections demonstrate is her awareness of the “not realness” of the current discourses and disrupts the seeming “it’s always been this way” response to regional economic and political change. As the local discourses of tradition and the intertwined relationship and the region are heavily supported through visual culture of bumper stickers, business signs, and billboards, making available any discourse that varies from this dominant one is potentially risky. However, as the niece of a politically active coal mine operator, Chayla was intrigued by this discourse of Appalachian history and the complex arrival of the industry in the region. Chayla’s positioning of herself in relation to the coal industry was growing in its complexity. Because of her participation in an environmental group led by a young female teacher who had graduated from Hilltop, Chayla was becoming increasingly aware of alternative energy sources and their growing power in the national energy discourse. At the same time, she saw a reciprocal
relationship between the national economic crash and the federal regulation tightening on local mining creating a seriously tense situation for coal-dependent families. Far from the common perception of rural Appalachian residents as being close-minded and isolated, Chayla demonstrates how residents see themselves as a central part of the national economy because of the coal-industry. Because of her positioning in a coal-mining community and her access to multiple discourses on energy, Chayla and many of her peers have a far more sophisticated understanding of Appalachia’s position in these discourses, as well as the relationship between these discourses, federal economic and environmental policies and local poverty. She described the critical need for timely action in the region to prevent a widespread depression:

To be eco-friendly, they should make the windmills and stuff, like they have up there…Take advantage of the water! We've got creeks running everywhere! We've got lakes! Try to use something! If you're going to take it out, you gotta, it has to be replaced. So that way, if it does, I guess it already has, cause coal mines are getting shut down, but they need to start finding the new plan, start the action, it's a changing over, not a drastic disastrous ... don't make people go straight to the bottom and then have to work their way back up again!

Evident within this comment is her tension with actions seemingly happening to the region by outside groups (i.e. “they should make windmills.”) and the consequences these externally made decisions will have on local residents. While these changes are seemingly inevitable to Chayla, she does see opportunities within other regional natural
resources to provide “eco-friendly” and locally derived sources of jobs and energy.

Navigating these highly politicized, high risk discourses in order to come to a vision of Appalachia post-coal takes great sophistication. Chayla and her peers have had a life-time of opportunities to learn to navigate the treacherous terrain.

Such terrain is the ground on which Chayla and her peers learn to walk:

As soon as you're old enough to talk and know stuff, there's just the basics: It's like you're born with it: You're born with people stereotyping against you. So, it's not like you're just walking into this all kinds of hatred, it's just been there your whole life….If you like where you live, you're going to like growing up there. And I like where I live. We're going to be the next to make this region. Hopefully, we're going to make something of it.

As an adolescent in rural Appalachia, Chayla has learned that life in her communities is saturated with the authoritative discourses of Appalachia’s deficiency, coal mining, language difference, and intersections of working and middle class expectations for girls and for education. Yet, she has also learned that there is still discourses available for a young woman to position herself and her community in ways that allow her to believe in her communities, her right to sound the way she does, and be a part of a positive future that she must be able to envision.

**Focal Student: Tracy.** Like Chayla, Tracy lived at the intersection of multiple discourses and daily navigated complicated terrain with sophistication. As an Appalachian heritage student relatively new to Akers County, Tracy had to negotiate her
insider-outsider positioning with her peers, particularly in relation to her speech. Tracy was also academically driven which led to participate in advanced courses more typically filled with middle-class peers, while Tracy herself was working class.

Tracy’s maternal grandparents are Akers County residents, but both Tracy and her mother were born and raised in a factory town in Michigan. Like many urban Appalachian families in northern factory towns, Tracy’s mother maintained strong familial connections in Akers County, and so Tracy, her siblings, and her mother spent her summer vacations “down home” in Akers County with her grandparents. Before the start of her junior year, her mother decided to move Tracy, her son and herself back to the homeplace to care for her aging parents. Tracy’s older sister stayed in Michigan. In great contrast to the discourse of Appalachian isolation, Tracy and her family illustrate the wide kinship network many Appalachian families have that cross multiple state lines (Hicks, 2005; Jones, 2006; Purcell-Gates, 1995).

Tracy had arrived as a junior at Hilltop High School the year before the study. Having come from a large urban high school in Michigan, Tracy had to learn to negotiate the tightly knit social groups and networks of small Hilltop High School. Tracy typically socialized in the hallways with students who attended the technical high school and were socially positioned as working-class students with little interest in traditional academics. With these young men and women, Tracy joked, teased, and chatted daily in the hallways. She dated three young men over the course of her senior year, and all three of them attended the technical high school and worked outside of school. Once the bell rang, Tracy moved into honors level classes made up of the school’s academically-oriented
students. While some of these students came from working-class and working-poor families, like Tracy, they typically participated in middle-class discourses of education as opportunity and gendered expectations of being “respectable” girls and boys.

From the beginning of her time at Hilltop, Tracy positioned herself as a strong academic student and a “good girl” (Hicks, 2005; Jones, 2006; Schwartz, 2006). This might of positioned her as an academic peer in the well-established academic elite of her class. In the small community, the students who were actively pursuing high academic achievement had been vying for the top positions since elementary school. While competition within this group was typically supportive and reinforced social connections, they did not seem to include Tracy. When she was the only student in English 101 who continued into English 102, and having earned an A in both writing intensive courses, this academic success did not seem to change her social standing with the academic elite in the school. Again when Tracy earned the senior class’ only distinguished score on the state On-Demand Writing Assessment, there seemed to be no shift in her social relationships. In English 101, students like Chayla, Brandie and Renee, all three of whom were highly respected girls with high social status and solid academic performances, were generally pleasant and friendly with Tracy, but only occasionally socially engaged with her in the hallways, despite sharing a majority of classes and activities together. For example, Tracy was the school newspaper editor and staff yearbook writer, and she wrote along side of Brandie and Chayla, and she was the secretary for the school’s National Honor Society. With her academic and service achievements and high aspirations, Tracy was the only senior to apply and be accepted by the major state school. All the same, she
and the girls who were established members of the social and academic elite of the school did not socialize at school.

As will be shown in Chapter Four, part of the dividing line between her Akers County peers and herself was her status as an outsider. Her status was symbolically marked by her peers’ continual reference to her differing speech patterns. On one of the days in the focal class that we discussed language variation, Chayla reminded Tracy and their peers of how they had teased Tracy when she first came to Hilltop. In this discussion, it became clear that Tracy had been strategically adapting her language over time to sound more aligned with her peers’ language practices. For Tracy, the dominant discourse on the Appalachian English’s association with ignorance was less internally persuasive than the immediate local discourses of fitting in and celebrating Appalachian identity.

Responding to the social discourses of fitting in for Tracy also meant that she would not separate herself from her working-class peers with whom she felt more connection. Like these peers, she worked a minimum of 25 hours a week after school. For Tracy, this was at a small tanning and laundry shop with her mother. Her earnings were not just for “fun money” as it was for her more financially secure peers; this money was critical for her family’s budget.

While Tracy may have felt addressed by many of the same working-class discourses as some of her peers, she also recognized that she was not addressed by the discourses of Appalachian cultural deficiency in the same way as her peers at Hilltop. From her position as an insider-outsider, Tracy had the advantage of observing her peers
carefully, without being fully implicated by the same discourses. Tracy named the stereotypes she heard most often: people in Appalachia are lazy and ignorant. She named clearly that these stereotypes were on the whole inaccurate, although she did name that she saw some realities resembling some stereotypes - mostly around the increased presence of poverty, a sizeable portion of the population who did not have stable income from a job, and a significant number of her peers who rejected schooling as a worthwhile endeavor for them. However, she always kept her understanding of people's lives that may resemble stereotypes as having come from a lifetime of hearing negative stereotypes and those messages having developed into a narrowed sense of possibility for oneself. Tracy explained how she saw her peers being positioned by these authoritative discourses in her end of the year interview:

If you hear it day after day, you might start believing it. Actually take it real. Once it gets stuck in your head, it's like, emotionally stuck with that. I think it affects them a lot worse. When we did research on the history of it, and if they don't know that, and they just know now, and what they hear and stuff, they might not be proud of what they have, or what they are. They might take it literally. A lot of kids in there, I know aren't going to college because they feel like they can't. And they just don't try. So, I think it has a lot to do with growing up here. Not here, growing up with that. Listening to people saying that, or having a stereotype like that in their family, then that's going to be me in a couple of years. That's why I think it's good for them to come here and know that they can do their best. They can do want they want -
they're smart enough to do it. (Tracy. End of Year Interview. 6.11.10)

She described the accumulated pressure the constant circulation of negative sociocultural discourses around a rural Appalachian identity, and how it can come to be 'taken as real'. She called out, in essence, the social construction - the 'not real'-ness of discourse having real consequence. These are powerfully internally persuasive discourses for many of her peers. From her position as a critically conscious outsider, Tracy was able to clearly distinguish the source of her peers’ disconnection with formal education as not being located within their “Appalachianness” *per se*, but because of the externally applied (yet locally circulating) associated with their Appalachian identities.

Tracy was not unfamiliar with the material consequences of living on the edge economically, or of having to make difficult choices in tight economic situations. In this way, Tracy is not an outsider to working-class and working-poor discourses and material realities. Despite all of her hard work described above and a scholarship to the state flagship university, when her mother’s on-going health issues became a crisis during the spring and summer of Tracy’s senior year, Tracy had to turn down the scholarship and not leave her mother. The material reality at this juncture overwhelmed her earlier negotiations of learning the discourse of education as “way out of poverty” and the discourse of family loyalty became the primary one. For many of the women in Sohn’s (2006) and Webb-Sunderhaus’ (2007) studies, this was a familiar and similarly complicated situation. Like these women, Tracy found a way to navigate both discourses, despite their seeming competition. With significant perseverance in her commitment to her professional goals by switching to a local college for a semester, and then again to a
nearby community college, Tracy completed an Associate’s Degree in social work two years after graduating high school. She now is beginning her elementary education degree in a distance learning program between a regional university and the community college.

**Focal Student Summary.** These three focal students allow an exploration of a range of social positionings of Appalachian and Appalachian heritage adolescents. Kevin highlights a young Appalachian man with an interest in how he and the Appalachian region fit in a broad political context. Chayla’s experiences with language marginalization make available a young woman’s awareness of the politics of language and its relationship with identity positioning. Finally, Tracy’s social positioning as an academically high-achieving, working-class student and newcomer with speech differing from typical practice in her peer group helps to make explicit views on language and difference from multiple “insider” and “outsider” perspectives. Together, they make evident the sophisticated ways in which adolescents in Appalachian negotiate the complicated discursive terrain of their lives in the mountains and beyond.

**Data Collection**

In this section, I outline the data collection process. Data collection took place over the course of the full academic year in four phases. The first phase took place during the autumn semester of the course. It was during this time that I was re-establishing myself in the school after a three year absence, and also was responding to the change in the instruction and design of the focal course (described above). During this phase, data collection was almost entirely teacher reflective notes on the students and my relationship
building, our struggles and interests. I made these notes approximately once a week, sometimes via audio recorder on my twenty-minute drive home, and other times in my teacher journal.

Phase two began with the start of the new semester in January following the winter break. This phase lasted until the first week in April. This was the most intensive data collection time of the study. It is during this phase that the focal unit on examining historical representations of Appalachia was taking place (see course description above). Data collection took place nearly every day in the form of audio-recordings of classroom interaction, audio-recordings of my teacher reflection, my instructional notes and materials (e.g. handouts), and student writing. Collection during this phase was interrupted by school cancellations for inclement weather (a total of twelve days across January and February were cancelled). A complete list of the data collected during this phase is in Table 5.

Table 5. Data Sources in Focal Unit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Types</th>
<th>Object of Study</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audio recording /</td>
<td>• Classroom Interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcripts</td>
<td>• Teacher Reflective Notes</td>
</tr>
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113
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<tr>
<th>Student Written Artifacts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• &quot;Homogeneity and Isolation in Appalachia&quot; Group Work - Main Idea and Supporting Ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• One Pager &quot;Homogeneity and Isolation in Appalachia&quot; Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <em>Storming Heaven</em> Character Study group handout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <em>Storming Heaven</em> Character Analysis Essay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <em>Storming Heaven</em> Discussion Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <em>Matewan</em> Response Paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <em>Harlan County, USA</em> Response Paper</td>
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<tr>
<td>• “What is the ‘Story of Appalachia’” Review Essay</td>
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Continued
Phase three was focused on the students’ engagement with the community-based research project. Due to technological difficulties, all audio recordings made during April were lost. Remaining data collected during this phase includes student produced writing. Of particular interest is their research proposal and paper, the product of their community-based research project. However, I have chosen not to draw from this work substantially in the analysis process due to the absence of the interactional data. Rather, I chose to use the papers only in the triangulation phase and to inform the focal student end of the year interviews and vignettes.

The final phase of data collection took place in May and June of 2010. Data collection in this phase took two forms: student writing and end of the year interviews. Student writing during this phase includes

- College Scholarship Essay – “Who is Your Hero?”
• Poetry
• Letter to Myself in 10 Years
• Writing Portfolio (4 pieces of writing):
  o Reflective Letter to Reader on Self as Writer
  o Creative Writing Sample
  o Non-Fiction / Transactional Writing Sample
  o Student Choice Sample

End of the year interviews were conducted with the three focal students. Each semi-structured interview was conducted one-on-one in my classroom. Interviews were audio recorded, lasted between twenty to thirty minutes, and the full interview was transcribed.

Data Analysis

In this section, I explain my data analysis process, including the components of my analysis, and my decision-making, ethical considerations, and acknowledgment of challenges and limitations of the methods.

As this is an ethnographic study, I primarily used inductive analysis to determine recurrent trends and themes based on my theoretical framework over time within the data corpus. Below is a table that shows the relationship between my goals for the study, the research questions, the data sources, and the approach to analysis. While I have many instructional goals as a teacher of the class, as a literacy researcher I am focused on the ways in which adolescents use literacy and oral language to construct social positions for themselves, for their peers, for their communities, and for me.
The data analysis of the research project is composed of data preparation and additional rounds of data analysis and writing of the findings. In this section I discuss the nature of the data preparation and analysis.

_Table 6 Data Preparation and Analysis Sequence_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Task Description</th>
</tr>
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| June -December 2010          | 1. Transcribe Audio Recordings  
Selective transcription based on notes of significant events |
| January - February 2011      | 2. Organize Data Chronologically  
Identify significant events in case study classroom  
Identify significant events for case study student  
Data Reduction |
| June – August 2011           | 4. Categorize by Significant Event for Student  
Analyze data using coding questions  
Identify persistent themes |
| August - October 2011        | 5. Triangulate Data  
Compare types of data to look for confirming and disconfirming evidence of themes and emergent theorization |
| October - December 2011      | 6. Write Conceptual Memos  
Record emergent theorization  
7. Conduct Member Checks and Peer Debriefings  
Submit conceptual memos to students in the study, teacher colleagues, and researcher colleagues |
Data analysis process. My data analysis process included the following components:

1. Data preparation
2. Data organization
3. Coding
4. Triangulating data
5. Writing conceptual memos
6. External auditing

Importantly, I do not see these as firm sequential steps; rather, I see them as iterative elements in a process. That is, as I explain below, I organized data in a chronological structure to code and make analytical notes, and then re-organized the data into a different structure (e.g. by focal student or by literacy event) to code again. The purpose of this iterative process was to take multiple perspectives and questions at the forefront of my analysis.

Data preparation. Preparation of data for analysis included the transcription of audio and video data, and organizing data (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). Audio and video data was selectively transcribed with the guidance of field notes for the determination of significant events. I transcribed my own and my students voices without representing our accents unless it was particularly important to the meaning. For example, when Chayla described how her peers at the summer arts institute did not say her name accurately, she modeled her interpretation of how they sounded. In this instance I tried to phonetically
represent the pronunciation.

Data organization. Chronological. Following transcribing audio and video data, all data was examined iteratively through multiple organizational structures (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). That is, data was organized in different ways so as to facilitate entry into the data from meaningful perspectives. First, all selected data was organized chronologically. The chronological order is to construct a sense of the use of space and time over the course of the year. Further, such a review can make evident particular events as significant (i.e. through intertextual and intercontextual references in oral and/or written discourse).

Once the chronological order has been constructed, I identified key events that provided relevant data. For example, for the purposes of this study, I did not focus on oral discourse about administrative tasks in class. On the other hand, I marked for further attention the transcript of an unplanned discussion about Tracy, Chayla, and Kevin and additional classmates’ discussion of selecting a college. In the second example event, the social discussion regarding the qualities and purposes of going to a particular college was illuminating as to how each student positions herself/himself as a potential college student, and how her/his peers took up or modified those claims.

Literacy event. Once key events were marked, I re organized the student writing by literacy event. That is, I paired student writing with the transcripts associated with the accompanying assignment. Here, I read across all students before reading the focal students. I did not want to read the focal students in isolation of the transcripts of the
classroom conversations, nor did I want to read them out of context of their peers. In doing so, I identified patterns across the entire class in a particular literacy event, and made note of how each focal student seemed to be a part of a pattern or set apart from a pattern. For example, in the literacy event of writing an academic summary of *The Myth of Homogeneity and Isolation*, Kevin frequently used the plural pronoun “we.” Because I had read across the entire class, I had noticed a pattern in students’ writings that Kevin represented most intensely, while Chayla was one of the few to not index a collective identity in this literacy event. It is important to see how the focal students socially position themselves in the context of the classroom events and relationships.

**Focal student.** After having organized the data by literacy event, I had begun to see patterns in the practices of the focal students. To explore the possibility of these patterns, and to search for disconfirming evidence, I grouped the work and key transcripts by focal student.

**Coding questions.** The research question focuses on how students socially position themselves, their classmates and me as a part of their identity work in the classroom. To unpack the data for evidence of identity construction, I coded transcripts of classroom discourse, interviews and student writing using coding questions driven by the NLS and identity-as-position frameworks. In seeking to understand how my students use language and literacy practices to negotiate discourses around identity positions, I need to understand the meaningful literacy events and practices (Heath, 1983), sociocultural discourses, artifacts and relationships that characterize the "intermediate timespace" (Holland & Leander, 2004; Wortham, 2004) context of our classroom in the second
semester of the year. These resources are the tools used by individuals to negotiate their identities, and engage and co-construct their sociocultural, temporal contexts.

These coding questions are intended to look both at specific significant moments of interaction as well as interactions and relationships across time. The students' research project is a task nested within the semester, which is nested in the year. Of course, all of this is happening simultaneously with the students' and my own complex lives that occur beyond the ever permeable borders of the classroom, so the net I cast over the flow of activity in the students' lives is a narrow and selective one. I draw from Holland and Leander (2004), who call for the examination of positioning in the moment, but also how the moment's artifact (e.g. memory, texts, etc.) is "carried over, related to other time-spaces, and juxtaposed with other artifacts" (p. 132). From this, I identified moments of explicit and implicit positioning, and then sought to trace these in subsequent moments. In tracing these moments, I was careful to read for how individuals may use various artifacts (e.g. memory, texts, etc.) to agentively reject, modify, or accept the positioning, or pose a different one of their own, and any given moment (Holland & Leander, 2004).

In addition to coding for how students draw upon resources to negotiate their social positions, I coded for the ways in which students and I used literacy in the context of the classroom broadly to identify academic and social purposes.

Finally, I coded for the ways in which students strategically use power to make claims about their own or others' identities (Holland & Leander, 2004). That is, in situations in which a student makes a claim about an identity (e.g. an explicit oral claim like, "I don't have to listen to her; she's a hillbilly"), that student constructs positions of
identity through engaging discourses with historical power. By coding specifically for claims of status and power, as well as coding for literacy practices, sociocultural discourses, and artifacts, I am able to triangulate for the relationships between these practices and power in these contexts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What happens when Appalachian and Appalachian heritage students are invited by their non-Appalachian teacher to engage in an English language arts courses focused on Appalachian-centered texts?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub Question 1</strong>: What opportunities to explore relevant socio-cultural discourses did the teacher-designed literacy events afford to the students?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sub Question 2</strong>: What opportunities to explore, take up, resist, and assign identity positions did the teacher-designed literacy events afford to the students?</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding Questions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. What <strong>literacy events and practices</strong> do my students signify in oral discourse and written texts as resources they socially position themselves and others in the classroom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. How is <strong>literacy</strong> used in this context?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. What <strong>relationships</strong> (e.g. with family, friends, teachers) do my students signify in oral discourse and written texts as resources they socially position themselves and others in the classroom?</td>
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Table 7. Research Question and Coding Questions

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<tr>
<th>d. What <strong>sociocultural discourses</strong> do my students signify in oral discourse and written texts as resources as they socially position themselves and others in the classroom?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>e. What <strong>artifacts</strong> do my students signify in oral discourse and written texts as resources as they socially position themselves and others in the classroom?</td>
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</table>

After using these initial coding questions to analyze the data, I had located “rich points” (Agar, 1996) of interactions where there seemed to be socially significant acts of social positioning. To unpack these interactions in greater detail, I used McVee, Baldassarre Hopkins & Bailey’s (2011) chart (see also Chapter 2) to code for Self-Other positionings.

**Triangulation.** The fourth component of the process is to triangulate multiple sources of data to compare and contrast themes (Denzin, 1970). Through coding, I developed preliminary claims around the questions of the study. In triangulating the claims and evidence in the transcriptions of the interviews with focal students, transcriptions of whole class discussions, and student writing samples, I worked to confirm and disconfirm developing explanations.

**Conceptual memos.** I wrote conceptual memos throughout the data analysis process. These memos ranged from rough narrative sketches of the focal students to a five-page synthesis of the coding of a particular section of transcript. Conceptual memos provided me a space to explore the use of theory in my developing analysis. I also used
these memos to share with colleagues for external auditing.

**External auditing.** Also known as peer debriefing, it is a technique that involves presenting preliminary findings, coded data, and conceptual memos to colleagues for the purpose of exploring and challenging implicit suppositions underlying the researcher's interpretations. I engaged in peer debriefing through monthly meetings with faculty members and selected peer doctoral students. I used the feedback from these meetings to revise and guide my subsequent analyses.

**Ethical considerations.**

**Participant risk minimization.** As both the teacher and researcher in the classroom, I am deeply invested in minimizing risk to the participants who are my students. My first emphasis to my students and their parents was that they have the choice to opt out of the study at any time during the school year. Furthermore, students had the choice to exclude any particular piece of writing or day's interaction from the data corpus. This was not the case, but I would have made all reasonable efforts to exclude the student from any form of recording, and would not include the students' interactions in the transcription. I also emphasized that a student's participation or refusal would in no way influence their grade in my course, and that the project is primarily a documentation of their engagement with the courses' lessons.

**Limitations and challenges.** There are several limitations to this study that I acknowledge as a potential part of teacher-research, and others to the complexities of my own and my participants' lives.

**Limits of Time and Space.** First of all, the data collection process was limited in
both time and space. I collected data periodically during the autumn from across all of the senior English classes in order to construct a contextualized understanding of the students’ work in the focal class. Data collection, as reported above, also took place primarily within the physical boundaries of my classroom. These practical decisions impact the data on the focal students. A longer term, multi-space study would provide richer data reflecting how rural Appalachian adolescents negotiate their complex social worlds within and beyond school’s role as a social institution.

Member Checks. At this time, member checks have not been completed. Member checks are critical to a qualitative study, particularly one conducted in a cross-cultural context between researcher and participants. Because I value the focal student participants’ right to name and frame their words and experiences, completing the member checks is a high priority. I remain in contact with each of the participants, despite lapses in communication in the two years since the completion of the school year. After graduating high school, each participant faced new challenges that did not allow time for responses to my earlier (November 2010) request for feedback. Tracy and Chayla both were involved in complicated intimate relationships and college, while Kevin was in basic training in the military. During this year, Chayla was out of communication completely until this summer following her sophomore year of college. Tracy gave birth to a son this summer, is engaged to her boyfriend from the focal class, and just completed her Associate’s Degree. Kevin returned from his nine months of basic training and began working in the coal mines to support his girlfriend and their nearly

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11 My reflective field notes include observational data from interactions in other areas of the school, after school activities, and community-based activities. These notes included observations of the focal students, but also more broadly about the community contexts.
one year old son. These significant new life chapters have focused the students on their immediate presents. All the same, I hope to complete member checks with them soon.

*Limits of My Positionality.* The most pronounced and consequential limitation of the study is me. As a non-Appalachian teacher, I held a position of power within the classroom that constrains and affords particular positions of and for my students. As a non-Appalachian researcher, I am in a position of power to name and frame the Appalachian adolescents, thereby participating once again in a larger relation of power that has consistently marginalized Appalachian residents. Despite however ethically and with deep care I have conducted this study, the teaching, collection, analysis and conclusions are subject to my own cultural position limitation.
Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

In this chapter I share the findings of the study. To address these questions I articulated in Chapter Two a theoretical framework that supports my analysis of the identity positioning opportunities afforded by the literacy events of the course, of how the focal students negotiated the discourses around Appalachian identities, and of how these practices and discourses supported the identity positioning work in an English classroom with a non-Appalachian teacher-researcher.

As detailed in Chapter Three, the analysis particularly focused on the focal unit in the spring semester of the focal class. This unit built on the academic literacy practices of the autumn semester, but did so through the use of Appalachian-centered texts. Data from
this unit included student produced writings, transcripts of classroom interaction, instructional materials and texts, and teacher-researcher reflective notes. Additional data for triangulation came from student work from subsequent units and the transcriptions of end of the year interviews with focal students.

**Chapter Outline**

The guiding research question invites an open examination into “what happens when…” regarding the social interactions in the context of the focal class. For the purpose of this study, the question pertains to the opportunities to explore *relevant sociocultural discourses* and *identity positions* the literacy events in the Appalachian literature class afforded for the Appalachian and Appalachian-heritage students. Therefore, in my analysis, I attended to the sociocultural discourses (i.e. discourses specifically relevant to an Appalachian identity position) and identity positionings the three focal students engaged within the literacy events of the course.

In order to structure the description of the results, I look first to the relevant sociocultural discourses available in the talk of the classroom. There were two significant sociocultural discourses being consistently and explicitly negotiated within the dialogue of classroom interactions and in students’ writings. One was a discourse on insider/outsider status and the other was the discourse on language variation. These two discourses, which I describe in detail below, were central to the students’ negotiations of identity positions, and thus I use them to create two broad analytic categories. I have selected key literacy events\(^{12}\) for each category that illustrate the focal students’ negotiations of these two discourses. Within each literacy event, I attend most closely to

\(^{12}\) As defined in Chapter Two, literacy events in this study are understood to be “occasion[s] in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants’ interactions and their interpretive processes” (Heath, 1983, p. 93).
the focal students’ identity positioning as they negotiate that discourse; however, there are variations in this attention when a focal student is not directly involved and other students are more central to the interaction.

Historically, the discourse of the “insider - outsider” division has been maintained by both non-residents of rural Appalachian is perpetuating discourses of Appalachian difference and deficiency, and by residents of rural Appalachia in response to this ongoing marginalization they have experienced (Billings, Ledford, Norman, 1999; Shapiro, 1978). These two positions have served as a part of the “story-line” of Appalachia’s relationship with the rest of the nation, and have come out of Appalachia’s perceived difference and failure to live within the middle-class discourses lauded in non-Appalachian communities. The exact defining lines of this dichotomy, or even an examination of its “real-ness” (i.e. how accurate are the characteristics assigned to members of either group) are situated within particular interactions; the official dividing lines of Appalachia (i.e. Appalachian Regional Commission definition of the geographical boundaries of the region) have little to do with any particular individual’s understanding of “what counts” as “insider” or “outsider” status. The dichotomy serves as an internally-persuasive discursive tool for individuals to position themselves and others as included or excluded.

It is not only about inclusion or exclusion, however. In the situated construction of these positions, there are implicit and explicit implications for each positions’ epistemological claims. In particular, there is a question of access: what knowledge about Appalachian communities is afforded by one’s positionality? One’s access to
“insider” knowledge can be used to assert the status of having privileged understandings. Locally, to be an “insider” has in large part meant to have developed one’s understanding of Appalachian communities through having strong working-class roots and personal experiences of living within conditions of hardship. However, the privileged understandings have also been claimed by non-Appalachians who have controlled the construction of a pejorative hillbilly image and the dominant discourses surrounding an Appalachian identity position (Billings, Ledford, Norman, 1999). It is from this position that authoritative discourses are maintained through the use of more recent television “documentaries” and comedies, as well as federal, state, and non-profit organizational social and economic policies and programs. It is important to note that these authoritative discourses circulate within Appalachian communities and are often internally persuasive for residents. At the same time, there are powerful local responsive discourses aimed at discrediting the authoritative discourses and re-establishing locally-constructed definitions of Appalachian identities (Gee, 1996).

I argue that three focal students, like their peers, asserted their agency in their responses to the monologic construction of the region and the relationship between residents and non-residents of the region. In their written and oral responses to the Appalachian-focused texts, my students countered the monologic relationship by interrogating the ways in which they have been addressed by the discourses, and the ways in which that they have used the discourses to address others. Knowing position matters in shaping perspective, the focal students have questioned their own, their community’s, and non-Appalachian communities’ positioning by the authoritative discourses. Central
to each of their arguments is the acknowledgment of Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism (Holquist, 2002). Like Bakhtin, they see themselves and non-residents “occupying simultaneous but different space” geographically and ideologically (Holquist, 2002, p. 21). Thus, the focal students recognize their ability to see their own communities from their insider position with a perspective that non-residents and people who participate in problematic discourses of region do not share (Campano, 2007; Wissman, 2011). In particular, the focal students’ assertion of an insider position came out through their agency in three ways: constructing a political Appalachian identity; taking up a social Appalachian identity; and experiencing tensions in locating Appalachian identity in academic writing genre. In addition to asserting an insider position, the students expressed agency through denouncing outsider discourses to two key approaches: critiquing outsiders’ epistemic privilege and establishing a Self As Other position. In their critique of outsiders’ epistemic privilege, the focal students named essentialized cultural artifacts used in authoritative Appalachian discourses; challenged the discourses with the realities of heterogeneity in rural Appalachian communities; assessed the accuracy of outsider’s discursive claims; differentiated between insider and outsider positions; cited limitations to the dichotomy; and confronted outsiders’ willful ignorance. In their assertion of a Self As Other position for Appalachia, the focal students challenged two central discourses that outsiders use to distance themselves from the region: that of Appalachia’s cultural and moral deficits and Appalachia’s poverty. The findings here are discussed in greater detail below.

**Asserting an Insider Position of Shared Experience**
One local discourse available to residents in their response to authoritative discourses about Appalachian residents is an assertion of an insider position built out of shared experiences. This unifying discourse could be used to acknowledge the externally-driven marginalization and generational economic hardship, while also identifying strength and fortitude within the community residents. Gottlieb (2011) located a source of additional support for this Appalachian discourse in working-class discourses that simultaneously celebrate the strength of living in hard conditions while also critiquing the material luxury of economically privileged communities. An Appalachian version of this discourse takes on the added pride of surviving the hardships of being in coal-centric communities. While pride for one’s family’s participation in mining has a long and rich history in the cultural arts of the region, recent visual culture has added another layer of politicization to the shared experience of living in the coal fields. “Friends of Coal” bumper stickers are found on business front doors and bumpers alike, creating a feeling of shared commitment coming from out of shared experiences. Finding ways of emphasizing the socially interdependent strength of one’s community in the face of ongoing denigration and marginalization is critical and has not been lost on the region’s youth.

**Constructing a political identity through an insider Appalachian cultural community discourse.** One of the first academic literacy tasks of the focal unit the students were engaged in was designed to be a continuation of our autumn’s work on understanding and building clearly evidenced and warranted arguments. After independently reading the assigned chapter the night before, I designed our literacy
engagement of Lewis’ text to be centered on peer-mediated discussions of his argument. Students worked in groups of four to identify the argumentative structure of the chapter by constructing a flow chart of the relationship between the ideas. Groups worked for about forty-five minutes in their discussion of the arguments. The discussion transcribed includes their oral report to the class on how they understood the relationship between the elements of the arguments. Each group assigned a member the role of spokesperson to share out on the main ideas and supporting evidence that they identified in their discussion of the text. For homework, students independently wrote one page summaries of Lewis’ argument.

The first group to share was Kevin’s. I had initially assigned a quiet, frequently disengaged young woman Shelby to be the official spokesperson. However, as she began to share, she quickly started to stumble in finding the words to describe her group’s work. Three of her group mates entered into the reporting out process to support Shelby. Kevin asserted a strong stance as a leader who used Lewis’ text to construct a political identity through an insider cultural community discourse. He not only took over the role of speaker for his group, but also established the discourse as a compelling one for many of his peers, as they took up his use of Lewis’ language in their own writing. Building on one of his group mate’s statement, Kevin added, “And it led to us to getting out of the time warp that we were supposedly in” (Transcript, 1.25.10). Asserting his male leadership authority, he continued,

What everybody thought of us, that we were stuck in the old time. We weren't revolutionized with the time. The industrial revolution, and everything. People
thought we were still stuck in the sixteen, seventeen hundreds. We were, you know, hillbillies.

It wasn't to get out of this, you know, it just kinda happened that they found all the coal in this area. You know that led to all the railroads. And with all the railroads, the coal, you had to have workers, so you had all those people immigrating. You have so many different ethnic groups. (Transcript, 1.25.10)

In speaking to his peers, Kevin did not adopt an academic tone, but rather a personal one. He spoke with casual confidence and as he spoke, he did not refer to either his copy of the text or to his group’s flow chart. Standing comfortably at the front of the room, Kevin explained to his peers with the authority, sophistication, and the rhythm of a preacher. He explained about how they were all implicated in the problematic construction of Appalachia, “What everybody thought of us, we were stuck in the old time.” In constructing a unified cultural community built on the shared experience of marginalization for his peers and the nineteenth century residents of Appalachia, a sense of a politicized identity grew. By articulating the connections between past and current marginalizing discourses for his peers and for himself, Kevin shifted the conversation from seemingly isolated attacks across the documentaries to an awareness of the consistent pattern in the discourses shaping Appalachia in the mind of the mainstream public.

Articulating the Position of Outsiders. To accomplish this task, Kevin interwove two voices into a dialogue as he spoke with his peers in the excerpt above. One was the perspective of “Everybody,” or outsiders. To illustrate this perspective, he engaged in
first order positioning of “Self-Opposed-to-Other” by stating how outsiders positioned his cultural community as a deficient, undeveloped people: “What everybody thought of us, that we were stuck in the old time.” Then he provided warrants for the claims made by “Everybody.” For example, he claimed, “We weren’t revolutionized with the time,” and then explained, “the Industrial Revolution and everything. People thought we were stuck in the sixteen, seventeen hundreds.” From here, he rhetorically built the connection between the perceived outdated living conditions of the region and the position of “hillbillies: “We were, you know, hillbillies.” With this remark, Kevin positioned his audience as insiders, “you know” hearing the tired claim that his audiences’ ancestors, and by implication, his audience, were hillbillies.

**Positioning self as addressee of historical discourses.** At the same time that Kevin was building the position of “Everybody” as an outsider, he was quietly engaged in his second order positioning, as Kevin used the plural pronoun “we” to position himself, his classmates, and the larger community as a part of a nearly timeless regional community. In doing so, Kevin took up a “Self-As-Other” position in relation to the communities discussed in Lewis’ text (1999). By using the plural pronoun “we”, Kevin constructed a coherent cultural community across time and region. That is, the original historical texts Lewis (1999) quoted *addressed* a regional population that is no longer alive; all the same, Kevin repositioned a current Appalachian regional community to also be *addressed* by the original texts because of the communities’ similar experience in being problematically positioned by outsiders’ discourse. Importantly, he was consistent in his use of the past tense. Had he used the present tense: “We aren’t revolutionized with
the time”, Kevin would have re-positioned the focus onto the present context of stereotypes. By maintaining a focus on the past yet also including the present Appalachian community through his use of the plural pronoun “we”, Kevin asserted a cultural community identity position.

In his written summary of the chapter, an assignment following the peer mediated discussions and whole-class sharing, Kevin maintained his use of the insider cultural community position. He opened his summary with, “Ronald L. Lewis discusses the history of the Appalachian mountain area and how we are perceived as stuck in a ‘time warp’” (Back Talk, Kevin, 1.26.10). He continued to describe the central argument of Lewis’ chapter:

“In the chapter, ‘Beyond Isolation and Homogeneity’, he portrays the thoughts of urban areas that we are against modernization and improvement. This, however, is completely incorrect. It is little known, but before the coal boom in the turn of the 20th century, we did strive for improvements” (Back Talk, Kevin, 1.26.10).

In his continuation of the discourse in his summary, Kevin demonstrated his personal commitment to this identity position. Kevin asserted his claim on the identity position within a writing task that was designed to be an academic writing task, like those in the past semester. We had previously discussed the lack of personal references in some academic writing genres, and while I had not specifically declared this writing task to be free from personal references, I had stated that this task was to be a formal summary. Thus, for Kevin, the power of being addressed by the discourses described in
Lewis’ chapter was significant enough for him to respond with solidarity. The identity position Kevin constructed has political implications, as he triggered a discourse of solidarity for himself and for his peers based on the on-going marginalization and persistent stereotyping he knew his community continued to experience.

**Taking up a social position in the insider Appalachian cultural community discourse.** Kevin’s construction of a “Self-As-Other” cultural community position offered a socially compelling discourse for Tracy. As she was the speaker for the next group’s reporting out, she took up Kevin’s insider discourse, “…[T]hey were saying we were isolated. With the railroads and the jobs, and different stuff, where they come through where we were located, and the different people coming with that, we weren't really isolated. We were sending stuff out” (Transcript, 1.25.10). In this episode, Tracy stepped into the position of being a member of the cultural community position Kevin constructed for himself and his peers. Based on Tracy’s own family history, her position in a historical cultural community is not inaccurate: while she and her mother both were born in Michigan, her grandparents and familial roots are in Akers County. While this familial connection provides some logical explanation for Tracy’s participation in Kevin’s discourse, her self-positioning also has social implications. Kevin is a socially powerful male in the class; further, he had just reasserted his status by usurping the role of speaker for his group, and demonstrated his intellectual prowess by providing a summary that was sophisticated and did not rely on reading aloud from his group notes. Tracy, on the other hand, had been working hard for a year and a half to be recognized as a peer in her class. By claiming participation, so to be accepted as a participant in a
shared community, she was able to make visible her claim of the social position of an insider. Indeed, during this interaction, no one questioned Tracy’s move to position herself as a part of the Appalachian community.

“Our Coal” as the point of shared insider Appalachia cultural community discourse. As will be discussed below, Chayla did not participate in the discourse Kevin made available to his peers in either her oral report in class or in her individual summary text. Chayla asserted one seemingly small reference to a discourse of insider cultural community in her written summary. Her one effort to align an Appalachian community across time was in relation to coal’s beneficial presence. Deep into her summary, when otherwise summarizing Lewis’ (1999) reported facts of the coal industry’s role in the economic landscape of nineteenth century, she described, “our coal” as the source of economic and population growth (Backtalk, Chayla, 1.26.10). In so doing, it seems that she positioned the presence of the coal industry as a thread of continuity across time.

Her cousin Brandie, a daughter of a coal mine owner, similarly highlighted the role of the coal industry in the development of Appalachia. And, like her cousin, Brandie’s only use of “we” in her summary was in relation to the community’s size and the coal industry. In her concluding paragraph, Brandie wrote, “the stereotype for Appalachia is that we have a small population, however, thanks to the coal industry, the population grew” (Backtalk, Brandie, 1.26.10). For these young women, the coal industry has been constructed as deeply intertwined with the region’s identity. That her reference to “our coal” is her only explicit positioning of a unified cultural community, is reflective of her strong affiliation with the coal industry and perspective on its role as
critical source of cultural and economic wealth for the region and as a source of unifying experiences and commitments.

**Tensions in locating Appalachian identity in academic writing.** After the autumn’s focus on academic writing genres like rhetorical précis and literary analysis papers, the students had become accustomed to writing in the depersonalized manner traditionally expected in many academic genres. The assignment to summarize Lewis’ (1999) chapter was intended to be a formal summary. However, it followed the previous day’s peer mediated discussion of Lewis’ argument and evidence, when Kevin had constructed a Self-As-Other positioning in the insider cultural community discourse for himself and his peers to participate in. There was a complex tension, then, for students: Kevin, a socially powerful student had asserted a personal and political reading of Lewis’ discussion of historically inaccurate representation of Appalachia, yet genre expected a depersonalized voice. Of the seventeen summaries turned in, all but three of them took up a strongly personalized response that drew from Kevin’s available discourse (Backtalk summary, 1.26.10). Most consistently, students took offense to the terms describing the region as “backwards” and “stuck in a time warp.”

**Switching discourses within a genre.** Like most of his peers, Kevin began his summary drawing from the insider cultural community discourse he had constructed the day before: “before the coal boom in the turn of the 20th century, we did strive for improvements” (Back Talk, Kevin, 1.26.10). In the remainder of his summary essay, however, Kevin did not use the personal plural pronoun “we” as he continued to describe specific actions taken in the past (i.e. development of
railroads, intentional recruitment of ethnically diverse miners, etc.); rather, he shifted into the use of a mixture of third person active and passive voice. This shift is in contrast to his oral report in which Kevin consistently and adamantly engaged in Self-As-Other positioning as he spoke to his peers about all of the parts of the chapter. In the social task, it served Kevin to assert his leadership and historical interpretation. However, in the literacy task of writing an academic summary, it seems that Kevin was caught in a tension of wanting to challenge the problematic language used to describe his community now and in the past, yet wanting to meet the expectations of this genre and specific literacy task’s changed audience.

**Switching discourses to meet genre expectations.** Similar to Kevin’s tension in switching discourses in the different academic genres of speaking to his peers and writing a summary for his teacher, Tracy demonstrated sharp contrast between the discourses in which she participated in the two literacy tasks. Whereas in the oral report Tracy leveraged the opportunity to assert to social position amongst her peers as a participant in Kevin’s insider cultural community discourse; however, in the summary she made a clear distinction of the time and group of people addressed by the discourse Lewis cited. In her introduction, she wrote, “One main argument he goes against is that Appalachia is less evolved and modernized than other areas during that time. [Emphasis added] (Backtalk, Tracy, 1.25.10). She carefully summarized Lewis’ arguments, and did not make any personal references or second order positionings. With her peers, she participated in the positioning of herself and her peers as members of a marginalized cultural and regional
community; in her writing assignment for her teacher, she engaged in academic discourse in which she removed personal pronouns and maintained distinction between a present day regional community and a historical one. That she maintains a distinction in the construction of a past Appalachia and a present one in this assigned academic writing, even though she had at other times made the connection between past and present day experiences with stereotypes, suggests that she positions the region and herself in relation to it differently with an audience of her Appalachian peers than with her non-Appalachian English teacher.

Of her peers, Tracy seemed most comfortable with academic writing genres, having received both a stronger English preparation in her school in Michigan, and having successfully completed English 101 and continued on in English 102. Participating in academic discourse was an accepted part of Tracy’s academic goals for herself, and one that did not seem to challenge her navigation of working-class discourses with her peers.

Engaging in depersonalized academic discourse. In contrast to both Kevin and Tracy, Chayla did not verbally position herself as a member of a historical Appalachian community in either her oral or written report. For Chalya, in general, neither genre was a space for personal editorial remarks. Instead, both when Chayla reported out on her group’s work and when she wrote her summary of the chapter, Chayla engaged in academic discourse that did not include personal references. While her participation in academic discourse without personal references did not seem to reflect her personal social working-class discourse style of boldness, this choice did reflect her efforts to be a
“good girl” in academic tasks for assessment. Chayla had just barely earned an A in the English 101 course in the autumn, and had not signed up for English 102. As this was the first formal writing task of the new term, she may well have been feeling academically vulnerable and feeling renewed pressure to adhere to schooling expectations.

When she presented her group’s reporting out, Chayla stood in front of the class with her notebook in her hands and her group’s flow chart taped to the front white board, and read almost directly from both texts. As her group had closely paraphrased Lewis’ text, her oral report adopted a depersonalized academic voice. She maintained this distance in her summary except at two seemingly small points.

The first of these points was her inclusion of the phrase “time warp” a remark Lewis (1999) reported on which had used to characterize the lack of development Appalachia was perceived to have in comparison with the eastern urban centers in the late nineteenth century. She named Lewis as trying to “disprove all of the stereotypes of the Appalachian region” being in a “time warp” (Backtalk, Chayla, 1.26.10). At this point, most of her peers would have used the plural pronoun to include themselves as addressees to this marginalizing discourse. However, Chalya did not engage in second order positioning; rather, she allowed Lewis (1999) to do it. That is, she relied on his second order positioning to defend the region. In a sense, that is exactly what the literacy task asked her to do: summarize the author’s arguments, warrants and claims. It might be that she did not seem to be addressed so powerfully addressed by the discourse Lewis was critiquing that she felt the need to supply her own second order positioning. The text itself provided the second order positioning that challenged the historical discourses, and
so having his insider positioning critique the historical discourses may have provided sufficient voicing of critique to satisfy Chalya. This also may have worked well in relation to the tensions of her vulnerable academic identity; thus, Lewis’ critique which may have been more internally persuasive for her at this moment than her more typical bold working-class discourse identity positions.

**Denouncing Outsider Discourses**

Across the literacy events in the focal units of this the focal class, the focal students and their peers engaged in critique of dominant Appalachian discourses so as to refute the positioning of these discourses as authoritative. Central to the focal students’ refutations was the assertion that from the outsiders’ positions, they were unable to see the Appalachian communities in the same way insiders could, and thus could not assert the epistemic privilege they claimed. Furthermore, by the perspective afforded their position, outsiders could not see either the similarities across Appalachian and non-Appalachian communities or the heterogeneity within Appalachian communities. Because of this limited perspective, the focal students considered outsiders’ discourses as inaccurate and, ignorant, and often intentionally so.

**Critiquing Outsiders’ Epistemic Privilege.** Building a shared cultural community between historical and current rural Appalachian communities is a move that acknowledges relations across time; it also acknowledges that with the power of marginalizing, authoritative and monologic discourses, there is little significant change to them across the span of a hundred years (Bakhtin, 1981; Holquist, 2002). This move, while powerful in revealing the persistency of the discourses, does not sufficiently
critique the discourses. In being aware of the self-other relations between Appalachian and non-Appalachian communities, my students challenged the imbalance within the relationship as it is constructed by non-Appalachians. For those who participate and accept the authoritative discourses on Appalachia, the position of non-Appalachians is the center is understood not as a relative one, but an absolute one (Holquist, 2002). In contrast, for those who engage dialogically with those discourses, there is a sense of shifting relations and relativity. That is, there is a clear sense of relationship between the positions of insider and outsider, and within that relationship, power is always shifting. For many middle-class, white non-Appalachians, there is little consideration of how to define “non-Appalachia” in relation to rural Appalachia. However, when it comes to considering the existence of poverty and illiteracy and white racism, non-Appalachians often locate these constructs within rural Appalachian communities, thus relieving middle-class white communities from the burden of questioning these social concerns within their own borders. Conversely, the cultural discourses available for rural Appalachians in defining identities have always been in relation with non-Appalachian communities (Holquist, 2002). In understanding the dialectical existence of rural Appalachian residents and non-Appalachians, the focal students also had a strong awareness of how these different locations permitted strongly different perspectives of life in rural Appalachia. This matter of perspective is one of the largest sources of critique within students’ discussion of authoritative Appalachian discourses. Within an outsider’s limited perspective comes inaccurate information and understanding, an inability to see either similarities between Appalachian and non-Appalachian
communities or heterogeneity within Appalachian communities, and often, willful ignorance of Appalachian communities. In the students’ writings, the description of themselves and their communities and their critique of authoritative Appalachian discourses almost always involved a description of the first order positioning from outsiders and then their second order positioning. The intertwined nature of these discursive moves reveals how intertwined the relations are experienced for many Appalachian adolescents. In this and the subsequent sections, I look across student writing and oral discussions to examine the main ways students critique authoritative discourses on Appalachia. These ways are not cleanly separated within the students’ discourse, and any repetition should reflect the multi-pronged approach a focal student engaged in any given literacy event.

**Naming essentialized Appalachian cultural artifacts.** The first task in the focal unit on Appalachia’s past was for students to make a list of the characteristics they had heard people used to describe the region (See Chapter Three for assignment details). The first step of the task asked students to name the ways their communities have been addressed by outsider discourses. Chayla’s list illustrates how substantially different the perspectives on three listed items the positions of insider and outsider could hold. Bakhtin (1981) would argue that these items, through the authoritative discourses, had been saturated with the intentions of non-Appalachians. For Chayla, from her position as an Appalachian adolescent, she could hear the intentions of outsiders layered onto the cultural symbols and insist on the failures of those discourses to define her own experience with those cultural symbols. Below are Chayla’s three highly visible symbols.
of Appalachia’s history, and how these items are discursively constructed within her peer
groups. Chayla lists the Hatfield & McCoy feud, “Hillbilly Days,” and coal mines as the
things others first think of regarding her community.

These historical traditions have a carefully crafted, strategically essentialized image
designed for non-Appalachian consumption, and local understandings that differentiate
between image and realities. For example, the first item on her list was the Hatfield and
McCoy family feud. In a nearby county was the home of the burial grounds of the
infamous Hatfield and McCoy families, and was a popular tourist destination. While for
some young people in area, this cemetery and the story of the feud hold some historical
interest, it more often fails to raise interest when mentioned in casual conversation. In
contrast, the feud continues to serve as a cultural symbol of the region for outsiders, as
evidenced by the Bones episode (4.27.12), and the recently aired documentary on the
History Channel.

Her second item, Hillbilly Days, is a significant cultural event for young people
across many counties in eastern Kentucky and southern West Virginia, as well as for
folks from the region who no longer reside there. For weeks prior to the early spring
festival, students at the school will spontaneously call out “Hillbilly Days!!” in the
hallways, cafeteria, and classrooms. School attendance during the festival hovers at sixty
percent. The festival, a significant fundraiser for the Shriner’s Children’s Hospital, is
built upon a celebration of traditional representations of hillbillies. While many people
attend in their typical clothing, many people embrace the opportunity to come in hillbilly
attire\textsuperscript{13}. The festival includes performances by local and nationally known bluegrass

\textsuperscript{13} Hillbilly attire typically includes patched denim overalls and either no shirt under the overalls or a flannel shirt. For women, hair is
groups, craft fair, a jalopy\textsuperscript{14} parade with local notable community members dressed as hillbillies, as well as more generic community festival components. Chalya’s reference is to Hillbilly Days, not hillbillies. As this is an event that magnifies the cultural symbol of the hillbilly, it is not meant to reflect daily life for Appalachian residents but is sold to outsiders and to one another to contrast the more culturally deficient image of a hillbilly defined by outsiders.

Her third item, coal mines, also suggests the tension of perspective, particularly when read in relation to a subsequent sentence: “People say that everybody in Appalachia is redneck hillbillies living in poverty with no teeth that [sic] make a living working in the coal mines.” Here, Chayla positioned coal mines as another negative aspect of an outsider’s perspective on her cultural community. This perspective that links coal mining with poverty and hillbilly discourses is in direct contrast with how Chayla consistently positioned coal mines. For Chayla, coal mines were a source not only of family income, but were the communities main industry. Indeed, not only were coal mines one of the largest employers in the region, but also held many well-paying jobs requiring a range of educational preparation.

\textit{Challenging authoritative discourses with heterogeneous Appalachian communities}. As has already been discussed, the authoritative discourse on Appalachia is built on essentialized and deficit understandings of the region. The power of the discourse is evidenced through the lamination of any of the deficit traits onto any resident of the region. For Appalachian adolescents the experience of challenging outsiders’ essentialized and deficit understanding of who they are is an expected part of interacting

\textsuperscript{14} A “jalopy” is the old term for old-fashioned cars associated with Clampett’s from \textit{The Beverly Hillbillies}. Usually worn in pigtails.
with outsiders. When Kevin explained to common stereotypes of his regional community at the beginning of the focal unit he wrote, “One of the biggest things I have heard people discuss about our area is our accent and that we are uneducated” (Stereotypes, Kevin, 1.20.10). Essentialized by his accents and assumed to be ignorant have, for Kevin, been frequent experiences in his travel as a military recruit.

In his response, Kevin engaged a partial second order positioning by acknowledging some “truth” to the first order, but also by countering it. Following this statement in the section for students’ own perception of the region, he wrote, “Some people do fit the stereotype, not all people do. A lot of people are schooled, a lot with college” (Stereotypes, Kevin, 1.20.10). Kevin did not accept the common description of the residents as uneducated. He acknowledged that some residents “fit” the stereotype, but that others do not. In providing evidence for his claim that not all residents live in ways that “fit” the stereotypes, Kevin referred to the degree to which people have completed formal schooling. Kevin could look around his community and see all the professions representing the business, health, law, mining, engineering, education, and other such fields filled with middle class and upper class individuals sharing the same last names as his peers and sounding like him. There was no doubt for Kevin that people from his community sought out professional lives built on high educational achievements, even when at the same time, he had peers and neighbors who did not finish high school successfully. Kevin could hold these two contrasting ways of knowing his community in juxtaposition and see that outsiders would only see the flaws.

Kevin was not alone in speaking back to the essentializing discourses of
Appalachia; in the same literacy event Tracy described the multitude of deficit ways Appalachian residents are described by outsiders, as well as the multitude of ways that residents live within and beyond these discourses. Her list of stereotypes included: "bad hygiene, overweight, poor, hillbillies, inbred, dropouts, illiterate, bad workers, pill poppers, really religious, no teeth, talk funny, red neck, barefoot & pregnant, alcoholics, racist, cultured" (Stereotypes, Tracy, 1.20.10).

In the section for students to share their own perception, she wrote:

1/3 the people are lazy, the other 1/3 work decent, and the last work very had a lot of older people are really religious
some do well in school, but quite a few don't care and drop out
people (some) don't care about hygiene or living conditions
Quite a few have one of them bad qualities
It is really divided - there are some people who fit just about all other qualities that people think of them and a few who have a couple. But there is also plenty who work hard and earn it, who are successful and good hygiene and educated.
(Stereotypes, Tracy, 1.20.10)

In constructing her version of the first order positioning she has heard by outsiders, Tracy addressed a wide range of characteristics common to the authoritative discourse on Appalachia. Like Kevin, Tracy’s second order positioning included naming clearly that this discourse is on the whole inaccurate, even if there was some accuracy within it - mostly regarding the increased presence of poverty, there being a number of people who did not have stable income from a job, and a significant number of her peers
who rejected schooling as a worthwhile endeavor for them. That is, she acknowledged that there are people in the communities who live in accordance with this discourse, yet, Tracy also observed that there is vast variation in how people live their lives in the Hilltop communities. Given her status as a relative newcomer to the community, she demonstrated her attention to heterogeneity in ways of living in relation to the stereotypes suggests a disruption of an essentialized positioning of the region’s residents.

*Assessing Appalachian discourses for accuracy.* The adolescents I worked with at Hilltop High School understood themselves to being a position to assess the accuracy of the dominant discourses. To assess the discourses, students drew from both the texts of the focal class and their own lived experiences. When the class text supplied sufficient critique of authoritative Appalachian discourses, then these could be re-voiced by the student. For example, in his written summary of Lewis’ chapter Kevin wrote,

“In the chapter, ‘Beyond Isolation and Homogeneity”, he [Lewis] portrays the thoughts of urban areas that we are against modernization and improvement. This, however, is completely incorrect. It is little known, but before the coal boom in the turn of the 20th century, we did strive for improvements” (Back Talk, Kevin, 1.26.10).

Leveraging the arguments and facts from Lewis’ (1999) chapter (see Chapter Three for a summary of the chapter), Kevin set a clear purpose for his summary: the “thoughts of urban areas” is “completely incorrect.” From here, Kevin continued to summarize the multiple ways in which Appalachia has historically been inaccurately represented in a range of texts. Likewise, Tracy looks across the narratives of the unit to
ask: “Just like in everything we have read and watched, they each demonstrated the great
efforts the people of Appalachia went through for unions. Does that look like laziness to
you? …” (Story, Tracy, 3.29.10). She described the work of Appalachian coal miners and
families, union organizers and striking families, and coal camp nurses as evidence of the
hard working, persevering spirit of Appalachian families – a direct confrontation of the
discourse of Appalachian laziness.

**Differentiating between of insider/outsider positions and perspectives.** For the
students, there is a clear distinction in how residents understood rural Appalachian
communities and how outsiders saw the community. First, insiders, “mainly focus on the
hardship of the miners and how living here is….People who were born in the
Appalachian [region], or have lived here for quite some time, tend to relate [emphasis
added] to the struggles we have in this area” (Story, Kevin, 3.30.10). Outsiders, on the
other hand, “tend to think more of the negative aspects such as lack of education and
[presence of] drugs….and the amount of welfare that we are on” (Story, Kevin, 3.30.10).
In this brief introduction, Kevin quickly outlined the two positions based on their
subscription to the discourses of working-class struggle or cultural deficit. If one
participates in the discourses of working-class struggle, one stands in *relationship* with
struggle and with others in struggle; if one participates in the discourses of deficit, then
all one can see is the failures.

Kevin was careful to name that he saw trends in the patterns of discursive
constructions. That is, according to Kevin, outsiders *tend* to engage in these particular
discursive patterns, and so too do insiders *tend* to engage in these other particular
discursive patterns. In naming these patterns as tendencies rather than rules, Kevin left space for individuals otherwise categorized into these binary groups to engage in differing views of the region at different times.

Also important is that in these categorizations, Kevin provided some flexibility in who populates these categories and in the strictness of their definitions. In his consideration of who qualifies as an insider, here Kevin wrote that individuals “lived here for some time” are included. This extension of his definition comes on the heels of our class viewing of Harlan County USA, filmed by an outsider over the course of a year, and an episode in a whole class discussion in which Kevin joked with me about being an outsider (transcript 3.16.10). Within these discussions the class had made clear both the filmmaker’s and my own efforts to be responsible in representing the “hardships” local residents face in the region (field notes 3.22.10). In it is acknowledgement of the space for agency for locating oneself within particular Appalachian discourses, rather than being assigned permanently by birth one’s insider or outsider position.

Citing limitations on both sides of the insider/outsider discourse. Like Kevin and Chayla, Tracy’s reflection on the “story of Appalachia” began with establishing the presence of first order positioning constructed through the discourses of Appalachia as deficient. Also like her Appalachian peers, she used second order positioning to challenge this discourse. However, unlike her peers, she was more explicit in naming that she saw some truths in some stereotypes. That is, there she did see an increased presence of poverty and a significant number of people who did not have stable income from a job, and a significant number of her peers who rejected schooling as a worthwhile endeavor
for them. Yet, Tracy also observed that there is vast variation in how people live their lives in the Hilltop community.

Below are a series of excerpts from Tracy’s reflective writing:

When people talk about the history of Appalachia, they tend to always bring up two sides. One side is agreeing with the stereotype of Appalachia and the people, while the other side is disagreeing with that and proving them wrong. They don't really have an in between. People, when talking about their history, tend to wander in one direction or the other.

To begin, it is safe to say everyone knows the stereotypes given to Appalachia and is people...You have the people who, when they start talking about Appalachia, make sure they emphasize this more than the other things. They agree with it too because they might actually see an example of that and are single minded. It seems it is easier for them to talk about the bad than anything good...

However you have the people who tell the history of Appalachia with great praise. They highlight all of the good things about Appalachia. They talk good about mines and coal producing and the challenges they had to overcome. Just like in everything we have read and watched, they each demonstrated the great efforts the people of Appalachia went through for unions. Does that look like laziness to you? … (Story. Tracy. 3.29.10)”

Tracy began her reflection with an acknowledgment of the simplistic dichotomous nature of the "story of Appalachia.” She went on to comment on the shared knowledge of
stereotypes of Appalachia and the residents, and that either these were the focus or the cultural assets of the region were the focus. In this commentary, she also offered recognition of the truths within each perspective. For example, for the perspective that highlights the negative stereotypes, Tracy noted that someone might have seen a person who seemed to resemble the stereotype, and thereby seemingly affirm its veracity. In regards to the perspective that highlights the cultural assets, Tracy drew evidence from the multiple Appalachian texts used in the class regarding the intense unionization struggles and the labor-intensive coal-mining that took place in the region. To her reader, Tracy posed the question: "Does this sound like laziness to you?" Rhetorically, she positioned the reader as someone expected to confirm the remarkable work ethic of unionizing coal miners, and then by transference, the confirm the flaw in the stereotype of laziness applied to Appalachian residents.

**Naming outsiders’ willful ignorance.** In the literacy event of writing “the story of Appalachia’s history” at the conclusion of the focal unit, Chayla expressed investment in the discourse of insider / outsider and the discourse Appalachian deficiency as one constructed by outsiders. She described the first order positioning she saw outsiders engaging when she wrote, “When Eastern Kentucky or the Appalachian Region is brought up, the first thing people usually think of is ‘dumb rednecks’, ‘toothless hillbillies’ and things of that nature.” The people holding these notions, according to Chayla, are, regardless of the source of their information, outsiders: “Whether they actually know what they are talking about or not, ‘outsiders’, as I like to call them, see us as uneducated” (Story, Chayla, 3.29.10). She concluded her opening paragraph inquiring
rhetorically about a local fact that seemed so obvious to Chayla: “Do they not realize we have the #1 hospital in the nation?” (Story, Chayla, 3.29.10). In this rhetorical question, Chayla used the fact of the hospital’s status (i.e. earning national recognition in a survey), to use second order positioning. In her counter positioning, she also positioned outsiders as having limited knowledge of regional facts, thus further disqualifying them from making comments about the region.

More specifically, she argued that the show’s director actively sought to “make everything to appear bad” (Story, Chayla, 3.29.10). This particular episode, however, is not alone. “Shows like that do not show the real Appalachia. They just focus on the bad which can be found anywhere. This further worsens the stereotypes of the area” (Story, Chayla, 3.29.10). During our viewing of the 20/20 special, multiple students verbally critiqued the filmmakers for turning off the cameras when driving by middle-class homes on their way to an interviewee’s home, and for searching for the family who most closely resembled common stereotypes. Josh asked, “Why do they work so hard to only tape that one family at the head of the holler when we’ve got nice homes? I’d like them to do one of those shows down on Northridge?" (field notes, 3.28.10). There was a clear feeling of hearing the intentions layered onto the images of their communities framed through the dominant discourses (Holquist, 2002).

Positioning Self As Other: We’re the same as any other place. The worlds of rural Appalachian adolescents have been discursively constructed as different from the “center” of a self-other relationship in which non-Appalachia is understood as the objective center. It is from this authoritatively defined relationship that non-Appalachians

15 Pseudonym for a local wealthy neighborhood made up of well manicured large homes of coal mine owners, hospital administrators, etc.
engage in “Self Opposed to Other” positioning (McVee, Baldassarre Hopkins & Bailey, 2011). The focal students demonstrated their understanding of this monologic, non-Appalachian-centered self-other positioning and its relationship with the external discourses defining their communities. To de-center and re-position non-Appalachia is a significant task, even at the local level within each other’s lives. This work relies on Appalachian adolescents’ confidence in their ability to see and articulate the similarities between the quality of life in non-Appalachian communities and their own.

**Challenging discourse of Appalachian deficiency.** This discourse of sameness was particularly internally persuasive for Chayla. Importantly, her claim of sameness did not come from a place of desire for erasure of her own community’s markers of cultural identity; it was a claim for being seen as of equal quality. When asked in the first journal entry of the focal unit to respond to the list of stereotypes they have heard outsiders make of their regional communities she wrote, “I think that we are the same as any other place. There are people like that everywhere. We just talk differently. But, I mean, we are different than how things are done in big cities. There are poor people everywhere you go” (Stereotypes, Chayla, 1.20.10). Her assertion that the region as “the same as any other place” different is built, in part, on a classed reading. Quickly acknowledging both differing language practices and cultural ways of “how things are done”, Chayla positioned these differences as superficial traits that should not count as a marker of significant difference.

In her examination across the focal unit’s texts, Tracy’s approach to taking up the discourse of sameness more clearly acknowledged the role of position supporting a
particular perspective, and that these could be limited on either side of the dividing line. As well, she acknowledged more clearly the challenges the region does face, yet within a context of greater diversity than typically assigned to the region in the authoritative discourses. She wrote:

When it comes down to it, though, no matter what, when talking about the history of Appalachia -- it is going to have many smaller points -- but the main thing people talk about is either the bad side or the good. They might brush a little on the other, but they'll mainly stick to just one. It doesn't help that this is like that everywhere and outsiders are just like that too. It is just like in movies -- you have a good side and evil side -- no in between. People just ignore the fact that you need both -- you wouldn't know good without knowing bad and vice versa. (Story, Tracy, 3.29.10).

Tracy concluded her reflection with the observation that "this is like that everywhere, and outsiders are like that, too" (Story, Tracy, 3.29.10). There are good and bad sides to outsiders, she pointed out. This move subtly recontextualized the focus on Appalachia's good and bad sides to fit within the context of "every" region's good and bad sides. Not only did Tracy use that argument to apply to the discourse around the region, but she also used it to apply to people. This application is suggested through her use of "and outsiders are like that, too." That is, both regions and people have good and bad sides, and these sides are typically discussed in isolation. Tracy argued, however, that both the good and the bad are needed. We need them, Tracy continued, in order to know of the other, and in order to understand the whole picture.
Challenging discourse of Appalachian poverty. From early on in Appalachia’s construction, poverty has been central to the discourses of the region. As described in Chapter Three, rates of childhood poverty and joblessness are unacceptably high, yet the recycled images of barefoot, dirty, and thin children hardly represent life in the Appalachian region. This type of imagery was particularly offensive to Chayla, and she frequently argued for the awareness of the region’s economic heterogeneity. For example, Chayla concluded her written review of the “Story of Appalachia” (see Chapter Three for assignment details) with a dismissal of the discourse of Appalachian poverty but not a denial of poverty within Appalachia. Chayla repositioned the poverty that is equated with rural Appalachia as the same as poverty experienced by the entire nation. She saw the region bearing large responsibility for representing poverty in the nation. “We have a working class of people that strive to make it on their own; not everybody from around here just wants their welfare check and not to have to work” (Story, Chayla, 3.29.10). On multiple occasions, Chayla had taken up a discourse of economic diversity to challenge the discourse of Appalachia as the nation’s center of poverty. Referencing the dense neighborhoods of coal mine owners, engineers, and operators, university and hospital administrators in both Akers County and the neighboring counties, “We have more millionaires living in a square mile than any other place in the country” (Story, Chayla, 3.29.10). While this is not a verified fact, it is commonly stated in the county as a second order position when someone makes a comment about widespread poverty in the region.

Displaying her skepticism for ‘outsiders’’ knowledge, Chayla discredited the
20/20 Special, “Children of the Mountains” for providing confirming evidence of outsiders’ uninformed stereotypes of the region. More specifically, she argued that the show’s director actively sought to “make everything to appear bad” (Story, Chayla, 3.29.10). This particular episode, however, is not alone. “Shows like that do not show the real Appalachia. They just focus on the bad, which can be found anywhere. This further worsens the stereotypes of the area” (Story, Chayla, 3.29.10). Here, Chayla returns to the “Self-As-Other” positioning between the region and “anywhere” that she had engaged in her earlier writings. For Chayla, the struggles of the region are not unique to the region; they are in line with the challenges experienced across many regions. The difference is situated in the position for Appalachia that shows like 20/20 have constructed. By drawing from common stereotypes, this type of journalism reinforces the position of Appalachia in the national discourse as the site of poverty and depravity: “We just seem to be frowned upon” (Story, Chayla, 3.29.10). Chayla did not deny the challenges of the region, but sees them existing, “just like any other place.”

Engaging in insider/outsider discourse play

In this literacy event, three young men in the class, including Kevin, and myself engaged in playful teasing positionings that were saturated with insider/outsider discourse. Using ritualized language from generic “country-westerns” movie or television scripts, the young men positioned me as a dangerous outsider. In response, I accepted the role of a villainous Yankee. Our interactions intertextually referenced old “country westerns” and the film we had just watched together, Matewan. Following our viewing the film Matewan, we read an excerpt of a review on the film. Our overt task
was to analyze the argument structure the writer used to evaluate the film. In the review, the writer describes the use of accent with the characters representing local West Virginian residents as “difficult to understand, demanding attention” and “creates a time and place.” I was reading the paragraph out loud in order to lead to another question, but immediately Savannah exclaimed, “It wasn’t hard to understand!” (transcript, 3.15.10). A series of snickers about outsiders not being able to understand accented characters rolled through the classroom. I responded, “Well, we live here. The person who wrote this is obviously not from here” (transcript, 3.16.10). I located myself as within the definition of someone who lives here, and that by implication, we have the ability to understand the accented speech used in the region. My comment sparked a play of language across several students and myself:

Kevin: [exaggerated accent] He city folk. Did he go to school or something? [Several girls giggle]

AS: Ehh, just remember who your teacher is!

Brad: You’re an outsider!

AS: [Playfully harsh] I am, I am an outsider. You don’t like me? Oh, I see how it is, Brad.

Kevin: [exaggerated country accent and volume] We don’t like your kind around here!

Chayla: Ehh! [Guffaw]

Kevin: He called you a Yankee!

AS: Oooh!
Josh: [Exaggerated country accent] We’re gonna run you out of town on the rail.

AS: Hahaha! I’ve already infected you with my Yankeeness!

Kevin: This town isn’t big enough for the both of us.

AS: It’s not tall enough for me, is what you’re saying.

AS: [Exaggerated country accent] All right, young’uns, let’s take a look. So, what’s going on in the first part of that paragraph, since y’all getting your education. (Transcript, 3.15.10)

This episode highlights a play on several significant discourses circulating about rural areas generally. Borrowing from storylines of a “country-western” movie genre, “insider/outsider” and “city folk/ country folk”, we verbally entered into a play on the roles we were supposed to inhabit: Yankee, outsider, “proper” speaking teacher and territorial, uneducated, “country” accented students. We were no longer addressing one another from our personal positions, but from our roles in a discourse (Bakhtin, 1981; Harré & van Langenhove, 1999). The stock lines can be seen in the following phrases: “He city folk”, “We gonna run you out on the rails” and “This town ain’t big enough for the both of us.”

Likewise, Kevin, Brad and Josh each adopted an exaggerated “country” accent as they re-voiced the phrases. I do the same in my last turn of this dialogue as I re-direct the conversation back to the academic task at hand. As we engaged these well-worn utterances, we signal our addition of new ironic meaning into these utterances through our exaggerated accents.

In this episode in the literacy event, we teasingly engaged in Self-Opposed-to-Other
positioning. In some ways, this can be seen as risky play as my students positioned themselves as active critics to my presence in the region. The riskiness is illustrated in Chayla’s outburst of disbelief (“Ehh!!”) that they were pushing these lines. I explicitly reasserted my role position in a teasing fashion, and that served as a set-up for continued play. This type of interaction required a great deal of trust across student and teacher lines. In part, the trust came from the knowledge that we were, in effect, indexing our positioning of one another as Self-Aligned-with-Other. That is, our play was informed by a mutual understanding that we were allies engaged in critical readings of discourses about Appalachia. While my position as an insider/outsider was re-articulated, our interplay ended with me playfully taking on an insider stance as I used an exaggerated local accent to re-direct the diverting play back the academic task at hand. With their laughter, the class accepted this tacit assertion of my insider status and of my role as a teacher.

This episode also serves as a transition from a concentrated exploration of how the focal students explicitly negotiated insider / outsider discourses to an exploration of their negotiations of language variation discourses. In the context of this rural Appalachian community and in the focal class, language variation discourses work in conjunction with insider / outsider discourses. That is, speech is most commonly understood as a cultural artifact of one’s cultural location: Appalachian (a.k.a. “hillbilly” or “country”) or not.

Section 2: Students’ Engagement of Language Variation Discourses

Students’ positioning as an insider or an outsider took place not only through speech,
but also about their speech. That is, one’s style of speech (i.e. perceived accent, word choice, stylistics, etc.) was “read” as a marker of one’s identity positioning within a storyline (Davies & Harré, 1999). For example, someone’s speech act heard as “country” might be assigned the position with various Appalachian storylines: “good ole country boy” or “ignorant hillbilly” or “sharp-tongued redneck chick”, or any number of common stories culturally associated with “country” speech. With such a positioning comes expectations for behavior, values, and interests (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999). These expectations of a “good ole country boy” or an “educated” sounding young woman demonstrate the non-neutrality of these discursively constructed positions (Gee, 1996; Foucault, 1972). Several years ago during my earlier teaching experiences in Akers County, there was a backlash in the community against an advertisement in the local paper. The advertisement was for a workshop on how to loose your accent. Sponsored by the local theater company staffed primarily by non-Appalachians, the advertisement suggested that local residents would want to sound less “country” for business, travel and acting. For some residents, this was a desired opportunity; for many others, it was considered an insult to their Appalachian identity. This anecdote contextualizes the tensions in the social world of rural Appalachian communities regarding language and identity. Understanding which discourses around language practices are relevant and understanding how they are used in positioning Appalachian and Appalachian heritage students is central to understanding how a young person takes up an identity position of a student in an English class.

In this section of the chapter, I argue that the focal students were marginalized by
their cultural ways of speaking within dominant relations of power and agentively cultivated particular ways of speaking so as to strategically position themselves and others within local relations of power. Specifically, the focal students described the ways they experienced and perpetuated social consequences when Appalachian speech patterns are used as a cultural artifact to signal belonging and difference within dominant and local relations of power, and asserted agency in challenging the discourses of Appalachian English as a signal of ignorance. These findings are exhibited in data excerpts from three literacy events and the interactional episodes within them. The first two events were class discussions based on the reading of *Storming Heaven* (Giardina, 1986); the third event was a class discussion that grew out of our watching *Matewan* Sayles, 1987).

**Identifying language as a cultural artifact signaling difference or belonging.**

“Each time we talk, we literally enact our values in our speech through the process of scripting our place and that of our listener in a culturally specific social scenario” Holquist (2002) writes of Bakthin’s understanding of the relationship between language, discourse and social position. When language is conceived as a cultural artifact, it can be seen as a tool to locate a speaker’s belonging to a particular cultural group. Within this act, it is less about accuracy, and more about an assertion of one’s position of power to claim or name one’s own or someone else’s inclusion or exclusion. In dominant relations of power in which Appalachian residents are marginalized participants, their cultural artifacts and discourses are used by non-Appalachians to position them as non-normative. In local relations of power, Appalachian residents engage in similar practices of
monitoring the insider / outsider divide through assessment of cultural artifacts and discourse participation.

**Using language to position Appalachians as not belonging.** Our reading of the fictional character Miles from *Storming Heaven* (Giardina, 1986), who had changed his eastern Kentucky accent while going to college, made available a conversation on language-based marginalization. Sharing with peers one’s personal experiences with language and language marginalization is a common cultural language practice in Akers County. Throughout this conversation, while only five students participated in the sharing, all of the students in the class leaned in or looked towards the conversation. Students across the classroom nodded in affirmation of these recollections. There was often laughter at well-timed moments. I listened as Brad picked up an intonation and phrasing pattern reminiscent of storytellers. While other students inserted bits of stories and punch-lines, Brad maintained the floor for the first part of this episode.

Kevin: I notice that people leave this area and travel a lot, they talk real proper.

AS: Why do you think that’s come to be true?

Brad: People make fun of them. I go to King’s Island, and people make fun of me.

AS: What happened?

Brad: I went, me and my cousin. They told him to sit down, and he said, I am sitting down.” The woman next to him said, “You’re from Kentucky, ain’t you?”

*Class laughs.*

Chayla: They [strangers] think I’m from Tennessee. I was at King’s Island with the band when we were in grade school and they thought I was from Tennessee.
Brandie: I went to Tennessee, and someone from Tennessee asked me if I was from Tennessee.

*Class laughs.*

Brad, Chayla, and Brandie both shared a story about traveling to the center of their home state or a neighboring state and being identified as being from an Appalachian region / state based on overheard speech. Within this identification is the assumption that someone’s “citizenship” is associated with his/her speech. That is, someone’s assumed state identity is made legible by his/her speech. At first glance, these stories can seem trivial conversations that many people around the country experience when traveling; however, for Appalachian residents, it is a practice that signifies perpetual outsider-status once they leave the region. Furthermore, there is an assumption that a stranger has the social right to identify someone’s belonging or not belonging to a certain place based on overheard speech. This pattern took place not only in face-to-face interactions, but also through multiple player video gaming. Brad described the common practice of being verbally assaulted when playing Xbox:

Brad: I get made fun of all the time when I play Xbox live.

AS: Yeah, that is what you were saying the other day.

Brad: ‘You dumb redneck’, that’s what they say. There’s lots more comments.

AS: Really?

Brad: Do you do your sister.

AS: That is not okay! [*Class laughter at my reaction*]

In addition to identifying one’s home, language use for these students is also a site of
cultural interrogation. For Brad, playing on his Xbox Live, which involves speaking live via headsets during the game with players from around the world, was an interaction fraught with commentary on his speech. In these interactions, his counterparts position Brad as an Other, a ‘dumb redneck’. In their naming of him, they position themselves as opposite him, as the standard by which Others, like Brad, are judged. With no fear of meaningful reprisal or negative social consequence, Brad’s counterparts draw from the stale authoritative discourse on Appalachian residents as another discursive tool to position Brad as an Other. To this retelling, I exclaimed, “That is not okay!” in a mixture of both disgust and sadness.

In dominant relations of power, the discourses of Appalachian deficiency and moral corruption are available tools for making sense of an Appalachian adolescent. Brad’s ongoing experiences in the social world of video gaming with non-Appalachian peers demonstrated the ways in which moral values are commonly linked with the perception of one’s language as an artifact indicating one’s cultural identity. For rural Appalachian adolescents, this positioning shows the continually reified link between Appalachian identity and moral depravity and ignorance that is beyond the boundaries of normative behaviors and morals of non-Appalachian people.

While understanding the scope of status rankings accorded to one by one’s regional dialect, Kevin rejected the claims of being a “redneck” when labeled as such by individuals from Tennessee and Texas:

Kevin: What's weird is that people from Texas, they make fun of people from here for being redneck, and they're just as redneck as we are. That's what weird.
I've actually been made fun of by someone from Tennessee [pointing out irony].

In his examples of people from Texas and Tennessee making fun of the speech patterns of individuals from the Akers County area, Kevin flatly rejected their self-positioning as a neutral Self; Kevin repositioned them in relation to himself in as Self-As-Other position, sharing the same “redneck” status as Appalachian residents. In so doing, he accepted that there is a position for “rednecks” as an Other, but denied that only Appalachian residents can be positioned to take up this identity location. Again, the location of the speaker and the addressed matters: to be a “redneck” who does not claim that identity position personally, but uses it to differentiate someone else is understood by Kevin as illogical. The use of these terms can only be understood in a Self As Other positioning demonstrating shared experiences within the discourses constructing that position. However, as the speaker positioned himself as non-Appalachian, and therefore normative, he was able to draw from the discourses available in dominant relations of power to position Kevin as non-normative (i.e. a redneck).

**Positioning Appalachians as unintelligible.** As the conversation continued, Chayla shifted the conversation from language as a tool for locating someone’s belonging to language as a tool for making someone socially unintelligible:

Chayla: Did they ever not understand you [to Brad]? When I went to [Summer Art Program], people didn’t understand me. Like seriously. I had a girl who walked around with me went around interpreting, cause-

Kevin (interrupting): You serious?

Chayla: I would tell them my name, and they were like “Sh-I-la?” I was, like,
“Sh-A-la” They still didn’t understand me.

AS: Huh

Chayla: Yea. It was pretty bad.

[Pause in conversation]

Kevin: Um…Whoa…

Transcript, 1.29.10

Chayla turned the conversation with a question for Brad: “Did they ever not understand you?” She does not give him time to respond, as she used that question to tie in to her own dramatic experience at a summer arts program. Her voice had a sharp edge in it as she spoke. As described in her profile in Chapter Three, during the summer prior to her senior year Chayla participated in a prestigious state-wide program thanks to her talent in drawing. While there, Chayla found that her peers from the same state claimed that they could not understand her accent. One young woman there named herself Chayla’s “interpreter” for the other program participants. This experience of being positioned as an unintelligible Other (i.e. Self-Opposed-to Other) because of her speech patterns was a powerful experience for Chayla. Her speech and presence so jarred the social world of the art camp populated by her peers across the state that there was a concerted effort to symbolically heighten her non-normative status.

As Chayla shared her experience, her peers sat quietly and listened intensely. While stories of language marginalization were not at all uncommon, Chayla’s experience was one that captured our full attention. Within the context of the school and community, Chayla was a high status young woman: pretty, well-dressed, active in both
sports and academics, and recognized state-wide as a gifted artist. All the same, here their peers from their own state were silencing her. Her experience illustrated how vulnerable they all were to the social marginalization outside of their communities’ linguistic and cultural boundaries. There was a long moment of silence after her story. This type of experiential narrative that is shared becomes a part of a collective memory that reinforces the boundary lines of the insider/outsider discourse.

**Positioned as an Outsider: You aren’t from here, are you?** After a loudspeaker announcement interrupting the class discussion, Tracy returned to the class conversation on language variation by telling a story from her experiences in moving away from her town in Michigan to Akers County. Tracy recalled the experience of being questioned about her insider status to her former home community only a few months after moving to Akers County.

Tracy: When I went back to Michigan last year, we went bowling. This old man and his son tell my mom, he said, “You’re not from around here, are you?” I was like, “Last year, but I was born here.” He was like, “I couldn’t tell.” I was, like, “I was born here!” I felt so awkward though!

AS: You were like, this was my home.

Tracy: Yeah, for 15 years, and I’m gone, and I come back, and..[trails off]

AS: That is really interesting.

Tracy: It’s weird, though. My mom started laughing. She said, “I told you, you started school, you started changing.” I said, “Well, when you’re around people every day…you start picking it up.”
AS: Yeah, absolutely.

Tracy: Either that or you get made fun of.

Transcript 1.29.10

In this episode, Tracy recalled the power of being positioned in a Self Opposed to Other discourse by someone with whom she had previously shared a community. No longer understood as a member of her former community, Tracy is shocked by the positioning. In her narrative is the emotional consequence of this Othering (i.e. awkward, weird). Especially in the context of the other conversations on language variation, Tracy was expressing the social cost associated with aligning oneself with a new community without full acceptance while simultaneously losing insider status in her former hometown. Furthermore, she was beginning to experience the social cost of sounding Appalachian in the dominant discourses of American English.

Tracy’s last comment however, especially when understood in context with the up-coming episodes, indexes three significant aspects of social positions relative to the discourses around language in Appalachia. First, Tracy acknowledged that she intentionally adapted her speech to sound more like her peers. This “combination” of speech patterns was earlier ratified in the up-coming episode by Chayla’s comment. There had been a recognizable shift in Tracy’s speech pattern as she learned to speak more and more like her Akers County peers. Her intentional effort to align her speech pattern to that of her peers is a powerful challenge to the authoritative discourse on Appalachian language deficiency. By seeking out and working to adopt speech patterns and language practices that are socially marginalized outside of the central Appalachian
region, Tracy had positioned herself as a Self-Aligned-with-Other in relation to the marginalized linguistic community. Indeed, maintaining her previous language practices in the region would have been socially marginalizing within her local peer context (Importantly, as her peers demonstrated in the up-coming episode, they did not express insult or frustration at her adoption of their speech patterns; rather, it seemed like an understandable outcome of having lived there for almost two years). Her rejection of the authoritative discourse in favor of slowly adopting marginalized language practices because of the social consequences of maintaining northern language practices also points to the significance of attending to local systems of privilege.

Like for the characters in *Storming Heaven* (Giardina, 1986), the women in Sohn’s (2006) study, and for Tracy’s mother school was a social institution school considered a site of cultural contact and change. In coming in contact with new discourses, both local cultural discourses and academic discourses, Tracy had significant choices to make about in which discourses she would participate. Inevitably, her choices would be understood as choices of values and claims about her social position in relation to those around her. As well, while any new social position would afford access to new social and material resources, it would also constrain her access to other resources.

*Monitoring educationally-driven speech change.* In this first episode of the literacy event, Chayla, her cousin Brandie, and I begin to explore Chayla’s perception of her brother Nick’s language change after he goes to college. Our dialogue is a personal response to our first class reading of the character Miles in *Storming Heaven*. The day before this episode Kevin had offered an observation, “Did you notice how it shows
Miles talking before he goes to school and then when he comes back, “I don’t say ‘hit’ no more…talks all properly” (transcript 1.28.10). Kevin’s query was not taken up in the class discussion; however, the next day I intentionally returned to the topic by asking about Miles going away to college.

AS: Kevin asked yesterday about Miles’ language change in college. Do you know people who that happened to?

Chayla: Yeah, my brother talks different now.

AS: James? [Chayla’s brother; I was his ninth grade English teacher]

Chayla: No, Nick. Since he went to Morehead.

Brandie: No, he doesn’t [speak differently].

Chayla: Yes, yes, he does. Like, you can’t tell as much when he stays for a while, but when he comes back in the summer…yeah, I can tell when he first went there and came back. He talks less … country. You know.

AS: Do you make fun of him for that?

Chayla: I used to; I don’t much anymore, cause I don’t really notice it as much as when he first went a stayed for a while and came back.

(Transcript 1.29.10)

In this episode, Chayla actively took up the discourse of education causing language change and positioned her brother as evidence of this discourse’s veracity. In her first order positioning, Chayla did not index explicitly additional social meaning to his language change (e.g. That his language change caused other socially meaningful changes in his identity positioning). Apparently, the change was a debatable difference,
as her cousin Brandie used second order positioning when she countered that she perceived no change in his accent. To this challenge, Chayla modified her initial positioning of her brother’s use of language to reflect the role in which time and place play in her perception of his language use. In her modified positioning, she drew in her audience and aligned ‘us’ with her: “You can tell…I can tell…You know.” As partners in understanding of his language difference, we are assumed to understand what speaking ‘country’ or less ‘country as the case may be, means. In other words, Chayla voiced an expectation that her social peers in the local relation of power would draw from similar discourses of Appalachian speech. These expectations, for Chayla, include the social pressure to not change Appalachian speech when going to college. As with the women in Sohn’s (2006) study, there was a fear of being read as shifting away from one’s family and cultural community when participation in academic discourses and language change began. Families and friends drew from local discourses of cultural pride and preservation to monitor and pressure someone going to college, even if it is in the region.

Drawing from my knowledge of Chayla as a playful person, as well as her pattern of antagonism related to language use, I asked her if she made fun of her brother for his language use, and she admitted that she used to do so. Marking the transitory nature of language and positioning, she noted that she engaged in the teasing only when she noticed an observable difference in his language. Once he returned to familiar practices, she no longer positioned him as someone who had chosen to sound different from the collective speech community. Her use of social pressure (i.e. teasing) to critique his language change also indicates a sociocultural value of sounding “country.”
Throughout her talk, Chayla drew upon the dichotomy of “country” vs. “proper” as cultural distinction of language practices. This was a familiar discourse to me; I heard students categorizing speech that they used as being either “country” or “hillbilly”, and their label for speech pattern for those without an Appalachian accent as sounding “educated” or “proper.” In my first years at the school, this was a frequent complaint about me; I talked too “proper.” Over the years, I adapted my speech to be less formal, and to intentionally take on local phrasings so as to reduce the difference between my speech and the patterns of my students. All the same, I was troubled by the use of the word “proper” because while it reflected current power invested in white middle-class language practices, it also reified Appalachian cultural language practices as “improper.” Discourse of language dichotomy is discussed further in the next section.

**Social monitoring of language of outsiders.** As the conversation on language change continued, Chayla made an observation about Tracy’s speech that was taken up by several members of the class. At first the conversation continued to be a shared space for relating common experiences. The focus was on our lives, not the text, so students and I physically relaxed. I was sitting in a student chair alongside two quiet girls. As this portion of the conversation proceeded, attention became more focused on Tracy:

Chayla: Tracy’s changed a lot, too.

Brandie (overlapping): Tracy has, too.

Chayla: She has changed.

Brad: She still has her accent

Chayla: It’s like a **combination**. I remember we used to get you to repeat stuff.
We’d get you to say your “a”s. Like, you said it so funny.

Daniel: We said oil and you said “ol” and things like that

Chayla: [laugh] yea!

Kevin: [to Tracy]: say, “oil”

Tracy: no..no…no

AS: It’s okay [to Tracy]. Don’t make her say anything [to Kevin and the class].

Tracy: That is what they did all last year.

AS: Not nice, is it?

Tracy: Not after a while.

AS: It gets old, people. It gets old.

Transcript 1.29.10

Sitting next to one another, the two girls leaned together and looked directly at Tracy who was sitting across the room in the last row. Tracy smiled tightly at the beginning of the conversation. In this episode, Chayla used first order positioning in claiming that Tracy’s speech has changed since her arrival at the school a year and a half before. Brandie affirmed this positioning almost simultaneously. This was not the social attention she sought. Brad used second order positioning to counter the claim, observing that Tracy seemed to have her Michigan accent. Chayla then modified her positioning by labeling Tracy’s speech as a combination, a word she emphasized. The combination, I presume, is between her Michigan speech and the speech patterns of her peers. Further providing evidence of the change, Chayla recalled past social practice of her peers and herself pressuring Tracy to repeat particularly marked words to objectify her difference.
Kevin cajoled her to say a word that would highlight her different accent. Together, Chayla, Kevin, Daniel, and Brandie, three of whom are socially powerful peers, led social practice. In doing so, they tacitly positioned themselves as insiders with power, and Tracy as a vulnerable outsider. Within the local power relations, they drew from the discourses and practices they were familiar with experiencing, and used them to position Tracy as an object of assessment. They publicly monitored her progress towards sounding like an insider.

Responding to peer speech monitoring. Tracy’s response to her peers’ monitoring of her speech demonstrates the social consequences of difference. As she explained, their monitoring of her speech had begun when she first arrived, and while had subsided, was easy to provoke a reprisal. She firmly resisted Kevin’s cajoling request for a reenactment. I interrupted the process as I observed Tracy physically responding to the social practice by curling up in her seat, and pulling her arms closely around her chest. Typically a young woman who laughed off discomfort, she dropped her head and began to pull on her hair (Reflective notes 1.29.10). As the next episode shows, however, Tracy’s experience with language marginalization was a two-sided process.

Broadening addressivity of speech monitoring. At the point at the end of the excerpt, I redirected the conversation on to my own experiences as a young girl from Maine moving to Iowa and experiencing significant social pressure to repeat words in my Maine accent for the entertainment of my new Iowan peers. I drew from these emotional experiences in my past to inform not only my protection of Tracy, but also my effort to reposition the conversation on language use as one that is not unique to the Appalachian
community in this time or specific community.

**Defining boundaries of “proper” vs. “country” speech.** The class dialogue moved to unpack the discourse of “proper vs. country” speech. As stated earlier, I identified a pattern of using the term “proper” to describe the language use of people who were perceived to have Northern accents and/or used academic vocabulary, while the term, “country” was used to describe the language use of someone perceived to have an Appalachian or Southern accent and informal or regional vocabulary. This imprecise definition is parallel to the difficulty my students had in defining their usage of the word “proper.”

Chayla: I think people sound funny when they talk proper. It sounds funny to me.

AS: My students used to make fun of me.

Chayla: When I hear people talk proper, I can’t help but laugh. I don’t know why.

AS: Why is it that it is called talking *proper*?

Chayla: I don’t know.

AS: You know what I mean? Why is it *proper*?

Brandie: Because we don’t say all the words, all the letters.

AS: But **no one** does! I mean, that’s the English language. Look at the word, ‘come’. No one says, ‘com-e’. Why ‘proper’, out of all of the words to use? My students used to say, ‘Ms. Slocum, we can’t understand you, you’re talking proper.’

Kevin: We don’t pronounce our “g”’s a lot of times.

Chayla: and we add “r”’s too. I add “r.”
Chayla: Like ‘warsh’ and stuff. Like my sister in law, like wheelbarrow -

**wheelbah::r.** She says ‘born’ for ‘barn’, too. Yeah, I always make fun of her.

Chayla boldly claimed that “proper” speech “sounds funny” and makes her laugh. In this way, and as she had implicitly done through the teasing of her brother (see above), Chayla positioned “proper” speech as a practice that is other than and distant from her own. Brandie reasoned that speech patterns other than those belonging to those who are Other to her speech community were proper because of the pattern of not pronouncing particular letters. Chayla and Kevin build on Brandie’s reason as they offered examples of ‘non-standard’ speech: dropped ‘g’ and the addition of ‘r’. Chayla shared how she teases down. On the other hand, Chayla also shared how she teased her sister—in-law about her “country” pronunciation of the words “wheelbarrow” and “born.” Chayla seemed to attend very closely to how someone sounds as a mode of determining where someone falls on the scale of “proper” and “country”, and engaged in social pressure through teasing to position that person as engaging in language practices that veered too far in either direction.

AS: If every region is a little bit different, why is there a ‘proper’ one in people’s minds?

Kevin: ‘Cause it’s from the city.

Tracy: It just might seem more proper to them, than what they’re saying.

AS: Every place has a variation, so there is no one right way to speak. Actually, since Chaucer’s time in the 1400s, people have been debating about how English should be spoken. There were criticisms in the 1400s on the problem of
“immigrants” not speaking English “properly.”

Kevin: Interesting.

AS: But, if you think about it, English is made up of multiple languages. It is how language changes: interaction with different languages.

Kevin: Is that how much the English language has changed?

AS: Exactly. It’s because of immigrants. And people traveling. Going back and forth, and bringing new words back.

Kevin: When you study history…

Transcript 1.29.10

Throughout this episode, there was an uncertainty about how to define what is an issue of perception, and a perception that seems widely shared and socially ratified throughout this community. There was a collaborative effort across several students to put together pieces of the definition based on pronunciation changes.

Kevin participated in our social exploration of the local definition of the term “proper.” When I had dismissed their attempts to define it through a list of pronunciations they perceived to characterize their speech as just a part of any region’s differences, and then pushed them again, Kevin made a suggestion. In this suggestion that “proper” speech comes from the “city” is a first order position that maintains the Self-Opposed-to-Other positioning between the country and the city ways of speaking. Indeed, his reason is evidence of the circular logic that can undergird the “truth effects” of an unquestioned discourse: “Proper speech is from the city, because country speech is spoken in the country” (Foucault, 1972).
As I continued to pose questions and historical context for language change, Kevin, an eager student of history, picked up on the historical references. He questioned with interest into the historical origins of English. His curiosity was piqued by the idea that language was a political and historical issue. Contextualizing language practices with power relations allows students to reassess the language diversity around them, and see their own language practices in relation not just to another practice at this time, but to practices across time, each within their own political context.

**Asserting privileged position for Appalachian English speakers.** As the focal students were well aware of, their language practices, speech and discourses were evaluated within two sets of power relations: dominant and local. Within these relations there is variation, but in general, there are these two domains. Furthermore, as they exist within both domains simultaneously, Appalachian adolescents are aware of the tension in which they reside. Within local power relations local discourses that promote cultural pride are privileged. Like rural Appalachian adolescents, classrooms within schools within Appalachian counties do not function within these relations solely. Thus, on the occasion when the texts and dialogue align with local discourses, there is available to students an opportunity to assert local privilege. In this episode, students have been discussing perceptions of the Giardina’s representation of dialect in the character dialogue. As is discussed in the previous episodes, a character in the novel, Miles undergoes language practice shift because of going to college. Giardina (1986) represented his language prior to going to college like the other characters from eastern Kentucky and West Virginia through the use of a representation of their English dialect.
When students had first encountered this representation, several complained at the awkwardness of reading speech that is written in dialect. Tania, a student who I hear as someone with a significantly pronounced Appalachian accent, commented, “I didn’t like the way they talked; it was aggravating” (transcript 1.28.10). Nearly a month later, the subject of the written representation of dialect speech came up again when they encountered another character who is an Italian immigrant woman. She was represented as having limited English proficiency through her novice usage of English. Her language was also full of symbolic metaphors, adding to the complexity of the chapters written in her voice. Kevin, now comfortable with reading a version of his own language represented in the book, posed a powerful question to the class:

Kevin: So, since her chapter was so hard for us to read, and the rest of the book wasn't, if you take this book to New York, is it going to be really complicated for people in New York City to read?

Brad: [exaggerated accent] Sho:::ot

Josh: [exaggerated accent] ‘Cause they’s a lot of sense in it.

[Whole class laughter]

Brad: It’d say the word “ain’t” ‘n’ they’d go crazy.

Kevin: Just the way it’s wrote, we understand a lot better than we would classic literature.

AS: Wait… That’s an interesting point, but at the same time, you guys were making comments too about it, saying “hit” instead of “it.” It caught your attention, because it’s not how a lot -
Chayla: [interrupting] We’re not used to seeing it in *writing*. We *hear* it but we don’t. Of course, some of ours would probably be worse! It’d be worse if you spelled it out.

Transcript 2.19.10

In this short episode, Kevin proposed to his peers the possibility of their privileged status in understanding the Appalachian dialect represented in *Storming Heaven*. In this act, Kevin rejected the authoritative discourse of speakers of Appalachian English as less literate. His suggestion, one that I had never heard a student suggest before in class, made available a new discourse – a discourse of Appalachian privilege because of Appalachian English.

Chayla lent additional support to Kevin’s proposal by explaining the flaw in my observation that several students had difficulty comprehending the dialect writing. Her counter was that the discomfort was only due to limited exposure to the speech in writing. She also conceded to the discourse that names Appalachian English as idiosyncratic and thus difficult to read in print.

*Translating understandings with language variation discourse*. Tracy entered into this episode by proposing that there is a sense of relativity in the judgment. Relative to their more urban peers, these students described their own and that of their family’s speech as country, and less proper.

*Translating for outsiders*. Tracy’s use of the third person plural pronoun “them” seems to suggest that Tracy was positioning both herself and me as outsiders (i.e. Self-As-Other), but herself also as a translator on my behalf (i.e. Self-Aligned-with-Other).
That is, by saying, “It just might seem more proper to them, than what they’re saying”, Tracy was explaining to me that from her Appalachian peers’ perspectives, the speech patterns not associated with their community, and the ones associated with metropolitan centers is more “proper.”

*Playing the hillbilly fool.* In this episode, two young men spontaneously take up a humorous approach to ratifying Kevin’s initial comment. They do so by taking on the voices of “hillbilly fools”, a trope common in old Jack Tales and similar to the simple-mindedness of characters in *The Beverley Hillbillies.* Brad took up the discourse of insider and outsider implicitly by temporarily voicing an exaggerated “country” accent. In doing so, he heightened the difference between their location as “country kids” and a perceived outside reader from New York. Josh added to this play on difference by speaking in an equally exaggerated accent to comment on the book: “they’s a lot sense in it.” Here he was drawing from a discourse on hillbilly as illiterate fool, wherein a book is an object of wonder and knowledge, and the hillbilly fool is in awe of it. This brief play on hillbillies takes on the Self Opposed to Other position typically assigned by outsiders to distance Appalachians, but these young men used it to flip the positioning. That is, as they embraced the marginalizing discourse, they added a new layer of satirical intention in the meaning of the discourse and used it to re-direct to position those who assign ignorance to Appalachian identities as buffoons. This flip was recognized as such by all of us in the class, and it was responded to as a representation meant to provoke humor at the tired trope. Similarly, when Brad turned the gaze back to the outsider reader when he predicted that the presence of the word “ain’t” would provoke the outsider reader to “go
crazy”, he ridiculed the rigidity of middle-class language practices. In turn, he implicitly positioned Appalachian residents as more calm and playful with language than those counterparts.

**Section Two Summary**

The Appalachian adolescents in this study participated in the social practice of sharing experiences of being marginalized because of their Appalachian speech. Their speech was used by non-Appalachians to designate the student’s as non-normative, at times unintelligible, and thus not belonging as they are in mainstream social contexts. Even when this positioning was not hostile, it had accumulative negative effects for the adolescents who are perpetually signaled as different within the dominant relations of power outside of their linguistic communities. Conversely, within the local relations of power, some of the Appalachian adolescents participated in the discourse of insider/outside in order to monitor through social pressure, ridicule, and isolation the language practices and speech patterns of new residents, family attending college who are shifting their speech patterns, and those who represent too excessively non-normative Appalachian speech patterns.

As has been discussed in this chapter, the literacy events within this focal unit were designed to make available for explicit negotiation relevant sociocultural discourses. As the teacher/researcher I had drawn from five years experience as a teacher in this school to inform my pedagogical decisions. I had selected texts and designed assignments that would both provide space for students to explore their own and each others’ perspectives on these discourses and continue to build on students’ fluency with
academic literacy practices. There were two relevant discourse categories: discourses relating to insider/outsider positions and discourses relating to language variation.

In the literacy events affording the negotiations of insider / outsider discourses, the three focal students engaged in a fundamental critique of the relationship between residents and non-residents of the region because of the relationship’s monologic construction. Despite decades worth of criticism by Appalachian residents, the discourses around Appalachia have been primarily constructed by non-residents to describe and evaluate the lives of Appalachian residents. In their reading of, and written and oral responses to the Appalachian-focused texts, my students have countered the monologic relationship with a strong critique of the way in which they have been addressed by the discourses. Knowing position matters in shaping perspective, each of the focal students has questioned their own, their community’s, and non-Appalachian communities’ positioning by the authoritative discourses. Central to each of their arguments is the acknowledgment of Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism (Holquist, 2002). Like Bakhtin, they see themselves and non-residents “occupying simultaneous but different space” geographically and ideologically (Holquist, 2002, p. 21). Thus, the focal students recognize their ability to see their own communities from their insider position with a perspective that non-residents and people who participate in problematic discourses of region do not share.

Significantly, each focal student articulated their understanding of the ways in which power flowed through these perspectives and positionings. Throughout the literacy events of the course, the focal students have critiqued this intentional practice as a central
piece of perpetuating the insider/outside tension. Through the classroom dialogue in which students had the opportunity to personally respond to the representations of Appalachian residents, each focal student, in their own way, also recognized the “truth effects” of these discourses on themselves and their peers. While he recognized that he and his peers were clearly addressed in the discourses, Kevin called for individual agency to not accept as internally persuasive the authoritative discourse on Appalachia’s cultural deficiency. Like Kevin who described how some community members are caught in the authoritative discourses on Appalachia, Tracy described the “truth effects” of these discourses in ways that recognized both constraint and agency on the part of her peers. In contrast to both Kevin and Tracy, Chayla had resisted the consequence of these “truth effects” by flatly rejecting the premise of the discourse that positioned her sociocultural community as deficient.

A requirement of the insider/outsider discourse is the ability to determine on which side of the dichotomy someone belongs. For the Appalachian and Appalachian heritage students in this study, someone’s speech was a “socially recognizable” signal in making this determination (Gee, 1990). Informing this assessment were discourses around language variation. There were two texts in the course that afforded direct engagement with sociocultural discourses of language variation: *Storming Heaven* and a critic’s review of *Matewan*. In both texts were explicit negotiations of perceptions of representations of spoken Appalachian English dialect. These text-based negotiations afforded significant exploration of language variation discourse and complex identity positioning work. Within and across the literacy events, Tracy, Kevin, and Chayla took
up and assigned shifting and contradictory positions that index the complicated social relations that exist in their situated lives (Moje & Luke, 2004). These complicated social relations were particularly highlighted by Chayla’s experiences as both the monitor of peer speech and having her speech monitored by peers. Responding to the narrative of a character’s language change, Tracy shared about her emotional journey to adapt her speech and its emotional and social consequences. Her intentional choice to adapt her speech to be similar to her Appalachian peers subverted the authoritative discourse that marks Appalachian English dialect as being inferior, as well as her desire to position herself as an ally to her Appalachian peers. Likewise, in responding to the usage of Appalachian English dialect in print, Kevin challenged the authoritative discourse of Appalachian English speakers as less literate by proposing a privileged position for himself and his speech community peers in understanding the dialect in print.

As I have stated previously, these discourses were already and always circulating in my students’ worlds including in the context of school. The texts and the literacy engagements I designed to accompany them invited students to take a sustained examination of the discourses from within academic literacy tasks as well as from personal stances of reflection. The implications of my students’ negotiations within the context of the literacy events will be discussed in Chapter Five.
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

In this chapter I propose several elements of rural Appalachian adolescent identities and extend Morrell’s (2007) literacy pedagogy of access and dissent to the rural Appalachian context. As a teacher-research study, my findings are informative for K-12 teachers, educational researchers, and other scholar-educators who bridge these contexts and engage in teacher-research. Furthermore, as a study situated at the intersections of Appalachian literacy studies and adolescent literacy studies, this research brings these areas of scholarship into conversation in ways that further both.

I locate this study as a response to the discursive construction of rural Appalachian adolescents as intellectually, culturally, and morally non-normative and less capable than their middle-class, non-Appalachian peers. Rural Appalachian adolescents have grown up negotiating these externally produced discursive constructions of what their communities are and who they are capable of being. On television, they see themselves essentialized as ignorant, incestuous and pitiably poor, when in the community they see complex histories and economies intersecting and impacting people’s individual and community choices. The complexities of their own lives and those around them rarely seem to be taken seriously by those outside of the community. Even within their communities, these circulating discourses provide ammunition for internally directed blaming.
Theorizing Appalachian adolescent identities

The data of this study tells the story of three focal students as they live in the material and discursive worlds of rural Appalachia (Gee, 1990; Holland, et al., 1998; Jones, 2006). Each student is uniquely positioned in the world, and is called to answer the discourses addressing him or her (Bakhtin, 1981; Holland, et al., 1998; Holquist, 2002). For each of these students, locating themselves within and against competing class and cultural discourses was a daily experience, particularly within school and in their English class with me, a non-Appalachian teacher.

Responding to and using power invested in the cultural discourses around Appalachia is a significant element of Appalachian adolescent identity. The constraining, homogenizing forces in the authoritative discourses that are used to name and position Appalachian adolescents cannot be ignored. Even as Chayla sees them as part of the air she breathes, like air quality, they have an invisible (and visible) way of making your life more or less healthy and complicated (Chayla, End of the Year Interview, 6.11.10). In their critiques, the focal students made powerful claims of agency in both denouncing outsiders’ claims on epistemic and linguistic privilege and for asserting their own privileged positioning.

Establishing an Appalachian adolescent identity position often includes positioning oneself in relation to outsiders. Appalachian adolescents know that locating oneself is a relational task: who they are changes depending on where they are and who they are with. While not necessarily visibly marked by their Appalachian-ness, any Appalachian resident knows that “as soon as she opened her mouth, I knew she was
ignorant!” (Purcell-Gates, 2002, p. 134). Just as Purcell-Gates reports in her account of an urban Appalachian mother experiencing an interaction with a non-Appalachian teacher, one’s working-class “country” Appalachian speech marks an Appalachian person as non-normative in relation to non-Appalachians. Thus, many writings and discussions began with the first order positionings by non-Appalachians. Drawing from local language practices of sharing experiences of linguistic marginalization and naming ways in which particular artifacts of their cultural community have been essentialized within problematic outsider discourses, in their talk and texts, the focal students critiqued the power relations that marginalized them. At a fundamental level, the students found non-Appalachians in a cultural and ideological position that prevented knowing and understanding Appalachian residents. Specifically, the outsiders’ discourses and positions blocked their view: they could not see the heterogeneity that the focal students could see their communities saturated with. The focal students named economic diversity as a central missing component to outsiders’ discursive production of their communities. Where outsiders saw Appalachian poverty and cultural deficiencies, the focal students saw a range of incomes from very wealthy to very poor, and those who were invested in formal education and those who chose to not pursue formal education – not out of intellectual incapability, but by choice or self-doubt.

Not only did the focal students fundamentally denounce the epistemological authority of outsiders on the grounds of their consistent failure to accurately see the community, but also the willfulness of their ignorance. When faced with the opportunity to see more clearly the community and to translate for other outsiders that cultural, historical and economic context of central Appalachia, those who position themselves as
arbiters of cultural representations *choose* to perpetuate inaccurate representations. All three focal students named the intentionality with which the filmmakers seemed to reproduce the same images of Appalachian residents.

Other forms of agency came as the focal students asserted their epistemic privilege (Camano, 2007; Wissman, 2011). Critiquing the failures of non-Appalachians is only one side of the coin. These Appalachian adolescents also understood themselves as positioned in a far better location to name and claim their lives. The move to renounce, denounce, and announce was quick: renounce their positioning as ignorant, poor, etc., denounce outsiders’ right to position them in the first place, and point out the obvious logical conclusion about their own position as a source of knowing. These moves were seen across journal entries, textual analyses and class discussions.

Textual resources were key in their agentive responses. Students drew from their own personal experiences, but also from the texts used in the class and broader speech genres tied to popular media texts. At times, critical responses were built into the literacy events. For example, the ways in which two related literacy events posed a challenge for the students to position themselves in relation to two different sets of discourses also revealed identity positioning work significant to each student varied. When asked to write a formal summary of the arguments of Lewis’ (1999) chapter that challenges historical texts perpetuating two common misperceptions of central Appalachia, Tracy, Chayla and Kevin were caught in a tension of responding personally to the misrepresentations and remaining “academic” by not personally engaging the texts. In the oral reporting, Kevin had positioned himself and his peers as being addressed by the discourses in the original texts, despite them being nearly one hundred years old. In being addressed, Kevin felt
compelled to respond personally and politically, and not just to rely on Lewis for the critique. His politicized response to organize his peer group into a unified cultural community was a powerful agentive move. He positioned himself as a political leader, taking on the rhetorical moves of a preacher and fulfilling his social position as a school leader. However, in the writing, Kevin was the one most clearly caught in the tension as he began his summary with a strong personal reaction to the texts Lewis’ critiqued, but then shifted into academic discourse. Chayla, on the other hand, did not position herself as addressed by these discourses, even though they were similar to the ones currently used to address her cultural community. Rather, Chayla was more compelled to answer the discursive expectations of the academic genre by maintaining a de-personalized position as the writer. Her only “slip” was to highlight what Lewis had likewise argued: that the coal industry was critical in the economic development of central Appalachia. Unlike her rural Appalachian peers, Tracy, an urban Appalachian young woman relocated to Akers County, did not seem to be caught in the tension in the academic writing of the summary. Where she had taken the opportunity of the literacy event of oral reporting to locate herself as addressed by the texts Lewis critiqued, she positioned herself quite differently in her summary. Her social positioning in class had strategic implications of asserting herself as a community member, linked by history made available by Lewis’ text. With a different audience (her non-Appalachian teacher) and a different purpose (to demonstrate her academic writing), Tracy participated fully within the expectations of the genre and the audience by not taking up reflexive positioning. In these two literacy events of oral reporting and written summaries of Lewis’ text, the students created the opportunity to meet their needs.
Students also asserted their agency to ridicule the discourses by intertextually referencing popular media. For example, Kevin, Josh, and Brad drew from the genre of westerns to play with my status as an unwanted outsider in their community. Later, Brad and Josh would also draw from the archetype of a hillbilly fool as built in *Beverly Hillbillies* in order to play out the assumption that hillbillies cannot make sense of a book as Kevin played the straight man asserting the argument that hillbillies were *better* able to understand Giardina’s Appalachian characters than non-Appalachian readers. In these cases, the textual resources made available both factual information, as well as opportunities to leverage personal experiences and useful archetypes to question the production of an ignorant hillbilly discourse.

Another significant aspect of Appalachian identity is positioning oneself in relation to discourses of Appalachian speech and language practices. This study drew from Heath (1983) to theorize the relationship between cultural community and language practices and identities. As Hicks (2002) described of Heath’s (1983) *Ways with Words*, “language practices are depicted as aspects of the social histories and cultural forms of life that fully saturate cognitive concepts. Infused with feeling, values, and the specificity of place, oral and literate language activities…are described as practices lived out within differing cultural and class localities” (p 24). For the adolescents in Akers County, the social history of one’s language is fraught with judgment in and outside of one’s communities. From out-of-state family vacations and playing online video games to in-state summer programs for talented students and school trips, when an Appalachian adolescent interacts with non-Appalachians, these are opportunities for being positioned as not belonging and as an ignorant hillbilly. Within these contexts of dominant social
relations, homogenizing forces empower mainstream English speakers to marginalize non-normative English speakers. The marginalization cannot be reduced to pressure to change one’s accent; it is a discursively produced link between language and identity that is packaged: to reject one is to reject the other. Appalachian adolescents’ language and identities are continually rejected. However, within local communities across multiple social institutions, maintaining some variation of a “country” accent is often privileged over “proper” speech. In these local power relations, sounding like an insider in the community has positive social consequences such as assumptions of shared values and shared experiences. Tracy tapped into this discourse and chose to adapt her speech patterns to more closely resemble her peers’ in Akers County. Significantly, she chose to not maintain her more “mainstream” speech patterns, as they did not position her well within the local power relations of her peers. On the other side, however, she quickly learned the social consequences of being perceived as “not belonging” by her former community members in Michigan. It is also important to note that the hegemonic practices of monitoring others’ cultural language practices are perpetuated across contexts. Not dissimilar to the intense questioning Chayla, Kevin, and their classmates experienced in their travels, the experiences Tracy had when she entered into the social arena of Hilltop High School were intense and socially ostracizing.

The challenge the focal students pose to their listeners is that as Appalachian and Appalachian heritage adolescents, they know the flaws and incompleteness in the discourses used to name and frame them produced and consumed by other non-Appalachians, yet they are continually positioned as ignorant “as soon as they open their mouths.” By positioning the examination of sociocultural discourses as an academic
endeavor informed by their lived experiences and popular media texts, the focal course of this study supported the legitimacy and value of these students’ intellectual work as Appalachian scholars. Adolescents in this study constructed local definitions and identity positionings that complicated the discursively constructed boundaries used to define “insider” and “outsider” positionings and monitor language variation. In doing so, they challenged the authoritative discourses of what it means to be from Appalachia. Studies such as this one promote scholarly attention to the tension between local agency and constraint in the face of historical sociocultural deficit discourses in marginalized communities.

**Pedagogical Implications: Extending a Pedagogy of Access and Dissent to Rural Appalachia**

I understand my students as always and already engaged in some forms of critical work, and thus acting with agency. I also understand that some of what we engaged would be familiar (e.g. discourses, a particular text, etc.) and some would be new (e.g. mode of inquiry, a particular text, a particular literacy practice, etc.). Thus, I do not see curriculum in this study as externally-produced “liberation” or “emancipation”; rather, I see it as a step towards a literacy “pedagogy of access and dissent” (Morrell, 2007). In a literacy pedagogy of access and dissent, students “acquire the skills they need to ‘succeed’ while also developing a powerful language of critique of systems of social reproduction” (Morrell, 2007, p. 237). Like Morrell, I believe that students, particularly those who come from marginalized communities, need to have access to academic

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16 I resist terms like “liberation” and “emancipation” in this context, because while I acknowledge systems of oppression at work within communities and schools, I also consider these terms that describe what is being done to someone (i.e. “I empower you”), this language does not acknowledge individual agency or partnership.
literacies because of their currency within institutions of power. And, like Morrell, I believe that these literacies alone are not enough; a critical literacy lens is needed.

“Critical literacy is the ability not only to read and write but to assess texts in order to understand the relationships between power and domination that underlie and inform them” (Morrell, 2007, p. 241). Designing situated literacy curricula that take seriously the need for the dialectic of access and dissent is a central task of educators, regardless of their location.

Often “place-based” pedagogies are located within rural communities, and are typified by oral history and cultural documentation projects (Branscombe, Schwartz & Goswami, 1992; Brooke, 2003; Wiggington, 1991). These are important and valuable projects that bring together renewed attention to the gifts and complicated histories within a rural community. However, these projects are also typified by minimal attention to the critical literacy components necessary when working within marginalized communities. This study suggests that centering academic literacy practices on the critical exploration of sociocultural discourses affords opportunities for rural Appalachian adolescent to name and negotiate socioculturally relevant topics as they relate to students’ lives generally and to their Appalachian identities. It was important for all students to increase their rhetorical dexterity and fluency in the “codes of power” through engaging in academic literacy practices, but particularly for young people from culturally, linguistically, and economically marginalized communities (Carter, 2008; Delpit, 1995). Significantly academically underprepared because of unfortunate and poorly timed circumstances (i.e. the loss of two English teachers and the district’s shortage of qualified applicants), my particular students did not have the experience with using academic
literacy practices that they deserved. Furthermore, as members of a sociocultural community in which discourses of illiteracy and education as “perilous empowerment” (Locklear, 2011) circulate broadly, it is important that adolescents know they are competent with academic literacy practices as they position themselves in relation to these (and other) discourses.

While the nature of the academic literacy practices embedded in this study was not the centerpiece of the research, these practices were a key element in my design of the course. Constructing a curriculum that takes up relevant sociocultural issues while also supporting students’ rhetorical dexterity (Carter, 2006) with academic literacy practices requires careful attention to the students’ communities from multiple lenses (i.e. historical, socio-political, economical, ecological, literary perspectives), as knowledge of students’ engagement with sociocultural discourses, a careful selection of texts, and intentional design in the engagement of the texts. More specifically, the texts should provide opportunities to reflect on self-other relations; name the dissonances across the discourses of their lives; and provide information students can use to intertextually position themselves in ways that challenges authoritative discourses on marginalized identities.

**Conclusion**

When rural Appalachian students are considered, it is most typically through the lens of failures of their academic performance, families, schools, and communities. When the lens of failure is not used, there is a celebration of quaint culture. The critical work in which Appalachian adolescents are already engaged continues to be unheard in the conversations about adolescent literacies. Importantly, powerful scholarship on the
literacy practices and identities of young urban and rural Appalachian children and adult women has begun to challenge the discourses targeting those groups. Even within this scholarship, however, the specific identity work of Appalachian adolescents is mostly overlooked. As Appalachia’s present and future, these young people exhibit skill and leadership that can make positive differences from within their communities.
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