We Are Crew, Not Passengers: Middle Level Students’ Experiences of the Expeditionary Learning School Reform Model and Its Relationship to Literacy, Agency, and Diversity

DISSERTATION

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By

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Abstract

At the time of this study, there were 165 Expeditionary Learning (EL) schools in the United States, but there was little research on the EL spaces of Crew, Community Meeting (CM), and Electives. The purpose of this study was to address that gap by (a) investigating the spaces of Crew, CM, and Electives in an EL school, (b) discovering the literacy events and practices that existed in these spaces, and (c) reporting on the student experiences in an EL school in regards to literacy, agency, and cultural diversity.

This study drew from a theoretical framework that combined sociocultural theory, New Literacy Studies, and theories on agency and adolescents to foreground the socially situated nature of youth and their literacies. The qualitative research design was informed by ethnographic methods in order to grasp how those within the culture understood it and how they made sense of their experience. The data included observations, interviews, focus groups, and document analysis over a year long pilot study and subsequent four month study. In particular, this data reflected the stories of eight case study students across three spaces central to the EL school reform model, Crew, CM, and Electives, in a newly developed EL middle school in a large Midwestern city. Within the three school spaces, I focused my analysis onto two Crews who met every day for three months, fifteen all school Community Meetings, and three Electives that met twice a week for four months. The findings in this study are presented through
descriptions of (1) the history and structure of EL as a school reform movement, (2) student experiences within this model, (3) literacy events and practices, and (4) claims about student experiences in Crew, CM, and Electives with regard to student agency, literacies, and cultural diversity.

The findings of this study indicated that the EL model comes from and is perpetuated by a privileged, white, middle to upper class male, Christian, heterosexual, and European perspective, which can create certain tensions and possibilities when placed into an urban setting; that adults often determine the students’ experience in this EL school despite the emphasis on the co-construction of community through rhetoric featuring “we are Crew, not passengers” and the Design Principles; and that EL schools provide space for a rich culture of literacy even in the nontraditional spaces of Crew Community Meeting and Electives; however, students are living lives full of rich literacy practices on their own that are not always valued within the model.

The study encourages teachers to consider the experiences that the youth in this study share through the data, to consider the rich literacy practices that are made possible through educational spaces like Crew, CM, and Electives, and to engage in explicit discussions and literacy practices involving cultural diversity and student agency.
Acknowledgments

First, my deepest gratitude goes out to the students, staff, and families that are connected to this study. Thank you for letting me look into and learn from your world.

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I am also grateful to the other members of my OSU community: Dr. George Newell, Dr. Brian Edmiston, Dr. David Bloome, Dr. Cynthia Selfe, Dr. Harvey Graff, Dr. Anna Soter, and Dr. Peter Smagorinsky (at UGA), Dr. Mary Beth Ressler, Dr. Ryan Rish, Dr. Denise Davila, Dr. Audra Slocum, Dr. Jill Smith, Frank Beickleman, Dr. Christy Bragg, Lisa Patrick, Emily Nemeth, Dr. Robert Mitchell, Dr. Allison Wynhoff Olsen, Nicole Luthy, Amy Bradley, and Jamie Smith.

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place that you can have a happy and joyful community in which to learn. Thank you Linda, Carol, Mike, and Pat for caring for my daughter while I wrote.

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Fields of Study

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Origins of the Study

As a former middle school teacher in an Expeditionary Learning (EL) middle school in the Pacific Northwest, learning more about the affordances and constraints of the EL reform model of education through the student perspective was important to me. During my years at an EL school, my teaching benefitted from the collegial relationships, common language, and professional development that the EL model fostered in our school. Because of EL, I took greater risks in my teaching, developed comprehensive interdisciplinary curriculum, and helped to create structures in the school that supported students and fostered connections between students, teachers, and the community. In many ways, I owe much of the development of a “teacher as learner” stance (Feiman-Nemser, 2012) to the EL model and the supportive and generous guidance from the EL School Designers that offered professional development on site and intensive multiday off campus institutes.

However, over time, I found myself stumbling into raced, classed, gendered, and sexualized tensions in the classroom that I felt unprepared to confidently investigate and understand. Although my undergraduate teaching training and the in-service EL training
claimed to work toward supporting all students, I realized later that I missed opportunities to serve all students. Those opportunities could have allowed me to consider how race, class, gender, and sexuality affected my students’ experiences and took shape in my classroom through my planning, instruction, selected texts, and interactions with students and their families. Some of the moments that stood out to me as missed opportunities involved:

1. Race- When reading an excerpt of *Black Boy*, an autobiography by Richard Wright, I shied away from a discussion on race, which was an essential aspect of the story.

2. Sexuality- I chose to combat the use of the phrase “that’s gay” among my students, but this was only because a loved one had recently identified himself as gay and I wanted to protect students that might also identify within the LGBTQ community. This was not a policy of the school or any part of my training.

3. Gender- I let boys often run the frequent Socratic seminars that occurred in my classroom to foster learning instead of actively working to encourage all voices, including the female students who were often quiet.

4. Class- I blamed students when they frequently failed to complete their homework or lost books. I did not realize that I was holding students from diverse socio economic backgrounds to my middle class expectations without seeking to understand the particulars of their lived experiences.
During my time as a teacher, I actively sought out multicultural experiences and relationships with diverse communities all over the nation. For example, I taught and connected with communities in Ohio, Maine, New Mexico, Southern California, and Nevada. Despite these attempts to create relationships with and better understand a diverse array of people and their communities, I remained reluctant and unsure when issues of cultural diversity emerged in my classroom.

It was not until I entered my Masters program at The Ohio State University that I examined the unearned privilege of my position in society, or the ways in which sociocultural constructions of identity perpetuated hegemonic norms. I finally asked how, I, as a white, middle class, heterosexual, private school educated, female was prepared to support the LGBTQ youth in my school; the diversity of socio economic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds of my students and their families; or hegemonic constructions of gender. I realized that I was woefully underprepared to support diverse students and work toward social justice and educational equity. I wondered how I might have unknowingly contributed to the marginalization of my diverse students and if the EL professional development opportunities and EL Core Practices (2011) missed an opportunity for training and guidance pertaining to cultural diversity. I wondered what literacy had to do with these issues, and I wondered what happened to students in this reform model. Because of these interests, I embarked upon a study of students’ experiences in EL schools with regard to the intersections of cultural diversity, adolescent literacy, and student agency.
Origins of Expeditionary Learning

ELMS was shaped from the Expeditionary Learning school reform model. EL was based on the Outward Bound organization founded by educator Kurt Hahn in 1941. Kurt Hahn was born in 1886 into a “cultured Jewish industrialist family in Germany” (Neill, 2008). According to the Outward Bound International (OBI) webpage (2013) Kurt Hahn unwittingly set the foundations of Outward Bound in his “Gordonstoun school in Scotland in the 1930's with only two students.” In 1934, the third pupil, “Prince Philip of Greece (who later became His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh) joined them in September” (OBI webpage, 2013). At this school, Hahn refined his philosophies into a practical curriculum that rewarded development of physical skills such as running, jumping and throwing, as well as learning to live in the outdoors through an expedition, and embarking upon a hobby or project, in addition to achievements in the classroom. (OBI webpage, 2013)

Hahn relocated the school to Wales and worked with “British shipping baron Sir Lawrence Holt to teach young British sailors the vital survival skills necessary during World War II” (OBI webpage, 2013). Together, their training program aimed to develop the “tenacity and fortitude” needed by sailors to “survive the rigors of war and shipwreck” (OBI webpage, 2013). This curriculum was:

Based mainly on Hahn’s belief that character development was just as important as academic achievement, the new school became the wellspring of experiential learning in the post-war period. Hahn found that people who were put in
challenging, adventurous outdoor situations gained confidence, redefined their own perceptions of their personal possibilities, demonstrated compassion, and developed a spirit of camaraderie with their peers. (OBI webpage, 2013)

This partnership quickly blossomed into the first official Outward Bound course in 1941. The name Outward Bound referred to the nautical term used “to describe a ship leaving the safety of its harbor to head for the open seas” (OBI webpage, 2013). Although the courses that he created “were originally developed to prepare British merchant seamen to survive at sea and to rescue others” (Pearson, 2002, p. 59), in modern day courses, participants signed up for opportunities to develop themselves as leaders through multiday excursions into wilderness settings. These courses included a vast array of activities including mountain climbing, kayaking, and trekking. These courses carried a significant price tag and could be taken as college credit; the majority of the clientele were white, middle class students (McQuillen et al., 1994). However, as Outward Bound grew, there was considerable adaptation of programs and venues. Programs became available for corporate teambuilding, for inner-city youth and for special populations such as recovering alcoholics, families or adjudicated youth. Programs moved from being solely wilderness based, to also being offered in settings like classrooms and urban centers. (OBI webpage, 2013)

All courses emphasized reflection, community, success, acquisition of skills, and the natural world. Participants were challenged but supported on their adventures, and these courses were often described as “life changing” (McQuillen et al., 1994). However, McQuillen et al. (1994) reported that tensions arose from the urban centers geared toward
presenting challenge in a way that supported the previously mentioned “vulnerable persons” in society. Those tensions were felt along class and racial lines stemming from the differences between backgrounds of the instructors and the participants.

From this organization, the original educational reform model was created and named Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound (ELOB). McQuillen et al. (1994) explained the shift from OB to ELOB:

In translating the Outward Bound model of change through challenge, the notion of challenge has been reinterpreted. Where challenge might mean a 26-day trek through the wilderness, challenge may now mean the completion of a difficult academic ‘learning expedition’ within the confines of a public school. Where teamwork previously meant helping each other scale a rock face or cross a roaring stream, teamwork may now mean listening attentively while classmates report their research on the history of their community. (pp. 45-46)

Eventually, the name was revised to EL and the EL network grew into 165 EL schools across the nation during the time of this study.

The detailed history of OB, and therefore EL, was meant to provide a foundational knowledge into the fundamental structure of all EL schools for this study. Clearly, the roots of EL come from nautical beginnings and were geared in most part toward men, whether they were sailors in the military or from the upper classes of society attending boarding school.

At the time of this study, EL had developed its own foundational principles, although its roots were still clearly tied to the foundations of OB. EL as a reform model
promoted the belief that the core of learning and growth was “interaction among individuals accepting a challenge in an unfamiliar environment; and this learning transfers to meeting today’s complex challenges at school or work” (Pearson, 2002, p. 59). EL emphasized learning by doing through a multi-year professional development plan with instructional materials and technical assistance that ushers in changes in culture, structures, teaching practices, and raises student achievement (Pearson, 2002, p. 59). Teachers were given time and support from an EL School Designer (and access to EL professional development institutes) to plan engaging expeditions that investigate topics relevant to the locale and community, connect core disciplines (Math, Science, Language Arts, and Social Studies), and to focus on high quality projects that display student progress and knowledge (school website, 2010). Teaching and learning in an EL school involved work in and out of the classroom to perform authentic research, involvement with content experts, opportunities to develop critical thinking abilities, as well as an emphasis on positive school culture by developing student agency, character, connection, and voice. Unique to EL schools were the learning expeditions that structured the academic year. They were “long-term, ‘real world’ investigations by teachers and students, of compelling subjects which culminate in public presentations” and always included dialogic literacy practices, “service to the community and adventure outside of the classroom” (school pamphlet, 2010). American Research Institute’s (2006) review of reform models explained that “the Expeditionary Learning model did not include a prescribed curriculum, but each school was responsible for creating an instructional model that aligns with the model philosophy. The philosophy was based on 10 Design
The following EL Design Principles and benchmarks are used as guiding philosophies for ELMS.

**EL Design Principles**

In order to guide EL schools like ELMS, EL provided ten Design Principles. These principles detailed ten essential components of the EL philosophy of education. On the EL website and in an ELMS school brochure (2010), these Design Principles are titled, described, and summarized into personal statements, which was an adaptation of the official EL wording to suit the needs of ELMS. These Design Principles are also taught each week in Crew on a rotating basis and distributed to the students on a bookmark on the first day of school. They are also present in the hallway of the school on a Design Principle of the Week bulletin board, as well as in the ELMS Handbook.
Figure 1 Design Principles

Of specific interest for this study was the Design Principle of “Diversity and Inclusion.” This Design Principle is described as increasing “the richness of ideas, creative power, problem-solving ability, and respect for others.” This principle was used at ELMS to encourage the recognition that “our differences make us stronger.” Unlike
some of the other Design Principles, this principle did not indicate to whom this principle was addressed. This principle was highlighted because it was discussed in detail throughout the discussion of the first claim.

**EL Dimensions, Core Practices, and Benchmarks**

In addition to the Design Principles, and in order to support student achievement in EL schools through meaningful and engaging learning expeditions, EL detailed a foundational structure based on five dimensions of life in an EL school. These dimensions were curriculum, instruction, assessment, culture and character, and leadership. The curriculum dimension encouraged EL schools to make:

- Standards come alive for students by connecting real-world issues and needs.
- Academically rigorous learning expeditions, case studies, projects, fieldwork, and service learning inspire students to think and work as professionals do, contributing high-quality work to authentic audiences beyond the classroom. Our schools ensure that all students have access to a rigorous college preparatory curriculum, and regularly analyze the curriculum to check alignment to standards and opportunities for all students to meet those standards. (Core Practices, 2011, p. 5)

The instruction dimension called for classrooms to be

- Alive with discovery, inquiry, critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration. Teachers talk less. Students talk and think more. Lessons have explicit purpose, guided by learning targets for which students take ownership and responsibility. In all subject areas, teachers differentiate instruction and maintain
high expectations in order to bring out the best in all students and cultivate a culture of high achievement. (Core Practices, 2011, p. 5)

The assessment dimension called for leaders, teachers and students to Embrace the power of student-engaged assessment practices to build student ownership of learning, focus students on reaching standards-based learning targets, and drive achievement. This approach to assessment is key to ensuring that schools achieve educational equity. Students continually assess and improve the quality of their work through the use of models, reflection, critique, rubrics, and work with experts. Staff members engage in ongoing data inquiry and analysis, examining everything from patterns in student work to results from formal assessments, disaggregating data by groups of students to recognize and address gaps in achievement. (Core Practices, 2011, p. 5)

The culture and character dimension of life in EL schools expected that schools like ELMS will Build cultures of respect, responsibility, courage, and kindness, where students and adults are committed to quality work and citizenship. School structures and traditions such as Crew, Community Meetings, exhibitions of student work, and service learning ensure that every student is known and cared for, that student leadership is nurtured, and that contributions to the school and world are celebrated. Students and staff are supported to do better work and be better people than they thought possible. (Core Practices, 2011, p. 5)

Lastly, leadership in EL schools were responsible for building
A cohesive school vision focused on student achievement and continuous improvement, and they align all activities in the school to that vision. Leaders use data wisely, boldly shape school structures to best meet student needs, celebrate joy in learning, and build a school-wide culture of trust and collaboration. Leadership in our schools goes beyond a single person or team—it is a role and expectation for all. (Core Practices, 2011, p. 5)

Within each dimension, EL provided Core Practices “that represent what the EL approach to education ideally looks like in a school and in a classroom” (Core Practices, 2011, p. 4). According to EL, the Core Practices were “not just abstract ideals: they are descriptions of actual best practices that we have documented from EL schools across the country” (Core Practices, 2011, p. 4). The five dimensions and corresponding Core Practices are displayed in the figure below. However, these Core Practices provided by ELMS did not reflect the most recent Core Practices available from the EL webpage. ELMS may have adapted some of the language to fit their audience or to fit the method of delivery (ELMS webpage). This wording was taken from the ELMS school website (2010) which explained that these practices “work in concert to promote high student achievement through active learning, character growth, and teamwork.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>CULTURE AND CHARACTER</th>
<th>LEADERSHIP AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT</th>
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<td>Using effective instructional practices schoolwide</td>
<td>Building school culture and fostering character</td>
<td>Providing leadership in curriculum, instruction, and school culture</td>
<td>Designing time for student and adult learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Designing compelling topics and guiding questions</td>
<td>Teaching reading K-12 across the disciplines</td>
<td>Ensuring equity and high expectations</td>
<td>Sharing leadership and building partnerships</td>
<td>Creating structures for knowing students well</td>
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<tr>
<td>Designing products and linked projects</td>
<td>Teaching writing K-12 across the disciplines</td>
<td>Fostering a safe, respectful, and orderly community</td>
<td>Using multiple source of data to improve student achievement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incorporating fieldwork, local expertise, and service learning</td>
<td>Teaching inquiry-based math</td>
<td>Promoting adventure and fitness</td>
<td>Linking Expeditionary Learning and school improvement plans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Producing and presenting high quality student work</td>
<td>Teaching inquiry-based science and social studies</td>
<td>Developing a professional community</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning in and through the arts</td>
<td>Using effective assessment practices</td>
<td>Engaging families in the life of the school</td>
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Figure 2 Five dimensions and multiple Core Practices of EL schools

Each of these Core Practices were boiled down into additional benchmarks for EL schools and published in a Core Practices (2011) 96 page booklet. Thus, in the most updated version of the Core Practices booklet the five dimensions lead to 38 Core Practices which are broken down into 143 benchmarks. Many of these Core Practices and benchmarks are discussed at length in chapter four.
Statement of the Problem

At the time of this study, there were 165 schools subscribing to the EL reform model across the nation. However, much of the research on EL does not address issues of cultural diversity, student agency, or adolescent literacy. Instead, it focused on academic achievement in relation to the model, teachers’ perceptions of EL professional development, and some aspects of literacy within an EL school. Investigations were needed to discover the ways in which EL conceptualized and incorporated literacy, and how these conceptualizations affected the EL student experience. This study responds to those needs.

Simultaneously, there was a pervasive deficit perspective of adolescent literacy that was shaping the discourse about schools and youth. In movies, cartoons, headlines, news reports, and television, US schools seemed to be under intense scrutiny and debate. A deficit perspective on youth and education blamed the current state of affairs between and amongst many different, yet actually interrelated, aspects of schooling: the institutional structure, teacher training, teacher unions, high stakes testing, parental involvement, homework completion, and student attitude. Work conducted by Lesko (2001), Pascoe (2007), and Maira & Soep (2004), among other scholars, showed that research, policy, and pedagogy that viewed adolescent literacy practices through a deficit perspective shaped many US public schools. This deficit perspective positioned youth in ways that denied their experiences as classed, gendered, raced, and sexualized beings. Deficit thinking about youth also refused them opportunities to participate in possibly authentic, engaging, and rich learning contexts because this kind of thinking valued high
stakes assessment over powerful learning opportunities that are more difficult to quantify (Valli & Buese, 2007). It denied the literacies of youth as valuable, complex, multiple, and socially situated.

The connection between schools and students in deficit was often assumed within the field of adolescent literacy research and policy (A Nation at Risk, 1983; Turning Points, 1995; Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Graham & Perin, 2007). Assumptions about youth as unruly, troublesome, and defiant have dominated US culture (Vasudevan & Campano, 2009) and media. This negative perception tainted portrayals of adolescent literacies, and Vadeboncoeur and Luke (2004) critique the media headlines that “call attention to a literacy achievement gap which is linked to a drain on the economy” (p. 14) because it is a false assumption resulting from deficit thinking, not fact. This study worked to increase recognition of adolescents as skilled, having multiple literacies (Moje et al., 2008), and as “knowledgeable and uniquely experienced, and that they, like all of us, have multiple identities that intersect and thus complicate one another” (Clark, Blackburn & Newell, 2010, p. 122).

The classed, gendered, raced, and sexualized contexts of adolescent literacy practices are an important aspect of research on literacy in American schools. Many literacy scholars value or call for additional research that pays attention to these cultural contexts and constructions to inform the study of literacies (Alloway & Gilbert, 2004; Amit-Talai & Wulff, 1995; Blackburn, 2005, 2006; Cherland, 1992; Coles & Hall, 2002; Davies, 1997; Delpit, 1988, 2006; Dutro, 2002, 2003; Epstein, 1997; Finders, 1997; Godley, 2003; Kehler & Greig, 2005; Kinloch, 2010; Lesko, 2001; Lloyd, 1998; Millard,
Research that disregarded cultural constructions of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality could perpetuate the hegemonic nature of these constructions by normalizing students and their literacy practices that appear to fit into these arbitrary categories, as well as silencing or dismissing students and their literacy practices that are historically and tragically marginalized (Delpit, 1998, 2006). Constructions of identity were a large part of the focus of my study on adolescent literacies.

This study aimed to build on previous research on EL schools, student agency, cultural diversity, and adolescent literacies by examining an Expeditionary Learning Middle School (ELMS). This study foregrounded the classed, gendered, raced, and sexualized aspects of adolescent literacy practices within the school spaces of Crew, Community Meeting (CM), and Electives, as well as the student experiences within these spaces and the students’ sense of agency under the EL model. These terms were used throughout the study and are defined as follows:

- Expeditionary Learning (EL) is an educational reform model that partners with schools, districts, and charter boards to open new schools and transform existing schools. EL schools focused on dynamic leadership, compelling curriculum, engaging instruction, continuous assessment, and positive school cultures.

- Crew consisted of one teacher advisor and 11-15 students who met every day for 45 minutes over the school year. This grade level grouping also continued over
the three years that each student was enrolled at ELMS. The grouping adjusted in most part to incorporate new students. Crew focused on community building, sharing information, scaffolding school processes, and personal and group reflection.

- CM consisted of the entire school gathering for one hour every week to discuss events, celebrate successes, perform for each other, hear student proposals, and pass out Thank You Notes.

- Electives were a wide variety of one hour courses based on student interest, teacher background knowledge, and standards. Students were given a list of Electives at the beginning of each trimester from which to select their first and second choices. Electives met two times a week. They were developed and taught by school staff.

The focus for this study emerged from a 2010-2011 pilot study of the adolescent literacy practices at ELMS. During this time, I observed the entire school day, including the traditional core subject area classrooms like Math, Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies, but the spaces of Crew, CM, and Electives, which are central to the EL model, emerged as rich spaces of literacy that have been given little attention in previous research. Previous EL studies focused on creating a multiliteracy focused ethnography of the whole school (Saurino, 2005), the educational intentions of five EL classroom practitioners (Sharpswain, 2005), the effect of feedback in core classes (Vancampen, 2000), a Peru expedition planning and implementation (Mahoney, 2006). Outside of EL research, these kinds of school spaces were also not studied, except for a scholarly
conversation about the benefits of Electives between Chavanu and Christenbury (2000) and reflections on McCotter’s (1999) experiences with team meetings. I also discovered that issues of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality came up over and over again in the data, as well as the related topics of students’ experiences in an EL school and students’ sense of agency. Thus, the focus of this research emerged from the data and the lack of research done on the intersections between EL schools, student agency, cultural diversity, and adolescent literacies. Although studies on adolescent literacy practices within the school setting, as well as studies that forefront social constructions of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality in terms of literacy are not new areas of research, combining all of these aspects together from a sociocultural constructivist, New Literacy Studies, student agency, and adolescent “as whole” theoretical framework extended current scholarship into new territory. By filling in the gaps with these foci, the study may be of benefit for the students and teachers at ELMS, the educators at EL who shape the schools, schools in general, and teacher education programs. Thus, I conducted a qualitative study using ethnographic methods with youth as they engaged in literacy practices within an EL middle school.

To clarify, although I use race and ethnicity as a related construction of identity, I draw on Sleeter’s (2005) study on how white teachers construct race in order to explain an important distinction between the two terms. Race and ethnicity are not to be confused as equivalent, especially in terms of possible migration paths to the US. Doing so would deny the history of colonization by Euroamericans over other peoples and perpetuate the
notion of the US as a meritocracy; hence, all people should be able to achieve the same things through hard work.

Also, I use the word agency to also include the students’ sense of power and voice. The definition of agency connects with personal identity and intersects with notions of “resilience, re(configuration), and resistance” (Leander & Sheehy, 2004, p.89). I also draw from Delpit (1988, 2006) who explains that people who have access to and knowledge of the rules of the culture of power can exercise agency within existing social conventions, and are said to have cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991). These terms are related and so I use one word to mean all three.

This data collection portion of this study took place during the first four months of the 2011-2012 school year. By focusing on a diverse group of case study students, data was gathered and examined through observations, interviews, document collection, comparative memos, and grounded theory analysis.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover what happens in an Expeditionary Learning Middle School’s (ELMS) Crew, CM, and Electives when a school works under an educational reform model that seems to value multiple literacies and youth, but was possibly silent on constructions of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality.

The purpose of this study emerged from the researcher’s own experience as an EL teacher, a pilot study at ELMS, and a literature review of research on adolescent literacies. This study addressed the gaps in knowledge concerning literacy practices in the
three EL spaces, the ways in which they are raced, classed, gendered, and sexualized, the students’ experiences in regards to these practices, and implications that can be of benefit to schools and teacher education programs.

**Research Questions**

This study aimed to answer the following research questions. What happens to middle school students when a school works under an educational reform model (Expeditionary Learning) that does not specifically speak to constructions of age, class, gender, race, and sexuality? Specifically,

- How do different students experience this model of schooling?
- What happens with respect to student agency when students participate in Crew, Community Meetings, and Electives in an Expeditionary Learning Middle School?
- What does literacy have to do with this? That is, what literacy events and practices are present during Crew, Community Meetings, and Electives, and how does literacy function to limit or enable different students’ agency?

**Organization of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the entire study. It includes a statement of the problem, the historical context of the EL school reform model, the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the organization of the dissertation. Chapter 2 provides the theoretical framework and review of relevant literature in order to inform and shape the study. It includes a description of theories regarding social constructivism, agency, NLS, and adolescence, as
well as a review of research on EL schools and adolescent literacies, agency, and cultural diversity. Chapter 3 is a discussion of research methodology used to shape and guide the study. This chapter provides a detailed description of the researcher’s background with EL and of the research site and spaces. Chapter 3 also contains a description of the ethnographic, qualitative study; selection of case study students; selection of the three ELMS spaces of Crew, CM, and Electives; data collection methods; analytic approach; the study limitations; and efforts toward validity. Chapter 4 includes a description and interpretation the case study students’ experiences in Crew, CM, and Electives. This leads into a discussion of the literacy events and practices within these spaces which concludes with the ways in which literacy at ELMS functions to limit or enable student agency and cultural diversity under the EL reform model. Chapter 5 discusses implications for ELMS, EL, schools, and teacher education programs. Suggestions for modifying literacy practices to work toward student agency and to attend to the ways in which students are constructed and being constructed in terms of race, class, gender, and sexuality at ELMS conclude the chapters.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

At the heart of this study is the idea that context matters in issues of literacy, education, and youth. The first section of Chapter 2 briefly summarizes the four theoretical frameworks that foreground understanding context in terms of learning, literacy, power, and adolescence. Following this summary, the bulk of the chapter focuses on a literature review of Expeditionary Learning schools, adolescent literacy, cultural diversity, and student agency. During this literature review, the four theoretical frameworks are used to address how the reviewed studies were shaped by various understandings of literacy, learning theory, perspectives on power, and perspectives on adolescence. Using these frameworks, I discovered that the studies on EL schools that focused on the effectiveness of the model promoted an understanding of autonomous notion of literacy. In comparison, the studies that focus on the teacher’s experiences of EL foregrounded the situated and social nature of learning. However, the studies that focused on literacy in EL schools promoted a perspective on learning, literacy, and youth as agentive, socially situated, and multiple. The non-EL studies on adolescent literacy emphasized an understanding of literacy to be complex and socially situated, especially
in terms of power as it is enacted in educational settings, and adolescents as agentive, free of confident characterizations of youth. Finally, the studies regarding cultural diversity and student agency also promoted an understanding of youth and learning as socially situated and complex, with great deal of attention given to the power structures in which youth experience constructions of race, class, gender, and sexuality.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study pulled from complementary theoretical frames in order to gather what is known about EL, adolescent literacy, cultural diversity, and student agency: sociocultural constructivism (Gergen, 1999; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978), New Literacy Studies (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 1990; Heath, 1983; Street, 1984, 1991, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2003), culture/power/agency/voice (Delpit, 1998, 2006; Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; Gillespie, 1994), and confident characterizations of adolescence (Lesko, 2001). The first asserts that people and society are mutually constructed within the context of history, society, and culture. The second promotes an understanding of literacy as a situated social practice. The third exposes cultural norms as neither natural nor inevitable, but as an attempt by the culture in power to remain dominant within culturally diverse societies. The fourth argues that confident characterizations of adolescence are problematic cultural constructions which position youth in negative ways. The following section provides a brief explanation of each of these theories in order to present the literature review as understood through the windows these theories provide.
**Sociocultural Constructivism.**

Sociocultural theorists argue that each person’s unique experience of life is actually shaped by the greater society’s constructions of identity. Yet, sociocultural theorists also believe that each person also shapes his/her society. Thus, individuals and society are mutually constructive. Additionally, this mutual construction takes place on both micro and macro levels, which include both local and global and historical and current community affairs.

Slightly branching off this theory are the more specific theories regarding the ways in which people learn. Sociocultural theorists argue that the way that people learn is also within a mutually constructive context (Gergen, 1999; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986; Wertsch, 1995, 2007; Wertsch & Toma, 1995). This theory posits that learning is a complex relationship between the individual and the context of the learning. Hence, learning is situated, mediated, and fundamentally social; what one person learns during a lesson might be completely different from another person. This is due to the macro and micro histories, oppressions, privileges, biases, experiences, schemas, and more that each student brings to the learning environment. This theory is important to the literature review and the research at ELMS because it directed the researcher to pay particular attention to the context that shaped the learning. It also encouraged the researcher to investigate the contexts of each participant in the community as well as the relationships to one another, even though a complete understanding will never be fully captured in the study. Vygotsky’s (1978, 1986) arguments that 1) the social and physical environment shape the ways people learn, and that 2) tools (like speech, words, symbols,
and signs) mediate thinking and behavior sum up the focus of sociocultural constructivism nicely. Sociocultural theories about learning influenced the methodology of this study to include rich description of the learning environment as it has an impact on students’ learning and literacy practices, as well as the inclusion of the participants’ impacts on the learning environment, especially the language that was used by, for, and on students.

In order to segue into the next theoretical framework, I turn attention to Rogoff (2003) who argues that people are prepared by both their cultural and biological heritages to use language and other cultural tools to learn from each other (p. 3). She posits that people learned in their communities, and in these communities that the practices, history, and culture could be found. Rogoff explained this was because these community components were not static. Her take on sociocultural theory cautioned against assumptions of normality for others. Instead, knowledge should be constructed from participating in one’s community, and that community is specific and situated. Thus, Rogoff advocated for a more culturally inclusive approach to human development. This idea discouraged ethnocentrism or a proclivity to normalizing the practices of a European American middle-class culture. It was this aspect of sociocultural constructivism that was of particular interest to this study. By shining a spotlight on the European American middle-class culture penchant for age as a structuring force in society and marker of development, Rogoff showed that this was not the best or only way to do things; some cultures do not acknowledge or keep track of age (Rogoff, 2003, p. 8). Rogoff worked to
avoid privileging one culture over another because this could be a way to assert power over another. The topic of power segues into the next theoretical framework of power.

**Culture, Power, Voice, and Agency.**

This study was interested in discovering more about the relationship between power, voice, and agency and the pervasive ways in which they are linked to culture. Conditions of power and agency are pervasive in all aspects of life and schooling, and this study sought to understand the ways in which power was named, hidden, investigated, and resisted at ELMS. Work from Delpit (1988, 2006), Freire & Macedo (1987), Freire (1985), Gillespie (1994), and Street (1984, 1995) provides helpful perspectives on power as it is enacted in educational settings. Five aspects of power that directly relate to teachers and students in terms of cultural diversity shape these perspectives.

First, “issues of power are enacted in classrooms” (Delpit, 1988, p. 282) and are resisted by those without power (Fairclough, 1989; Foucault, 1978). Fairclough (1989), like Delpit, called for a change in social relations through a consciousness of “how language contributes to the domination of some people by others, because consciousness was the first step toward emancipation” (p. 1). In his work, Fairclough sought to correct the widespread underestimation of the significance of language in the production, maintenance, and change of social relations of power. He was especially focused on common sense assumptions which could legitimize existing social relations and differences in power. He was effectively resisting the status quo by interpreting and explaining the rules of the culture of power. Foucault (1978) claimed “that one is always
inside power, there is no escaping it” yet, “where there is power, there is resistance” (p. 95). Delpit, like Foucault, recognized that although power was never exercised with a series of aims and objectives, it does not mean that it results from the choice or decision of an individual subject. Rather, Foucault saw power as a “network” of relations within society which included “the caste which governs” and the cynics of the system who are aware of the cultural restrictions on their access to power (p. 95).

Second, Delpit (1998) argues that there is a “culture of power” in schools and that there are codes or rules for participating in the culture of power (p. 282). Freire and Macedo (1987) explain that power was “always associated with education” (p.121). Bourdieu (1991) argues that social interactions are influenced by conventions and rules. People with access to the knowledge of these rules could exercise agency within existing social conventions, and are said to have cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991). Delpit called for this cultural capital to be shared through transparency of the rules. Through this knowledge, people could resist hegemonic power structures, especially in schools. When the rules are understood, then the access to power becomes less exclusive, especially in terms of literacy and language (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002).

Third, the “rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power” (Delpit, 1998, p. 282). Gee (1990) argues that children’s success in school was linked more to their social class than any sort of instruction (p.33). Because school was set up by the middle class and perpetuated middle class values, Gee found that children from middle class homes were more successful within a culture of power that reflected their home culture. Lankshear (1994) defines empowerment as
having the “qualities one possesses (or has available) made discursively-that is, through Discourse [Gee, 1990]–into ‘currency’ for acquiring goods and benefits, or for having them bestowed” (pp.64-65). Thus, the absence of power could be experienced by certain groups in educational settings, especially “those social groups whose discursive histories and allegiances impede their attaining control of the requisite language uses and related dispositions, attitudes and performances” (p.65). In other words, people who were “on the right side of discourse” (p.65) automatically benefitted from having access to the dominant literacies.

Fourth, if one is “not already a participant in the culture of power, being explicitly told the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier” (Delpit, 1988, p. 282). Lankshear also called for meta-level knowledge to be taught so that students knew what was involved in participating in a Discourse (p.66). Freire (1985) saw literacy learning as an integral part of gaining power. By emphasizing the acquisition of values and the formations of opinions regarding conditions in society, Freire advocated reading the world and the word. He believed that people could learn to problematize the social reality in which the inequities occur through a process he called conscientization. Freire believed that acquiring literacy was an active process of consciousness (praxis), and not just the learning of a skill. Thus, he advocated for a learning process geared toward participants’ own interests (not the profit making interests of corporations or governments which historically have backed hegemonic literacy campaigns). Freire (1985) also argued that no teacher or text was neutral and that every act (or non action) carries with it an agenda. Thus, as Freire argued, knowledge and learning could be a conduit for hegemony.
Hegemony, the act of making showy efforts to share power, yet covertly doing all that one could to maintain the status quo, was constantly present in life and in the educational system\(^1\).

Fifth, “those with power are frequently least aware of or least willing to acknowledge its existence. Those with less power are often most aware of its existence” (Delpit, 1988, p. 282). Delpit calls for recognition of power\(^2\) as it was enacted in classrooms because these structures are not always recognized by educators, especially those who come from the culture of power. This recognition could also enable educators to recognize demonstrations of agency as necessary and positive resistance to oppression. Holland et al. (1998) took up the notion of agency and described it as “frail, especially among those with little power, but it happens daily and mundanely, and it deserves our attention” (p. 5). They focused on agency “specific to practices and activities situated historically contingent, socially enacted” and culturally constructed (p. 7). Holland et al. (2008) also explained that agency could be produced (p.192) and involved “gaining control over one’s behavior” (p. 38). These ideas of agency connected with the work of archaeologists, Varien and Potter (2008) who defined agency as “the choices made by

\(^1\) Street (1984, 1995) echoed Freire’s work to recognize hegemony in his theory of ideological literacy. The ideological model makes power structures transparent in terms of literacy and language, treats claims skeptically from “western liberal educators for the ‘openness’, ‘rationality’ and critical awareness of what they teach,” and “investigates the role of such teaching in social control and the hegemony of a ruling class” (Street, 1995). Like Delpit, Street and Freire saw the inherent power structures in society and educational systems and wished for them to be made known.

\(^2\) Delpit defines power as the ability (or cultural capital) to give orders (commands) and expect them to be followed in order to avoid negative consequences.
people as they take action, often as they attempt to realize specific goals…agency includes choices that are nonreflexive and generated by a person’s habitus\(^3\) (p. 7).

Lastly, Gillespie (1994) spoke about power in terms of student voice. She compared voice to a quilt; that stitches together the different Discourses in which the student participates and has access into a cohesive whole. Discourses is defined as the ways in which people are “behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing that are accepted as instantiations of particular identities (or ‘types of people’) by specific groups” (Gee, 1990, p. 3). Thus, Discourses are “socially situated identities” and were “social and products of social histories” (Gee, 1990, p. 3). In this way, voice is a lens for description and interpretation that pays particular attention to the complexity of the student’s actions and words, points of view, and ability to participate in the classroom discourse. Gillespie also described voice as a person’s essence or truth. Thus, this study gathered data during the times in which the student said or appeared to feel validated and heard, as well as when students seemed to be ignored or silenced. Attention to voice enabled the researcher to understand the ways in which literacy events intersected with agency. In essence, voice was another way to look at and investigate power.

These theories informed the study by emphasizing the ways in which culture, power, voice, and agency intersected with ELMS literacy practices and the inherent constructions of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality.

\(^3\) Habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) refers to the social construction of thoughts and actions acquired by virtue of being raised in a particular social environment.
New Literacy Studies.

The third theoretical framework from which this study was fashioned was NLS because it speaks to sociocultural constructivism; issues of culture, power, voice, and agency; and values the multiple literacies of youth. This section maps out the essential components of NLS that make it a valuable theoretical lens: social contexts of literacy, autonomous and ideological notions of literacy, literacy events and practices, multiple literacies, and literacy sponsorship. The work of Brandt (1998), Barton and Hamilton (2000), Hamilton (1991), Heath (1983), Street (1984, 1995, 1996, 2000), and Wagner (2004) informed this study, and are described in the following section.

Social context matters in discussions of literacy. NLS argues for a complex and situated notion of literacy. Aligning with sociocultural theory, NLS views the contexts in which literacy takes place as important. Furthermore, to fully understand the contexts of literacy, one must recognize that literacy (often linked with education) is enmeshed in power structures, histories, cultures, and societies. Thus, literacy looks and means different things from one context to another. Street (2000) commented on the importance of recognizing context when he cautioned:

If you identify a literacy with a mode or channel-visual literacy, computer literacy-then you are slipping into the danger of reifying it according to form: you are failing to take into account the social practices that go into the construction, uses and meanings of literacy in context…the focus would then be on the mode, on the visual and the computer, rather than on the social practices in which
computers, visual media and other kinds of channels are actually given meaning.

(pp. 20-21)

NLS speaks against autonomous notions of literacy; instead NLS recognizes literacy as ideological. An autonomous model of literacy views literacy as a set of skills to be learned that indicate a person’s ability to function. An ideological model views literacy as a complex set of practices performed in a particular community. In other words, the ability to read and write (functional literacy) cannot be seen as a set of neutral skills to understand neutral texts. To illustrate this claim on a very basic level, Street (1984) argued that no one will ever be completely literate and claims the idea was ridiculous. Street (1984) stated that

The alternative, ideological model...offers a more culturally sensitive view of literacy practices as they vary from one context to another; it posits instead that literacy is a social practice... It is about knowledge: the ways in which people address reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity and being. (p. 7)

Thus, literacy was tied to the contexts in which it was learned, used, and understood.

Literacy events can be observed; practices are brought to the forefront by noticing patterns in events. Barton and Hamilton (2000) described literacy as a contextualized social practice through these essential components:
• Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from literacy events which are mediated by written texts\textsuperscript{4}.

• There are different literacies associated with different domains of life.

• Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others.

• Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices.

• Literacy is historically situated.

• Literacy practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making. (p.8)

Street (1996) defined literacy events as “any situation or event in which reading or writing were salient” so events can be seen or photographed. Again, by looking at events over time, practices will be revealed. Practices are “located at a broader, more abstract level and so enable us to describe not only the immediate settings of literacy but also the cultural concepts and practice that are brought to bear on the event” (Street, 1996). Heath (1983) studied literacy events (like a bedtime story) in order to discover the literacy practices of three different communities. Through this method, coupled with reflexivity, observing literacy events enabled her to avoid privileging the literacy events that were similar to her home culture. Instead, Heath sought out value, complexity, and meaning in all three communities’ literacy practices.

\textsuperscript{4} Texts include, but are not limited to traditional alphabetic texts. Thus, literacies from Barton and Hamilton’s (2000) list are expanded in this study to be anything that could be read, including actions, symbols, conversations, body language, and more as all language is multimodal (Kress, 2000).
NLS theorists also recognized that there are multiple literacies. Street (1995) argued that “literacy has become associated with educational notions of teaching and learning and what teachers and pupils do in schools, at the expense of the many other uses and meanings of literacy” (p. 106). Multiple literacies (Street, 1984, 1996) are valuable, including the social and cultural influences in which they were shaped and did the shaping. NLS scholars utilized the term literacies, which “has been picked up and adapted by many who have been previously frustrated by the singular notion of literacy as a unique "tool" that is or isn't possessed by individuals to varying degrees” (Wagner, 2004, p. 236). Literacies is a more appropriate term to encapsulate and communicate the complex and varied forms that literacies take place in people’s lives as it refers to the multiple social and cultural constructions of literacy in practice, which may or may not include different technologies of communication such as television, graphics, computers, etc. Focusing on literacy practices in specific contexts, the multiple literacies view takes a holistic perspective on the various technologies that may be implicate in any set of practices. (Street, 1996)

This idea acknowledges and privileges the many different ways that people use literacy in their own lives. This includes how literacy is taken up in a local context rather than a hegemonic and historically constructed notion of what literacy should be and how it should look. This view of literacy emphasizes the sociocultural influences and the construction of meaning instead of viewing literacy as an autonomous skill (Street, 1995). By using multiple literacies, NLS scholars worked to represent multiple modes of reading and writing, multiple approaches to literacy work, and multiple perspectives, rather than
just those that were dominant (Street, 1984; Barton, 1991). Although a previous EL study (Saurino, 2005) documented the numerous ways in which multiliteracies were incorporated into an EL school despite the absence of this term in EL documentation, this theory was also used to guide observations and analysis of literacy events at ELMS.

Lastly, as an extension of the first point of the NLS section (that reading is learned within a particular social context) is the idea of literacy sponsorship. Literacy sponsorship initiated from this definition of sponsors:

- Powerful figures who bank-roll events or smooth the way for initiates.
- Usually richer, more knowledgeable, and more entrenched than the sponsored, sponsors nevertheless enter a reciprocal relationship with those they underwrite. They lend their resources or credibility to the sponsored but also stand to gain benefits from their success, whether by direct repayment or, indirectly, by credit of association. (Brandt, 1998, p. 167)

Drawing from Brandt (1998), sponsors of literacy can be people: family members, school teachers; or institutions: church, school, television, internet, brand recognition, and more. Regardless of the manner from which one learns, there is an agenda to the sponsorship. According to Brandt (1998) "sponsors, as I have come to think of them, are any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy-and gain advantage by it in some way” (p.166). Sponsorship creates a unique and important context to the ways in which literacies are taken up in everyday lives. In this study, literacy sponsorship in students’
lives was used as a way to understand the context of the adolescent literacy practices, constructions of identity, and effects on agency.

**Adolescence.**

Although adolescence is a challenging term to define, in this review, it is understood to be a cultural construction of the time, expectations, events, behaviors, and emotions for youth experiencing puberty. The acknowledgement, definition, treatment, and ideology of adolescence varies from one context to another. For instance, constructions of adolescence are absent in some cultures, others define it as not-adult, and others view it as a positive time of life. In the United States, adolescence is most commonly associated with the teenage years. However, at the time of this study, the researcher understood adolescents “to be knowledgeable and uniquely experienced, and that they, like all of us, have multiple identities that intersect and thus complicate one another” (Clark, Blackburn & Newell, 2010, p. 122). This definition does not included age limits, grade spans, or assumptions about people.

Adolescence is a fairly recent historical and social construction (Alvermann, 2009; Christenbury et al., 2009; Lesko, 2001). Although the concept of adolescence is relatively new, since its inception, the Discourse of adolescence has permeated every aspect of the US culture and created serious consequences for youth, as well as the communities and institutions around them. For example, in US discourse, adolescents were oftentimes linked with notions of crisis, deficit, and risk. These negative associations create the culture of blame, worry, and fear in which adolescents live and ironically are labeled as struggling. In this context, deficit is not assigned to the
institutions that are meant to serve students (i.e. school, structured settings like homeroom, etc). Instead, adolescents themselves are assumed to be deficient.

Understanding the history of adolescence sheds light on the current Discourse of adolescence. The idea of adolescence originated in the late 18th and early 19th centuries in western countries and stemmed from labor and school reforms (Christenbury et al., 2009; Lesko, 2001; Maira & Soep, 2004). These reforms that shaped the current Discourse of adolescence did so through the formation of a new middle class, a new group of consumers, and a system of compulsory schooling. This particular time period also positioned middle class communities as the birthplace and naturalizing norm for conceptions of adolescence, even though adolescence is unique for each culture and each individual (Rogoff, 2003). Despite the diversity of experience, adolescence was typically constructed as the period of time between childhood and adulthood. Many scholars who define adolescence by grade band or age typically place this stage of development from middle school to the first year of college, ages thirteen to nineteen, or ages eleven to twenty for some people (Christenbury et al., 2009).

The term adolescence gives people an efficient means of learning and talking about (and with) youth, especially within the context of mass compulsory schooling. However, it also carries with it the propensity to stereotype and create problematic common misconceptions about youth. The Discourses of adolescence characterizes youth as “not yet adults…at an awkward stage that will soon pass…egocentric…and irresponsible” (Sturtevant et al., 2006, p.7) as well as
Belonging to another tribe…synonymous with crazes and hormones, as delinquents, deficiencies, or clowns…beings no to be take too serious…trouble…instability, emotionality, present-centeredness, and irresponsibility” and even “violent Internet-addicted suburbanites, teenage mothers, and urban criminals. (Lesko, 2001, p. 1-2)

In the United States, adolescence is commonly characterized through the construction of opposing binaries: youth/adult, becoming/realized, unbalanced/balanced, storm and stress, or contentment/peace. These binaries position youth as other than adult and associate youth with negative characteristics. Overarching ideas about adolescence could be summarized into one main assumption: adolescents were not fully formed beings; they were other than adult (Lesko, 2001). This single story⁵ (Adichie, 2009) about adolescents so easily found in US classrooms, institutional structures, media, popular culture, and communities reveals assumptions about deficit and youth and creates a problem for adolescents and the people that intersect with their lives. One such example of the presence of the Discourse of adolescence is the Turning Points document. In this document, adolescents are characterized in terms of deficit or as a problem to be fixed. Nevertheless, many scholars have pushed back against this construction, including Lesko (2001) who works to dispel the confident characterizations of adolescents.

Like Lesko (2001), I “believe in the necessity and desirability of different patterns of social relations with youth” (p.10) in from the negative example put forth in research. In this review, the negative Discourse of adolescence by attending to studies that

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⁵The term Single Story is similar to a stereotype; it is a story that essentializes.
perpetuated a more complex and socially situated notion of adolescence. This move was essential in order to avoid this study becoming research that prescribed “solutions for a subpopulation that may or may not fit any of its members particularly well” (Alverman, 2010, p. 15). Thus, this literature review was used as an opportunity to critically examine research on adolescence. Lesko’s (2001) confident characterizations provided a helpful heuristic for revealing the conversations about adolescence in the United States:

adolescents come of age into adulthood, adolescents are controlled by raging hormones, adolescents are peer oriented, and adolescents are signified by age. The table below lists Lesko’s (2001) confident characterizations of adolescents. The left hand column lists the characterizations and the right hand column lists the ways in which Lesko defines these categories. Although these confident characterizations have shaped the ways in which adolescents are viewed, this study worked to avoid perpetuating these negative assumptions about youth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confident characterizations</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>adolescents come of age into adulthood</td>
<td>This characterization assumes that identity is a linear process which has a fixed end and complete development. This assumption creates a binary and hierarchy between youth and adult. Thus, this places authority with the adult/researcher when talking about youth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adolescents are controlled by raging hormones</td>
<td>This characterization focuses attention onto the bodies of youth in order to discover evidence of hormones. It is these ‘raging’ hormones which will inevitably trigger intense mood swings, rebellion, and risky behaviors.</td>
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<tr>
<td>adolescents are peer oriented</td>
<td>This characterization assumes that youth automatically have an inclination toward peers and are powerless against peer pressure. It positions youth as less individual than adults who are constructed as autonomous, rational, and determining.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adolescents are signified by age</td>
<td>This characterization assumes that age determines what youth are like and what choices they will make. In other words, age declares the very nature of youth, and during the teenage years youth’s choices determine not only their own future, but society’s as well.</td>
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There was ample evidence to show that the deficit based characterizations of adolescents has been established and perpetuated in related research. Erikson (1968/1994) emphasized that adolescents were coming of age “as technological advances put more and more time between early school life and the young person’s final access to specialized work, the stage of adolescence become an even more marked and conscious period and, as it had always been in some cultures and some periods, almost a way of life between childhood and adulthood” (p.128). Erikson’s (1968/1994) work on adolescence presumed that development was a linear process, or as “a period of crisis resolving the conflict between identity formation and identity ‘diffusion’” (Maira & Soep, 2004, p. 249). However, Erikson, drawing from Vygotsky and sociocultural constructivism, also “emphasized social and cultural influences and the agency of individuals” yet “the problem with much developmental work on adolescent identity in the US, even today, is that it tends to assume that identity formation is a linear process, detached from historical or political contexts” (Maira & Soep, 2004, pp. 249-250). Turning Points explained that the purpose of their focus on youth was because “the early adolescent years are crucial in determining the future success or failure of millions of American youth” (p. 8). Pascoe also explained that the current constructions of adolescence were framed in the US “as a time in which teenagers work to create identity and make the transition from childhood to adulthood” which includes “[turbulence] psychologically, biologically, and socially” (p. 16). Zuckerman also commented on the current constructions of adolescence as a “waiting period” where youth were “belligerently not adult” (p. 637). Hall (1904) asserted that youth love “intense states of mind and is passionately fond of excitement”
(p. 73), which he found by observing adolescents. During his observations, he noticed
that “tears and laughter are in close juxtaposition” (p. 76), that it “is the age of giggling,
especially with girls” (p. 78), and that youth were “talking, acting, dressing to be noticed”
(p. 79). Mead (1973) emphasized that the idea of storm and stress was particular to the
US. Erikson (1968/1994) stated that adolescence was “a time of life when the body
changes its proportions radically, when genital puberty floods the body and imagination
with all manner of impulses” (p. 132). Lesko (2001) critiqued the notion that adolescents
automatically have an inclination toward and powerlessness against peer pressure. This
notion positions youth as less individual than adults, which positions adults as superior by
their construction as autonomous, rational, and determining beings (p. 4). Furthermore,
“to demean peer pressure also has the effect of privileging an individualism that is
historically associated with middle-class, white males” (Lesko, 2001, p. 4). Maira and
Soep (2004) found that adolescents were portrayed as so peer oriented that they were
often unconsciously linked with popular culture consumption (p. 259). For instance,
Turning Points (1995) lamented that so many teens cannot find the guidance they need
from adults, and that they were “surrounded only by their equally confused peers” (p. 8).
Erikson (1968/1994) found that adolescents “seem much concerned with faddish attempts
at establishing an adolescent subculture with what looks like a final rather than a
transitory or in fact initial identity formation” (p. 128) and that “to keep themselves
together they temporarily over identify with the heroes of cliques and crowds to the point
of an apparently complete loss of individuality” (p. 132). Developmental thinking was
taken up again in the Turning Points (1995) document, which argued that
Adolescents face significant turning points. For many youth 10-15 years old, early adolescence offers opportunities to choose a path toward a productive and fulfilling life. For many others, it represents their last best chance to avoid a diminished future. (p. 8)

Again, age was used to tell “us what is important and enduring in adolescent lives” (Lesko, 2001, p. 5). Strauch’s (2003) work was another example of the confident characterizations as her research on adolescent brains led her to conclude that it was a time of storm and stress, as teens were “crazy by design” (p. 3). Douvan and Adelson (1966) created a helpful illustration of characterizations of adolescence over time,. They explained that adolescents were first thought of as Fool (fun, callow, flighty, silly given to infatuations, wild enthusiasm, transient moodiness, but not to be taken too seriously), then as Seer (distinguished by wholesomeness of moral vision which enables him to see things that impure adults could no longer see) which was also Victim (betrayed, exploited, and neglected by adults), and finally as Holden Caulfield (p. 1). This humorous, yet insightful language for describing the Discourse of adolescence provides context for Lesko’s confident characterizations, which provided a useful tool for sorting through the patterns of discourse around adolescence.

As Ayers summarized in his introduction to Vadeboncoeur & Stevens edited collection (2005), “puberty is a fact; everything surrounding that fact is fiction. We constructed the myths, and just like that, the myths construct us…teenagers are trouble—this is the pervasive and defining myth, the myth that sticks to kids like barnacles, sharp
and ugly” (p. x). The facts of puberty and the fictions of unexamined assumptions about adolescence shape the lives of youth. Ayers offered a reminder that

Of course it’s true that no one can be mature without being immature, wise without being innocent, experienced before inexperienced, but these categorizations, too, are inventions precarious and vulnerable. There is not purely stable ‘experienced,’ no absolute state called ‘inexperienced.’ We are, each of us, on the move and on the make, propelled from yesterday toward tomorrow. (p. xiii)

Deficit thinking may be present in the dominant US discourse, but many scholars specifically address these common misconceptions about adolescence in an attempt to use their findings to disrupt the common cultural narrative.

**Literature Review**

This review establishes what is known and remains unknown about EL schools, adolescent literacy, student agency, and cultural diversity via the lenses of sociocultural constructivism, power, New Literacy Studies, and perspectives on adolescence. This literature review discovered that the previous EL research provided knowledge about the history of EL, including comprehensive school reforms; performance of EL schools; EL teachers and professional development; and literacy in EL schools. Much of the research on the effectiveness of EL as a reform model viewed literacy as an autonomous skill that could be assessed through test scores. Those scores were used to evaluate the effectiveness of EL schools and the reform model with little regard to the historical and cultural effects of hegemonic power structures, the rich literate lives of youth, or the ways
in which learning is socially situated. However, the studies that investigated the teacher’s experience of the EL reform model, and even more so the studies that looked at literacy in EL schools, for the most part considered learning as socially situated. These studies sought to understand the context of the teachers’ experiences and especially the ways in which literacy took shape in EL schools. The four studies on literacy also recognized literacy as multiple, used by students with agency and expertise, and one case as classed and gendered beings.

The review on adolescent literacy in non-EL schools yielded knowledge that promoted a positive and complex view of literacy, learning, and youth. Many of these studies conceptualized learning and literacy as a socially situated practice, including attention on the power structures as they are enacted in these contexts. Other studies investigated literacy as ideological and multiple. Some studies emphasized adolescents’ literacy practices as tools to work within and actively resisting power structures to assert their agency.

The review on student agency yielded a comprehensive definition of agency, as well as implications for educators who desire to work toward supporting student agency. These studies foregrounded socially situated notions of learning and literacy, adolescents as agentive and free of confident characterizations by researchers, and power as enacted in the educational setting.

Lastly, the literature review of cultural diversity revealed that students experienced troublesome cultural constructions of identity in schools. These experiences
included a raced, classed, gendered, and sexualized hidden curriculum that perpetuated hegemonic norms and affected academic access and achievement.

**Expeditionary Learning.**

This section of the review explores what is known about EL schools through empirical studies focused on this reform model. These sixty studies take form in dissertations, master’s theses, and grey papers. The literatures were located through a ProQuest and Google Scholar search of Expeditionary Learning, Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, and their acronyms, EL and ELOB. Both names have been used to describe schools working under this reform model, although EL is the most current. Many of the grey papers were located by searching the EL website. It must be noted that many of these effectiveness studies were organized and funded by EL and did not find anything negative about EL schools. In this way, researcher bias and lack of control groups in most studies could raise issues of validity (Borman, 2009; James, 2009). The findings and relevant information contained in these studies were grouped in four sections: history of EL as a reform movement, performance of EL schools, EL teachers, and literacy in EL schools. These findings have helped to explore and explain EL as a viable reform model in the current US education system, yet these studies have left some aspects of adolescent literacy, student agency, and cultural diversity unexplored. This gap will be addressed at the end of the EL research review and investigated through this study.

**EL history as a reform movement.**
According to the sociocultural perspective and perspectives on power and cultural diversity, the historical context of this system of education has influence on EL as it practiced during the time of this study. To better understand the foundations of EL one must look at the history of school reform movements in the United States. According to Farrell (2003), EL as an educational reform model began in Europe as Outward Bound (OB), a short course to regular schooling. At this point, the review of the European development of OB ends. The focus transitions to EL efforts in US around 1962 by school leaders. At this time, OB offered wilderness experiences for youth and adults focused on developing leadership skills. Eventually, OB set up urban centers in order to “provide better recruiting and follow-up with minority students from low income areas of big cities” (Farrell, 2003, p. 23) in the 1980s. The centers connected with local public schools to share OB teaching technologies and the spirit of adventure and service to the classroom. In 1998, OB joined Harvard Graduate School of Education to bring in a mutually beneficial partnership based on expertise; OB brought experiential learning to Harvard, and Harvard brought academic rigor to OB. In the 1990s, OB focused on becoming an educational reform model and received funding from the New American Schools Development Corporation to put theory into practice. OB started with 10 demonstrations schools in 1993. At the time of this study, there were 165 schools in 30 states and DC, serving 45,000 students and 4,000 teachers (EL website, 2012). This background information concerning the EL reform movement provides the context needed to understand the origins and initial shaping of EL schools.
EL became involved with US schools during a time known as Comprehensive School Reform (CSR). CSR was bolstered by monies available through Title I and New American Schools Corporation funding (Farrell, 2003, pp. 14-15). This time period began in 1980, and has been described in terms of three eras which focused on different aspects of schooling over the years. Murphy and Datnow (2003), in their edited collection of lessons on leadership in CSR, found that the initial focus was on fixing schools through the strong medicine of government intervention (p. 5). From 1980-1987, during the first era, failing schools were attributable to ineffective teachers and materials. Thus, textbooks were rewritten, and teachers were told how to teach. From 1986-1995, a lack of achievement under government control shifted CSR philosophy to be less top down to more bottom up. Teachers and parents were considered capable catalysts of student achievement, so the focus turned to the problematic structure of schooling. Thus, decisions were made in school by the teachers, and families were given the opportunity to choose their school. From 1992 to 2002, when this book was published, Murphy and Datnow (2003) found that the third era of school reform continued the market based thinking begun during the second era. However, it was mainly characterized by holding schools responsible for student outcomes, rather than teachers, materials, or parents. Farrell (2003) described EL as mission based rather than market based (p. 22). This focus shaped the emphasis on standards and benchmarks, as well as the availability of different kinds of educational opportunities like home schools, vouchers, and charters (p. 8). The EL research done during these eras mainly took the form of effectiveness studies.

**Effectiveness of the EL model.**

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These studies mainly focused on academic test scores to assess EL, and did not attend to the explicit ways in which issues of power, conceptions of learning, or perspectives on adolescent literacies may have influenced the outcomes. The effectiveness studies on EL schools found them to either be the result of a reform model that was at the very least promising or on the brink of establishing strong research bases (Borman, Hewes, Overman, & Brown, 2002; Camburn, Rowan, & Barnes, 2004) even though it was often too soon to tell (Berends, Kirby, Naftel, & McKelvey, 2001), and at best, the EL model was effective (Cavalier, 2008). Many studies, like the following, investigated EL and effectiveness in relation to other CSRs.

In “Comprehensive School Reform and Student Achievement: A Meta-Analysis,” researchers from the University of Wisconsin, John Hopkins University, and the University of North Carolina looked at twenty-nine Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) models including Expeditionary Learning. The study looked at the research base, design characteristics, and student achievement results for each of the models. The report’s conclusions were, among others, that “the overall effects of CSR are statistically significant, meaningful, and appear to be greater than the effects of other interventions that have been designed to serve similar purposes and student and school populations,” (Borman, Hewes, Overman, & Brown, 2002, p. 34) and that the model’s effects were strongest for schools in their fifth year of implementation. The report characterized Expeditionary Learning’s research base as showing “highly promising evidence of effectiveness.” Only three of the twenty-nine other CRS models received higher ratings. Models in this category were those that had positive and statistically significant results.
from comparison or third-party comparison studies, but did not have research bases that were as broad and generalizable as those of the models that met the highest standard.

Other studies found similar data regarding academic achievement regarding EL schools. Amoruso, Bontempo, and Wilson (2010) found that the relationship between EL and academic growth was present for certain groups of students in Math, language use, and reading. Their study took into account student socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, and grade level. The EL model succeeded with students from rural, urban, and free/reduced lunch populations. However, the results were reported as “not statistically significant” in comparison to non-EL students, and the EL model did not work comprehensively across all subjects with all students. Furthermore, they also determined that it takes time for ELS to yield positive outcomes. Feinzimer’s (2009) study of six CSR models found that EL does respond successfully to the NCLB legislation, including provisions set forth in Title 1. Lee (2008) studied three start-up schools in Cleveland, OH to evaluate their programs in terms of transformation. Lighthouse Academy of Expeditionary Learning met seven out of ten non-negotiable expectations as determined by Knowledgeworks, which classified this EL school as attempting successful transformation. Van Winkle (2008) compared the academic growth of EL and non EL students in nine middle and high schools through the US. He matched each EL student to a virtual control group student and focused on language usage, Math, and reading test scores. Van Winkle found that EL students within highly implemented programs grew significantly more in reading than the virtual students, yet the Math and language usage

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6 As of 2013, the EL school in this study was not listed on the EL network of schools website.
scores were not significantly higher. American Institutes for Research (2006) found most EL studies lacking in terms of studies that investigated accessibility for diverse students, specifically non white, non middle class students. Zhang, Shkolnik, and Fashola (2005) examined the relationships between CSR and student achievement gains. They found that the results were inconclusive. In “Putting the Pieces Together,” Cross (2004) reviewed research on twenty nine CSR models, including EL. Cross (2004) found that EL was on the brink of establishing a strong research basis. This is important because the effectiveness of all CSR models needed to be substantiated with data, and the six credible EL studies did not compare to the data available on other, more established models.

Another report investigated the compatibility of service learning to twenty eight different CSR programs. Pearson (2002) found that the EL model scores were “highly compatible with service-learning and provided substantial support for service-learning activities or projects” (p. 61). Berends, Chun, Schuyler, Stockly, and Briggs (2002) study of multiple CSRs in San Antonio, TX revealed that EL had a difficult time making a positive difference for students in this high poverty district because of the “high-stakes accountability environment, the pressing need to improve test scores, and the lack of the qualities-depth/specificity, power, authority, consistency/alignment, and stability—of the policies directly related to design implementation” (p. 142). They also found that leadership was crucial for success of the model (p. 141), and that collaboration time for teachers did not affect student success (p. 134). During their examination of student improvement in three NAS CSRs, Lewis and Bartz (1999) acknowledged that EL was still in the early stages of implementation. Nevertheless, during 1995-1996 and 1998-
1999, EL schools showed a decline in fourth and six grade student performance in comparison of Ohio Proficiency Test scores to the district average scores. New American Schools (1999) published their report to provide administration, faculty, program evaluators, and other educational stakeholders information about seven NAS reform models, including EL. They found that when models were chosen wisely and implemented well, they could be effective for improving teaching and learning for a wide range of educators and students. Fashola and Slavin (1998) found that there was a huge gap in the knowledge base of effective models that supported students placed at risk, and that many of the studies performed on EL schools and other reform models did not or only partially provided for replicability. Fashola and Slavin (1998) suggested that “effective programs have clear goals, emphasize methods and materials linked to those goals, and constantly assess students’ progress towards those goals” as well as professional development (pp. 291-292). McQuillan, Kraft, O’Conor, Timmons, Marion, & Michalec (1994) spent ten days at six EL schools to conclude that EL did improve the lives of urban youth especially in terms of attitude, “which has lead to an increased engagement with their schoolwork” (p. 7).

The following studies differed from the previous studies in that they only looked at EL schools, thus the data was much more focused on the specifics of EL. These studies were generally positive in regards to EL, but they did not seek to understand the foundational orientations of EL philosophy that might have influenced their findings. Bunn (2009) investigated levels of engagement and learning in EL schools, as this was an important indicator of school success. Bunn determined that levels were high when
propensities and interest of the school, faculty, and students matched the five dimensions of a classroom: pedagogy, curriculum, evaluation, structure, and intentions. According to Bunn’s data, this alignment resulted in a strong community. Stello-Perez (2006) found that there were very few differences between EL and non-EL students in measures of attendance, retention rates, and achievement. In the non-EL schools, school climate was more positive, and student behavioral infractions were lower. Ulichny (2000) looked at two EL schools that had been implementing EL for seven years at the time of the study and found them to be very effective in terms of student academic performance. Bonilla Bowman (1999) evaluated a system of portfolio assessment for documenting the academic progress of culturally diverse students in a bilingual EL school. She found that portfolios showed potential for effectiveness, but the model needed to be scaled down for teachers to truly implement. She also found that in the process of using portfolios, teacher dialogue about goals and values became a positive professional development opportunity.

The study by Academy for Educational Development (1996), through an investigation of ten EL schools from 1993-1995, sought to understand what was happening for EL students and teachers both academically and socially. AED found that EL brought about transformations in student, teacher, and parent relationships; scheduling and school organization; collaboration around developing curriculum; faculty professional development; and assessment practices including the use of portfolios.

Three studies looked at effectiveness of the EL model, but focused on topics other than academic achievement. Mattig (2011) conducted a study on the effectiveness of EL

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7 These results excluded Mathematics because EL was not implemented in that subject.
in terms of the happiness of its students. It was not clear if the two schools in Japan and Germany were K-12 institutions or wilderness education centers as this was never directly explained. However, one of Mattig’s relevant findings was that students reported that they were happy in school when they received good grades. Martin (2009) looked into the effects of EL on developing seventh and eighth grade student environmental virtue. Using the Children’s Environmental Virtue Scale, an instrument designed for this study, Martin found that the participation in EL did not improve student environmental virtue. Peason (2002) investigated the service learning capabilities of the EL model and found that they were highly compatible.

Again, these effectiveness studies lacked an in depth investigation of the contexts that created their findings. Although they narrowed their focus to EL schools, instead of multiple CSR models, they did not seek to understand EL schools in terms of theoretical foundations and stances on adolescent literacy, cultural diversity, or student agency.

**EL and teachers.**

Other studies on EL schools investigated aspects of the teachers’ experiences. These studies focused on educator professional development, training, and skills. These studies contribute a more contextualized understanding of EL that attends to the socially situated nature of the data and findings. They do not, however, investigate perceptions of literacy, learning, adolescence, or power as it is taken up in EL schools or by individual teachers.

Klein (2011) explored findings from a two year study of EL teacher professional development. Klein found that EL helped teachers to instruct in innovative ways. Klein’s
data included investigating the structure, strengths and shortcomings, and teachers’ experiences of their professional development experiences. EL professional development enabled this innovation through four key components: immersion in student experiences, initiation into discourse communities and networking, the acquisition of general strategies through specific content, and reflection.

Mahoney (2006) investigated the effect of EL teachers on student learning during a month long Peruvian expedition. This learning expedition was a culmination of eighteen months of preparation and planning by teachers and students, and Mahoney found that the teacher was central to student learning even when the teacher was leading the learning from behind the scenes. Mahoney also concluded that the expedition resulted in significant growth in and maturation of student identity as self-directed learners.

Burke (2005) looked into the effects of experiential professional development (EPD) for world language educators who intended to use a communicative approach (CA) to language teaching. By observing classrooms of teachers undergoing EPD, Burke found that EL “Design Principles allowed for teachers to integrate CAs through fieldwork, collaboration, reflection, observation and demonstration” (p. 351).

Martin (2002) looked into three EL Idaho public charter schools to understand how teachers perceived the effects of EL professional development. She obtained surveys from twenty six teachers and found that they did in fact perceive improvements in their instruction, attitude toward teaching, and classroom environment due to EL professional development. Martin was careful to explain that the study may have been limited by the
strong possibility that those “who feel positively about ELOB in-service training chose to participate in the study” (p. 6).

Perillo’s (2001) Master’s thesis focused on the pedagogical affordances of the EL model, even in wilderness based courses. She found that the combination of disequilibrium during expeditions and the use of experiential methods created strong opportunities for student learning. Her work also focused on 1) discernment between hands on and experiential learning; 2) self developed lesson plans in order to demonstrate how reading a book, like Into the Wild, or writing could be integrated into any Outward Bound course; and 3) addressing Minnesota state standards in her lessons.

Ross (2001) was a part of three studies that used the schools in the Memphis district to investigate CSR models, including EL. His solo (2001) study determined that there were many lessons to learn from the implementation of the school reform models in Memphis, and that teacher buy in was extremely important. Ross, Sanders, Wright, Stringfield, Wang, and Alberg (2001) studied thirty seven Memphis elementary schools, four of which were EL schools. They found that these schools generally out-performed non-CSR schools in year to year gains on the state mandated CTBS/TCAP measure. They also found that the CSR schools that made the most advances in student learning had the following teacher supports in place: capable leadership, sufficient resources and materials, professional development, and ongoing formative evaluation and improvement efforts. However, more data was needed to understand if these designs were more effective in high-poverty schools. Ross, Wang, Alberg, Sanders, and Wright’s (2001) report compared fifty three CSR elementary schools to twenty three non-restructuring
schools in Memphis. By comparing TerraNOVA/California Test of Basic Skills data in Math, reading, language, Science, and Social Studies, the researchers found that generally the CSR schools outperformed their comparison schools in year to year post-reform gains. However, EL schools were not one of the seven CSRs that demonstrated the most noticeable achievement gains.

Hatch (2000) looked into the common domain skills needed by CSR teachers to support student success in schools. Hatch gathered data from 495 faculty members in twenty two schools in Memphis, TN, which included one EL school. The results indicated a common domain set of teacher skills affected student success in CSR model schools, including: modeling appropriate behaviors; creating positive work environments; selecting and implementing student centered strategies; understanding how learning occurs; linking new learning to prior knowledge; managing conflict; allocating space, time, and resources; engaging in collaboration; evaluating educational effectiveness; managing change; assuming and engaging in professional development; mentoring; communicating with multiple constituencies; and one’s ability to assume responsibility for leading reform (p. 77).

Thomas (2000) compared the EL model to the Project-Based Learning (PBL) model. He found that although descriptions of expeditions resembled descriptions of projects in PBL literature, EL classrooms differed in two ways. First, the learning expeditions were similar to wilderness expeditions in that they involved teamwork, fieldwork, character building, reflection, and building a connection to the world outside the classroom. Second, EL transformed the entire school, not just assignments. These
comprehensive reforms included regional partnerships with EL centers and staff, flexible or block scheduling, heterogeneous grouping, teachers who worked with students over multiple years, and increased involvement of parents and community members.

Killion’s (1999) National Staff Development Council report on twenty-six professional development organizations for middle school teachers found EL to be the only program that met all twenty-seven standards for high quality professional development. Killion (1999) found that EL students’ “academic achievement in Math and reading on achievement tests increased significantly… when compared to other schools in the states and/or districts” (p. 159). Additionally, Killion found that “students' attendance, parent involvement, attitude about school, enjoyment of school, and active engagement in learning increase as a result of the expeditionary structure of learning” (p. 159).

Dawson (1996) used thirty-eight teachers and two principals in two urban K-6 elementary schools in Memphis, TN to describe the teachers’ processes of implementing interdisciplinary units called learning expeditions. Dawson found that teachers had difficulty working in teams and often chose to design expeditions alone rather than work through communication breakdowns amongst staff; teachers were dissatisfied with EL professional development and felt unprepared to design expeditions; and teachers’ concerns over standardized testing made them reluctant to change their methods of pedagogy and assessment.

Three studies took place at the flagship EL school, Rocky Mountain School of Expeditionary Learning (RMSEL). Dorman (2002) examined development and initial
implementation of the EL teacher preparation program. Dorman felt that current teacher preparation programs were problematic and wanted to know if EL could provide a better teacher training model. To do so, Dorman compared the data in his study on EL professional development to the implications he gathered from other studies on teacher education research. The data revealed that EL may become a widely accepted model of teacher education because it incorporates theory and research to improve teacher learning. Sterbinsky (2002) compared the Iowa Basic Skills scores of RMSEL to the four adjacent counties and discovered that the mean achievement score for all grades, subjects, and years was 6% higher. In addition, the scores in grades six and seven were 16% higher at RMSEL. Johann (1996) used participant observation to explore how teacher practices could empower middle and high school students to be personally and socially responsible. Johann defined personal responsibility as the ability to accept consequences for choices and actions and social responsibility as the time when students’ actions benefitted their peers and the wider community. Johann found that teachers needed to provide students with structured experiences that incorporated opportunities to develop or experience accountability, self control, intrinsic motivation, interdependence, and freedom.

**EL and literacy.**

Four studies set in Expeditionary Learning schools focused on different aspects of literacies: dramatic inquiry, multiliteracies, portfolios and assessment, and daily elementary reading and writing events. Each study detailed the daily workings of the EL schools in which the research transpired; these findings added to a deeper understanding.
of literacy in EL schools across the grades. From these studies, it appears that EL practitioners perceive literacy as multiple, socially situated, and connected to power structures. The teacher in Hodde’s study also conceptualized adolescents as capable and whole, free of negative characterizations.

Hodde’s (2005) research took place over six months within an EL and dramatic inquiry context in order to understand how “youth construct and express meanings in multiple media, literacy genres, and diverse participatory environments” (p. xiv). She explored the specific New Literacy practices of twenty three adolescent (ages 11-14) Latina girls in an urban Chicago community theater workshop that immersed youth in a thematic project exploring a Utopia for girls. The girls had already spent several months forming questions for their work like: “What would our [as in a Chicago girl] ideal world look and feel like? What matters for adolescent girls in everyday life? What do girls dream about?” (p. 7). Thus, the girls were primed for investigations of the gendered nature of the world and texts like the art of Remedios Varo, as well as a rewriting of reality through their “multimodal improvisational spectacle entitled ‘Architects of Change: A Girl’s Utopia’” (p. 7). Hodde used New Literacy Studies, multimodality, critical literacies, and sociocultural constructivism to discover new literacy forms (p. 8), the ways in which adolescents read the world and the word, and the “contexts in which youth learn and create identities with language and other sign systems” (p. 9). Hodde found that

Aesthetic culture encouraged girls: to embody, perceive and construct dramatic felt meanings; to develop multiple strategies for translating intermedial concepts
between theatrical modes; and to identify and interact in ways that provided meaningful intertextual connections between their social collaborative in the workshop and their fictional performance of Girltopia. (pp. xiv-xv)

Multiple literacies were also the focus of the next study in an EL school. Saurino (2005), who first discovered EL through her work as a contracted researcher evaluating teacher effectiveness, and returned to her original research site, Pacific Northwest EL Charter School, to investigate multiliteracies. Saurino valued multiliteracies (especially from students’ home environments) because: 1) “students live in a world of multiple forms of print and non-print representations of text. Often, those who appear to be illiterate or alliterate in school are multiliterate outside of school”, 2) “at-risk students” could “become marginalized through traditional academic literacy”, 3) integration of multiliteracies hinges on an understanding of the conditions needed to implement technology, and 4) “researchers need a systematic way to merge adolescent’s out-of-school interest in technology and other popular media with in-school content area learning” (pp. 12-14). Thus, she sought an understanding of what conditions made this possible, if not abundant, in an EL school. She gathered data through analysis of the school vision statement, student portfolios, school artifacts, teacher and administration interviews, observations of a yearlong integrated unit, and notes in her field journal. She found that although the faculty was unaware of multiliteracies research and terminology, the K-7 school presented nine conditions that allowed for multiliteracies to emerge. These conditions were represented by the following code words that emerged in her data: goals, community, collaboration, curriculum, assessment, whole child, literacy, and
multiliteracies. In order to illustrate the nine conditions referred to as key words like “goals,” Saurino described multiple instances in which these words came up or best described the situation. For example, one goal for students was to be constructively critical of the work of others, a goal which included an understanding of objective versus subjective criticism (p. 73). Because of this goal, students were taught to place “appropriate value on each type of criticism” and seek out criticism from multiple viewpoint (p. 73). In this way students would be able to incorporate “multiple sources of related feedback” in their work (p. 73). This goal was just one of many that led to a condition of multiliteracies at the EL schools, and this was only one condition of nine total. Saurino also named other conditions not captured fully in the nine codes that lead to multiliteracies: a shared vision, educators who value their professionalism, high expectations for every member of the learning community; authentic achievement tied to authentic performance and assessment; students and teachers engaged in active learning; adult advocates for every student; an inviting, supportive, and safe environment; school-initiated family and community partnerships; multi-age classrooms; flexible classroom space; cognitive-guided Mathematics instruction; sensor-motor methods and materials (pp. 151-178).

Sharpswain’s (2005) research goal was to “describe, interpret and appraise the day to day workings of five EL classrooms.” She made an excellent case for why and how EL works to support students. She tied her rich description to evidence from the Design Principles and EL literature, as well as research on best practices in learning. She sought out the educational intentions of EL practitioners, the conditions teachers provide
for the students they teach, the educational significance of the theories and practices, and
the meanings of these theories and practices for students. Like Hodde (2005), Sharpswain
found that aesthetic conditions engaged and connected the students to experiences in
meaningful ways that compelled them to seek other experiences. She also discovered that
democratic conditions nurtured “student voice, decision-making, and ownership in the
learning process; reflective conditions reinforce that learning is a process” and provided
“students with time and skills to think” and “collaborative conditions support the
assertion that learning happens in the context of relationships.” Multiple literacies and
many literacy events were described in full ethnographic detail, including classes on
Language Arts, literature, literature 2, community expert, expedition, and reading/book
club. She also briefly described a “Meeting” in the morning and one “Debrief” in the
afternoon for each grade she observed. These groupings might have been called Meeting
and Debrief as opposed to Crew because the elementary students in this classroom seem
to stay in the same Crew all day, rather than switch to different classrooms as was the
custom in the higher grades. Thus, this school used the term Crew instead of grade.
Meeting activities included grouping in a circle, a good morning song, a greeting, and a
“dialogue about issues of personal and Crew importance” (p. 65). Sharpswain looked
specifically at first/second grade, third and fifth/sixth grade classrooms, but also paints a
detailed picture of EL as a CSR. Her data was drawn from teacher interviews, document
analysis, and observational notes.
Sharpswain also included criticisms of EL. For example, one of the classrooms
she studied did not resemble the other EL classrooms because the financial means were
not available to continue receiving EL professional development, training, and support. Because of this, she encourages EL to incorporate “capacity building skills . . . to sustain and deepen their implementation of the design” through documentation of success and fundraising (p. 290-291). She also encouraged future studies that examine standardized test scores in EL schools, as well as studies that seek to understand how EL affected students of color or students with disabilities or cultural differences. She recognized that some studies have been done on English language learners, but she wanted to know if the EL model encourage[d] a multi-cultural and/or diverse approach to curriculum?

Are the character values espoused in the design appropriate for students of other cultures? What is the experience of students with diagnoses such as attention deficit disorder, learning disabilities, and psychological conditions…[and] can the EL model shed some light on how to help these students succeed in school? (p. 294)

The fourth dissertation by VanCampen (2000) looked at teacher feedback and revision. She researched three teachers and twenty eighth and ninth grade students in an EL school. By examining teacher feedback on student work, the revisions, and the connections between them, she found that revisions resulted in three things: improvement of the quality of the work, damage to the work, or no change to the work. Feedback, both oral and written, addressed student understanding 14% of the time, acquisition of skills and knowledge 14%, conventions 72%. Also, 30-35% of feedback was linked directly to student revision, but that students do not understand or ignore the rest. However, students did revise on their own: 45% of the revisions they made were self-initiated and 90%
addressed conventions. She provided detail about the literacy practices involving teachers and students, but did not include any peer to peer revision, the social or emotional components of feedback, or how praise effects adolescents’ literacy practices.

At this point, the review detailed and examined the theoretical frameworks that informed this study, as well as the research on EL schools. These theoretical frameworks emerge again to review research on adolescent literacy in non-EL settings, cultural diversity, and student agency. In Chapter 3, these lenses are used to guide study methodology, in Chapter 4 to guide data analysis and findings, and in Chapter 5 to extend understandings of learning, literacy, and youth from the findings of this study. As a review, the previous EL research provided knowledge about the history of EL, including comprehensive school reforms; performance of EL schools; EL teachers and professional development; and literacy in EL schools. In order to continue preparations for the study, the next section of Chapter 2 provides a review of research on this adolescent literacy outside of EL schools, student agency, and cultural diversity.

**Adolescent literacy.**

This study understands literacy to be a complex, socially situated set of practices (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 1990; Heath, 1983; Street, 1984, 1991, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2003), which extends notions of literacy beyond the abilities to read and write. This study recognizes multiple modes of meaning for literacy practices, which are not limited to alphabetic texts (Christenbury, Bomer & Smagorinsky, 2009, p. 7) and can be called multiple literacies (Street, 1996) or multimodalities (Kress, 1997). Literacy is not considered neutral; instead, it is viewed as enmeshed in power structures (Street, 1996).
Finally, d/Discourses (Gee, 1990) are socially recognized ways of being in the world that include much more than language (p. 2).

Thus, adolescent literacy is a socially situated practice done by people “with agency and expertise, though how this manifests itself may vary significantly across contexts and situations” (Clark et al., 2010, p. 117). Adolescents are not “wholly ‘in crisis’ nor ‘in deficit’ when it comes to literacy” (Clark et al., 2010, p. 117). The National Council of Teachers of English was helpful in further defining the concept of adolescent literacy, as Jacobs (2008) did in her work on adolescents:

It is more than reading and writing. It involves purposeful social and cognitive processes. It helps individuals discover ideas and make meaning. It enables functions such as analysis, synthesis, organization, and evaluation. It fosters the expression of ideas and opinions and extends to understanding how texts are created and how meanings are conveyed by various media, brought together in productive ways. . . . This complex view of literacy builds upon but extends beyond definitions of literacy that focus on features like phonemic awareness and word recognition.

With that definition in mind, the following studies revealed some of what is known about adolescent literacies. In many ways, these studies overlapped in how they framed adolescent literacy, power, and learning. However, for this review, I grouped the studies together by the most salient perspective they contributed to what is known about adolescent literacy, issues of power in education, and socially situated learning. Thus, the following section is organized by these three main ideas: 1) literacy and learning are
socially situated practices in relationship with power structures and cultural identities. These cultures involve local, global, historical, and current aspects that come together around the use of text. 2) Literacy is investigated from the ideological model and multiple literacies are valued. 3) Confident characterizations of adolescents are troubled by researchers who position youth as agentitive resisters of hegemonic power structures.

The first studies reviewed posit that literacy and learning are socially situated practices in relationship with power structures and cultural identities. These cultures involve local, global, historical, and current aspects that come together around the use of text. Relationships between people, and relationships between people and texts were important implications of these studies.

Finders (1997) ethnography of two groups of middle school girls revealed that “literacy provided a tangible means by which to claim status, challenge authority, and document social allegiances” and that “the girls turned to literacy to assist them in defining and displaying their more adult roles” (p. 4). The teachers in this middle school, although reporting to have a student centered philosophy, tended to gear literacy practices toward the students that were just like them. Finders warned that "a pedagogy built on comfort, built on students' experiences, will, of course, continue to privilege those who feel most at home in the classroom" (p. 119). Finders urged educators to consider adolescents’ abilities to read critically, as well as to address the realities of students’ lives through informed literacy instruction. Lastly, Finder’s participants were marginalized through gender and class normalizations of how good girls behave. Girls were often used by teachers as “a spacer” (p. 125) between ‘rowdy’ boys due to the fact
that, as gendered students, their expected cooperation and accommodating was meant to be a calming presence (Harper, 2000).

Franzak (2006) reviewed qualitative studies for what they “reveal about the reading habits and values of adolescent readers” (p. 221). She found that teachers and schools could support adolescent literacies by providing choice and by developing relationships with students in order to “increase their sense of efficacy in all aspect of reading, from selecting texts, to developing stance, to acquiring subject-specific textual understandings” (p. 228). Positive, caring relationships could be used to mentor adolescents through literacy practices (p. 226), which will position the teacher as interpreter rather than teacher as guide. It was a lack of an “internal perspective on one’s reading identity” that “is perhaps the most pernicious fallout from reading instructional practices” (p. 226) where the teacher does all of the talking and thinking. Teachers also needed to set authentic purpose for reading and writing (p. 227) and to look at the books that were available in the classrooms to determine if these texts represent what students want to read (p. 228). She sought to know if students were engaged or if they were capable, but not engaged (p. 232). Furthermore, “marginalized readers will benefit from the valuing of their nonschool literacies as they learn that all literacy practices are contextually bound” (p. 228). She critiqued the current testing practices and encourages adolescent literacy policy to be

Responsive to adolescents’ authentic needs and behaviors as readers of multiple texts. It must allow for individual responses, and it must teach students how to recognize cultural responses. Such a policy acknowledges student agency and
fosters accountability where it most matters—in students’ views of their own reading abilities. (p. 235)

Franzak (2006) concluded by calling for a rethinking of the current crisis rhetoric so that adolescents could have a supportive and positive environment in which to flourish. She argued that adolescent literacy policy fosters the belief that we were in a crisis that calls for intervention (p. 209).

Intrator and Kunzman’s work (2009) found adolescents desired connection with adults; these relationships mattered (p. 39). It was through this ecology of relationships that literacies emerged (p. 29). However, these “relationship[s] between teachers and their adolescent students must be dialogical in nature, a cultivation of listening and learning by both adults and teens” (p. 29). They also claimed that “it seems clear that our schools struggle to engage adolescents in the formal curriculum” and that students were often “bored and disengaged in school” (p. 31). They were alarmed that “researchers have found that the secondary curriculum is boring” and “the pervasiveness of student testimony describing boredom and disengagement with school-related tasks is alarming” (p. 37).

Kinloch’s (2010) participatory action research with two African American high school students in Harlem revealed that youth could be ethnographers of their own community and agents of change. By working with youth, Kinloch organized and supported Khaleeq and Phillip in working with community members, other youth, teachers, and researchers, all of which involved complex literacy practices like journaling, discussing, interviewing, teaching, researching, and “critiquing multiple
positions and perspectives” (p. 145). These literacies also included a variety of media from “oral language, multimodalities, to computer and visual literacies, and among other things, performances” which “help us acquire voices and critical agencies” (p. 9). Her work positioned adolescents as racialized beings whose literacy lives were “heavily connected to cultural practices, activism, and rights movements, as well as community forms of education that value the power of the written and oral words” (p. 6). Their literacy practices were “influenced by politics of place that is connected to local histories, discourses, and lived experiences” (p. 6) and enabled youth to join with others to investigate their communities, as well as themselves.

Weir (1998) studied the effectiveness of embedded questions as a comprehension strategy in her middle school remedial reader classroom. She scaffolded embedding questions for the readers by physically cutting apart the stories, pasting in questions, and putting the story back together with the questions as a part of the official text. Gradually, through a deep connection with the text, the students learned to embed their own questions, as well as make predictions, characterizations, and vocabulary notes. The data she gathered from their final projects, talk in class, annotations on stories, standardized assessments, and interviews revealed that the students were able and willing to annotate the stories themselves, with predictive questions as the predominant type, followed by questions of clarification. She also found that standardized tests results “validated gains in reading competency for many of the 15 students” with pretest reading comprehension percentiles ranging from 14 to 52 and post test percentiles ranging from 11 to 99 (p. 466). She discovered that the process of talking to one in small groups and whole
classroom talk “reinforced the utility of the [metacognitive] strategies modeled by embedded questions” and helped students to internalize them (p. 467). Thus, socially situated notions of literacy and learning brought about positive educational implications for educators and researchers.

Although Weih’s (2007) boys’ book club study contained significant limitations and troublesome implications, he discovered important information about adolescent literacies for all students and teachers. The limitations of his study included using only ten boys, all of whom he already knew from previous experience. He also asked them questions that perpetuated gendered answers and roles within the group. Weih assumed that good pedagogical decisions, including student choice and voice, making students experts on a topic, having texts that connect with student interests, and making learning meaningful would only apply to supporting boys’ reading and comprehension abilities. He also encouraged a male, coach-like leader to ensure a successful boys’ book club. However, this study should not be discounted for its gendered assumptions because Weih provided a helpful reminder that books in classrooms need to appeal to many different people, and these books should not only reflect the teacher’s interests. He also reminded educators to scaffold for students, have a clear purpose for choosing books, to consider issues of motivation, and to reread the texts until the text was known well enough to teach.

Lenters (2006) reviewed the literature on adolescent literacy and determined that resistant readers could become struggling readers (and vice versa) without teacher support. For her review, she asked: “what does the literature on adolescent resistance to
reading contribute to our understanding of struggling adolescent readers?” (p. 136). She sought out answers from adolescents, teachers, and researchers. Adolescents said they resisted reading most often because lack of interest or text difficulty. Students rarely cited poor reading ability. Students reported that they were more motivated when there was an authentic purpose for the reading. Teachers said that they believed student resistance comes from an early lack of success and enjoyment of reading. Teachers found that content area literacy was too demanding without enough time to cover content or knowledge of how to support students through proper content area literacy professional development. Researchers said that literacy needs to be seen as a situated practice that expanded the literary canon and values the types of literacies valued by students. Lenters emphasized that not all resistant readers struggle with literacy skills (p. 141) and that teachers needed to demonstrate the usefulness and relevance of school reading and information. She found that intrinsic motivation was more important to develop than situational motivation, school literacy did not equal intelligence, students needed practice time, and that some students could learn how to get by without reading (as opposed to learning to be a better reader). She encouraged educators to consider and integrate: peers and social learning opportunities, read aloud and independent reading across genres and medias, assessed and non-assessed reading activities, and protecting the pleasure factor in reading activities.

Finally, Vasudevan and Campano’s (2009) extensive review of research on adolescent literacies revealed that some adolescent literacy practices were “marginalized in schools and engender stereotypes along lines of class, race, and gender” (p. 320). They
suggested that “as an alternative, literacy curricula may invite young men to become partners in challenging heteronormative and homophobic assumptions and cultivate feminist masculinities” (p. 322). In other words, educators must attend to the socially situated nature of literacy and learning.

The second grouping of literature investigates literacy from the ideological model and values multiple literacies. According to Jacobs (2008), “educators commonly agree that adolescents come to school with knowledge of multiple discourses or literacies.” This knowledge came from their membership in a variety of communities, both online and off, which they use for a multitude of purposes in order to create meaning and participate in creating the contexts in which they live.

In Davies (2006) study of teenage girls on Wiccan websites, she framed her methodology and findings within the New Literacy Studies (NLS). She found ample evidence that adolescent literacies were rich, complex, and thriving. She also discovered that adolescent literacy practices were blurring the boundaries between on and offline worlds. She described the spaces as fluid and seamlessly connected. The youth in her study brought in aspects of their lives like photographs and diary like entries in such a way that they become “part of a new digital, textual landscape and gain new meanings within those texts” (p. 62). She argued that these spaces “afford teenagers opportunities to engage in powerful writing” which were due to the immediacy of publication and social alliances (pp. 60-61). Davies described teenage communication as characterized by “constant contact with peers” who use the internet to “interact both within and beyond their immediate peer group to create an affinity space” (p. 61).
Moje et al. (2008) argued that youth were associated with struggling even though statistics show that students could comprehend a text, integrate information across multiple texts, relate text to self, use textual knowledge to evaluate new texts, and use this understanding to compose texts for an audience, especially in regards to content area texts (p. 111). Moje et al.’s (2008) study sought ways in which adolescent’s motivation for reading could be encouraged (p. 113). Moje et al. (2008) discovered what students value in texts: They like to read books about people like them, and not only in terms of race, ethnicity, age, class, or gender (although these features are important). They also like to identify with characters who are resilient through struggles, people who are working through relationships, people trying to figure out who they are. They want to read books and write texts that offer them social capital in the form of information, ideas for self-improvement, models for identities, or ways to maintain existing relationships and build new ones. (pp. 146-147).

Moje et al. (2008) also found that adolescents were reading and writing frequently outside of school in a range of literacy contexts (p. 146). In most cases, the youth that were reading novels, were simultaneously building their vocabulary, which in turn lead to more reading, and thus, the better youth became at reading overall. This finding was an example of success leading to more success, yet this was also an important indication of what reading skills traditional academic grades were actually assessing, and what information on other important skills they may be missing. Their results also indicated that adolescents may not be engaging in literacy practices enough to make a difference in
school achievement (p. 147). This lack of academic achievement could be due to lack of frequency because “only reading novels on a regular basis outside of school is shown to have a positive relationship to academic achievement as measured by school grades” (p. 107). Why were other literacy practices not leading to increases in achievement? They discovered that this was mainly because the things youth were interested in reading align more with the purposes for reading in English Language Arts, where emotions and opinions were explored more than in a chemistry classroom. They were troubled by this finding because it presents a particular challenge.

Knowing that much of the reading and writing youth are motivated to do on their own revolves around the maintenance of social networks, relationships, identity development, and self-improvement and self-expression, how do we engage young people in the texts of disciplinary domains outside of school? (p. 147)

Lastly, Moje et al. (2008) also verified that youth were participating in affinity groups based on literacies (e.g. poetry and writing clubs, as well as chat rooms) during their day. They determined that “Internet activity does not seem to be responsible for distracting youths’ attention from school reading and writing, as some would argue” (p. 149). However, “nor is Internet activity particularly supportive of school achievement” (p. 149).

The third collection of research includes studies that are grouped together because they trouble confident characterizations of adolescents. Instead, these adolescent literacy researchers position youth as agentitive resisters of hegemonic power structures.

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8 a group of like-minded people who engage in shared practices
Pitcher, Martinex, Dicembre, Fewster, and McCormick’s (2010) study of seven case study middle school students who attended the university reading clinic revealed that these adolescents’ literacy needs were not being met by their teachers. Pitcher et al. interviewed the students and their parents, administered multiple assessments, and gathered information from multiple sources on what was being taught in the students’ schools. The researchers learned that “reading comprehension was below level for all of the students in the study, but none of them were receiving intervention focused on comprehension” (p. 643). Two of the students were in classrooms with scripted programs focused on phonics, and the other five were only asked to read and answer questions in their Language Arts classes. In addition, content area teachers were not providing any comprehension assistance with the materials, even though the test data revealed that these students had the lowest comprehension scores with expository texts. The research team recommended that schools hire qualified reading specialists rather than purchase scripted curriculum, incorporate technology and student choice, and communicate regularly with family members about their student’s education. Although it was not directly stated, it was clear that their work also highlighted the need for teachers to incorporate comprehension strategies into their instruction, to use a variety of strategies so that students could find one that helps the students, and that teachers should be working from assessment data to improve instruction. This study positioned youth as agentitive in that they did not blame them for failing to improve their reading comprehension abilities.
Instead, the researchers examined the failure of the institution to not only properly assess the students, but to serve them with the instruction they needed to improve their abilities.

Alvermann (2006) used discourse analysis to study a discussion between two African American young males, a pre-service teacher, and an eighth grade student in order to challenge the ‘not yet adult’ cultural model of adolescence. She organized her findings into four areas following Gee’s (2004) example: social languages, situated meanings, cultural models, and Discourses. For example, the participants used social languages to enact particular socially situated identities, namely claiming and sharing expertise on rap music. Through this analysis, Alvermann demonstrated how adolescents could provide relevant viewpoints when the adults around them worked from a situated perspective, considered them capable to share knowledge, and gave them an opportunity to do so.

Tatum (2008) also focused his work on African American adolescents in a quest to find what texts interested them. He discovered two types of texts were most often present in the lives of the young men he worked with: enabling texts which went “beyond skill or strategy development to include a social, cultural, political, spiritual, or economic focus” and disabling texts which reinforced “the perception of being struggling readers” (pp. 164-166). He recommended that researchers and educators stop focusing on African American males as at-risk, which “ignores their racialized and gendered identities” and puts focus on “comparing their academic outcomes to those of other students” (p. 163). Instead, the focus should be on selecting texts which connect with their lives, contribute to a healthy psyche, focus on a collective struggle, provide a road map for being, doing
and acting, and provide a modern awareness for the real world (p. 165). He added that “the content of the text alone may not be sufficient to move them toward engagement. Instructional supports that included explicit strategy instruction and ways of finding an entry point or entry passage to the text may be necessary to get adolescents engaged” (p. 165).

Brozo (1990) observed a high school classroom and interviewed the “poor” readers in the class in an attempt to uncover their coping strategies. He carried out this study because he believed that the students who were hiding their struggles with reading did not get the attention or practice they needed to expand the skills that they did possess. Brozo found that students employed many different coping strategies: fooling around, acting sick, forgetting to bring books and materials to class, getting an answer from another person, hiding out, bluffing, making or avoiding eye contact, nodding head, moving their body, moving a pencil, engaging in “apple polishing,” sitting right up front, and exploiting alternative assignments to reading. Brozo encouraged teachers to support unsuccessful readers by: developing personal rapport, becoming more aware of behaviors, teaching all students to monitor performance, adapting instruction to low ability students, referring to and cooperating with a reading specialist, avoiding dismissing or expecting less of these students, and letting students work with others.

**Student agency.**

These studies foregrounded socially situated notions of literacy and learning, adolescents as agentitive beings, and contributed to the perception of adolescents free from confident characteristics that Lesko (2001) determined were so pervasive in US
culture. The scholarship around student agency often began with a positioning statement regarding the definition of student agency. Oftentimes the definition spoke to self and action, specifically how students could take action on their own behalf (Akos, 2004, p. 3) as well as to see the results of those actions (Basharina, 2009). On some occasions student agency was connected to student voice (Bahou, 2012) and an ability to exert power (Basharina, 2009; Blackburn, 2004; Brown, 2009). Definitions of agency also included mention of students in relationship the world (Gutstein, 2007), to teacher, or to other students, as well as in a binary relationship to authority (Brown, 2009). Lastly, Lindgren (2012) defined agency as the capability of a person to make a choice that makes a difference in their lives.

The empirical studies reviewed included work from Akos, Bahou, Basharina, Blackburn, Gutstein, and Lindgren. Akos (2004) studied 10,000 letters of advice to sixth grade students about entering middle school from eighth grade students. He found that students most often discussed "choosing and changing classes or electives, improving study habits, and making and managing friends" (p. 1) in their letters. Bahou (2012) built student agency by using and documenting students as researchers (SAR) as an intervention to the ineffective teaching she witnessed in a Lebanese school. In Basharina’s (2009) research “on the kinds of learning afforded by asynchronous international computer-mediated communication among Japanese, Mexican, and Russian English language learners” (p. 390), she sought to discover what the role of student agency was in learning. Blackburn (2004) highlighted three queer youth who asserted their agency in different ways through their school experiences, including 1) creating an
outreach to education teachers to better help queer students, 2) academic achievement despite school bullying, 3) creating an alternative learning environment. She cautioned people working with youth to avoid assuming that “students lack agency because they do not exhibit their agency in school sanctioned ways” or ways in which educators recognize or value (p 109). Instead, educators should be open to viewing their assertions of agency as active resistance to the institutions that oppress them. Thus, “resistance is not a failure to assert agency; rather it is a move, perhaps even an aggressive move, to assert agency for a purpose that is in conflict with the dominant person or institution, such as a school” (p. 109). Gutstein (2007) studied his own Mathematics middle school classroom and his focus on social justice. He sought to understand how teachers could create conditions for student agency to develop. Through a unit based on the students’ neighborhood and the issue of gentrification, he brought in an authentic audience, field work and experts to make the lesson effective, especially in developing student sociopolitical consciousness and agency. On a side note, EL schools often struggled to bring Math into the expeditions, but Gutstein’s curriculum was an excellent exemplar for how it could be done. Lindgren’s (2012) study of an online course revealed that explicit elements of narrative and student agency aided student learning, heightened critical thinking, and strengthened their engagement in the course (p. 352). Students were especially enthusiastic about story animations and the ability to choose learning modules.

Matters that could affect student agency in negative ways varied from academic to social concerns in schools. Akos (2004) review of literature uncovered concerns over homework, difficult courses, more rules, getting lost, being on time, lockers, stricter
teachers, bullying, making friends, and getting good grades (as cited from Akos, 2002; Akos & Galassi, 2004; Lord et al., 1994; Mizelle & Mullins, 1997; Scott et al., 1995; Weldy, 1990; Wells, 1996). Gutstein (2007) asserted that students must have ownership of their developing writing and thinking in a way that challenges Macedo’s (1994) literacy for stupidification and Friere’s (1970/1998) banking model, as well as Lipman’s (2004) high stakes testing and accountability regimes.

In addition to concerns, Akos (2004) found that some research has discovered positive perceptions for the transition from elementary to middle school concerning student sense of agency in school. Those positive changes included new friends, more freedom, class variety, athletic opportunities, and enjoyment of electives (p. 2).

This review of literature on student agency also yielded important information about what teachers needed to know to support student agency. The diversity of responses connected with the diversity of student experiences in school, including the variance in curriculum and classes offered from one learning environment to another. Bahou (2012) encouraged educators to reposition students as researchers, rather than the objects of research in order to active their voices and social agency (p. 246). There were organizational conditions for schools to facilitate projects like SAR, which casted “teachers in a different role than banker” and helped them to be prepared “to cross the boundaries of their cultural norms” (p. 243). The conditions included teachers who considered themselves co-organizers and supporters for student learning, as well as people who listened to students. These items did not change who had the authority in the classroom. Instead, the conditions disrupted the traditional and problematic student
teacher binary. Basharina (2009) found that the level (deep, strategies, or surface) of interaction in international online learning communities revealed the student’s sense of agency. The deep communicators, or students who spent time and effort on longer responses and posts, gained the most from the learning environment (p. 401). According to Brown (2009) talk within and talk about classroom was a good source of information, as well as the use of the personal pronoun “I” as this may denote ownership of the activity and choices. He also found that explaining and arguing could be seen in this classroom as resources that have potential to promote an understanding of the nature of knowing and doing Mathematics, as well as an awareness of the ‘self’ acting as a Mathematician (p. 182). Lastly, Brown encouraged educators to develop student agency by scaffolding skills overtime and through negotiated decisions between students and teacher. Gorzelsky’s (2009) findings suggested that student agency was linked to the teacher’s respect for student boundaries. This respect could affirm “students' competence and creativity” which was “a necessary step in promoting their readiness to consider weaknesses or problems in their positions” (p. 75) Furthermore, this “approach encourages the mental chewing required for integration and intellectual agency” even when it meant they might “argue against ideas Justin had encouraged them to consider seriously” (p. 83). Lindgren (2012) concluded that students were more driven to achieve the agendas they set for themselves. Thus, working for student agency through choice could lead to people working harder and persevering through challenges (p. 346).

The review on student agency yielded a comprehensive definition of agency, as well as implications for educators who desire to work toward supporting student agency.
The final studies reviewed bring together all four of the theoretical perspectives on adolescents, literacy, power, and learning. The assertion that cultural diversity in terms of class, gender, race, and sexuality are constructions that matter in the research on adolescent literacies. The following studies explored the ways in which students constructed social identity markers like class, gender, race, and sexuality, as well as the ways in which the students were constructed within educational contexts. The goal of this literature review was to inform the study in terms of cultural diversity and class, gender, race, and sexuality as social constructions of identity for adolescents in EL schools.

The impacts of class, gender, race, and sexuality cannot be experienced as separate social constructions of identity. Instead, every experience has aspects of each construction present, although one aspect could be foregrounded from the rest. Thus, it is difficult to study one in isolation. The following categories foregrounded one aspect of cultural diversity, but most of this research overlapped into other categories. From this literature review, literacy practices were understood to be classed, gendered, raced, and sexualized; people constructed and were constructed; people were often juxtaposed against a mythical norm; and, without attention, inequities would be reproduced in schools. Because my study took place in a predominantly African American school, it was important to consider Hinton-Johnson’s (2005) work in terms of oppressive constructions of beauty and the researcher’s inadvertent place in them as a white female. Connell’s (2009) review of gender research positioned the researcher to avoid problematic assumptions about gender as a binary or biological fact. Instead gender was
understood as a social construction that was linked with race, class, and ethnicity, which corresponded to the many other scholars reviewed and who foregrounded gender and sexuality in their work. Anyon’s (1980) work provided a better understanding of the ways in which class may influence the students’ experience of ELMS, as did Gilmore’s (1985) study with class and race.

Class.

Anyon’s (1980) work on socio-economic class in schools found that there was a “hidden curriculum” in education. She looked at examples of tasks, work, and dialogue between teachers and students in five elementary schools to investigate if different types of educational experiences and curriculum were made available to students in contrasting social class communities (p. 67). She defined social class as “one’s occupation and income level” and “as a series of relationships” (p. 68). She explained that “a person’s social class is defined here by the way that person relates to the process in society by which goods, services, and culture are produced” (p. 68). For example, what one does to earn money affects the relationship to how and where one shops. Using this definition, she found that school differed drastically for the different classes.

Gilmore’s (1985) research on a black elementary school and its literacy practices spoke directly to the ways in which race and class could affect the students’ experience of school and sense of agency in the classroom. His study found that access to higher track literacy classes was denied to students who had an “inappropriate attitude” despite their demonstrations of literacy competence (p. 111). Gilmore revealed that attitude at this school was defined by teachers in terms of race. The “portraits of resistance” and “face-
saving dances” were “regularly interpreted as part of black communicative repertoire and style” and were linked with “having a bad attitude” as well as student worth (pp. 113-4).

**Gender.**

Connell’s (2009) gender theory provided a framework to better understand the following empirical studies. In her work, Connell led the reader through an extensive examination of gender theory, research, and construction throughout history. She explained that gender was a “social fact,” that the brain does not choose neatly to be male or female, and that most discussions of gender were based in a problematic binary system, which creates divisions and oversimplifies what it means to be human. For educational researchers, it was important that bodies were recognized as both objects and agents of social practice.

To add further complexity to the gendered constructions of identity in Connell’s work, attention turned to the work of additional gender researchers and theorists Davies (1997), Connell (2009), and Pascoe (2007). These scholars state that the historically based sociocultural construction of gender is so pervasive in society that the consequences seem normal and natural. Gender construction, which shapes everyday life, is based in difference, power, and hegemony. People are constantly performing and resisting gender dichotomies. Gender issues are intersectional with other complex issues of race, class, sexual orientation, and location (Sanford, 2006; Godley, 2003). Orellana (1995) made the important distinction “between gender and sex” in that “sex refers to biological features that differentiate males from females, and gender refers to the ways in
which masculinity and femininity were constructed, shaped, and expressed in society” (p. 678).

In an effort to understand normalized masculinity, studies by Epstein, (1997), Young (2000), Alloway & Gilbert (2004), Godley (2003), Dutro (2002), and Orellana (1995) offered assistance. Masculinity has been constructed over time to create present day norms for biologically determined males. Gender (traits associated with masculinity and femininity) and sex (a mix of chromosomes, hormones and genitalia) were often conflated in that one determines the other. Because of this construction, masculinity was associated with a macho appearance, heterosexual, very rugby (read sports and competition), homophobic, and unfriendly to women (Epstein, 1997, p. 109). Davies’ (1997) interview with Zac revealed similar masculine tendencies to position males over women, even to the extent that he spoke these roles “into existence” (p. 14) despite the obvious reality of the situation because there was a “joyful sense of power that boys could gain from being positioned within dominant forms of discourse which hand them ascendancy over others” (p. 15). Davies also utilized a student’s Barbie and Ken story to illustrate another unnerving aspect of masculinity; violence and silencing of others (p. 15). Young (2000) pulled from her research on four homeschooled boys and Jackson & Salisbury’s (1996) work to argue that “there is no such thing as masculinity-only masculinities” in that there was no one way to be masculine, “different periods of history and different cultures construct practices of masculinity differently” and (from Connell, 1987) that “power and domination are not shared equally among men” (p. 316). The four boys asserted their masculinity in different yet sometimes overlapping ways by setting
lofty goals, laughing at girl’s bodies, calling each other derogatory names, contemplating self-loathing and suicide if transformed into a girl, and “displaying physical prowess and a competitive nature” (p. 316). Alloway & Gilbert (2004) found that masculinity was constructed as real men do not study; real men work, boys disliked school, boys want the practical, males were the workers with access to economic independence and as rejecting any hint of femininity. Steve, a white, high SES, and student athlete, positioned himself as academically superior (drawing on his social capital) in some contexts and as inferior in others (Godley, 2003). Dutro (2002) found that some males were affectionate, many used sports to form and maintain relationships, and those with social capital (Bourdieu, 1977) used humor to navigate the crossing of gender norms. Finally, Orellana (1995) found that boys positioned and aligned themselves with heroic actions and characters in texts.

Although this organization perpetuates the binary of masculine and feminine, the following section details information on normalized femininity. Exaggerated femininity took place in Epstein’s (1997) work as a student, Ayo, recalled a wedding simulation while he was in infant school. The girls were dressed in bride’s dresses, while the boys remained in ordinary clothes, as if the girls were meant to gain something from wearing “pretty, frilly clothes” and the boys would not (p. 107). Pascoe (2007) described how girls were positioned in a high school pep rally as helpless, yet attractive, and silent victims. Orellana (1995) found that in the particular classroom setting of her study, girls chose to write drafts of the stories by hand (not on the computer), participated less vocally than boys in class discussions, and read to younger students (p. 695). These
findings revealed normalized versions of femininity as technophobic, silent, and caretaking. Most of the girls in this class also focused their writing topics around beauty and relationships (p. 696); which corresponded to the findings in other studies that look for difference. Girls were also positioned as “powerless victims to be attacked but then saved by male heroes” and then later “granted” more opportunity for gender equality in two boys’ story (p. 696). These examples began to reveal the way that students position each other within gender boundaries, as well as the opportunities teachers have to step in and provide assistance. A particularly important aspect of Orellana’s (1995) work was that she attempted to “correct the tendency of research on gender to assume a White, middle-class norm” (p. 674), which should be a focus of any research in education.

In their work with Nikki, Trousdale & McMillan (2003) complicated normalized descriptions of femininity because of the fluid nature in which Nikki performed gender in her own life. Nikki was drawn to female characters that were brave, possessed agency, took an active role in solving problems, and had physical strength or power (pp. 14-15). Chandler-Olcott & Mahar (2003) also chose to focus on participants that resist hegemonic versions of gender, Rhiannon and Eileen, who followed their interest in learning to program and learning to negotiate attachments and links, respectively. Both girls were limited in real time school settings from crossing the genderized boundary lines of technology with social repercussions, so they used digital literacies to “consider the complexities of heterosexuality, develop standards of physical beauty, and explore the relationships between masculinity and femininity” (p. 380).

Race.
Research regarding youth and education has documented the ways in which race has been enacted in the classroom. Hinton-Johnson (2005) selected and reviewed six young adult novels by three African American female authors, Johnson, Williams-Garcia, and Woodson, for their contributions to the larger discussion around race, gender, class, and beauty. In these novels, “physical beauty is a significant concern” for the female protagonists as it was often used as a form of oppression (p. 28). Hair and skin politics were reflected in these novels and “characters often convey contempt for a beauty standard that excludes people of the Diaspora, as it is suggested that white or light skin and long, straight hair connote beauty” and could turn that contempt toward themselves or white women who have been used as the standard (p. 28). Another aspect of beauty came through ideals on body size. Hinton-Johnson (2005) explained through the work of Cauce et al. (1996) that “the ideal American feminine figure” of “petite proportions, slim hips, and small facial features—is not often seen among African American women” (p. 103). Instead, “black women have been described as big, fat…and boisterous” (Hinton-Johnson, 2005, p. 29). Thus, discussions of race need to consider beauty as a way to communicate experience.

Fordham (1993) explored the impact of gender diversity on adolescent school achievement by analyzing ethnographic data from an urban high school. Within her data and from many females in the academy experiences, she recognized that females often have to let go of identification as a woman (e.g. mother) and attempt to pass as male to succeed and win acceptance of peers. Relatedly, she concluded that the normalized definition of femaleness perpetuates white middle class ways of being. In response to
both racial and gendered othering, African American females "resist these consuming images that assert their nothingness" through "loudness" (p. 3). This subversive behavior often negatively affected academic achievement (p. 5). Fordham also found that although the Black female students at Capital High were the more successful students:

Silence around female achievement was not unusual. In some ways, this silence suggested that school officials took their ability and willingness to do the work for granted; in other ways, the silence could be-and was-perceived by the students as discounting and/or disparaging their academic effort and achievement. At the same time, however, these girls were learning an important lesson for survival in the academy: the most efficient way to intersect the patriarchic system at the school is to perform all assigned tasks while remaining silent, to respond as if absent rather than present. (p. 21)

The girls in this study had few options for success. Fordham found that they were pushed to relinquish their femaleness and Blackness and attempt to “pass” according to white male’s standards, or at the very least, they were to dissociate themselves from “those loud Black girls” who refuse “to conform to standards of good behavior without actually entering the realm of bad behavior by breaking school rules” (p. 22). In addition, the “loud Black girls” were punished for their reluctance to adhere to Euro-American patriarchic structure, and were stripped of their sense of academic agency.

**Sexuality.**

Ma’ayan’s (2010) work told the story of Erika, a Hispanic eighth grader in a large urban southwestern public middle school. Erika was chosen as a key participant in
Ma’ayan’s study because Erika made intriguing shifts from a vibrant young woman working the hallways like a politician to a passive and silent victim in the classroom. Although Erika was engaged in many significant literacy practices, none of these practices were acknowledged by the school. She was labeled at risk, and earned low test scores and failing grades. Ma’yan found that “Erika was not silent because she was shy; she was silent because the school had no room for her words” (p. 646). The lived experiences that Erika could speak on with agency in the classroom were gangs, sexuality, and violence. All of these experiences were not welcome topics in her school, so Ma’yan recommended that teachers “working on developing literacy with urban middle school students are to use culturally relevant and age-appropriate texts coupled with open discussion” (p. 650). Erika, and the other students in Ma’yan’s study, wanted to talk about sexuality and wanted to have open and honest relationships with their educators.

Blackburn and Buckley’s (2005) study of ELA curricula to determine the extent to which US public high schools addressed same sex desire found that only eighteen schools of the 212 schools that responded included texts, films, or other materials. In addition, these materials were usually only addressed in a single class that was an elective for seniors (p. 205). Thus, Blackburn and Buckley made many recommendations for a queer-inclusive curricula which recognizes the fluid nature of classifications, rather than LGBTQ-inclusive curricula, which could oppress through labels (p. 202). Blackburn and Buckley appreciated the people in schools which worked toward inclusivity in the larger school structure (e.g., Gay Straight Alliances, same sex prom dates), but they believed it
was “more important that high school students examine their cultural connections to what they study,” and most ELA curriculum “is hindered by heterosexism and homophobia” (pp. 202-203).

Summary.

This literature review has explored the research performed with and about four essential components of this study: EL schools, adolescent literacies, student agency, and cultural diversity. First, the study worked from the understanding that there has been significant research performed on EL schools in terms of the effectiveness of the model, much of which found the EL model to be promising or too new to adequately assess. Other research covered the success of EL as a professional development vehicle as well as some aspects of literacy in EL schools, including the multimodal nature of literacy in and out of EL school spaces. Second, there was also research that informed adolescent literacy as a socially situated practice which is sometimes recognized by adults as rich, multiple, and multimodal; as more than a set of skills; and as a means of relationship maintenance. Adolescent literacy research was often geared toward improving comprehension in school. Most importantly, research on adolescent literacies found that adolescents benefited from teachers who considered motivation, offered choice, provided access to a diversity of texts, and considered adolescents’ classed, raced, and gendered selves. Third, research on student agency spoke to positioning students as sources and seekers of information, powerful agents of change and resistance, as well as owners of their developing writing and thinking abilities. This research also informed this study in terms of teachers who worked toward developing students’ intrinsic motivation and
personal agendas, while respecting students’ boundaries. Fourth, students experienced troublesome cultural constructions of identity in schools. These experiences included a raced, classed, gendered, and sexualized hidden curriculum that perpetuated hegemonic norms and affected academic access and achievement.

**Implications and Gaps for Future Research**

Because context matters deeply in issues of education, literacy, learning, and youth, this review sought to understand the literature through a focus on socially situated notions of literacy and learning, as well as specific perspectives on power and adolescence. Using these frameworks, I discovered that the studies on EL schools that focused on the effectiveness of the model promoted an understanding of autonomous notion of literacy. In comparison, the studies that focus on the teacher’s experiences of EL foregrounded the situated and social nature of learning. However, the studies that focused on literacy in EL schools promoted a perspective on learning, literacy, and youth as agentive, socially situated, and multiple. The non-EL studies on adolescent literacy emphasized an understanding of literacy to be complex and socially situated, especially in terms of power as it is enacted in educational settings, and adolescents as agentive, free of confident characterizations of youth. Finally, the studies regarding cultural diversity and student agency also promoted an understanding of youth and learning as socially situated and complex, with great deal of attention given to the power structures in which youth experience constructions of race, class, gender, and sexuality. The review uncovered that no one has thoroughly investigated Crew, Community Meetings, or Electives as spaces for literacy practices in EL schools. Relatedly, there is also a gap in
what is known about literacy, student experience, and cultural diversity in EL schools. Thus, this study aimed to fill this gap and attend to the suggested implications of past research. These efforts were attempted through the following inquiry questions and by using the methodology explained in the next chapter:

What happens to middle school students when a school works under an educational reform model (Expeditionary Learning) that does not specifically speak to constructions of age, class, gender, race, and sexuality?

- How do different students experience this model of schooling?
- What happens with respect to student agency when students participate in Crew, Community Meetings and Electives in an Expeditionary Learning Middle School?
- What does literacy have to do with this? That is, what literacy events and practices are present during Crew, Community Meetings, and Electives, and how does literacy function to limit or enable different students’ agency?
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

I conducted this study with the intent to understand Expeditionary Learning (EL) schools. From my experience and from the review of literature, EL seems to be a promising reform model. However, EL schools may be limited in that the framework from which they have been developed does not speak directly to the experiences of middle school students who are different in terms of class, gender, race, and sexuality, and as a result, may limit students’ sense of agency. By examining culturally different adolescents and their literacy practices in one EL Middle School (ELMS) in the three contexts that are central to the EL model (Crew, Community Meetings (CM), and Electives) this study attempts to gain a better understanding of the limitations and possibilities of the EL reform model. Thus, this study seeks to fill this gap in understanding by examining the following research questions:

What happens to middle school students when a school works under an educational reform model (Expeditionary Learning) that does not specifically speak to constructions of age, class, gender, race, and sexuality?

• How do different students experience this model of schooling?
What happens with respect to student agency when students participate in Crew, CMs and Electives in an Expeditionary Learning Middle School?

What does literacy have to do with this? That is, what literacy events and practices are present during Crew, CMs, and Electives, and how does literacy function to limit or enable different students’ agency?

In this chapter, I outline and describe the methodology I utilized to do this work. My work began by carefully selecting a site that would allow me to pursue my interests within the intersections of EL and adolescent literacies. At ELMS, I collected data through interviews, participant observation, focus groups, and document collection. My analysis attended to theories of social construction, NLS, agency, and adolescence. I read, coded, and processed data multiple times to find a series of patterns. Eventually, I collapsed those patterns into three findings for my data and multiple implications for schools. Finally, I worked for validity of the research through member checking, triangulation, and praxis. I also documented the limitations of the research.

This chapter is organized into explanations of the following sections: my background with EL and ELMS; ELMS in general, including the three spaces of Crew, CM, and Electives; the ethnographic, qualitative methodology of the study; the selection process for students and spaces; the data collection, the analytic approach, and the efforts toward validity.
Social Location of Researcher

My background with middle schools, EL, and the Ford family\(^9\) of schools has bearing on my location as a researcher within this study. I am highly motivated (Maxwell, 2005, p. 16) to learn more about EL schools and adolescent literacies that can help me to better inform preservice and in-service educators in my future academic career. The choice of an EL school setting came from my positive experience in another EL middle school. I taught at this school in the Pacific Northwest\(^{10}\) for five years and helped it to grow from its first troubled months as a new public charter serving “at-risk” youth to a well-regarded school with a long waitlist of hopeful students. I experienced this school as both a public charter and as an EL school; EL was not present during the first year of the school, but was adopted during the second year. This experience enabled me to see a school before, during, and after EL staff and philosophies came on board. At PNELMS, the EL reform model seemed to transform the school into an engaging, authentic, and effective educational space for teachers and students. This space was characterized by three compelling components: the pervasive culture of literacy, the positioning of students as important and active members of the community and their own learning process, and the authentic and rich learning environment. As a teacher, these components made my job wonderfully rewarding, so when I began my graduate studies, I knew that I wanted to study an EL school. I hoped this setting would enable me to have

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\(^9\) The Ford Family of schools will be explained in detail later in the chapter. For now, it is an administration that is overseeing a set of four diverse public charter schools (including ELMS) in the city of the study.

\(^{10}\) This school will henceforth be referred to as the Pacific Northwest Expeditionary Learning Middle School (PNELMS).
something new to say about adolescent literacies, especially in terms of educational implications that emerged from schools that are working and supporting adolescent literacy practices in a positive way. I did not want to contribute another study which needed to take place out of school to find examples of how schools can work. I was thrilled when an EL middle school (ELMS) was opening in the fall of 2010 in a nearby Midwest community. It was even more convenient that the school was within the Ford family of schools because I was familiar with many of the administrators involved in the school opening. During 2007-2008, I was employed by the Ford family of schools in their public charter high school as an experiential teacher. During that time, I created relationships with administrators and teachers. Thus, when it came time to approach them about participating in this research, I had already established a level of trustworthiness. I gained access to ELMS and joined their community as a researcher during their first and second years of operation.

Description of Site

Geographic location.

In September 2010, the first Expeditionary Learning School in one Midwestern state opened its doors to eighty middle school students. The students came to ELMS from a variety of different communities and locations in the surrounding areas. The students traveled to ELMS through multiple modes of transportation; some students’ journeys took up to an hour or two and involved switching from one mode of transportation to another (field notes, 2011). During the first year of its operation, ELMS was located in an area of the city that included an active recreation center, parks, historic cemeteries, a
small liberal arts university, a thriving church community, and an industrial business area. The housing around the school varied from trailer parks to modest homes priced on average at $60K, but these homes oftentimes sold for less than $20K. According to Zillow.com (2010), supermarkets were not available in this area; mini markets and carryout beverage stores were the only source for local store bought food besides three fast food restaurants within a two mile radius. This area was almost crime free during the month of February according to CrimeReports (2010), but a mile away in all directions, the school was surrounded by an alarming number of sex offenders and incidents of crime. ELMS was housed in a former elementary school building. ELMS shared this space with the Samwell High School, which was another school within the Ford Family of schools. Samwell High School was not an EL school.

During the summer of 2011, ELMS moved to a historic building which was also a former elementary school. This new location was within walking distance to the local state university, which is one of the nation’s largest higher education institutions. This area is surrounded by churches, sororities and fraternities, other university groups, many restaurants, and a highly trafficked area by both pedestrians and cars. Houses in this immediate area sell for $250,000 and up, but most homes were for rent. CrimeReports (2012) lists multiple assaults, stolen vehicles, and thefts around the area, and there were approximately ten sex offenders living in close proximity to the school. College students often walked past the school. During the study, efforts were underway to adjust the school to also house the Ford Family Expeditionary Learning Elementary School set to open for the 2012-2013 school year.
Demographics and structure.

During the time of this study, ELMS was a public charter school that served a diversity of students from many districts. The demographics of the 128 enrolled students as of June 2011 included 66 females, 53 males, and 9 students who did not identify themselves in terms of sex; 38 white, 62 black or multiracial, and 28 students who did not identify themselves in terms of race. Some students and their families enrolled without completing all aspects of the paperwork, so not all data was known about the students at the time of this poll. The ELMS teaching, administration, and office staff also grew to include 13 white and 4 Biracial, Indian, or African American adults, 11 of whom were female, and 6 were male. As cited in many other studies (Baldwin et al., 2007; Dowdy & Campbell, 2008; Garmon, 2004; Zumwalt & Craig, 2005), the racial demographics of the teaching staff were, and remained to be after the 2011 summer hiring period, very different from the racial demographics of the student body.

Both teachers and administrators at ELMS instructed students on a daily basis and met once a week for staff meetings. Each of the ELMS teachers led a Crew, instructed a content area, and offered a variety of Electives to the students. Ms. Ava is a white female who instructed Language Arts, Shakespearean Elective, and Yearbook. Ms. Cara is a white female who instructed Science and a Crime Investigation Elective. Mr. Daniel is a white male who instructed Math, Teambuilding Initiatives, and a Money Management Elective. Ms. Eve is a biracial female who instructed Social Studies and Humanities, as well as a Dance Elective. Ms. Francine is a white female who instructed Wellness, the Yoga and ROX Electives, and functioned as the School Counselor. Mr. Harold is a white
male who instructed Social Studies and the Media Mojo Elective. Ms. Indigo is a biracial female who instructed Art. Ms. Kerry is a white female who instructed Social Studies and Math, as well as the German Elective. Ms. Rose is a white female who instructed Math.

The two ELMS administrators were Mr. Ben, Dean, and Ms. Georgia, Dean and Instructional Guide. They both led crews and Response to Intervention classes in addition to their administrative duties. During the pilot study, Mr. Ben led a Shakespearean Elective and Mrs. Georgia led the band. Mr. Nate was also an administrator, but his role at ELMS was unique. He was present at ELMS in order to prepare for the 2013 opening of the new elementary school to be housed in the same building. He began the year with a Crew, but transitioned out when the new intervention specialist was hired. He also led the Graphic Novels Elective.

Other ELMS staff included intervention specialists, technology support, and office managers. Ms. Jenny, Intervention Specialist, is an African American female and Crew leader. Ms. Olga, Intervention Specialist, is a white female and Crew leader. Mr. Pete is the IT Manager and Network Engineer. Ms. Lauren and Ms. Michelle are both white female office managers.

In addition to the structure of the staff, the ELMS school day and academic year were structured to accommodate the EL reform model. The school day started at 9 am and ended at 3:30 pm, and each class met for 45-50 minutes. The length of the school-day provided for daily Crew meetings around lunch time, a mixture of content area classes in which to explore the expedition topics, and an extended period at the end of the day for Electives and CM. ELMS separated the students during the school day into grade level
groups indicated by 6a, 6b, and so on. There were three sixth grade groups, two seventh grade groups, and three eighth grade groups. The 6a students traveled together to each class, but attended different Crews and Electives. The table below indicates the typical daily schedule, including the teaching assignments and preparation times for each educator. The schedule changed slightly each day so that each group of students could attend each class over the course of the week.

Table 2 Monday ELMS schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Start</th>
<th>End</th>
<th>6a</th>
<th>6b</th>
<th>7a</th>
<th>7b</th>
<th>8a</th>
<th>8b</th>
<th>8c</th>
<th>PREP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:00 AM</td>
<td>9:50 AM</td>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Art</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Rose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Eve</td>
<td>Kerri</td>
<td>Aya</td>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>Indigo</td>
<td>Cara</td>
<td>Studies</td>
<td>Harold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:54 AM</td>
<td>10:44 AM</td>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Social</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Art</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Kerri, Cara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Eve</td>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>Studies</td>
<td>Aya</td>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>Indigo</td>
<td>Kerri</td>
<td>Cara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:48 AM</td>
<td>11:38 AM</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Social</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Art</td>
<td>Harold, Daniel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kerri</td>
<td>Eve</td>
<td>Cara</td>
<td>Studies</td>
<td>Aya</td>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>Indigo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:42 AM</td>
<td>12:13 PM</td>
<td>Crew</td>
<td>(for 1/2 of school, the other half is in Lunch)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:17 PM</td>
<td>12:48 PM</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>(for 1/2 of school, the other half is in Crew)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:52 PM</td>
<td>1:42 PM</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Adventure</td>
<td>Art</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Social</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Algebra</td>
<td>Harold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kerri</td>
<td>Ed Daniel</td>
<td>Indigo</td>
<td>Cara</td>
<td>Studies</td>
<td>Aya</td>
<td>Rose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:46 PM</td>
<td>2:36 PM</td>
<td>Wellness</td>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Art</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Social</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Kerri, Rose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Francine</td>
<td>Eve</td>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>Indigo</td>
<td>Cara</td>
<td>Studies</td>
<td>Aya</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:40 PM</td>
<td>3:30 PM</td>
<td>RTI on Monday and Wednesday, Electives on Tuesday and Thursday, CM on Friday</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Indigo, Ava</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The school year began in September and ended in June. Many of the school year events focused on meet the EL Design Principles, including student led conferences, professional development, fieldwork, and presentations of learning. Additional events focused on student recruitment and orientations, which speak to the relative newness of the school and the need to explain the EL reform model and how it is taken up at ELMS.
The following table came from a September 2012 newsletter that was mailed to each student’s family.

Table 3 2012 September-December ELMS academic calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>September 24-25</th>
<th>Professional Development Days: NO SCHOOL!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 4</td>
<td>Fieldwork to The Hanby House, The Kettle House, and Southwick Funeral Home (all stops on the Underground Railroad)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 12</td>
<td>Fieldwork to The National Underground Railroad Freedom Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 13</td>
<td>Enrollment Information Session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 28-29</td>
<td>Professional Development Days: NO SCHOOL!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 3</td>
<td>Enrollment Information Session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 19</td>
<td>Community Presentation Night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 22-23</td>
<td>Student-Led Conferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 1</td>
<td>Enrollment Information Session</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ford Family of schools.**

ELMS came from a network of connected, yet distinct public charter schools that have been filling a Midwestern education niche since 2000. Basic background about the Ford Family of schools helps to provide context for the everyday operations and guiding philosophy of ELMS. The first school within the Ford Family was the Brown High School whose motto is to “Encounter the World, Engage the Mind” and “emphasizes experiential education through a comprehensive internship and volunteer program as well as hands-on learning and engaging curriculum in the traditional classroom setting” (School website, 2010). This focus on meaningful teaching and learning within community was evident in the four year high school curriculum. Besides a rigorous and student centered traditional high school curriculum, during a Brown student’s freshman through junior year, he or she would learn within the larger community two days a week through a yearlong apprenticeship. The community organizations and businesses that
supported this work included childcare facilities, elementary schools, soup kitchens, community gardens, habitat for humanity, and more. These apprenticeships were supported by experiential teachers who worked with students to develop knowledge of the community, a deeper understanding of oneself in the community, reflective abilities, and professional demeanors. By the student’s senior year, he or she selected a walkabout destination and spent months apprenticing at the location. Some walkabouts included a Paris fashion house or observing a teacher in another state.

Town Meetings and Electives were Brown structures that aligned with EL, and became part of the ELMS schedule. The Brown school website (2012) described these meetings as opportunities for all students to play an active role in many school decisions. One day a week, students and teachers gathered to discuss happenings at the school, present awards, and more. Brown also offered Electives to students to diversify their school experience and learning opportunities. Electives were also offered as an opportunity to earn subject area credits.

Spaces.

ELMS was influenced in large part by the EL reform model in terms of professional development for teachers and administration; professional standards as outlined in the Core Practices (2011) document; the use of learning expeditions11; and the organization of the ELMS’ weekly schedule, which included Crew, CM, and Electives.

11 Learning expeditions involve work in and out of the classroom to perform authentic research, involvement with content experts, opportunities to develop critical thinking abilities. These expeditions structured the academic year. They were “long-term, ‘real world’ investigations by teachers and students, of compelling subjects which culminate in public presentations” and always included dialogic literacy practices, “service to the community and adventure outside of the classroom” (school pamphlet, 2010).
The first two aspects of EL philosophy will be discussed in relation to literacy in Chapter 4. This section provides a description of the schedule in terms of ELMS’ Crews, CMs, and Electives because these spaces are central to the EL model. Two Crews, six Electives, and multiple CMs are a part of this description.

_Crew._

Crew was a small group of students (10-15) and one teacher that met every day, every week, over the three years that the student was enrolled at ELMS. Crew was an essential component of the Expeditionary Learning model and in some ways looked similar to a teacher advisory meeting, a group counseling session, a book club, or a homeroom. According to American Institutes for Research’s (2006) review of middle and high school comprehensive reform models, Crew helped to

Create a positive relationship between students and teachers. The meetings provide an opportunity for students to get assistance on projects, assignments, and personal matters and serve as a forum for students to discuss schoolwide policies and present proposals for changes or modification to current school procedures.

(p. 81)

At ELMS, the 2011 leaders of Crew include the intervention specialists\(^\text{12}\), content area teachers\(^\text{13}\), two administrators\(^\text{14}\), and the Art and Wellness Elective teachers. The teachers

\(^{12}\) Intervention specialists work one on one during the school day with the students who have IEPs. These two teachers will sit in classes, pull students out to talk or work together, and generally follow the students throughout the day.

\(^{13}\) The content area teachers instruct the core curriculum found in most middle schools: Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies, and Humanities.
took turns planning one week of Crew and distributed the plans to the other teachers. These plans were compiled into a notebook and electronic document for reference throughout the year and to plan for the future. The Crew leaders followed the plans in various ways; no two Crews seemed to be alike on the same day. These variations appeared to be due to the differences in people and settings for each Crew. In addition, some Crews chose to focus on different aspects of the plans for different amounts of time. When the Crews gathered in their designated spaces, they typically moved the chairs into a circle. In some cases, the seating was determined by the activity or focus for the day. The schedule for Crew repeated for everyone; reading on Tuesday and Thursday and discussion/activity on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

During the reading days, the students and teachers were expected to have a book or printed text with them. Many regularly followed through on this expectation. Some books were borrowed from the small classroom and large main school libraries. Some of the books read during Crew were expedition novels. Expedition novels were typically young adult historical fiction or realistic fiction on a topic that aligned with the school’s current expedition topic. For example, the 2011 expedition was “When Cultures Collide” and investigated colonialism in West Africa. The ten expedition novels focused on the lives of West African youth, and students were instructed to read these books. Thus, some students read the same novels, but all students read at least one story about the

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14 The administration included one dean of students and one literacy specialist. These two administrators worked in the building on a daily basis. The other administrators worked throughout the Ford Family of schools, and are not present in the school on a daily basis.
same basic topic to build background knowledge and empathy toward the larger expedition. These expedition books were referred to during the students’ subject area classes, field work, and more. Besides expedition books, some students read newspapers or magazines. The school received the daily city paper and provided copies in the hall for people to pick up at their leisure. Talking, doodling, drawing, or completing work during reading time was not allowed.

According to Crew lesson plans, each non-reading Crew day followed a set rhythm: Design Principle of the week, greeting, reading, activity/initiative, debrief/reflection, reminders/announcements. This rhythm was not completely clear from watching the lesson unfold. Instead, the data showed that the common order of events was announcements, the Design Principle, greeting, reading, debrief. The Crew time took place during the lunch hours. Half of the school ate lunch and had recess outside while the other half of the school was in Crew. After approximately forty five minutes, the two halves of the school would switch.

Most people in the school were part of a Crew. Crew membership differed for students and teachers between the first and second year as the school population expanded and ELMS switched to a grade based Crew system. Each Crew was named after and referred to by the teacher who led them. During both years, secretarial, lunch, cleaning and maintenance staff were not part of a Crew.

For this study, I concentrated my observations on two Crews. I selected one of the eighth grade Crews which was run by Mr. Ben, and one of the seventh grade Crews which was run by Ms. Georgia. Mr. Ben was a white, male administrator who had
worked with the Ford Family of schools as an administrator at Brown HS. He continued on with the Ford family in a new capacity when they invited him to become the administrator of ELMS. His background was in theology and experiential education. He was very personable and easy going; the students genuinely seemed to enjoy being around him. Ms. Georgia was a white, female administrator who had been connected to the Ford Family of schools through her husband’s teaching. She was invited to join the administration because she was a literacy specialist and a seasoned classroom educator. She was detailed and professional, and students thought of her as having high expectations. Her Crew was very focused and productive, and her passion for literacy was evident in the culture of her Crew.

I will refer to them henceforth by the grade of the students in the Crew, but it should be noted that there were multiple Crews for seventh and eighth grades headed by other teachers. Because these two Crews were my focus, I observed these Crews every day over three months of time. Seventh grade Crew met before lunch, and eighth grade Crew met after lunch. I chose to focus on these two Crews based on observations from last year and the desire to observe case study students within their Crews. By watching only two Crews, I was able to observe both Crews everyday and this schedule allowed me to better understand the context of the students’ experience in Crew.

In order to be transparent, I intended to observe and pull students from only Mr. Ben’s Crew because of the rich conversations that his Crew participated in during the pilot study. However, unbeknownst to me, between the two school years, the Crews changed drastically. Thus, many of the students I originally wanted to observe were no
longer with the same teacher. In particular, the students in Mr. Ben’s Crew would no longer provide a range of diverse perspectives based on visible identity markers, including gender, race, grade/age, and in some cases sexuality and class. Because of this lack of diversity, during the first week of the 2011 study, I turned to Ms. Georgia’s seventh grade Crew to provide more students and perspectives. Despite my best efforts, and because of a case study students’ removal from the school, I had to turn to one more Crew to seek out an African American male’s perspective. His name was Hal. I did not attend Hal’s Crew because I would have had to miss observing the two Crews I was already established in and from which I was already gathering data. Furthermore, I observed Hal during content area classes (Social Studies, Art, Wellness, and Language Arts). I attended these classes to understand the content of the expeditions; I also observed Hal and the other case study students during CM. Thus, I was able to gather information on Hal in addition to the focus group discussions and interviews. Besides needing to pull in students from multiple Crews, I realized that both Crew leaders were administrators. Excluding content area teachers as Crew leaders was not my intention. I chose to pull from Mrs. Georgia’s Crew because I especially wanted Cathy to be a case study student. Cathy demonstrated a strong voice and insightful opinion during the pilot study, so I had to select the Crew that she was in. Both of these administrators did teach Response To Intervention (RTI) classes, so they were in the classroom with the students besides attending to their administrative duties. RTI classes were focused on remedial math or reading/writing instruction. The enrollment for RTI was based on teacher
recommendation and Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)\textsuperscript{16} test scores. ELMS administered these tests three times a year. Teachers also re-assessed RTI placements on a rolling basis.

The following section provides a description of each crew. Each description includes detail about the meeting place, the decoration and set up of the room, the activities, and common occurrences.

\textit{Seventh grade Crew.}

The seventh grade Crew met in a room on the seldom used third floor. The room was on the corner of the building, and it was full of light from the tall windows. The ceilings were very high, the floors were wooden, and everything was decorated in large wooden crown molding typical of early 1900’s construction. The room was decorated with work from the Crew, including “I am poems” written out by hand on lined notebook paper, as well as a bulletin board with “best lines” written out by hand and quoted from the books that the students were reading during Crew. In the corner of the room there was a home like area: two upholstered lounging seats with a lamp and a rug. In the other corner, there was a plastic folding table and two wooden chairs. In the middle of the room, the wooden chairs were arranged in a circle.

Crew activities differed day to day, but maintained an overall rhythm like the eighth grade Crew. Ms. Georgia and the Crew students often pulled me into Crew to

\textsuperscript{16} The MAP test assessed reading, mathematics, and language abilities. MAP is distributed by the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA). According to the NWEA website (2012), MAP tests help schools to understand each student’s academic level so that teachers will have the “power to help them excel.” The tests were computerized and were adaptive.
participate in their activities and discussions. On reading days, everyone in Crew read and answered a prompt together, including the leader. The prompts differed, so sometimes the Crew spoke to each other about a “golden line” or explained “whose life they were living today.” Other times, Crews rated their books from 1-10 or “popcorned” a beautiful, funny, or interesting line, or explained what they liked about the book. For example, during one reading day, the Crew told each other what they were reading. Cathy shared that she was reading a book about a 16 year old girl living rough. Sal said that he only read *Harry Potter* and was currently reading it again. David seemed to love science fiction, and mentioned *The Dark Elf Trilogy* by R.A. Salvatore, which is based on the Dungeons and Dragons game. Gina shared that she enjoyed the expedition novels and that she was reading another book about a young girl named Desmond.

*Eight grade Crew.*

The eighth grade Crew met in the school’s main library and multipurpose room on the main floor of the school. The walls were decorated with poetry artwork from 2010 expedition, as well as large bookcases full of books and magazines. There was a mural on the walls of the room above the many book cases. This mural focused on children’s literature and was created by the elementary school that used the building before ELMS moved in. The room was mainly lit by fluorescent lights in the ceiling because the long row of windows was shaded by the mature trees in the front lawn of the school building.

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17 A self selected favorite, summative, or worthy sentence or phrase from a book.
18 An opportunity to explain what was happening to one of the characters in the story from the first person point of view.
19 An opportunity to share in a random, out of order way when the time feels right to the speaker.
This room also served as the school’s large work and meeting room, so there were many large tables and an abundance of chairs around the room. In addition, one of the main school printers and one copier sat in this room. This large room was also connected to the staff kitchen and two offices, so non Crew members traveled in and out of the room often.

The chairs were often set up in an open air circle for the non reading days, but this configuration would adjust for reading and writing activities. The Crew sat around large tables pushed together when they had a task that involved writing. During reading days, the students sat wherever they wanted around the room.

According to observational notes, it appeared that students had different levels of comfort, access, or interest in speaking during Crew discussions or in small groups with other Crew members. The Crew students varied in their levels of participation throughout the study, but everyone usually seemed to be listening to one another during the group discussions. Egan drastically varied in his participation level. On some days, he participated fully in Crew by sharing his interests, his opinions, or by giving examples to illustrate a point made by the Crew leader. On other days, he seemed to withdraw completely into his doodling or reading; during these times he turned his face to the side or back to the Crew as they were working or discussing. Abby shared quite a bit, and Fawn would share as well. Both always at least appeared to be physically present in the Crew conversations. Some students who appeared to have social capital within the group and the school, like Steve and Sage, talked often and freely in the group. Sophie, a soft spoken student, seemed very comfortable contributing and asking questions of her Crew
members, including clarifying questions. Sable told the Crew that she was admitted to a psychiatric hospital for anxiety when they asked if she had been sick. Sanders, who teachers told me might have some developmental delays, was not always focused on Crew. Instead, he played with a toy or tried to endear himself to another student. The Crew seemed to try to tolerate him, but they were rarely nice to him. The Crew leader often had to be his partner because students would not choose him willingly. Sydney, a student who had some behavioral issues, had not been in Crew during a significant portion of the study. This was unfortunate because Crew seemed to one of the places where she did not act out or try to impress her friends in a way that went against school rules. She seemed happy to be in Crew, and worked to maintain her relationships there by sitting close to and complimenting Sage. She did skip on one occasion to be with her other friends during lunch.

These two descriptions of crew, the case study students in them, and their leaders are shared in an effort to provide context and background knowledge for the methodology, findings, and implications of the study in future sections and chapters.

*Electives.*

At ELMS, Electives were generally understood as the classes that were instructed by teachers during the last period of the day, for two days a week, and for one trimester. Electives met for everyone at 2:30 on Monday and Wednesday, or Tuesday and Thursday. Electives let out when school ended at 3:30. Students attended the same Elective on both days. In general, each student usually had one Elective class and one RTI class. Each of these classes met twice a week on alternating days. Each student
received one Elective class per trimester. However, Fawn was able to take both German and Graphic Novels because she was in an advanced Math cohort. For the most part, the students self-selected their own Elective from a list of choices each trimester. Because the enrollment of classes was up to the students, Electives could include students from mixed grades. According to an interview with Mr. Daniel, no teacher was purely in charge of running, teaching, or planning; Electives were a whole staff effort. However, some teachers did not have to teach an Elective every trimester, and others had to teach two a trimester depending on other duties. Electives emerged from the teacher’s background and interests, but they ranged from the physical to the academic in an effort to provide varied opportunities for learning and community building. At the time of this study, there was not a formal process for seeking out or developing student interest based Electives unless the students went through the CM proposal process. Electives were a far less developed component of EL than CM or Crew, but Electives are a part of the EL model.

During the fall 2011, the Elective choices document was distributed at a CM. Each teacher stood in front of the entire student body to describe (and sell) their Elective. Students were encouraged to ask questions during this process. Before and after each presentation and question and answer session, the students cheered for each teacher. The atmosphere in the CM could be described as enthusiastic, positive, and purposeful. At the end of the presentations, the one page document was distributed to the students. The students were asked to add their names to the document and number their top three choices. Some students completed it immediately, others talked with friends and planned together, but all took the paper with them out of the CM. They took the paper because the
student choices need to be signed off by a family member, which was an effort by the teachers to further strengthen the communication between students’ families and the school.

Some Electives met in the same room every time with the same students. Others moved around to different locations and were sometimes combined with students from the same Elective on the opposite days, or other Electives entirely. This regrouping happened a few times because a university sponsored Art class took over the library, Mr. Nate (who taught Graphic Novels, was also an administrator in training for the new Elementary EL School) had other business to attend to, a teacher was absent, or the laptop carts were in use by multiple Electives and needed to be shared.

At the end of the trimester, the selection process began again. New Elective choices were given and students were asked to list their top three picks. Students were then assigned to one Elective and one RTI. RTIs were based on grade level. However, Mr. Daniel shared that these groupings will be based on current skill level and needs in the near future. At the time of this study, Electives classes were not offered multiple times or repeated, but it is possible that they will in the future.

The literacy based Electives that took place during the fall of 2011 included ROX, Media Mojo, Graphic Novels, and German. The other, non-literacy based, Electives were Yoga and Ultimate Frisbee.

Ruling Our Experiences (ROX) was a program for adolescent girls developed by an Ohio State University graduate during her PhD program. ROX claimed to teach girls to deal with the “social, personal and academic issues of adolescence such as: body
image, self-esteem, relational aggression, sexual harassment and violence, academic and career development, and leadership development” (ELMS Electives handout, 2011). In this Elective, a small group of girls participated in discussion, learned self-defense and earned rewards for completing ROX work (which were worksheet based reflections). This Elective was only available to seventh and eighth grade girls. ROX was taught by Ms. Francine, who was a white, female teacher with a Masters in counseling. This was Ms. Francine’s first year with the Ford Family of schools and first year teaching.

Media Mojo was a class taught by Mr. Harold, a former reporter and current Social Studies teacher. This was Mr. Harold’s first year with the Ford Family of schools. The goal of the class was to “produce a school publication that incorporates multimedia while exploring topics such as freedom of speech, the media’s role in society, trends and ethics” (ELMS Elective handout, 2011). Depending on their role within the publishing area, the students emailed their article to the editor for proofreading, created a WordPress blog entry to publish work, interviewed others to create reports, reported on current events in the school and in the community, and edited and revised work.

Graphic Novels was a writing workshop focused on literary works called graphic novels. In this Elective, students looked at graphic novels as exemplars for inspiration as well as to understand text features particular to this genre. Students eventually created two of their own graphic novels, some of which were aided by computer software. This Elective was instructed by Mr. Nate, an Indian, male teacher who was preparing for the opening of the new EL Elementary School. Mr. Nate previously taught at the Samwell HS within the Ford Family of schools.
Sprechen Sie Deutsch? was an Elective in which students learned pieces of German conversation, culture, and history of Germany. Ms. Kerri, the teacher of this Elective, had traveled to Germany and studied German while in college.

I chose to focus on the three Electives that my case study students attended and involved literacy: ROX, Graphic Novels, and Media Mojo. Sprechen Sie Deutsch? would have also fit into this description, but I chose to not attend those classes. I made this decision for many reasons. First, only one of my case study students was enrolled, but I could also observe her in Graphic Novels. Second, observing Sprechen Sie Deutsch? would have taken me away from the Electives that were more densely populated with case study students. Third, the other Electives were rich in issues of social construction of identity. Fourth, in order to see all four Electives I would have only been able to see two out of the four each week by alternating my observations or staying for half of the class and then switching to the other Elective. Fifth, ROX involved quite a bit of personal sharing and discussion, and it already felt a bit uncomfortable to only see the girls for less time. Cutting those observations down to even less time could have made them uncomfortable to be open in front of such an infrequent presence. Sixth, I assumed that German would involve a lot of time spent on repeating vocabulary words instead of the interactions I was looking forward to seeing in the other Electives. In the end, it was a difficult choice to make, but the data gathered was plentiful. I stayed with ROX all of Tuesday, and switched between Media Mojo and Graphic Novels on Thursdays. The Thursday Electives were much less intense, raw, and emotional, so my presence or absence seemed to be less noted. Basically, students were hard at work on their own
projects (news stories or graphic novels) so there seemed to be less notice of the makeup of the group.

In my initial analysis, I also included incidents from four Electives from the 2010-2011 school year which differed in topic, teachers, and students. These Electives were called Crime Scene Investigation (CSI), Romeo and Juliet, Girls Group, and I’m Moving Out. I did not end up using data from these spaces beyond the pilot study, but they greatly influenced my choice to study Electives for the dissertation study. Thus, I thought it important to at least name them in order to provide background information regarding other Electives that have been offered at ELMS.

**Community Meeting.**

At ELMS, all of the students and teachers met on Friday afternoons for CM in the cafeteria, the largest open space in the school building. The cafeteria offered a large stage area with five stage length stairs leading from the lunchroom floor to the stage. The floors were cleaned and the tables were folded and pushed against the walls. The school invested in audio equipment that was used for CMs and events. Each CM lasted about one hour.

During this time, the students were asked to sit on the floor in a particular location. The teachers sometimes joined students on the floor and sometimes they stood, but students were not allowed to stand. Students and teachers were also asked to sit with their Crews. Occasionally, a student and teacher would position themselves to be close to a particular person in another Crew while staying in the Crew formation. The floor of the cafeteria was extremely cold, and Crews started to bring tablecloths, carpet remnants, and
rugs to sit on, but not everyone could fit on these objects or chose to sit close enough to the group to use them.

The content of the CM varied from one week to another. There did not seem to be a set format except for the consistent exchange of Thank You Notes and that a teacher was directing the flow of the meeting. The frequency of meetings was also not consistent, although the meetings were supposed to occur every Friday. To illustrate, I have a very small amount of data in the form of observation notes on CM in comparison to other school spaces. This data was not missing because I was not there; I only missed two CMs over the entirety of my study. Instead, I found that CMs were canceled or school was not in session at the end of the week. During one of those meetings I missed observing, the students sampled West African food because this region was the focus of the seventh and eighth grade expedition. The other missed meeting occurred during ELMS’ first year (and my pilot study) and included yearbook distribution and signing. I learned about the content of these meetings from talking to students and teachers. The CMs that I observed included: the selection of a mascot; a slide show of the school images; awards presentations; community building initiatives; announcements; performances both student and teacher initiated that included singing and dancing; an informative demonstration regarding alcohol consumption by a city police officer; a West African dancing and drumming performance; the presentation, refinement, and acknowledgement of a Halloween dance proposal; and the presentation of a holiday dance proposal. Some

20 Because the EL model provided on site professional development from an EL school designer, school closures were often due to ELMS using the end of the week for these all day meetings.
of these events took place or repeated over multiple meetings, and others were a solitary event.

The three spaces of Crew, CM, and Electives provided common and definitive experiences for ELMS students and teachers. These spaces were common in that everyone shared these spaces and experiences in them and definitive because the data suggested that they appeared to have a defining affect on the student experience of ELMS. To review the three spaces, Crew was an official space within the school in which the same students meet together with the same adult every day for three years. Each Crew ran differently, even though every Crew worked from the same lesson plan. Crew time included lessons and discussion on three days of the week, as well as silent sustained reading on two days of the week. I focused on one eighth and one seventh grade Crew for my observations in order to see the context of my case study students’ Crew experience over an extended period of time. Electives were developed by the teachers who led the class. These classes occurred twice a week during the last period of the day for most students. The Electives selection process was a celebratory event, and class rosters were often formed from students’ first and second choices. Because of the choice element to Electives, these classes could include students from the three grades, which made it the only time during the day that grades intermingled besides lunch and recess. The Electives that I observed for this study and that included consistent reading and writing were ROX, Media Mojo, and Graphic Novels. CMs were held at the end of the school week, and were attended by the entire school except for the secretarial, custodial, and maintenance staff. These meetings varied week by week except for the exchange of written Thank You
Notes. These three spaces are central to the EL philosophy and were the focus of this study.

Methods

The following sections detail the methodology used to conduct this study. I begin with a description of my ethnographic, qualitative study. I follow with an explanation of the selection process for both case study students and the focus classes. This explanation is followed by an accounting of the data collection process that incorporated data from different sources. These sources included participant observation notes, interviews, documents, and focus group discussions. I then describe the data analysis. To conclude this chapter, I detail my efforts toward the validity and replicability of the study, as well as its limitations.

Qualitative ethnographic research.

The purpose behind using ethnographic methods is not only to “describe a particular culture” (Spradley, 1980, p. 3), but to grasp how those within the culture understand it and how they make sense of their experience. Athanases and Heath (1995) described ethnography as potentially providing “researchers, teachers, and other educators with rich documentation of learning as it unfolds and varies over time” (p. 263) if close attention is paid to the social contexts in which literacy practices occur (p. 266). Athanases and Heath (1995) listed the fundamental features of ethnography as “comparative frame, long term participation and observation, multiple methods, generation of theory” (p. 267). Ethnography is about talking to and learning from people. Agar (2006) argued that a fundamental assumption of ethnographic methods is that the
study is about people, not just the place, so it is important to get into the context and make connections and conversation with participants. Agar (2006) also cautioned that there are unacceptable ethnographies and those are the ones who keep stable codes for data from the outside perspective, fail to shift from reporting to focusing on repeated themes that signal core concerns, or just use focus groups to tell a story of a place. Instead, an ethnographer must try to understand the point of view of the community member, while remaining conscious of the fact that the ethnographer is trying to make sense of it through his/her own point of view. Collisions between ethnographer and participants’ points of view are the spaces where rich points come into the data set. Rich points are the signals that ethnographers can learn something from the participants’ point of view about culture. Agar (2006) described rich points as the moments researchers do not understand, find surprising, and/or sense a departure from the researcher’s (as an outsider) expectations. These moments indicate a difference between the point of view of one community and another. They signal opportunities for learning and are the “fuel for ethnographic research” (p. 4). Agar (2006) encouraged researchers to notice rich points, ask “what else in the event is the sign connected with,” and “look around and see what else is going on” because ethnographers should be “on the lookout for patterns” (Agar, 2006, paragraph 109). Heath and Street (2008) explained that ethnographers need to search for interconnected patterns (p.7), as well as cultural influences both in and out of the classroom within institutions of formal education (p.17). They encouraged ethnographers to attend to the “ways that historical and political forces…determine language, modalities, and norms,” not just the “immediate ‘face to face’ observables”
Thus, ethnographers of language and literacies must be aware of changes in participants’ habits and beliefs and how those correlate with shifts in uses of literacies. Ethnographers should seek out essentializing meanings or explanations made in formalized institutional language, as well as participants’ use of “meaning-making processes that they themselves take for granted.” This is especially important if “their explanations often bear little relationship to realities of usage” as they might be “expressing ideals of behavior rather than actual behavior” (Heath & Street, 2008, p. 8). In this way, the culture of and around the participants in a study is considered “unbounded, kaleidoscopic, and dynamic” (p. 7) as opposed to a fixed state.

Selection of case study students.

I was interested in learning about ELMS from the student perspective, so I selected eight case study students from whom to gather information. This interest came from my review of literature in which researchers called for studies that work with and for youth. The process of selection was recursive between the students I wanted to talk to, the students that provided their assent, the demographic markers I wanted the group to have, and the Crews that I wanted to watch. I wanted the group to represent a diversity of backgrounds and viewpoints on the school. I also wanted the students to come from one Crew that meets before lunch, and one Crew that meets after lunch, so that I could observe them in Crew every day.

Other factors came into play that I had not anticipated until I started the selection process. I felt that having both new and returning students was important because they offered a variety of perspectives on EL based on their time with ELMS. Some of the
eight students were new to the school, but I had observed the others during the pilot study. As I previously mentioned, Crews shifted drastically from one year to the next at ELMS. During the pilot study, I had preliminarily selected the Crew and students I wanted to watch from my observations of all of the Crews in the school. Because students and teachers were in different groupings, I had to significantly adjust my selection process and schedule of observations. It was also difficult to choose the final students for the study because there were so many voices that I wanted to include and students that asked to be a part of the study. I wanted to increase the number of students in the study, but focus group methodology guides clearly suggested only four to eight participants.

I used the following table to help me to track the diversity of my focus group as much as possible and make selection decisions. This table is a finalized version of a much larger table that included many more students. Because of this organization, I was able to have equal, or almost equal, numbers of seventh and eighth graders, males and females, white and African American students, academic achievement, and new and returning students.

That information was easily accessed or reported by students, but other factors were not. I sought out information about class (determined by free and reduced lunch status, housing situations, neighborhood information, and possibly parent(s)’ highest education completed and/or employment). In order to add this information, Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) encouraged ethnographers to listen and look for clues about class. If more students would have identified themselves in terms of class or sexuality, I would
have worked to include more diversity in those perspectives as well, but they did not, and I was unable to gather that information.

In this table, I struggled with labeling the students in terms of social constructions of identity, and this method was the only means available to me at the time. In the table, I list the students’ pseudonyms, their Crew leader, Elective, grade, sex, race, sexuality, socio-economic status, academic achievement as good, fair, or poor, and ELMS experience as new or returning. I only listed the information that the students self identified to me during the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Crew</th>
<th>Elective</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Socio economic status</th>
<th>Academic Achievement (Grades, MAP scores, behavior, attendance)</th>
<th>Sexuality</th>
<th>New or returning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fawn</td>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>Graphic Novels, German</td>
<td>8th</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Low to middle</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Hetero</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abby</td>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>ROX</td>
<td>8th</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Low to middle</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Hetero</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egan</td>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>Graphic Novels</td>
<td>8th</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Low to middle</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Hetero</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hal</td>
<td>Toni</td>
<td>Ultimate Frisbee</td>
<td>7th</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Low to middle</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Hetero</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>Graphic Novels</td>
<td>7th</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Low to middle</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Hetero</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cathy</td>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>Media Mojo</td>
<td>7th</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Low to middle</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Hetero</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gina</td>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>Graphic Novels</td>
<td>7th</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Low to middle</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Bi Sexual</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burt</td>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>Ultimate Frisbee</td>
<td>7th</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Low to middle</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The number of eighth and seventh graders is not equal because the only African American male eighth grader in Mr. Taylor’s Crew did not want to participate in the study. Burt joined ELMS and Ms. Georgia’s Crew a few days after the start of school, and I wanted to learn from his male, African American perspective which would in some ways fill in the gap that Sanders left behind. His perspective was more important than balancing the grades. However, Burt was expelled from school shortly after the study began, so I was only able to do the initial interview with him and observe him for a few weeks. He was in the Ultimate Frisbee Elective, so I did not observe him (or Hal) there, but Burt shared his experience with me in an interview.

Each of the participants is described below according to their self-identifications, as well as the information they included in their interviews and focus group discussions. Because students were invited to talk about the things that were of most interest to them and to skip any questions that were not of interest, the information gathered varied from student to student. During the study, each case study participant was interviewed immediately after their parental consent and personal assent forms were turned in (September), and again after the focus group meetings concluded and the study drew to a close (November). These interviews were retrospective in that the students were prompted to recall information from their past through a broad selection of questions. Students were also given the choice to use any portion of their one hour lunch and recess time for the interview, so this flexibility also varied the interview time and amount of information gathered. The following is a description of each of the case study students
during the time of the study. These descriptions detail their background information as shared with me in our interviews.

_Abby._

Abby is an African American eighth grade girl. She is in her second year at ELMS. She lives with her parents, brother and step-brother in a “ghetto” neighborhood. She explained that the complex is not unsafe, but there is a lot of cop activity, people hanging around, and boys that “think they are thugs.” She is passionate about music and follows her favorite artist, Nikki Minaj, on Twitter; keeps a notebook of songs and raps; uses an app on her phone to play guitar; and hopes to one day be in the music business if she does not become famous herself. She explained that she is “not dumb” but she has never read a chapter book; she finds them boring. She also finds tests extremely stressful. Abby said that she is committed to always writing in script.

_Burt._

Burt is a seventh grade, African American male who transferred into ELMS after the start of the school year. He came from a therapeutic program and was referred by his counselor. Burt is often absent due to unexplained events, illnesses, or suspensions, so it was difficult to get time with him to gather information in the interviews or focus groups. However, I observed Burt numerous times within his cohort (a grouping of students at ELMS that is organized around grade and Math ability and can also include members of the same Crew) during Art and Social Studies. He was expelled from the school by October. In addition to the small, but eye opening, amount of data I was able to gather about Burt’s experience in and out of ELMS, as well as his lack of presence in the data.
also tells an important part of the story. I believe that his story demonstrated how the EL model as it was taken up by ELMS did not serve him, he was not able during his time at ELMS to develop a positive academic identity nor positive relationships with the ELMS community, and he understood what it meant and what it cost him to not do school practices that might have diminished his sense of agency. As to the last point, Burt considered emotional and physical safety more important than learning, and attended to protecting himself through the ways and means that were available to him as a student. Safety and learning should not be an either or kind of situation in our schools, and his story speaks to this unfortunate reality.

_Cathy._

Cathy is an African American seventh grade girl. This is her second year at ELMS and her second year of being involved in the Halloween dance. She lives with her mother, father, and younger sister in an “African American suburb.” Her parents are both college graduates; her father studied law and her mother works in the medical field educating patients at the university hospital. Cathy shared that she used to be picked on because of her weight and skin tone, so much so that she wore her winter coats to cover up her body, even during the hot months. However, in elementary school she decided to be strong and stop caring about people’s opinions. She said that once she decided on that, the people came to her, and now she is popular. She really enjoys the conversations about social constructions of identity in the focus groups, and said it is worth the discomfort to get to discuss the issues. She describes it as a once in a lifetime opportunity.

_David._
David is a white male seventh grade student. He lives with his mother and her boyfriend, and his biological father lives in Tennessee. His mom works for the County Warning System that sets off the tornado sirens, and his father was in the military, but is currently working in the civilian sector. David moved nine times and lived in England, Texas, Virginia, and around the state of this study. He shared that a lot of stuff in his life “sucked,” especially his ex-stepfather and the relentless bullying he endured during fifth grade. He loves to play with Nerf guns and wishes they were seen as “practical, safe, and economical” instead of childish. He owns a personal laptop and loves search engines, internet videos, and computer games like Halo.

Egan.

Egan is a white, male, eighth grade student who transferred to ELMS from another middle school. His father is a baker at a local grocery store and his mother is a professor of paleontology at the local state university. His parents are divorced and remarried and he spends his time between the two families. Egan said that he is a black belt in karate, a cook, an artist, and a good kid. He cares about his relationship with his parents and appreciated co-creating a comic with his father and when his mother gave him the right amount of responsibility around the house. He explained that he has really low self-esteem and wishes he fit in better.

Fawn.

Fawn is a white female eighth grade student who transferred to ELMS last year. She reported that she had a terrible sixth grade experience at her neighborhood public middle school in which she felt unsafe, depressed, and unfairly in trouble. Her parents are
together and her father is a janitor and her mother is in property management. She shared that she started off her eighth grade year feeling like she did not have any friends, but was pleased to be able to connect with Egan in Crew. She keep a blog online and a series of detailed sketch pads. She often puts her head down in class and complains about teachers.

**Gina.**

Gina is a white, female, seventh grade student who identifies as bisexual. She revealed her sexuality within a focus group session. Her parents are divorced and she lives with her mother who is remarried. She has four siblings and one of her brothers identifies as homosexual and transgender. Her mother is an artist and her father is a vegetarian food cart entrepreneur. During the time of this study, she was put on ADD medication, and she believes it has positively affected her grades. She is earning all Exceeding Expectations, which is the highest grade at ELMS. She is really enthusiastic about the Ford Family of schools and plans to attend one of their high schools, like her brother.

**Hal.**

Hal is an African American seventh grade male in his first year at ELMS. During the time of the study, Hal lives with his grandmother, sister, and brother because his parents have issues with drugs and incarceration. Hal has a history of being in trouble in school and has been suspended multiple times. He was at one time very involved in boxing and knew quite a bit about the sport. However, he was “taking a break” during the time of the study and would not share why. He likes to play video games on his Xbox 360 and has Internet connection at his home which he uses to connect with other Xbox
players from around the world. He prefers to play with his school friends, but he said that there not many other ELMS students had online capabilities. He enjoys watching the Discovery, History, and National Geographic channels, especially shows like Man Versus Wild and Sons of Guns. I learned from the secretary that he hopes to be a Navy Seal. He shared that last summer he read his first and only book and it was about snowboarding. His participation was enthusiastic in the focus groups, but he was difficult to get time with for one on one interviews. He would use up time by walking really slowly through the hall and making requests to do other things with his time, like get a drink, find his pen, or talk with a teacher.

Selection of spaces.

I selected the spaces of Crew, CM, and Electives for multiple reasons. First, I chose them because my literature review revealed that there was very little if any research on those spaces. Second, I chose them because they are unique to EL schools. Third, during the pilot study, these three spaces and the people in them created the opportunity for numerous literacy events. Fourth, I chose the Electives: Media Mojo, Graphic Novels, and ROX because they were literacy based. Fifth, I selected the two Crews because they had students I wanted to interview; these students represented a diversity of viewpoints; the Crews were run by capable leaders who facilitated meaningful conversations with each other; and because these Crews occurred at different times of the day. Sixth, I chose to observe Social Studies, Art, and Language Arts so that I could see what was happening with the expedition, as well as with content area literacy practices. Seventh, I observed Wellness because the curriculum and teacher seemed to work toward social justice. Also,
the posters and print in the room specially addressed issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality in a supportive manner. In conclusion, I wanted to use my time in the school to gather around my three focal spaces and students, as well as context data. This schedule appeared to be the best way to enable a robust set of data.

Data collection.

Data collection methods included: participant observations in content classrooms, Crew, CMs, and Electives; interviews with case study students; collection of documents; and focus group discussions.

Participant observation.

Participant observation was a large part of my data collection. I observed and recorded written notes in my journal every day of the school year from September until December. I also attended special events, like an open house, an end of the trimester celebration of learning, and an after school dance. Over the course of three months, I observed over 250 hours during a total of 65 days. The following table maps out my weekly schedule for observations.
Table 5 Weekly schedule of observations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crew</td>
<td>Crew</td>
<td>Crew</td>
<td>Crew</td>
<td>Crew</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crew</td>
<td>Crew</td>
<td>Crew</td>
<td>Crew</td>
<td>Crew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:52</td>
<td>7a Art</td>
<td>7b Wellness</td>
<td>8c Wellness</td>
<td>8b ELA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:46</td>
<td>7b Art</td>
<td>7a Social</td>
<td>8c Social</td>
<td>8b Art</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Studies</td>
<td>Studies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:40</td>
<td>ROX</td>
<td>Graphic Novels</td>
<td>Media Mojo</td>
<td>CM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some of the classes have a 7a or 8b next to the name of the course. These symbols represent the grade cohort. The case study students were spread out among the cohorts, so I diversified the schedule so that I could see all of them in at least one academic space besides Crew, CM, and Electives.

I chose to spend my time at a mixture of spaces for a variety of reasons. First, I wanted to use the time between Crew (11:42-12:50) and Electives or CM (2:40-3:30) effectively. I decided that observing the case study students in the more traditional core content area spaces such as Social Studies and Language Arts could create helpful context for my other observations. Second, I observed courses that were more unique to ELMS that might be considered Electives in other schools. These courses included Wellness and Art. Third, I observed both seventh and eighth grade Crews because I needed to pull students from more than one Crew to get a purposeful sampling of perspectives. Also, because the two Crews that I selected to watch occurred at different times, I could observe both Crews in one day. I divided the time in Electives between

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ROX, Graphic Novels, and Media Mojo because they were the three that were literacy based. Lastly, I attended the CMs on Fridays.

During these observations, I took detailed notes. The students asked me throughout the study what I was writing on, and I always replied: what was happening that seemed to be important to the students, as well as what writing and reading activities were happening in the classroom. I became a part of the classroom experience, and was often left to observe and write without interruption. Other times, I was asked to join in the discussion by students and teachers, or felt comfortable and compelled to join in without a formal invitation. I varied where I sat in the classrooms in order to see the classroom from different perspectives, as well as to create the possibility of hearing different conversations around the room. However, I made sure that I could see or hear my case study students in the classrooms that I observed. I occasionally audio recorded what I was observing in the classroom, but only as a backup measure for fast paced dialogue that might be too difficult to capture only through note taking. In these instances, I usually pointed the audio recording device, which was also a camera, toward the ceiling or away from the students, so that they did not feel any discomfort from being videotaped. The only times the device was not pointed away was when the direction determined the quality of the audio recording.

During the note taking, I employed Geertz’s (2003) notion of thick description in order to understand how a specific event can reveal a larger pattern. I attempted to attend to both verbal and nonverbal actions of the participants (Ochs, 1979, p. 44). I later transcribed these notes into word files on my computer. During this practice, I would stop
to explain a situation in more detail, jot down reflexive notes, ask questions, notice
critical incidents, or give myself direction for observations, interviews, document
collection, and focus group discussions. My initial observations involved recording
classroom literacy events, information about what my case study students were doing and
saying, ways in which identity markers came up or were ignored in the classroom, and
moments where voice, power and agency seem to come into play. Although my
background as a teacher and a supervisor of student teachers pushed me toward recording
what the teacher was saying, I purposefully worked to focus on student voice and learn
from their point of view.

Interviews.

I conducted two formal sit down interviews with the case study students in order
to “find out from them those things which we cannot directly observe” (Patton, p. 340). I
attempted to practice “empathic neutrality” which means that “there is a middle ground
between becoming too involved, which can cloud judgment, and remaining too distant,
which can reduce understanding” (p. 50). I wanted my participants to feel valued, but not
judged for the information they shared with me. I found that this stance built rapport with
the participants, and they all expressed that they enjoyed our conversation. I also used
aspects of both conversational information interviewing and general guided interviewing
approaches to gather data from the participants. Thus, I relied on both the natural flow of
conversation to discover questions, as well as direct questions that were prepared before
the interview began.
The first interview occurred within the first month of school after I selected the candidates, introduced them to the focus of the study, and received the assent and consent paperwork. The second happened during the last eight days of the study in November. My site gave me a private office in which I could have a comfortable discussion with the student without worry of anyone overhearing. However, the office was enclosed in large part by glass, so we were not out of eyesight of Crew or teachers frequenting the adjacent kitchen. This transparency added to my comfort in providing some privacy for the student, but not wanting to be alone with the student. I came to the interview prepared with any information I had about the students, as well as a list of possible interview topics and questions. I used my research questions to inform my interview questions (Maxwell, 2005, p. 92) but I did not directly ask the full research question to any of the participants. During the interview, I also jotted down notes if the participants said something that I wanted to refer back to without interrupting them. Otherwise, I just listened. I recorded these interviews with an audio recorder and transcribed what was said using Express Scribe software. These interviews lasted from a half an hour to an hour, depending on if the students wanted to attend Crew, eat lunch with friends, or go to recess.

**Document collection.**

In addition to observing and interviewing participants, I collected many documents. These data sources included photocopies of both EL and ELMS generated documents and artifacts, as well as student created documents and artifacts. In addition, I photographed documents that could not be copied. These sources included EL, ELMS,
and student private and public artwork, posters, work, and materials. I particularly sought out data that came from a case study student.

**Focus groups.**

Four focus group discussions were used in this study in order to answer the research questions. These focus groups were the only time that all eight of the case study students had an opportunity to come together. They took place over the lunch and Crew periods, and lasted for one hour. Lunch was provided during focus groups, and the participants sat around a large table to eat and talk. Each session was audio recorded and later transcribed. I brought questions to engender discussion on a particular topic, as well as reflection sheets to support students in sharing or reiterating any information that felt important to them. On the last focus group, I was able to provide Flip cameras for all of the students, and they were given the opportunity to record or write their reflection. Focus groups followed this format: an explanation of the idea by the researcher, an opportunity to process and discover additional information through discussion, and personal journaling and reflection time.

The discussion based focus groups in this study were designed in an effort to “gain information about [the participants’] views and experiences of a topic” (Gibbs, 1997), especially from multiple perspectives on the same topic. The topics included participants’ knowledge and understanding of, experience with, and opinions on: ELMS (especially the spaces of Crew, CM, and Electives); gender (which, through participant discussion, morphed quickly into sexuality); race; and class. Because the topics were emotional in nature, there was some discomfort during the discussion for the researcher.
and participants. This discomfort was expected because of purposeful selection of diverse opinions, experiences, and perspectives on cultural constructions of identity. Because of the emotional nature of these topics, as well as the fact that the participants were youth in a school setting, the role of the moderator became very important in mediating group discussion (Gibbs, 1997). In order to establish the goal of focus group discussions, possible participants were asked during the recruitment process if they could agree to give space to others’ ideas during discussions. Before and during each discussion, case study students were reminded of their agreement and the goal to allow all voices to be heard. As the mediator of discussion, I worked to keep all participants safe, both emotionally and physically, throughout the discussions. I checked in with students at the end of each discussion, both in the reflection process and in person after the group dispersed. Unlike other school discussions, I did not expect the focus group discussions to be community building or even polite. Instead, my goal was to gather data from the diverse participants’ interactions and conversation (Gibbs, 1997). In the end, the purpose of the focus group is not to reach consensus, but to gather information on students’ views, perspectives, and experiences regarding each topic.

There were possible benefits and risks associated with participation in the focus groups. The benefits of participation in focus groups included the opportunity to be involved in a learning environment, to be valued as an expert, and to be given the chance to work collaboratively with a researcher (Goss & Leinbach, 1996) as this experience can be empowering for many participants (Gibbs, 1997). The possible risks included possible feelings of stress from struggling to have their voice heard in the group. In addition, the
topics could engender feelings of vulnerability and discomfort. As the mediator, I worked to ensure that every voice had the opportunity to be heard by keeping track of the number of times each student spoke, that students kept discussions private, and that each session included time for personal journaling so that all students will have an additional opportunity to respond to the topics and each other in a way that they felt less hindered by attending to group dynamics.

**Data analysis.**

All of these methods and sources of data were used to build theory through “systematic observing, recording, and analyzing of human behavior in specific spaces and interaction” (Heath & Street, 2008, p. 29) in ‘multiple ways and directions” (p. 32). These methods build toward reliability, replicability, and validity (Heath & Street, 2008, p.28). As with all good ethnographies, I aimed to make the familiar strange through a constant comparative perspective (Heath & Street, 2008, p. 32). This idea means that the research attempted to explain what was happening at the site for the participants in terms of adolescent literacies in an effort to bring forth new understand and theory. It also means that I did not try to describe what was not there, or contrast my experience with the study. This effort was especially important because I aimed to be a reflexive researcher who was aware of the influence of my background with middle school, adolescent literacies, and EL. Instead, I compared what was there through attention to co-occurrences in an effort to discover the patterns that may “lie outside the consciousness or concern of locals” (p. 38). Lastly, I asked research questions that focused on discovering behaviors and ideas that can be documented, quantified, compared, and
analyzed through various theories to scaffold my original and pilot study informed theories regarding adolescent literacies in an EL school (Heath & Street, 2008). I mapped out what questions would be answered with which data, as well as what analytic approaches I would use in a matrix (Maxwell, 2005, p. 102). I mapped this information in order to confirm that my research questions and data collection methods connections were logical and would benefit each other (Maxwell, 2005).

Table 6 Research matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data that will Provide Answers</th>
<th>Method of Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What happens to middle school students when a school works under an educational reform model (Expeditionary Learning) that does not specifically speak to constructions of age, class, gender, race, and sexuality?</td>
<td>EL, ELMS, and student generated document collection and analysis</td>
<td>Grounded theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do different students experience this model of schooling?</td>
<td>Case Study Student Interviews (8 students, pre and post study)</td>
<td>Thick Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What happens with respect to student agency when students participate in Crew, CMs and Electives in an Expeditionary Learning Middle School?</td>
<td>Four focal groups with case study students, each group focusing on one of the topics: class, gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality</td>
<td>Constant Comparison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does literacy have to do with this? That is, what literacy events and practices are present during Crew, Community, Meetings and Electives, and how does literacy function to limit or enable different students’ agency?</td>
<td>Observation + Field Notes Student’s written + other work</td>
<td>Determining, interpreting, and seeking to understand critical incidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Praxis/ Reflexivity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analytic approach.

This section is formed with attention to Maxwell’s (2005) warning that the analysis section of a dissertation is “often the weakest part” of the research (p.95). It often takes “generalities and boilerplate language from methods texts” and neglects to inform the reader of exactly what was done (p.95). I also paid particular attention to Smagorinsky’s (2008) caution that methods sections “often lack significant detail” (p. 389) especially in terms of data reduction. He instructed researchers to verify and communicate the alignment of theoretical perspectives, methods, and results (p. 405).

As discussed in detail in Chapter Two, I drew upon New Literacy Studies, theories about agency, adolescence, and sociocultural construction to frame the study. These theoretical frameworks assume that context matters in regards to studies of literacy. I used the literacy event as a unit of analysis, and studied those events to find patterns and literacy practices. I watched for these events in multiple ELMS settings, and labeled, described, and detailed these events in my notes and my analysis. Thus, I paid attention to the social context of the literacy event and used this more complete information to shape my understandings. I looked for events that involved reading, writing, drawing, and speaking around texts. I privileged the traditional alphabetic based texts, but extended the definition of text to include multimodal texts such as illustrations, conversations, body language, and facial cues (Kress, 2000). I believe that one can read many things and that there are multiple modes of communication (Kress, 2000). I took into account what was said and done during these events by both teacher and student, but
focused on the case study students. I sought to record and understand what they did or did not do or said or did not say because I was particularly interested in their experience and perspective. I had more access to these case study students because we were able to talk during interviews and focus groups, so I could triangulate my data. I also made sure to avoid interrupting their class or social time. Lastly, I studied the documents that were created by ELMS, EL, or ELMS students and teachers. I analyzed the documents for what they did and did not say, as well as the ways in which they were used during actual literacy events, or the ways in which they might have affected the literacy events that I witnessed.

As Maxwell describes, my data analysis began “immediately after finishing the first interview or observation” and continued throughout my work on the research and writing process (p.95). I describe my data analysis in the following ten steps. First, before the study, I organized my approach by my research questions detailed in Table 4. Thus, I knew what information I would collect from each data source and by which methods. Also, I varied my methods and my goals for each source. Thus, I ensured that I would be able to answer my questions. I referred back to this research matrix throughout the entire study.

Second, during data collection, I transcribed and compiled all of the information gathered. As previously mentioned, I used Express Scribe, headphones, and a foot pedal to help me with this process. I made sure the typed observation notes were labeled with day and name of class. I organized the initial and final interview data into tables. I created a different table for each student, but retained the same categories of information. The
initial interview table listed the following categories of information provided by the students and due in part to my questions: general information about 1) themselves, 2) Crew, 3) CM, 4) Electives, and 5) ELMS. The final interview table listed these categories: 1) Crew, 2) CM, 3) Electives, 4) ELMS, and 5) focus group conversations. All information fit into these categories. For the focus groups, I compiled the observations, reflections, and transcripts into each of the four focus group meetings. For example, one set of data (observations, reflections, and transcripts) informed the students’ experiences of race. I also transcribed and added in the data collected from each student during the reflection period at the end of the focus group. I printed out the data set and prepared it for coding.

Third, after the data collection, I coded the information according to three aspects of my research focus: cultural diversity, student agency, and literacies. I used different colors to represent the three codes. During this process, I also separated out cultural diversity into sub categories: race, class, gender, and sexuality.

Fourth, I processed the observation notes further by pulling out critical incidents in each of the three spaces and describing them in full detail. I considered these descriptions to be critical memos. Drawing from Heath and Street (2008), conceptual memos are written each week in connection with observation notes and are five to six pages in length (p. 79). They function as “memos to the ethnographer about generic ideas that come from particular events, along with queries raised in the reflection column of the field notes” (p. 79). I originally intended to write these memos every week during data collection, but I found that I only had the time and energy for conversations about these
moments with colleagues. These conversations were helpful; I thought critically about what I observed and applied theoretical frameworks to the data. I also constantly revisited my questions while looking through and rewriting my field notes to make sure I was gathering information that would answer my research questions.

Writing these memos immediately proved to be helpful. During this process, I realized that my notes on ROX helped me to see that this Elective was rich with information about literacy, cultural diversity, and student agency, whereas my observation notes on Graphic Novels and Media Mojo did not. Because of this, I decided to focus on ROX, as I described earlier. During this step, I also described each of the literacy events and practices in each critical incident, as well as my initial thoughts on how this incident intersected with issues of cultural diversity and student agency. I aimed for ten conceptual memos in each space so that I could have a well rounded picture of all of the spaces. It was a labor intensive process that took a lot of time, so I felt that thirty was a good sample size. I had to revise my descriptions multiple times to be less judgmental and more explanatory. I often found myself frustrated with a space because it seemed to be defined by the teacher instead of by the group as a whole. Other times, judgment came from frustration regarding my experience as an EL middle school teacher who did things differently (but definitely not always better), my expectations for what could have been done, and my connection to the students through our interviews and conversations. I especially empathized with the students when I felt that they were being slighted because of lack of preparation or concern by teachers. I referred back to video
and audio recordings when available to verify dialogue and used my best judgment to fill in the gaps from my notes when recordings were not available.

Fifth, I reread the data set (focus groups, interviews, conceptual memos, EL and ELMS documents) and developed a set of patterns. By patterns, I mean themes that seemed to come up multiple times in the data from multiple students and in multiple spaces. The patterns included:

1. students felt powerless or voiceless because of age and did not like being told what to do or talked down to; students want responsibility, but just the right amount or they are overwhelmed;

2. body image as an important aspect of gender;

3. beauty as an important aspect of race/gender;

4. the possibility of being able to say something made students feel heard;

5. purpose behind literacy matters;

6. students escape and create through reading and writing;

7. these escapes often seem to come from lack of social comfort;

8. some spaces are stress free where students feel relaxed;

9. literacy was used to build relationships and community;

10. students enjoyed discussion through the focus groups;

11. talking about things seems to be an important part of learning process;

12. students were hesitant to offend someone or say the wrong thing.

I adjusted wording of these patterns to be inclusive of the different students’ experiences.
Sixth, I discussed these patterns with my advisor and considered collapsing
categories into more overarching findings or possible directions of inquiry. We
investigated possibilities like:

- The culture of Crew: what is the relationship between teacher and student?
  Is there a positive peer culture? Are Crews so different because they are
either dependent on an adult or are they peer mediated?
- Foundations of EL and their fit with a largely African American
  population: Is this a source of tension and possibility?
- More focus on the current expeditions: for 6th graders this means the
  underground railroad, for seventh and eighth grades it is when cultures
  collide

This was helpful, but I reread the data to find out what resonated to me and my
knowledge of the students and spaces.

Seventh, I reread the data again to look for additional patterns. These new patterns
both expanded and collapsed previous patterns. I found multiple mentions of: ELMS was
better last year; Mr. Daniel is a great teacher; religion as an identity construction; parents
mentioned in students’ stories; students’ complex literate lives; students characterized
online literacies in terms of indulgence; students’ first and sometimes only *chapter* book;
having people to talk to was a very important aspect of enjoyment for any setting;
expression through Art; multiple perspectives were valued; troubling language; validation
meant a lot to students; disconnect between reading and writing identities; ELMS was the
only option; bullying; marginalization and vulnerability; students’ life goals/plans; Thank
You Notes; displeasure with teacher created inefficiency; love of choice and freedom; and experiences in Crew and class reinforced stereotypes.

Eighth, I collapsed these patterns into three final claims. The first claim is that the EL model comes from and is perpetuated by a privileged, white, middle to upper class male, Christian, heterosexual, and European perspective, which can create certain tensions and possibilities when placed into an urban setting. The second claim is that adults often determine the students’ experience in this EL school despite the emphasis on the co-construction of community through rhetoric featuring “we are Crew, not passengers” and the Design Principles. The third claim is that EL schools to provide a rich culture of literacy; however, students are living lives full of rich literacy practices on their own. I went back to the data to find specific evidence to support each of these claims. These claims are detailed in Chapter 4.

In summary, my analytic approach included careful coding and reading of the data. Through this process, I sought out codes, then patterns, and finally, claims. These claims were selected because the data supported their importance, and they fit with what I believed the students were trying to say during this study.

Validity and limitations of the study.

I incorporated different methodologies to work toward the validity, reliability, and replicability of the findings. These methods included triangulation of data sources, member checking, and praxis. However, I recognize the ways in which this research is limited. These limitations include small case study group size, the newness of the school, researcher bias, and the specificity of the site choice.
I used triangulation of data sources because this “strategy reduces the risk that your conclusions will reflect only the systematic biases or limitations of a specific source or methods, and allows you to gain a broader and more secure understanding of the issues you are investigating (Maxwell, pp. 93-94). However, instead of using three data sources, I drew from four data sources. These sources included document collection, observations, interviews, and focus groups. These different sources of data allowed me to compare events more broadly, to confirm and disconfirm the patterns that were emerging in the data, and to clarify my theories.

I also incorporated member checking to ensure accurate representation of events, behaviors, and contexts, as well as to clarify any questions that emerged in the analysis. Member checks with teachers included follow up via email, as well as face to face meetings and conversations. Member checks with students involved visiting with them during school hours and asking follow up questions for clarification. Some of the questions I asked teachers were for clarification on the school schedule, and some of the questions I asked students were to clarify my understanding of an event during a particular observation.

Lastly, I worked toward validity by attending to research as praxis (Lather, 1986). I started with acknowledging that I brought particular ideas about adolescent literacies, EL, schooling, and cultural constructions of identity to this study. From there, I tried to pay attention to times where I judged instead of noticed. When I caught myself judging, I went back over my notes with the goal to describe first, and then interpret. I attempted to be as neutral as possible, but recorded when I realized I was not. In some cases, strong
emotional reactions or judgments were used positively in order to discover rich points or critical incidents in the data. I also worked to make sure that my work attended to issues of reciprocity, so that the research was mutually beneficial to both myself as the researcher, as well as the participants in the study. For example, I constantly asked for ways in which I could share my data to be of use to the people at my research site, and followed through with information when my requests were taken up by interested participants.

I also recognize the limitations of my research. I purposefully decided to focus on a very specific school, set of spaces, and set of students. I could have gone broader by looking at multiple EL schools, spaces, or students. This might have allowed for my study to be more generalizable. However, I decided to privilege depth rather than breadth.

In addition, have a small but diverse case study sample of students that did not represent the exact demographic makeup of ELMS led to specific constraints and affordances. My sample is particularly useful because I purposefully varied to the diversity of the group, so I was able to gather a diversity of voices, perspectives, and opinions. The sample enabled me to hear from students who could have easily been silenced in the data if I had not actively sought out their participation. However, my sample is also limited in that it does not tell everyone’s story in the school. There are experiences that my data does not reflect. It is my desire that the depth of the understanding I worked toward in this study will enable the findings to be more accessible, and perhaps encourage future studies that will seek out additional voices.
Another limitation is that the research site is a very new school. During the time of the study, ELMS was only in its first and second years. My findings might have been very different in a school that was more established.

I also came to the study with my own particular viewpoint, which in some ways was both emic and etic to the research site and context. I had years of experiences with EL in a different school, years of experience teaching young adolescents, and a continually developing and expanding notion of literacies, cultural diversity, and student agency.
Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

Chapter 4 is organized into three claims in order to determine the possibilities and limitations of the Expeditionary Learning (EL) reform model as it was taken up at Expeditionary Learning Middle School (ELMS) and experienced by the case study students. Through the theoretical lenses of sociocultural constructivism, culture and power, NLS, and adolescence as a social construction, these claims speak to cultural diversity, student agency, and literacy at ELMS under the EL model. The first claim speaks to the celebratory and surface attention to cultural diversity at ELMS. At ELMS, present day and local discussions of race, class, gender, and sexuality were lacking. Instead, these issues were framed as historical events or as geographically bounded events that were disconnected from students’ current realities. The second claim argues that although ELMS claimed to work toward a co-constructed community through spaces like Crew, CM, and Electives, the student experience of the school and curriculum was often determined by the adults. However, students asserted their agency within this binary through subversive and sophisticated methods. The third claim posits that while
ELMS offered a rich culture of literacy through the traditionally less academic spaces of Crew, CM, and Electives, a lack of attention to cultural diversity perpetuated hegemony within the school. Delpit (1988, 2006), Heath (1983), and Street (1984, 1991, 2003), argued for an understanding of literacy as socially located and tied to issues of cultural diversity, as opposed to an autonomous skill. At ELMS, the understanding of literacy was somewhere in between ideological and autonomous perspectives due to a lack of deep understanding of the connection between literacy and cultural diversity.

As a reminder, the overall focus of this study was the EL reform model. Although EL appears to be a promising reform model, EL Schools may be limited in part by the frameworks from which they have been developed. From observational data and document analysis, EL do not speak directly to the experiences of middle school students who are different in terms of age, class, gender, race, and sexuality, and as a result, may limit students’ sense of agency. This study aims to investigate this problem by examining culturally different adolescents, their experiences under the EL model, and their literacy practices in one EL Middle School in the three contexts that are central to the EL model (Crew, Community Meetings, and Electives). By considering these shared, but seldom investigated spaces in EL schools, this study may enable a better understanding of the limitations and possibilities of the EL reform model. This study seeks to fill this gap in understanding by examining the following research questions:

What happens to middle school students when a school works under an educational reform model (Expeditionary Learning) that does not specifically speak to constructions of age, class, gender, race, and sexuality?
• How do different students experience this model of schooling?

• What happens with respect to student agency when students participate in Crew, Community Meetings (CM), and Electives in an Expeditionary Learning Middle School?

• What does literacy have to do with this? That is, what literacy events and practices are present during Crew, CMs, and Electives, and how does literacy function to limit or enable different students’ agency?

**Claim 1: Diversity is a problem of the past in other places**

Because the EL model came from and was perpetuated by a privileged, white, middle to upper class, male, Judeo-Christian, heterosexual, and Western perspective, culturally diverse students could be marginalized in EL schools, despite the stated emphasis on “Diversity and Inclusion” as one of the ten Design Principles. The data suggested that the EL model seemed to talk around cultural diversity in EL guiding documents, EL professional development, and during EL school designer visits. Because of this lack of explicit training or guidance, the data suggested that ELMS followed suit. ELMS either ignored or presented discussions of race, class, gender, and sexuality as historical events or as geographically bounded events that were disconnected from

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21 See EL’s history in Chapter 3, specifically the originator, Kurt Hahn, as well as the influence from Harvard detailed in Chapter 2. Also, in my seven years of experience with EL, I have only met white male and female school designers, and every person on the EL administration team pictured on the website is white. McQuillen, et al (1994) cited the NAALA Institute report in 1993, which described OB as a “largely white organization, especially at top management and Board levels” (p.58). Lastly, the ELMS school designer expressed that she did not see a need to talk about the topic of race at ELMS in order to inform good teaching.
students’ current realities. This absence of attention or framing of events as “not here” or “not now” resulted in missed opportunities for meaningful connections between students’ lives and the EL curriculum. I believe this state of affairs diminished the case study students’ sense of agency and perpetuated the dominant cultures rules (Delpit, 1988, 2006), in ways that are applicable to all of the students in the school.

**What does EL say in print about cultural diversity?**

In this section, I reviewed foundational EL documents for language on diversity, especially, race, class, gender, and sexuality. The review returned few or vague mentions about EL’s stance on cultural diversity with exception of ELL students and students with disabilities. The few mentions I was able to uncover came from the EL Core Practices (2011) document and the EL 2012-2013 National Professional Development Catalog (2012). The following is a discussion of the information found in the Core Practices document.

*Design Principle of “Diversity and Inclusion” in the Core Practices document.*

The Core Practices (2011) document includes an explanation of EL and a vision for improving schools. EL plans to help schools meet EL’s standards by “provid[ing] the concrete and practical guidance that teachers and school leaders need to bring those principles to life” (p.3). The majority of the 96-page document is dedicated to detailed Core Practices set up like state educational learning benchmarks. These Core Practices

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22 During this chapter, when I refer to students, as in students who reported, or students who provided evidence, I will usually be referring to the eight case study students, except in the case of the ROX Elective, in which I am referring the students who participated in the Elective.
are based on the ten EL Design Principles, also known as the “heart of the EL Model” (p.3), and are meant to shape the design of the school. It makes sense that the core practice benchmarks are intentionally vague in order to avoid prescriptive influence on schools, which is a goal shared with me by EL school designers. There is one Design Principle out of ten that briefly speaks to cultural diversity. This Design Principle, called “Diversity and Inclusion,” states:

Both diversity and inclusion increase the richness of ideas, creative power, problem-solving ability, and respect for others. In Expeditionary Learning schools, students investigate and value their different histories and talents as well as those of other communities and cultures. Schools and learning groups are heterogeneous. (p.4)

The vague language of this Design Principle does not forefront issues of cultural diversity within EL’s comprehensive school reform model. Instead, it leaves its definition, interpretation, and application up for debate. That data suggested that ELMS had used this principle to shape their school curriculum. It also suggested that their interpretations of this principle both supported and hindered students’ agency. It appeared that ELMS interpreted this Design Principle to mean that “difference makes us stronger.” These words comprised the short tag line ELMS used to explain the meaning of this principle to the students. It was also written on the posters in their halls and on the bookmark distributed to the students on the first day of school.

The Design Principle of “Diversity and Inclusion” had been taken up in a variety of ways at ELMS. First, ELMS structured the students’ experience in large part by
grades. ELMS populated their Crews heterogeneously the first year by including students from the three different grade-levels, but they changed this structure for year two. Instead, they had homogeneous grade-levels groupings for each Crew, which some of the students and staff reported to dislike in comparison to the first year. The core subjects were also organized by grades, thus, students only had an opportunity to work with other grade-levels during Electives, which was based on choice, or during RTI\textsuperscript{23}, which was based on math ability according to the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment. In order to see and possibly interact with other grades besides lunch, students could attempt to do so during CM and sometimes during expedition fieldwork. Expedition work in particular brought about a lack of heterogeneous grouping, at least in terms of grades. During year two, the sixth graders were involved in a totally separate expedition than the seventh and eighth graders, so the homogenous grade grouping continued in that way, as well. Thus, students rarely experienced a diversity of ages within ELMS.

Second, I believe that ELMS attempted to address cultural diversity through expedition topics. As a reminder, expeditions functioned within the EL model and at ELMS as a method to plan and implement long term, in depth, and experiential investigations of a relevant research topic. The expeditions during the time of this study were the Underground Railroad for sixth graders and Colonialism in West Africa for seventh and eighth graders. The research question that drove the learning for Colonialism

\textsuperscript{23} RTI stands for Response to Intervention which was taught as a remedial course for math and language skills.
in West Africa was “What happens when cultures collide?” The choice of expedition topic revealed an attention to a diverse student body through an investigation of “their different histories,” but the lack of interest and connection reported by different case study students to the expedition content did not lead me to believe that the students saw it as “their” history. Instead, the history they investigated felt like “someone else’s,” despite the geographical and racial connections that were apparent between the Underground Railroad expedition with the school location and population. This same perceived disconnect was reported for the Colonialism in West Africa expedition which clearly could have connected with the students in terms of race, as well as the West African immigrant youth the students wrote to and met with through fieldwork to a local international school.

This disconnect was also apparent in Abby and David’s experiences. Abby was only on the first chapter of her expedition book because she was not inspired to know more about the topic, and David described the expedition as something he would not be inspired to write about because “it’s not relevant or real life…there was no helpfulness [about it]….I don't know why we need to know about West Africa. It's a foreign country that I’ll probably never go to.” He also did not know why the West African dancing and drumming group took up an “entire” CM²⁴.

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²⁴ During CM, a group of West African men and women performed for ELMS. The CM included an introduction to the group by the principal and by the main speaker for the West African group, an informal assessment on West African knowledge, a riveting drumming and dancing performance, and an invitation to come up on stage for students. This invitation was accepted by about thirty students and they performed alongside the professionals. The students then extended the “invitation” to the teachers until all were on stage. The tone at the end of CM was positive and celebratory.
As a counterpoint, Fawn and Cathy’s experiences spoke to the connection they felt with the West African dancing and drumming CM. Fawn participated enthusiastically during the “quizzing” portion of the CM lead by the leader from the West African drumming and dancing group. Fawn demonstrated an understanding of, and interest in, West Africa by answering almost every question posed by the guest speaker. Cathy specifically cited the drumming and dancing CM as an example of how CM could and should be done at ELMS. For Cathy, this CM was an effective use of time and provided an engaging learning opportunity.

As a side note, other case study students did not report on expeditions. Expeditions were not a focus of this study, except in the cases where they intersected with Crew, CM, or Electives. Additionally, Expeditions were not a space like Crew, CM, or Electives. Instead, they were a curricular tool used comprehensively by all teachers at ELMS.

There is more to say about the drumming and dancing CM in terms of cultural diversity at ELMS. In some ways, this CM exemplified the efforts from ELMS to work toward the “Diversity and Inclusion” Design Principle. However, these efforts may have “othered” the community it intended to celebrate by putting them on display, which further distanced the students from connecting to the community and expedition topic.

The addition of the West African dancers and drummers showcased and “value[d] [the] different histories and talents” of “other” communities and cultures as the Design Principle instructed. There were many examples to support that the efforts to work
toward this Design Principle created positive experiences for many students\textsuperscript{25}. First, the entire school participated in this CM, even though this focus was intended to connect to the seventh and eighth grade students’ West African expedition. Case study students reported that they liked to have interactions with all of the grades, so this was a positive use of CM time. Second, many students participated in the activity by listening, and a number of seventh and eighth graders took notes in the Intrasubject Notebook (ISN) journals. These notes were prompted by a Social Studies graphic organizer. Third, during the presentation and explanation, students and teachers moved their bodies to the rhythm of the music. I believe that participation, even if it was just active listening, revealed that students were compelled by a topic. Fourth, Fawn eagerly and accurately shared the background knowledge she had learned about West Africa when the leader of the dance and drumming group asked questions of the students. This was a remarkable difference between her actions during other academic settings. In those settings, she was often silent, withdrawn, or had her head down on the desk. Fifth, at the end of the presentation, students were invited to the stage to dance with the presenters and many went. By following the dance leader’s example and instructions, many students spread out along the three long levels of the stage and danced in front of their peers. Sixth, the students asserted their agency by creating the CM ending they desired. The students cheered and clapped until all of the teachers joined each other up front of the CM to dance for them.

\textsuperscript{25} On a side note, this event was the only CM in which the students were invited to sit on tables, and not on the floor. This physicality could have contributed to students feeling agentive as many case study students reported disliking sitting on the floor for CM.
as well. It was a positive CM that Cathy shared later should be what all CM are like; interesting and creative educational opportunities.

Nonetheless, ELMS’ work toward the “Diversity and Inclusion” Design Principle in this CM did not engage all learners. The following evidence could support the argument that the “othering” of other cultures by putting them onstage to perform further disconnected the students from the West African community and focus of the expedition. Egan spent the majority of this meeting doodling in his personal drawing notebook instead of writing notes in the ISN. I did not confirm that the drawings were connected to the CM, but the illustrations that he shared with me throughout the study were never connected to course content. Thus, I suspected that these illustrations followed suit. Hal was also disconnected to the content as evidenced by his “misbehavior” in creating a loud and disruptive slapping sound during the quizzing portion of the CM. It is not clear how this CM contributed to the literacy learning within ELMS beyond showcasing different histories and talents of an “other” community. Besides witnesses some students adding notes to the graphic organizer, I did not observe the learning outcomes supported by this CM or how it was taken up before and after in the curriculum. However, this lack of data does not mean that it did not happen. It does mean it was not clearly stated during the observed CM.

Specific Core Practices that speak to “Diversity and Inclusion.”

Some of the 143 of core practice benchmarks also speak toward the “Diversity and Inclusion” Design Principle. In the “Differentiating Instruction” section, EL calls for EL schools to create a culture of differentiated instruction by meeting these goals:
1. Students know and learn with a diverse group of peers.

2. Teachers learn about the home, cultural, and community backgrounds of their students.

3. Teachers examine their own classroom equity practices using protocols such as tracking patterns of student participation in classroom discussions and tracking teacher/student interaction.

4. School communications accommodate linguistic and cultural differences. (p. 34)

I observed ELMS working to meet two of these benchmarks. The first benchmark has already been discussed in terms of the lack of exposure and opportunity to work with diverse grades during the second year of ELMS in comparison to the first year. However, diversity in terms of race, class, and gender was clearly present in each of the cohorts within each grade, as well as the Crews and Electives.

Speaking directly to the second benchmark, I witnessed attempts by teachers to learn about students and their “home, cultural, and community backgrounds.” In Social Studies, the students were asked to bring in a few artifacts that would represent them well. During these presentations, the artifact owner’s identity was kept secret, and the artifacts were presented one by one as clues. As the artifacts were presented, invariably, discussions and assumptions concerning race, class, gender, age, and religion followed every object, even though those discussions were not named as such.

Another attempt to learn about students’ backgrounds included invitations to students’ families to attend ELMS events. ELMS invited students’ families in on multiple
occasions throughout the school year through open houses, student led portfolio sessions, celebrations of learning, volunteer meetings, and open invitations to participate in school day events and fieldwork.

The Wellness teacher led the students through an investigation of their neighborhoods. She supported the students through a guided internet search of their neighborhood and zip code through Google maps. Students recorded the data (or lack thereof) on a worksheet that listed neighborhood amenities like supermarkets, recreation possibilities, and libraries. She prompted them to discover what was and was not available in their area, and some students were surprised by the differences as they compared their notes to others. I did not observe the discussion that might have followed about race and class, but that does not mean they did not happen. The Wellness teacher was particularly interested in investigating and talking about these topics as demonstrated by discussions in her ROX Elective.

These examples were good opportunities to explicitly discuss student experiences of race, class, gender, and sexuality, but I rarely saw these opportunities taken advantage of by all teachers. There are many more examples which are too numerous to describe, but it was important to note that they occurred often and in all of the spaces I observed, including Language Arts, Social Studies, Wellness, Art, Crews, CM, Electives, and in the main ELMS office. What I cannot speak to was any evidence of ELMS’ efforts to “examine their own classroom equity practices” or make school communications accommodating. However, I directly observed and learned from case study students about the homophobic, classist, racist, and gendered bullying that occurred at ELMS on a
regular basis. Perhaps ELMS will make more concerted efforts to realize these
benchmarks in the future; this study took place during the first half of their second year
and schools take time to get established. However, the language from EL that could
inspire ELMS to make this a priority was not there at the time of this study. Instead, the
majority of the explicit direction from EL to help EL schools meet this goal is directed
toward students with disabilities and ELL students (EL Core Practices, 2011, pp. 34-35).

Another section of the Core Practices encourages EL schools to actively work
against threats to student agency. In the “fostering character” section, two benchmarks
call for EL schools to ensure that “the school community demands respect for all” and
that “proactive traditions are implemented consistently to avert bullying and
discrimination (e.g., Crew discussions, literature studies, historical case studies)” (p.65). I
find this language helpful, but vague. For example, how does EL envision respect in an
EL school? What did it sound like, look like, and feel like? The answers to these
questions were apparently up to each individual EL school, as well as the adults that
made the decisions about the community.

To date, EL only offers one PD course that could help educators talk about
cultural diversity with each other and with students, especially in terms of community
and respect. Thus, any work on this aspect of community would have had to come from
teacher training programs or teacher’s lived experiences. Therefore, there was no
assurance that teachers would have possessed this background and training. During the
first year of operation, ELMS called upon two university researchers and educators well
known for their anti-homophobia work to support them in combating bullying. I cannot
speak to the affects of this work, but students reported daily incidents of bullying on
buses, in the halls, and during classes, specifically citing homophobic slurs. Because I
was able to observe ELMS classes, I was also a spectator to some of these incidents. I
was often shocked by the breakdowns in community that I witnessed on daily basis due
to bullying and discrimination, and on a few occasions felt the need to bring my
observations to ELMS staff and teachers.

EL Core Practices also set the expectation for schools to use research and data to
ensure educational equity. This core practice contains the only direct mention of class,
gender, and race in the entire 96-page document:

1. School leaders and teachers disaggregate and study achievement patterns by
gender and race, and by socioeconomic, English language learner, and special
education status.
2. Teachers know the achievement patterns of subgroups of students in their
classrooms and of subgroups in the school as a whole.
3. School leaders and teachers use data to monitor and address achievement gaps.

(p.78)

This core practice does not mention equity in terms of age, ethnicity, religion, or
sexuality. However, it does specifically address ELL students and special education
students, which is mandated by law.

The remaining Core Practices that speak to cultural diversity are meant to
cultivate a positive school culture through staff efforts. The first states: “All staff
members believe in all kids, appreciate diversity, and apply a problem-solving
orientation. They always discuss students and their families respectfully” (p. 79). From this statement, it appears that EL considers believing in kids and cultural diversity as a problem that needs to be solved.

The second benchmark encourages hiring diverse teachers in terms of perspectives and backgrounds. School leaders should “intentionally seek innovative, creative thinkers and cultivate a faculty with diverse perspectives and backgrounds while also building a cohesive team that was unselfishly committed to the common vision and mission of the school” (p. 81). Again, these benchmarks are worthy goals for EL schools, but their language is vague and open to interpretation. Do diverse perspectives and backgrounds mean intentionally hiring staff that come from diverse communities? Who counts as diverse? How might the student experience at ELMS have differed during the time of the study if the faculty was not limited to four teachers of color, no teachers that identified as LGBTQ, or teachers that came from socio economic classes that mirrored many of the students? The data suggested that a lack of language specifically addressing cultural diversity allowed for schools, even well intentioned EL schools, to perpetuate hegemonic power structures. I believe this silence or indirectness around cultural diversity affected students’ sense of agency by limiting their opportunities to learn in an environment that worked toward meeting the needs of all students.

**Professional development catalog.**

In the approximately thirty five possible PD offerings during 2012-2013, one of them appears to provide an opportunity for teachers to explicitly think about and discuss race, and some of the ELMS staff attended this session. Over the summer and in between
the pilot study and dissertation study, ELMS administrators and new teachers attended a five day EL institute\textsuperscript{26} in Little Rock, Arkansas. The EL 2012-2013 National Professional Development Catalog (2012) describes this learning opportunity as:

Civil Rights Institute. This institute is geared to meet the needs of K-12 Social Studies and Language Arts Teachers. The struggle for Civil Rights is illustrated through the experiences of the Little Rock Nine, the African American teenagers who found themselves at the center of the maelstrom resulting from the integration of Central High School in 1957. This five-day learning expedition takes place in Little Rock and demonstrates how to plan a major case study using a variety of instructional approaches including the workshop model, assessment for learning strategies, and protocols for discussion, critique, and building background knowledge. It serves as an example of a Learning Expedition that integrates history, writing, and the performing arts. Through the use of primary sources, fieldwork, and experts, participants gain knowledge and understanding of the multiple perspectives around current issues of race and equality. (p.9)

A trip like this involves considerable monies, time, and enthusiasm from ELMS to learn more about the EL model, as well as the content embedded within of the institute

\textsuperscript{26} An EL institute asks “teachers and administrators to be learners and to experience fully what it means to read, write, assess, and do Social Studies, Math, Science, and Art the ‘EL way.’ This means that facilitators’ model active pedagogy, and participants engage in the social construction of meaning by collaborating in small and large groups … participants experience a slice of a learning expedition that explores significant content… [which] provides the context--and motivation--for learning specific skills… Typically, participants stay in ‘learner’ hat for much of the institute, but they spend time in their ‘teacher’ hat, debriefing and applying lessons learned to their own classrooms” (EL 2012-2013 National Professional Development Catalog, 2012, p. 2).
expedition, which in this case was Little Rock. This dedication was a positive piece of evidence from ELMS and EL that they might already be working toward including explicit knowledge about cultural constructions of identity like race. First, there are many different institutes to select from so the ELMS staff could have selected many other ways to spend their time, budget, and PD days. Second, many of the teachers that went to this institute and stayed four nights have families and partners that they had to leave at home. It was encouraging that teachers and administrators were willing to go, and that EL was providing at least one professional development opportunity that could support teachers in investigations of privilege, power, and race.

It is possible that privilege, power, and race were covered during this institute, at least in small part, because I was able to look through training materials that the teachers were given during the institute. One of the documents I found was *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*, by McIntosh. In this document, McIntosh reveals, challenges, and guides the reader to understand both the daily and comprehensive effects of white privilege. This is important work for all educators to undergo, and it could help ELMS teachers to examine cultural differences that are often invisible to the culture in power (Delpit, 1988, 2006). The presence of this document could mean that EL was at least starting to integrate this work into EL PD. If this work transferred from teacher to

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27 Depending on the level of EL Package purchased by the school, some PD days like five day institutes are factored into the cost for part of the staff. According to my experience, EL expects different educators and administrators to rotate through these PD opportunities over the years of connection with EL, so that eventually, everyone gets to attend.
student, though, I cannot say. I did not see any evidence of this possibility during the study.

However, as the data from ELMS suggested, an expedition that could have focused on race did not mean that students discussed or learned about how cultural constructions like race affected them on a daily basis. In all of my observations during the expeditions on the Underground Railroad and Colonialism/Genocide in West Africa, the effects of these racially motivated historical events were not understood by the students to be relevant today. Among the case study students’ complaints about expeditions, Cathy, who is an African American girl, lamented the continued focus on Africa and expressed her desire to learn about something “interesting” like Asia. Thus, the presence of this document did not mean that it was used to support student understanding on cultural diversity or an improvement in the culture of the school. Instead, ELMS seemed to take up race as an historical artifact or something that happened “over there.”

In conclusion, the Core Practices and EL Professional Development documents do not explicitly detail and explain expectations for EL schools in order to value, teach, discuss, or support cultural diversity. This state of affairs seemed to have affected the student experience at ELMS. Specific language and training is needed to truly work toward an acceptance of diversity as an asset and the inclusion of all students. In the next section, I turn from document analysis to data analysis. From observations, focus groups, and interviews, I work to support my claim that EL perpetuated a privileged, white, middle to upper class, male, Judeo-Christian, heterosexual, and Western perspective,
which caused culturally diverse students to be marginalized in EL schools, despite the
stated emphasis on “Diversity and Inclusion” as one of the ten Design Principles.

**What happened during the school day?**

During observations, interviews, and focus groups, students either reported or I
witnessed events in which culturally diverse students may have been marginalized. I
believe that these events may have occurred because of a lack of explicit language by
ELMS (and by EL as the model shaping the school) regarding cultural constructions of
identity including race, class, gender, and sexuality. Fortunately, ROX provided a counter
example to this narrative in that it provided a space for the girls involved in the Elective
to investigate and problematize these constructions of identity.

*We are Crew, not passengers.*

One such event occurred on the first day of school and involved the motto “we are
Crew, not passengers.” Two Crews of students and teachers were gathered in the library.
The teachers facilitated a discovery process lesson in which the students worked to make
sense of the hints shown in the table below. These hints were meant to guide the students
toward a deeper understanding of what Crew in an EL school means. Small groups of
students were given one of the strips of the paper (denoted in the table by row) which
contained a goal (left hand column) and specific benchmarks to reach those goals (right
hand column). These four slips of paper use sophisticated terms like “constituents” and
“candor.” In addition, the goals are clearly designed for an adult audience who might
interact with others on the phone or manage volunteers, but the goals seem applicable to
the EL Core Benchmarks and Design Principle language.
Table 7 Hints given to the students

| Missing in the data | **We will** listen carefully to understand each other’s positions and judgments.  
| | **We will** negotiate first, then compromise to find win-win solutions.  
| | **We will** acknowledge what we have heard and agreed to do, as a measure of good communication.  
| | **We will** address serious disagreements or concerns in person or by phone, before involving others.  
| Commit to exceptional service to our constituents | **We will** be positive about US SAILING and fellow C.R.E.W. members at all times.  
| | **We will** be easy to reach, friendly, and on time in responding to constituents and fellow C.R.E.W. members.  
| | **We will** give C.R.E.W. members and constituents who seek us out our undivided attention and establish deadlines for unfinished business or the next agreed-upon actions.  
| Respect the integrity and work of fellow C.R.E.W. members | **We will** interact using candor, honesty, and constructive criticism as benchmarks.  
| | **We will** value each other’s work and our need/right to have a life away from work.  
| | **We will** be aware of the similarities and differences in the roles and responsibilities of volunteers and staff.  
| Expect excellence as a group and personal standard of accomplishment | **We will** establish goals and give those responsible the tools and freedom they need.  
| | **We will** remember that asking each other for help is a powerful tool.  
| | **We will** complement each other for work well done, and acknowledge when we haven’t kept our promises.  

These hints came from the United States Sailing organization, and were the requirements to win a C.R.E.W. award. In the US Sailing organization, the term C.R.E.W. was a double entendre for the people working on the boat and for the first letter of each of the four key words that organize the norms for proper Crew behaviors: commit, respect, expect excellence, and work together. At ELMS, Crew was often referred to within the phrase “we are Crew, not passengers.” Thus, students were
positioned to understand the definition of Crew within the nautical context of this phrase. This phrase, like the acronym C.R.E.W., was meant to influence and shape behavior at ELMS. However, within the context of ELMS, these terms came from a foreign context; sailing for pleasure, sport, and recreation, which is an exclusive and predominately upper-class, white, and male world. Without background knowledge of sailing, rowing, or other nautical endeavors, this motto cannot easily make sense to student at ELMS. ELMS students are also geographically located in an area which is far from a coast or significant body of water. From my observations of this class, I witnessed the students struggling to make sense of these slips of paper. I also read their posters and found them to be representative of a surface level understanding of EL. In the figure below, students wrote down key words they heard the teacher say during the lesson, words they recalled from their experience last year at ELMS, words they saw in the hallways of ELMS, and generic phrases that could describe any ideal learning environment.
The words and phrases listed in this image included: teamwork!!, community, nice ☻, power to the people, Design Principles rule, power, create, service and compassion, we are crew not passengers!!, writing together, Mother Nature, see my future, work together, ideas, nature, and learn from your mistakes. Some of these words and phrases overlapped with EL language, while others were generic. Only a few of the students’ ideas captured on this poster referred back to the strips of paper about C.R. E.W. This evidence supported the argument that a nautical-based text was too alien for the ELMS students to make meaning; perhaps if the crew being referenced was another kind of crew, the connection to students’ lives might have been more of a bridge to aid in learning. There are many types of crews including demolition crews, hip hop crews, tagging (graffiti) crews, pit crews that are associated with different aspects of race, class, and gender. If EL
was working from a different conceptualization and Discourse of crew, ELMS might look very different and these students might have experienced ELMS differently. Moreover, the students that participated in this activity might have felt more connected to the concept of C.R.E.W.

*As reported by students in focus groups and interviews.*

My data show that the case study students had much say on the subjects of race, class, gender, and sexuality, but the focus group interviews, individual interviews, and ROX Elective on beauty seemed to be or were reported to be their first chance to talk about these issues in school with their peers and an adult. I witnessed seven incidents where students attempted to discuss race and gender in the classroom, but only two were taken up by the teachers in ROX and Crew. In addition, case study students provided evidence that the ELMS student body as a whole was talking about these issues with each other. In many of these cases, the student to student discussion or silence from the teachers in response to these discussions perpetuated hegemonic norms and further marginalized students.

*Language.*

Many conversations between students perpetuated stereotypes; caused pain, anger, or confusion; or essentialized and “othered” people. Multiple students either used or reported that they heard other ELMS students using the following problematic language to describe, joke with, or bully other students of color: ni***, smoking, foul mouthed, drug dealer, ghetto, gangster, ghetto mother, poor, loud, loiter, lazy, and stealing. Gina, Burt, Cathy, Abby, and Fawn all reported hearing homophobic language
around and in the classroom. These reports included calling each other gay or fag, and happened in the hallways, on the bus, during Electives, and in the classroom.

*Act your age.*

Although I was looking into race, class, gender, and sexuality, students repeatedly reported that they felt let down by adults who were treating them as less than because of their age. In some ways, it was easier for students to name the ways they were marginalized through cultural diversity as aged, instead of as raced. They mentioned that certain teachers “talked to me like a kid”, “was rude”, “just walked away” (without telling him why he was in trouble), “switched them into different groups” (without checking in with the student for their input), “put me in RTI” (that she did not feel was indicative of her ability), “lied to me”, or did not follow through on promises. Students wanted to be treated with respect despite the fact that they were younger than the teachers.

*Conceptions of masculinity and femininity in terms of beauty.*

Another aspect of cultural diversity that came up many times for the students were the ways in which they felt defined by rigid raced, gendered, and classed beauty standards. Gina shared that she was bullied and called a lesbian because her hair was “too short;” Cathy shared that she played football and kept an appropriate weight for this sport, but worried everyday that someone would bully her by making her step on the scale (provided by the school in the hall for Crews to weigh their recycling); Abby explained that her skin was too dark and Cathy felt the same way, especially because she had darker spots where blemishes had been; David shared that he felt pressured to be
“manly” and excel at traditional sports; and although Hal did not characterize this as a problem, he also inadvertently expressed the pressure he felt to conform to expectations of masculinity and beauty when he explained that he only dated eighth grade girls because the “seventh grade girls were not pretty.” Students experienced these norms in ways that created pressure to conform; even when it was impossible to do so as in the case with Abby and Cathy’s skin color.

**Subversive assertions of agency.**

Much evidence supported the finding that students had a threshold for these cultural constructions. When they could not take the pressure anymore, the students asserted their agency in school-appropriate or inappropriate actions. School-inappropriate assertions of agency were not school-sanctioned actions, including actions that were commonly understood to be hurtful, like name-calling. David felt so bullied during his elementary school years that he still fantasized about bringing a gun to the school to enact revenge. At ELMS, he felt that the anti-bullying work was a painful reminder of his elementary years, and he “just wanted to stop talking about it.” He felt that things were much better at ELMS and he wanted to put the past behind him. Although the bullying had stopped for David, Burt was called names and bullied incessantly. He fought back by challenging teachers who were unaware of his torment; by refusing to go to school; by lying to skip classes or meeting; by acting out so that he would not be allowed to go to school; and by moving seats to avoid being next to bullies or having his back to students. Cathy was frustrated by the way she perceived the dance had turned out, a topic discussed in more detail below. I believe this was because she felt that she had lost “control” of the
dance. She asserted her agency by stating that she would not organize the dance in the future, as well as by refusing to get involved in another proposal to run the school store. Abby was frustrated with teachers for not considering her pleas to be put in a higher-level RTI. In order to gain some sense of agency, she would move out into the hall to work so at least “she wouldn’t have to see the other students.” She also resigned herself to not talk with ELMS teachers about these issues because she did not feel that they were truthful or listened to her when she needed them. Other subversive assertions I witnessed included forgetting work, reading, doodling, insulting others, laughing when uncomfortable, lashing out, and talking to a neighbor/friend during instruction. The most pervasive method of regaining agency involved students claiming distance from a situation or stereotype that caused them discomfort. During the focus group, students often started their idea by saying, “I am not gay, but…” or “I am not really that heavy, but…” I found this language to be subversive in that it was used subtly to start the story of how someone was bullied because of their sexuality or weight. These stories often ended with the narrator expressing their disappointment that people were treated poorly or even violently because of a problematic standard. These stories worked toward two contrasting goals: 1) to identify the speaker as outside of the group that is vulnerable, and 2) to admonish the bullies for their behavior toward others. These two contrasting goals seem to work against each other in an effort to protect the storyteller from similar attacks. In this way, it was a subversive attempt at asserting agency in the situation by “kindly othering” people, which appeared to seem better to the speaker than “aggressively othering” people.
subversive assertions of agency helped students to gain a sense of power during situations that were difficult.

**Uses of literacy to escape racial discomfort.**

Egan and Fawn (and less often Gina and David), who are white, escaped from classes by reading novels or creating figurative worlds\(^{28}\), composing characters, and illustrating elaborate stories with dialogue and images. I believe that this happened when they were struggling to participate in a group that was largely African-American. They did not seem comfortable in an environment where white, middle class norms for “good behavior” did not set the tone for everyone in the group. Each of these white students shared their discomfort with the “rowdy” kids, which were also defined as the African American kids. Instead of sharing her experience in the focus group, Gina chose to write to me about her experiences regarding being bullied for being white. In her writing, she described her elementary school experiences of being chased and hit with rocks by African American students who meant her harm because she was white. Although Gina felt comfortable enough to come out as bisexual during our focus group sessions, she did not feel comfortable enough to talk about her experience of being bullied because of her race. From what Gina shared in her written focus group reflection and individual interview, I believe this reluctance to speak was because she struggled with her white guilt and the knowledge that she did not actually deserve to be tormented. Gina began

\(^{28}\) I define figurative worlds according to Holland, et al (2002) who explain that "narrativized or figurative identities . . . have to do with the stories, acts, and characters that make the world a cultural world. Positional identity . . . is a person's apprehension of her social position in a lived world" (pp. 127-128). Thus, the students are playing with their identities by combining intimate with the collective and creating a new space of “cultural forms and social relations” (p. 5).
this study believing that colorblindness (Wise, 2010) was a solution to the problem of race. In the first interview, she seemed confident to share that “race did not matter” to her; instead she focused her interview on problematic conceptions of gender and sexuality. After the focus group discussion on race, she revealed that race did matter to her, and that she was conflicted by it. By only “talking” about it through her writing to me, she demonstrated that she still did not feel comfortable with her experiences around race. Such instances are difficult for anyone, let alone a young person. Fawn, who did not shy away from sharing her feelings about race in the diverse focus group, reported that many of her experiences have reified African American stereotypes. For Fawn, these experiences created incredible frustration on her part. She said she did not feel like talking to people “who embraced stereotypes.” Because of this, she shared that she remained silent in her first year Crew, which was predominantly African American. She came to ELMS having mixed feelings about race; her home culture included an openly racist father and many negative experiences with African American men and women in her neighborhood, yet her first friendship as a child was with an African American youth. In Egan’s stories, African American became an synonym for misbehavior. White students became victims who were silenced; he was one of the “good” kids who were “trying to get something done” by “paying attention to the leader.” David, who claimed to not care about race, was actually reported by another student to tell racist jokes or make racist assumptions on a regular basis. He did not seem to need to escape from his Crew, but he often pulled himself away from others in class when he was not sitting next to his white friends from Crew. From the stories they shared, I believe these white students wanted
the classroom atmosphere to be quiet, focused on turn taking, and inclusive of their ways of being. And sometimes it was; especially in the seventh grade Crew. However, I feel that this discomfort comes from larger systems of privilege and oppression. In order to be present or count in the classroom, some African American students resort to certain behaviors (Fordham, 1993) that are deemed inappropriate in schools. In response, white students that are used to being heard, disengage from the group because they have not had the opportunity or inclination to practice being heard in a diverse setting.

**Religion.**

Although ELMS is a public school, half of the case study students felt assumptions were made about their religious status that made them uncomfortable. Both white and black students exclaimed that they were assumed to be Christian because of their skin color, even though they stated that they identified more with atheism. I did not ask or engender discussion about religion during the individual interviews or focus groups, but students brought up religion on multiple occasions in a passionate tone of voice. During one seventh grade Crew, students were lead through a religious song that referenced angels and God. The lyrics were written on chalkboards around the room, and the students used this text to join their voices in song. However, three of the case study students who specifically complained about religious assumptions, actively participated in the song; Gina even asked to lead the song and Cathy asked the teacher if they could sing it to end their Crew session. This indicated that students did not mind references to religion. In fact, the case study students and other ELMS students broached the subject of religion in multiple conversations and were eager to find out my beliefs and discuss their
own. The participation in this song also indicated that at least Gina and David, who both identified as atheist, were willing to overlook the religious overtones during an opportunity to bond with their Crew community.

**The benefits of culturally relevant pedagogy in teacher training.**

The ROX Elective was a site of many rich and valuable conversations between Ms. Francine and the seventh and eighth girls, including Abby. During one such conversation, students revealed to each other the ways in which they felt constricted by rigid beauty norms. Students seemed engaged and free to share their ideas; I could almost see the metaphorical light bulbs flashing over the students’ heads as they made deep connections to each other’s experiences and profound realizations about cultural constructions. The discussion began with a Dove commercial about “real beauty” in comparison to the photo-shopped images in traditional advertisements. Through a progression video, students watched step by step how people were transformed through digital manipulation into an ideal image that was physically unattainable in real life. After watching, Sapphira immediately understood the point of the video and said, “there is a lot that goes into the photos that we [don’t usually] see.” The students considered each body part that was enlarged or shrunk, stretched or tightened, and considered the beauty norms for each of their own bodies. They shared these ideals (I have underlined the norm for beauty in their statements):

Scarlet: if you have acne you are considered not pretty
Sandra: most people think that you have to be thin, and if you watch some of those modeling shows, they don’t eat for days before the shoot.
Sage: I have something to add- if you want to be popular you have to wear Aeropostale
Student: if I have my shoes, my hair, I am good to go
The students were sensitive to and aware of the cultural and economic constructions of identity that were a part of their lives. They noticed what counted for beauty, as well as how they were chastised for not measuring up. These contributions to discussion also spoke to issues of class. It takes economic resources to access these particular constructions of beauty.

Ms. Francine asked the girls to “be sensitive to each other’s differences about this. What messages have you heard from your culture about this?” The students had much to say about cultural expectations in terms of skin color, weight, hair, clothes, and behavior:

- Samantha: not good messages
- Sonny: me personally... too dark nothing else
- Samantha: dark chocolate
- Song: in my neighborhood and stuff I have been called big and ugly, I don’t think I am, if I bring that up to them, they don’t believe it
- Student: you think that was because of where you live?
- Suzy: people don’t be talking about me too much, but not everyone at a Christian store was Christian. Some random Caucasian person, not that I don’t like them, because I love you guys, but she said I should put on a maids outfit
- Student: boots past your knees because you be on the floor scrubbing, see African Americans as slaves and hookers
- Sage: some girls wear booty shorts
- Sadie: my neighborhood was all old people so I don’t have anything to say about that, but in my culture I have been called big, ugly, have heard people make fun of short people, and say that all chunky people have short hair
- Sapphira: I hate when people say “you are pretty for a …” can’t somebody just be pretty
- Samantha: they used to call me Precious (as in the overweight African American girl movie character)
- Sadie: they called me that last year
- Samantha: this dude on the street said you pretty and all but no one want to mess with a fat girl
- Song: I have been called immature and the messages I have received have been not pretty
- Suzy: I am going to categorize this like I saw on Oprah, Caucasians are pretty, African
American have nice body, (unintelligible) junk in the trunk, and then they say stuff about wet dog hair, and all black people have big lips
Sonny: my hair, people don’t be saying stuff about that but they did say I am too
dark, my body my mom be telling me I need to get rid of my gut in front, other
than that people not really be talking about me, well my friends when I am eating
food-called me fat, but people that be serious not calling me that. Unless in
argument then they have said 'you fat b_', but I am not fat so I don’t be tripping
over that
Sadie: well some people say if I was skinner and had long hair I would look
pretty, some people say I look fat but I take it as PHAT which was pretty hot and
thick

During this conversation, many things were happening in terms of student agency. By
naming, sharing, examining, and judging these problematic norms for beauty, the
students were asserting their agency as critical ethnographers of their communities. The
expectation for students to express their feminity and sexuality through revealing clothing
or tiny bodies was examined. Some students were taking risks and building connections
to each other by revealing that they shared similar experiences, as in the case with being
called Precious. These connections seemed to strengthen the students’ sense of agency.
Other students were re-spelling hurtful words like “fat” as “phat” in order to re-define the
meaning and assert their agency. Some students were making jokes like “dark chocolate”
to ease the pain and lessen the affect of the words “too dark.” These students revealed
experiences that could have been considered shameful and hurtful during this
conversation. Through discussion, these painful experiences were exposed as ignorant
and untrue, and it appeared that the students realized that these experiences did not define
them as people.

Although these rich conversations were happening in ROX, one teacher and a
small group of students doing this work could not change the entire culture of the school.
Moreover, the only students that were able to participate in these discussions were the fifteen girls that were enrolled in this Elective. Although they attempted to create change through the Mix It Up day, there was still more work to be done to create an inclusive culture. Ms. Francine also bridged some of these topics in her Wellness class, but she only met with each grade cohort once a week for one period of the day, which was approximately 45 minutes long. I believe an open and explicit dialogue about race, class, gender, and sexuality must be present in the majority of the classrooms, if not all, to make any significant change in the culture of ELMS.

In all of these examples, students entered into discussions or encountered an opportunity to discuss constructions of identity through texts. By texts, I include the Dove commercial shown in ROX, the ROX students’ reading of their bodies and lived experiences, the ROX discussion concerning the expectations of the dominate culture, the song written on the Crew room chalkboards, the white students’ reading of their experiences with race and the culture of the classroom, the reading of the school culture in order to assert agency, the reading of masculine and feminine norms for beauty, the students’ reading of the language used by adults, the stereotyped terms and descriptions used by students, and the slips of paper about CREW, which were discussed earlier. An autonomous notion of literacy at ELMS neglected to consider the issues of cultural diversity present in these texts except in ROX. Ms. Francine had an advantage over the other teachers at ELMS as she was trained during her Master’s program to mediate this kind of work with students. However, I do not know what kind of literacy training she encountered. Other teachers seemed less prepared to encourage or support these kinds of
conversations in their classrooms or they purposefully chose not to. For example, Mr. Harold shut down a request by a Media Mojo reporter to ask students to identify themselves according to race during a brainstorm on questions to ask interviewees. Thus, teacher preparation from EL regarding cultural diversity, student agency, and adolescent literacies must become an important concern. In addition, teacher training beyond the EL reform model is needed as comfort in discussing constructions of identity, supporting cultural diversity, or attending to ideological notions of literacy seem to be a systemic problem for teachers and teacher preparation programs across the board.

**Conclusion for claim 1.**

It is possible that these findings are due to the newness of ELMS, as well as EL within the ELMS community of students, student families, teachers, and administration. The ELMS community is not only learning about EL, but they are also learning about being a part of a brand new middle school, the middle school curriculum, and more. This newness might result in a lack of understanding of EL by teachers, families, and students. Over time, these issues may change as the familiarity with EL increases. However, even if familiarity improves the school, attention to cultural constructions of identity in ELMS spaces and curriculum will continue to be avoided, and students will suffer. I believe the origins of the EL philosophy helped to create a school that assumed a particular way of being in the world. Thus, the EL model is intended in many ways for those that identify with the dominant culture: white, middle to upper class, heterosexual, and male students. EL seemed to be “blind” to all “other” ways of being. Perhaps as ELMS matures, they
will begin to focus their energies on making the philosophy work toward culturally diverse students, but in these first years, this task did not seem to be foregrounded.

Furthermore, ELMS was not only a beginning EL school, it was also still developing its identity within its community. The case study students reported that they came to ELMS because the alternative was unacceptable. All of the home middle schools were characterized as bad, dangerous, or “ghetto.” Thus, ELMS was the only option available to the students whose families were unable (or unwilling) to pay for a private or parochial school, or did not apply (or did not know to apply) to a public magnet school. Many of these students came from situations where they were bullied incessantly and were feeling depressed, some even suicidal. Out of these eight case study students, two of the case study students came to ELMS because they knew about the Ford Family of schools and wanted to go to one of their high schools. This information suggested that EL itself was not the central attractor for enrollment. Because students rarely talked about or wanted to discuss their expeditions, especially in comparison to Electives, I believe this aspect of ELMS was still not the draw for the current students who understood it better than a new student. Thus, most students did not come to ELMS for the expeditionary curriculum. If students had chosen to attend ELMS because it was an EL school, the data could be different.

I believe this means that a young ELMS will change significantly as it develops over time. I believe that the ELMS staff was understandably still learning about being an EL school; figuring out how to create those successful Crews, CM, and Electives; and discovering who their students were and how to best serve them. As ELMS grows and the
culture solidifies, I believe incoming students will be drawn to ELMS for its unique school structure guided by EL. This knowledge will create more buy in from the students and families who want to be there as opposed to those who feel this is the only safe option. The entire ELMS community will know more about what the school could offer, and the school will have more support to make those possibilities come to fruition. ELMS will not remain a decent or safe alternative; instead, it will become a school students want to attend. It will become a school that is known by the exceptional learning, innovative spaces, and successful students. My beliefs come from experience, as this was what happened in the Pacific Northwest EL School. However, even though the school culture changed with the increase in student buy in, I never received any formal training on cultural diversity or student agency through the EL model.

In conclusion, despite the wording in the EL documents, which teachers and students could take up as a call to celebrate diversity and work toward inclusion, by neglecting explicit discussions in schools about the students’ experiences of race, class, gender, and sexuality, student agency was affected negatively. Students felt the pressure and discomfort of unexamined and ignored stereotypes, and were hungry to talk about these issues with each other and with a trusted adult. As the ROX Elective proved, these conversations were beneficial and could happen with teacher training. EL did not provide ample structure or PD to support schools in talking about cultural constructions of identity. The wording that was present in the guiding documents did not explicitly confront homophobia, classism, sexism, ageism, or racism. The EL documents need to change so that schools like ELMS can follow suit. I believe the EL staff as a whole need
to be trained on how to examine their own biases and privileges, how to talk about these issues, how to work with students to do the same, and how to be agents for social justice and educational equity. EL and ELMS were not completely clear on their vision for “Diversity and Inclusion” in EL schools and some of the students were suffering because of it. On a larger level, EL needs school designers and PD that support staff through this work with specific training, language, and feedback.

**Claim 2: Adult/student binary interrupts co-construction of community**

The second claim is that ELMS adults often determined the students’ experience in this EL school despite the emphasis on the co-construction of community through rhetoric featuring “we are Crew, not passengers” and the Design Principles. My understanding was that one of the goals of EL was to ensure that students have a role in shaping the community. In many ways, the data suggested that students are both given and denied an opportunity to shape ELMS. This confusion was linked to a distinct and sometimes problematic binary of student/adult. There were many possibilities for why this was so. At the foundations of the issue could be the possibility that ELMS staff did not share a vision of co-construction of community, or that staff shared the vision, but not the definition of a student influenced school community. Nevertheless, disconnects between EL ideals and ELMS experiences affected students’ agency at ELMS. However, as Foucault (1978) explained, where there is power, there is also resistance. ELMS case study students demonstrated through subversive and sophisticated means assertions of their agency, despite the presence of this binary. In the following section, I detailed the
literacy based events that told this story. As with the previous section, these events bring together issues of cultural diversity and student agency.

**What does EL say about the adults and students’ roles in shaping the school community?**

As with the first claim, I turned to EL documents for specific guidance on the students’ role in an EL school, and the structures that were meant to give them this space. I also looked for descriptions of how EL adults were to bring about these possibilities. These structures included Crew which was specifically described in the Core Practice document (p. 66-67); CM which was described in multiple EL documents, as well as in multiple sections within the Core Practice document; and Electives, which were not described in detail in any document. The benchmarks called for EL adults to work toward four particular goals in order to support students. Those goals included creating a schedule that helped students to achieve learning targets; ensuring that every student was known and cared for; celebrating and modeling contributions to the school and world, as well as literacy and Mathematics; and nurturing student character and leadership. According to EL, all of these components were supposed to happen across spaces so that students were experiencing them in different groupings and configurations multiple times a day and/or week.

**Schedule and learning targets.**

Because adults in EL schools are supposed to help students experience EL in four particular ways, the schedule was a vital component of achieving these goals. A traditional school schedule would not work for an EL school because teachers need
whole staff planning time; physical spaces and blocks of time for interdisciplinary collaboration; a schedule that allows for fieldwork; and more. Thus, EL schools needed an EL friendly schedule. According to EL Core Practices (2012) schools should create “school spaces [that] accommodate various traditions and classroom configurations (e.g., Crew circles, collaborative groups, Community Meetings)” (p. 64) and “project work, fieldwork, service learning, Community Meetings, exhibitions of learning, and flexible groupings of students” (p. 75). EL referred to the expected schedule as a set of “traditions” in order to highlight the requirement to transmit customs or beliefs from adult to student, student to student, and student to adult (these adults being a community member, family member, or a teacher). Included in the EL directives for setting a schedule was the importance of setting learning targets for each configuration of school time and space. EL called for educators to set up specific learning targets within these spaces to help students be challenged, be successful, and experience EL. I was unable to locate any official EL documents at the time of this study to describe or situate Electives within the EL model, except for the following quote which uses the word Elective as an adjective. This quote, it is used to describe an enrichment class. ELMS used the term Elective as a noun, and the difference is interesting:

School leaders customize the school calendar and schedule to challenge and support students of all levels. This may include “Intensive” periods between quarters, trimesters, or semesters that provide extra support for students not meeting learning targets and Elective enrichment for those meeting targets. It may
also include before- or after-school activities to challenge and/or support students (p. 75).

EL seems to consider Elective enrichment classes as rewards for those students who have met all of the required learning targets. ELMS offered Electives to all students on Tuesday and Thursday, and most of the case study students reported enjoying their Electives. For all of the Graphic Novel Elective case study students, this class contributed to their sense of agency by validating their literacies in an academic space, helped David and Egan develop a friendship, and, as they all shared, became a highlight of their week. Fawn, whose MAP scores and classroom assessments freed her any need for additional instruction, participated in two Electives. However, she seemed to be in a unique situation as every other case study student reported having to take an RTI. It is not clear why ELMS decided to structure Electives as a reward for everyone, which seems to go against EL guidance, but this was how we structured Electives at PNELMS, too.

This benchmark also called for adults to create a schedule that supports students to be successful. It was not clear how EL defines success, but this quote seems to aim for an academic notion of success. ELMS created a schedule that incorporated many different groupings and content areas, including daily Crew around lunchtime, a CM before the dismissal on Friday afternoon, and Electives that happened at least twice a week for the last period of the day. ELMS could have attempted to use Electives in the schedule to help students meet particular targets. From my interview with Mr. Daniel, I was aware that ELMS wanted to support both physical and academic development of the students through Electives. However, during the Electives that I observed regularly, I did
not see any specific learning targets shared with the students. This may be because I was not in the room on days when learning targets were shared (I spread my observation time between three Electives), or such sharing may not have happened. However, I did come across one learning target during a Celebration of Learning evening at ELMS. This learning target for the ROX Elective was communicated to and through the ROX students. Taking turns in shifts throughout the evening, a ROX student stood in front of a display board and gave visitors a “tour” of the learning that happened in ROX. She also used a display board full of photos and text to illustrate her explanation. On that board, the ROX learning target was displayed as “I can demonstrate the skills necessary to defend myself physically and experience my body as strong and powerful.” This target referred to the self-defense sessions of ROX, but the learning targets that would have referred to the discussions that I observed were missing from this board. This lack of learning targets in Electives could be an aspect of the relative youth of this particular EL school because learning targets were clearly communicated in the core subjects.

The Celebration of Learning night was a specific part of the school schedule that welcomed students’ families. The Core Practices (2012) called for events aimed at “engaging families and the community in the life of the school” (p. 68). EL schools were to welcome visitors, build relationships with families, communicate with families, and provide a variety of ways for families to participate in the school (p. 63). In particular, EL “school leaders and teachers learn about and respect the cultures, backgrounds, and values of their students’ families” and “establish forums that guarantee respectful communication and the opportunity for diverse perspectives to be heard” (p. 68).
Every student was known and cared for.

EL also called for adults to set up “structures and traditions such as Crew, CM, exhibitions of student work, and service learning” to ensure that every student is known and cared for (p.5). Although students were encouraged to connect with any adult, at the very least, they also had an adult in their Crew leader that interacted with them and was available for support on a daily basis. Crew was just one of the many traditions already in place at ELMS during this study and I believe they were continually striving to improve their practices and add more as time progressed.

At ELMS, the Crew leaders planned to stay with the same group of students through all three years of middle school, so it appeared that they were working toward this benchmark. This plan connected with the EL Core Practice Benchmarks (2012) which provided clear direction for Crew. However, EL only differentiated between elementary and secondary Crews, without specific mention of where they perceive middle school fitting in between the two. Some of the direction overlapped, so I took the main ideas from both that applied to middle school and ELMS. To summarize, this document called for Crew to:

1. Meet on a consistent basis, multiple times every week, everyday if possible
2. Keep Crew size small and meeting time significant
3. Students are to be active participants
4. Staff beyond classroom teachers are trained and supported to be Crew leaders
5. Crew leaders develop learning targets and instructional plans to address relational and performance character development, literacy, portfolio work, adventure, service, school-wide concerns, and postsecondary readiness.

6. Crew allows students and teachers to forge productive relationships over time to support their achievement. To this end, Crew composition is structured in the way the school feels works best in its culture.

7. Crew provides a time to focus on relationship building among students and between adults and students (e.g., greetings, personal sharing, classroom discussions).

8. Include check-ins on how the class is doing in terms of character and academic progress, and how well individuals are doing. Problems with courtesy, behavior, tolerance, or responsibility are often addressed.

9. Crew provides an opportunity to help students define what it means to be an EL school (e.g., commitment to positive character, exploration of the Design Principles, the concept of “Crew, not passengers”).

10. Whenever possible, students in Crew sit in a circle so they can see each other, participate actively in discussion, and hold each other accountable for high standards of character.

11. Engage students in collaboration and competition in a joyful, supportive environment.
12. Crew leaders form relationships with parents, monitor academic progress, lead interventions, and ensure readiness for graduation.

13. Crew is often used as a setting to prepare for student-led conferences, portfolio reflection and presentations, and school exhibition preparation. (pp. 66-67)

From my observations, many benchmarks were met on a daily basis. However, the secretaries were not considered teachers and thus not Crew leaders, but the Core Practice document called for everyone in the school to run a Crew. This was especially interesting because the students seemed to like the secretaries and vice versa. Students often stopped into the office during free time to talk with the secretaries, and in one ROX Elective session, a student named both secretaries as trusted sources of advice and safety. Both of these examples seemed to support the positive relationships that I observed between the secretaries and the students.

For the Crew teachers and students, having an adult connected to a student for three years on a daily basis may have made it easier to work toward the first Design Principle: The Primacy of Self-Discovery. In this Design Principle, EL explained that a “teacher’s primary task is to help students overcome their fears and discover they could do more than they think they could” (p.4). In order to do this, EL educators needed to recognize that “learning happens best with emotion, challenge and the requisite support” (p.4), which was another part of the first Design Principle. EL aimed for schools to welcome each and every single student into a community that supported their individual needs. EL called for a learning environment in which everyone was respected:
Learning is fostered best in communities where students’ and teachers’ ideas are respected and where there is mutual trust. Learning groups are small in Expeditionary Learning schools, with a caring adult looking after the progress and acting as an advocate for each child. Older students mentor younger ones, and students feel physically and emotionally safe. (p.4)

In light of this directive, it seemed like ELMS failed in meeting the needs of Burt. For example, Burt shared that he almost got in a fight with Hal during Ultimate Frisbee. Hal called Burt gay to “his face,” but Burt was suspended because of the “words that were flying” in front of the principal. He was angry and frustrated that Hal was still at ELMS and did not get into trouble.

Moreover, he was visibly disgusted when recalling another similar incident in Art during our final individual interview. I witnessed this event and reported it to the teacher and principal. I do not know all of the details from all points of view, but Burt shared that the principal told him to shake hands with Hal and “make friends.” He shared that he tried to explain this kind of situation to teachers before and they did not see his side, so he did not pursue the matter further. He did not offer an explanation, so the teacher dismissed his request as this was not classroom policy. Burt began to assert his agency in this situation in a school-sanctioned way, but the situation spiraled out of his control when he was told he could not move seats, and the incident escalated to them yelling across the room at each other. Burt’s punishment for this situation was most likely due of Burt’s non-school sanctioned reaction to the abuse, which seemed to be the more pressing issue to address. I did not realize until Burt shared this story a month after the incident.
that it appeared that my account of situation was dismissed by the teacher and principal. I recall sharing how Burt asked the teacher for permission to move seats, that he was being severely bullied in class by multiple students, and that it was bad enough that I felt it necessary to break my stance as an impartial observer.

After Burt returned from suspension, he was again positioned to defend himself in Social Studies. Because the grade-based cohorts travel together, Hal, and the other bullies from Art were there. They were laughing and pointing at Burt, as well as mouthing the word “gay.” The teacher, who did not see any of this, had recently reconfigured the seating chart so that Hal and Burt were the only two students in the middle of a U shaped configuration of tables. Thus, Burt was placed center stage with his back to the rest of the students, next to a bully. I watched him struggle to explain calmly to the Social Studies teacher that he wanted to change seats. I got the sense that Burt could not explain to Mr. Harold that Hal was a bully without losing cultural capital. So, like in Art class, Burt gave little explanation. Burt was clearly angry and annoyed that he was forced into a position in which he was neither emotionally or physically safe. During this class, Burt was called to the office, so the situation ended. Soon after, Burt was expelled from ELMS.

In light of these three examples, was Burt’s expulsion ELMS responsibility? Should a student who had been through multiple schools because of behavior issues most likely stemming from his struggles as a young, gay, African American male be cast aside? Or should Burt have been as supported the same way as a student who had experienced only academic success, safety in school, and trusted adults? EL did not say
which students should be supported; instead, EL demanded that all students should be supported. So who was responsible for Burt slipping through the cracks? Was it the Crew leader who should know this student well? She told me that she was hoping this school would serve Burt, so I know she was trying. Was it the student’s responsibility? Burt, as a young man, cannot be expected to know how to deal with bullying perfectly.

I understand the teachers’ frustrations with a student like Burt who is asserting his agency in the best ways he knows how, which are not always the best ways for others. Even as an impartial adult who took up a position of advocacy for Burt, his behaviors affected me in negative ways, too. In my case, Burt lied to me about what he needed to do at lunch time instead of sharing with me that he did not want to do the interview (which I attempted to make clear was always an option for all case study students). When I realized what had happened, I had to search the school for Burt to make sure he was in the correct place, and it caused me to lose significant opportunities for additional data collection. Burt also said he told a teacher she smelled like “piss” which was clearly inflammatory language. However frustrating Burt’s behaviors might have been they do not warrant the treatment Burt was subjected to by the school. Burt was using the means available to him within an institution and culture that was not consistently supporting or protecting him, which is not only a responsibility, but a code of conduct as stated in the ELMS Handbook.

I cannot locate any formal policy in EL documents that speaks to any aspect of this issue. Instead, EL leaves a situation like Burt completely up to the individual EL
schools. I believe this lack of language about cultural diversity was part of the problem that creates further marginalization for students like Burt.

Celebration.

Both adults and students in EL schools are called to engage in celebration in multiple spaces for four reasons: math, literacy, learning, and service. Celebrations should “emphasize the importance of literacy and mathematical thinking and learning in multiple spaces, including Community Meetings” (p. 40). In addition, celebrations should recognize “contributions to the school and world” (p. 5). I believe when Cathy received a round of applause for her work on the dance, it was intended as an acknowledgement of her service to the ELMS community, even though it was not named as such. The significance of these contributions was emphasized in the tenth Design Principle, Service and Compassion. EL stated:

We are Crew, not passengers. Students and teachers are strengthened by acts of consequential service to others, and one of an Expeditionary Learning school’s primary functions is to prepare students with the attitudes and skills to learn from and be of service.

In order to prepare students to learn from and be of service, adults were called to act as role models by caring for and knowing about each and every student. When applicable, celebrations were to specifically focus on adults “act[ing] as models of lifelong learning for students” by visibly demonstrating and communicating their accomplishments through CM presentations and “documentation panels of professional development” (p. 64). Thus, adults were asked to celebrate multiple things in multiple places; including
their own accomplishments to serve as exemplars for students. I looked to EL literature on CM for additional information.

**Community Meeting.**

I located three documents on CM through the EL website and literature. These documents were focused on CM presentations, example structures, and methods to incorporate students.

The first document is a two page check list and rubric for assessing a presenter during a CM. This document was created by an EL school and shared with other EL schools via an online, password protected website. This document asks the evaluator to describe the presenter in terms of name, grade, and advisory, which suggested that this was feedback for the student presenter, not teacher. The document calls for the evaluator to know this information about the student presenter. This could mean that presenters started off by introducing themselves with this information, teachers gave student evaluators this information, teachers filled out the evaluations, or that students and teachers knew each other well in this school. It could also be assumed that this document is built for a CM in which students are running things, which was not the case at ELMS during the time of this study. The form is also indicative of the common language that is shared through EL professional development and literature and included the language concerning: what feedback looks like, the levels of performance, as well as the 6+1 writing traits (which are not developed by EL, but advocated by them).

The second document was on EL letterhead and is entitled *Examples of Community Meeting Structures at EL Schools.* This document details two styles of CM at
two different schools. Both schools have the entire school meet once a week for 30-60 minutes, but in many ways each school took up CM differently from each other and from ELMS.

The first of the two schools that took up CM differently is located in New York and began CM by playing “Let’s Get This Party Started” as students entered the meeting to sit in a large circle. Everyone stood for the Pledge of Allegiance and the school pledge, which was basically about following the Design Principles. They had the school pledge set to music so they sang it together. Two students, referred to as school radio station announcers, had microphones and welcomed everyone through call and response. These radio announcers led students through a variety of activities and reminders that were often backed up with music. The following elements were introduced with more call and response, but sharing the meeting content was taken over by a new class each week. This class sat in the middle of the circle to lead students in a greeting, number of the week, sharing of expedition work exemplars, and passing of the torch to the next class in charge of the content portion of the CM. Then the announcers shared an expedition fact of the day followed by a music/dance performance. Finally, they ended their meeting with a song and everyone went back to class. This document reported that their meetings had developed over time from teacher to student ownership. These meetings were modeled after African American church services, included rhythm and repetition so each meeting looks similar, and were noisy, but included signals for quiet.

In the second of the two schools, CM followed a specific pattern and focused on communication and celebration. This pattern was made up of six parts:
acknowledgements, apologies, announcements, a letter reading, discussion, and the school pledge. The acknowledgement portion included an opportunity for students and staff to acknowledge examples of greatness. The apologies portion included an invitation to students and staff to apologize for any mistakes or poor choices. Announcements provided an opportunity to announce academic events such as fieldwork, service projects, assessments, and deadlines, as well as student birthdays, accomplishments and successes. During many CMs, a letter to the school was read aloud. These letters came from a past or present student, visitor, or staff member. Discussion was community wide, usually faculty lead, and may have been about one of the five “promises”, a short reading, or a problem within the community. Finally, the entire community recited the school pledge and returned to class.

The third document comes from EL headquarters and is on EL letterhead. *Community Meeting: By Students, For Students* includes possible components of CM. The title reveals part of the focus and purpose for CM according to EL philosophy: planning and running meetings empowered students to help develop the school community, as well as to have ownership regarding the quality of this collective time. These meetings gave the students an opportunity to see themselves as “Crew, not passengers,” a fundamental mantra in EL. EL also aimed for the “presentation skills learned from critiquing their meetings and revising them for key components” to aid students during “Passages, other presentations, interviews, and in a variety of roles in our communities” (EL document). It was a goal for all EL schools to support their students to

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29 The literature did not define the term “promises.”
run meetings, which was not happening at ELMS during the study. This lack of student ownership could be due to many things, including the teacher planning time needed to bring about this change. This document also includes many possibilities for CM as suggestions, but not requirements. EL calls for meetings to be “vibrant, authentic and purposeful” (EL document) and suggests that schools consider adding these components: preparation, timeframe, music, welcome, presentations, business, closing, and debriefing.

This document explains each component in detail:

- First, preparation involved scaffolding for presentation by developing skills, style, and organization of content. Crew leaders could help with this preparation, and serve as models for student critique. Eventually students could lead meetings with only a proposal and approval process for agendas.

- Second, the timeframe EL suggested was only 20-30 minutes, without any further explanation.

- Third, EL schools could have students playing music or instruments as students entered the meeting as to avoid chaos while allowing for natural chatter. This music could also alleviate feelings of anxiety because everyone was together in one room, or could build anticipation and enthusiasm for the meeting time together.

- Fourth, EL encouraged an official welcome and agenda review, especially if hosted by a student.
• Fifth, presentations could make up the body of the meeting. They could include sharing, discussion, and guest speakers. Students could share something they were doing in class, or Crews could share service project plans. Other presentations suggestions included slide shows from expedition events or other school happenings, or small-group discussion of an important current issue. EL advised that these presentations only fill ten minutes of time, so schools should “keep it simple and student-driven.”

• Sixth, meetings might include time for business. Business items could be acknowledgements, awards, announcements, questions, and concerns. EL specifically mentions the possibility of apologies for missteps.

• Seventh, the closing: EL suggested student selected music, thanking everyone for coming, creating a positive sense of spirit, and an “optional reading or last word from anyone in hosting or in the crowd.”

• After the meeting, EL recommended a debriefing session to give feedback to the Crews or students in charge of the meeting. EL suggested using a school-wide rubric or feedback form “so that students could clearly see what the expectations are and how their meeting met or did not met those criteria” followed by an opportunity for students to reflect and set goals for the future.

Some of these aspects were in place at ELMS during the time of the study, and others were not. For example, ELMS had a variety of welcome techniques that they use in Crews (often called greetings), but they were not used during CM. Instead, during
occasional CMs, students participated in teambuilding initiatives. There were also no agendas shared with the students, which I verified in the interview with Mr. Daniel and through my observations. ELMS CM ran for about an hour, but EL suggested twenty to thirty minutes. Twenty minutes was usually the amount of time that ELMS needed to get all of the Crews into the cafeteria, quiet, and ready to begin the CM. I did not witness any sort of debriefing practice, music, or apologies. However, I did witness presentations of proposals, dancing or signing performances, awards, and announcements.

**Character and leadership.**

Related to leadership though example, an EL school schedule should also include a focus on character and leadership. The Core Practices (2012) set the goal for EL staff to develop and implement “a common set of EL traditions . . . in whole-school settings and in classrooms (e.g., CM, Crew, team-building activities) to foster character” (p. 64). One of the ways to do this was through setting an example. EL school leaders should “celebrate and define the values of EL through their daily words and actions, displays and materials related to the school vision, and CM and public events” (p. 79). Again, adults were to create traditions in a variety of spaces for students to emphasize and perpetuate EL notions success. In these core practices, EL emphasized developing character in order to be successful. School leadership was held accountable by these benchmarks through an expectation to set an example through multimodalities.

**What happened at ELMS?**
As already mentioned, CM at ELMS looked differently from the CMs written about by EL. According to the ELMS school website (2010), ELMS’ mission was to prepare:

Students for academic success, self direction, life long learning, and commitment to community by providing intentional learning experiences that foster imagination, discovery, problem solving skills, and growing independence. With a particular mission to serve urban students, ELMS will be a supportive community where students learn to care for themselves, each other and the natural world. As a school that values generosity, stewardship, and service, ELMS will nurture not only students’ academic growth and confidence but also their development as compassionate citizens of a global world.

In order to find out more about the commitment to community, I interviewed Mr. Daniel, who was in charge of CM.

This interview data contributed to the finding that adults were not currently included in the use of the word “we” in the phrase “we are Crew, not passengers.” To continue the use of a nautical metaphor: adults at ELMS seemed to be positioning themselves outside of the boat telling the students what to do, much like traditional organizations of school. As the students created their own culture in the boat together both parties created distance from one another. Thus, the adult/student binary was created. The result of this positioning within the Crew of adult/not adult, power/no power was that the adults could not truly hear and respond to what was happening in the boat; communication broke down and the students were on their own at sea.
Community Meeting according to Mr. Daniel.

During this interview, Mr. Daniel shared his teacher perspective on CM from his experience in another school and from his participation in the EL professional development. Thus, Mr. Daniel’s perspective was a blend of EL and non-EL philosophies, but I found the information to align overall to my experience and understanding of EL and EL at ELMS. Overall, Mr. Daniel talked about the purpose of CM, its current structure, how it was evolving, and the goals for the future. After this section, I explain what EL said about CM. I believe that the information Mr. Daniel shared was representative of the ELMS staff’s opinion in general because of conversations about CM with other staff, observations of staff during CM, and because these meetings were planned collaboratively during weekly staff meetings, as well as during professional development days with the EL school designer.

Purpose of Community Meeting.

Mr. Daniel shared that the purpose of CM was to bring the whole school together, to show off their community, and to have students participate in the meeting and the school as a whole. ELMS rarely hosted guests, so he must mean that they are showing off their community to each other. He felt that ELMS staff encouraged students to participate as an active member in the community, especially through the school proposal process, which he described as a chance for students to propose their ideas for the school.

According to Mr. Daniel, school proposals included organizing dances, starting a student store, and having a spirit week where everyone dressed up. Proposals also included proposing a performance for other students. These performances included
singing or dancing on stage. He saw the proposal process as “a chance for them to propose an idea to the school” and “to get some opinion on if [the students and staff] liked that idea.” He also noted that the proposal process was still under construction. Even during the last days of the first school year, the staff was just starting to establish procedures and norms for students. He remarked that the staff was mainly trying to avoid students spontaneously standing up and making proposals they had not organized or thought through.

The document based proposal application process and connection to Crew was also under construction. Teachers discussed having students go through a trial run of sharing their proposal to an audience within Crew. The hope was that the trial would help save meeting time. This time had been used up by questions from students, many of which were repetitive. Instead, the trial could provide a chance to get those questions answered in a small group so that the student could amend the proposal to include the missing information before taking it to the entire community.

The expectations for a student with a proposal were under construction at ELMS, but the role for an ideal CM audience member was clear to Mr. Daniel. Depending on the activity proposal or performance, the audience should ask questions. For example, helpful student questions about the dance have focused on topics of chaperones, leadership, funding, and logistics. These questions could help a proposal by addressing missing or inadequate information necessary for a proposal to be completed. The staff encouraged students to be successful with their proposals so they could shape the school, but they were willing to let proposals “die” if the students were unable or unwilling to put forth
the knowledge, effort, and persistence needed to see it through. For example, the student store was still in an initial proposal phase because the students had not been able to come through with the logistics. These logistics included location, supply source and delivery, and times of operation. If the students did not think through all of these logistics before they made their proposal, and if the students in the audience also did not ask questions about these aspects during the proposal presentation, this proposal was considered a failure at ELMS. It did not appear that there was an official process to ensure teacher support for students with proposals, and this lack of assistance was concurrent with my observations.

Mr. Daniel illustrated this point again by sharing a story about a student who wanted a football team. Mr. Daniel encouraged the student to do the legwork to make it happen, but the student refused because he thought that should be the teacher’s job. Because of this, there was no football team at ELMS. Mr. Daniel appreciated that he did not feel pressured by administration to add running a football team to his duties. To Mr. Daniel, pressure like that was not part of the culture at ELMS, nor was it the way things worked at his other school last year. At this previous school, the students wanted a soccer team and he offered to sponsor it by being the adult in charge as long as the students did the majority of the legwork.

In both of his stories, he mentioned that students have to be willing to do the work, but he made no mention regarding student’s skills or sense of agency. In order to prepare and work on a proposal, a student would also need to possess the abilities to organize, coordinate, and manage time or people. These are challenging skills for people
of any age to master, especially a student without an adult to support them. Proposals also
required a student to have the courage to talk in front of the entire school, cultural capital
to obtain signatures of support, and agency the agency required to bring about change.
The data did not suggest that these aspects were considered in the proposal process. Mr.
Daniel said that he wanted the proposal process to relay the message to the students that
they have the power and responsibility to change the school. In addition, students should
realize that teachers will help but that teachers will not do the work for students. Thus,
the emphasis at ELMS seemed to more on making sure that students had the correct work
ethic even in the face of a daunting task, rather than helping students to see their
proposals to fruition, develop a sense of agency, and make positive change in their
community.

In my observations at ELMS, the ways in which “teacher help” was offered
during the proposal process varied drastically. For example, when I observed Cathy
trying to follow through on her dance proposal, I noticed that she was left to run meetings
with peers by herself, which was not a skill that, as a seventh grade girl, she completely
possessed. Cathy made a good attempt at running the meeting; she had the students sign
in and list what items they were bringing to the dance, and organized this information
into her dance notebook. However, most of the students were playing, talking, painting
their nails, and not listening. After the meeting, she shared that she was extremely
disappointed and disheartened, so I tried to support her by talking about what she could
do to run the next meeting more effectively. Another enthusiastic and goal driven student
sat through our post meeting talk, as well, and also offered his ideas. Cathy also did not receive support during the invitation creation process, so again I stepped in to help.

*Community Meeting current structure and connection with Crew.*

CM followed some structure at ELMS in order to build community. Mr. Daniel reported that CM was usually considered a priority at ELMS. During 2010, the normal schedule for CM was Friday from 2:30-3:15. During 2011, CM also took place on Friday afternoons and was cancelled three times over three months, which did not included the multiple days that school was not in session on Friday. During the time of this interview, he gave the example that they would usually change it to another day instead of canceling it because community was so important at ELMS. The importance of community was especially crucial for Mr. Daniel because ELMS was still trying to establish the school identity and culture. He shared that establishing culture did not just happen in the classroom; culture was also established during CM. According to Mr. Daniel, the CM functioned to help the students learn how people should treat each other, as well as the purpose of ELMS.

Another aspect of the meeting structure was that two different kinds of preparation went into the meeting. The first kind of preparation took place in Crew. In Crew, Mr. Daniel said that students were starting to have a trial run for proposals. The other kind of prep took place in staff meeting. During staff meetings, Mr. Daniel reported that the teachers and administrators basically talked about what content should be included for the week in terms of the important information that needs to go out to the
students (e.g., testing, fieldwork, overall reminders). This type of planning corresponded with the students’ remarks that CM felt like a bunch of announcements.

EL had influenced the structure of CM, especially in terms of the Design Principles, which were also emphasized in Crew. At ELMS, Crews focused on one of the ten Design Principles each week. He said that “in Crew, they pick one each week to look at and to focus on so that students could be aware that these are things we value at this school.” He felt that the focus on Design Principles relayed the message to the students that they were “not just going to come to school, do a worksheet, and consider [themselves] a successful student here; there was a lot more to it at an EL school.” He felt that CM helped to set the expectations that students were responsible for follow through on behavior, quality work, and learning. Of the ten principles, Mr. Daniel did not feel that any particular Design Principle stood out as the biggest influence. To him, they felt balanced. He also felt that the meetings communicated to the students that they needed to care about many things. Students were to care about themselves, others, the materials, school, and nature.

**Evolution of Community Meeting at ELMS.**

The CM evolved drastically over the first year of ELMS. Mr. Daniel shared that at the start of the year it “almost like a felt like a giant homeroom where all the students would come into the gym, sit down, staff would do announcements, and then we'd go onto our next class.” Thus, ELMS “students didn't really have an idea of how much power or freedom they could have.” To address this issue, he felt that the teachers continually explained that idea to the students. As a result, Mr. Daniel believed that
ELMS successful transformed CM into a space where students were more in charge, which was their goal.

During the time of the study, CM included a time for all of ELMS (students and teachers) to exchange acknowledgements with one another; thus, the school had developed and implemented Thank You Notes. This idea, like many others, came from Mr. Daniel’s previous school. There, a thank you was acknowledged though the giving of a bead, which the students could collect into a necklace, a bracelet, or a key chain. At ELMS, Mr. Daniel explained that once a week everyone gave an official Thank You Note to one person in the school who affected their lives in a positive way. He explained that the purpose of focusing on one person was that it would require more thought from the student. This practice would help to make the Thank You Note more meaningful, especially in comparison to saying a brief thank you to many people. The students wrote their notes during Crew, where all of the notes were collected by the Crew teacher. While the Crews were sitting together during the meeting, the leader would redistribute the notes to their authors, and the author would stand up and walk over to deliver it to the recipient.

Many of the case study students commented on the Thank You Notes in interviews and focus groups. They said that Thank You Notes were not actually used this way. Instead, Thank You Notes were only exchanged between friends. Many of the students had not received a note. Because of this, they did not give them.

During the interview, Mr. Daniel said that ELMS was still working on the traditions needed to develop the positive culture at ELMS. He was proud of Gina, then a
sixth grader, who gave an award to another student at the CM the day before our interview. He shared that Gina came up with the idea of this award and asked permission to present it to her friend who had “come out of her shell.” He found it exciting that “it was one of our sixth graders standing on the stage talking to the whole class and saying I wanted to give this award to the student” and “because of her, the whole gym starting applauding and people came over and starting giving her hugs.” He was pleased that this award was totally student driven.

*Community Meeting goals for the future.*

Mr. Daniel hoped that in the next year or two, ELMS would start transitioning students to run the meeting rather than the staff. For example, students could greet other students as they came in, students could seat themselves, students could start the meeting, and students could make the announcements like “we are going to do this fieldwork, so make sure you have this type of shoe, this dress for this; it might rain.” He felt that the students were more than capable of delivering such information, so having the group in charge of the announcements would be an easy transition. He also wanted students to take advantage of the chance to acknowledge each other and share what they were doing in class. At his previous school, classrooms alternated responsibility for presenting a high quality piece of work during CM. Thus, “those students knew at the end of that week that they were going in front of their peers and presenting something they had done.” In his previous school, these presentations were especially notable because first graders were presenting to eighth graders, which gave them an enormous amount of public speaking practice in what could be for some a high pressure setting. During these presentations, the
students talked about what they created, what they liked about it, and then they had to take at least two questions from the audience. The audience was already prepped on how to ask quality questions, so they knew that they could compliment the work, but that they also had to provide a specific reason. Hence, this was “something that [he] would like to see added as [they] build the [ELMS] community because the expedition was built around quality works” and it “was something that would integrate here easily.”

In conclusion, CM at ELMS was influenced by different philosophies and was still a work in progress. During the study, these meetings were not yet aligned with EL suggestions or the ways in which other schools used CM. Although CM goals were shared widely and often, it was understandable that ELMS was still working toward meeting those goals. There are over ninety pages of goals in the Core Practices (2011), and ELMS had only been open for a little over a year during the time of this study. They had a lot on their plates; from familiarizing themselves as a staff with this reform model, and then teaching it to the students, to the other typical school year endeavors.

Implementation of this reform model takes time (Fashola & Slavin, 1998). With that limitation to this study in mind, there are five specific ways during the time of this study that adults had a direct influence on student agency at ELMS. These findings came from critical incidents in which literacy, cultural diversity, and the ELMS spaces of Crew, CM, and Electives intersected. They also came from one on one interviews and focus group discussions with case study students. These five findings about proposals, Crew, silent reading, communication to students’ homes, and explicit language about bullying/cultural diversity have both positive and negative effects on student agency.
Support of proposals.

Case study students reported that they appreciated the opportunity to make proposals at ELMS. Almost all of the case study students had at least one idea in mind for a proposal they would like to see come to fruition. Gina wanted to propose that the mural left over from the former elementary school be painted over; Egan wanted an art show, to adjust the schedule regarding Electives so that they were on continuous days of the week, and to allow algebra students to take two Electives instead of RTI; Cathy wanted to propose a different system than the ISN because it was difficult to organize, and David wanted more food in the lunches. David traveled to school over a long period of time and through multiple modes of transportation. One stretch of his travels included running with a large and heavy backpack, and he felt that he could not carry any additional food to supplement the school lunches. He said his bag was packed full because the lack of lockers at ELMS and that he spent much of his day ravenous.

Despite the desire to bring about change at ELMS, students appeared to need more scaffolding from teachers or adults to assert their agency through this proposal process. During the interview with Mr. Daniel, he shared that the adults wanted students to get involved and have ownership in the school. Yet, during this study, there was only one proposal shared on the stage and completed successfully. Unless a student knew exactly how to bring about their vision for the school, the adults at ELMS did not have the time or inclination to support their efforts. If adults were going to continue to be the only ones determining the culture of the school, they needed to embrace it, name it, and do away with proposals. Cathy, who had participated in the proposal process over two
years with energy and enthusiasm, was completely burnt out. She no longer wanted to organize the dance. She also did not want to follow through on creating a school store, despite the positive encouragement she appreciated getting from a teacher about her idea. She felt like she was “listened to but not heard” and that “someone else could do it.”

Gina reported that she had not yet created a successful proposal because she was too shy. Both Gina and Mr. Daniel beamed with pride when they told me separately about the award Gina created and presented to a fellow student. Her efforts created school change and opened the door to student created awards, but she did so by adjusting the proposal process to suit her needs and style. It appeared that she circumnavigated the formal proposal process by working with Mr. Daniel to create and present the award. Because of this, she did not have to get up in front of the school to propose her idea for the award. On the other hand, she did get up in front of the school at a CM to present it to the student, which was part of the official proposal process. The award was called the Golden Turtle, and it represented the student’s efforts to come out of her shell. Gina also described herself as shy and quiet, but the opportunity to work with her beloved teacher (whom she trusted and enjoyed learning from in class), as well as the opportunity to do something she found rewarding and creative (things that she shared were important to her), allowed Gina to assert her agency. Because an adult gave her room to propose her idea just to him, and because he supported her efforts, Gina felt good about herself and her community. She consistently shared that she liked ELMS last year more because of the family feel especially during CM. Perhaps this event was a large part of that feeling. From observing and hearing about Cathy’s experience, it made a difference on a student’s
sense of agency before, during, and after the proposal process if an adult helped to support and validate their efforts.

Like Gina, for other students who have proposal ideas, the prospect of presenting the proposal by standing in front of the entire school was too overwhelming to see their vision through. David described it as “really intimidating-like writing a research paper and there is just that blank page.” Abby shared that she had a proposal, but she was too shy to get up on stage in front of over a hundred people. Presenting in pairs or groups was one technique that students have utilized to overcome their fear. ELMS attempted to support students (and make the proposal process more efficient with higher quality proposals) by requiring a practice proposal presentation to the Crew before it was presented to the entire school. I believe that ELMS teachers should continue with these efforts to make proposals a successful experience for all students. EL recommended reflection and evaluation of CM; perhaps these recommendations could apply to the teachers and their handling of the proposal process. ELMS could ask students to fill out a proposal process feedback form so that they could make data driven instructional decisions. If student proposals were actually an important part of the school, as Mr. Daniel claimed them to be, then ELMS staff needed to take steps to support them. It was understandable that the teachers in the school are stretched to their limit, especially in the second year of operation. However, students should have experiences like Gina who was enabled to assert her agency and voice, instead of Abby, David, and Egan, who were too scared to even try, or Cathy who felt burnt out and disappointed.
It appeared that ELMS was already taking steps to involve adults and student leaders in ways that may support student proposals. This connection was still developing at the time of the study, but the efforts of the parent volunteer group and the newly forming student government seemed promising. ELMS had recruited student family members to volunteer on a variety of school efforts, and Cathy told me about one the meetings after school that her mother attended. Cathy’s mother was there to represent Cathy and offer information and direction about the dance. Cathy shared that she was glad to see “her” Halloween Dance listed on the volunteer opportunities signup sheet that was distributed to the parents. The student government group had just formed when the study drew to a close, and Gina said she was looking forward to supporting the “little guy” at ELMS. As a student who successfully navigated the proposal process, she might be specifically positioned to help another student with their proposal idea.

**Crew.**

The second area where adults affected ELMS students’ sense of agency and experience was in Crew. Some case study students reported that Crew provided them with someone to talk to during the school day, relaxation on the reading days, connection with peers and adults, and opportunity to explore topics with other students. The students also mentioned the aspects of Crew that felt frustrating to them. These aspects included the shaming or silencing use of the phrase “we are Crew, not passengers,” student apathy, embarrassment, and tensions around cultural diversity.

All the case study students had something positive to say about Crew. Cathy felt that Crew gave her the time and materials (i.e. books she liked) that she needed to read.
Because of Crew, she considered herself a reader. She also liked when people shared with each other, as did David. David reported that Crew made a big difference for him in terms of school. As I mentioned previously, David reported to have been seriously bullied during fifth grade. Crew at ELMS provided him with people to talk to that were peers and adults, even if they were not technically friends. He wanted to be safe, and to have a place to share his thoughts and feelings. Fawn felt the same way, but was also grateful that Egan joined her Crew so that she had a real friend. David credited the Crew leader as creating a positive and caring space for the students, and felt that the students were supportive because the adult was there to guide them. Gina felt the teacher’s stance toward the student was important, but she reported appreciating both Ms. Georgia’s “strictness” and Mr. Daniel’s ability to let students be independent. Gina also shared that Crew provided her with the family she wished she had at home. In Crew, she felt she was treated with respect. At home, she said she was treated like a kid; her step father’s authoritarian ways conflicted with her biological father’s supportive demeanor. This caused her much frustration and anxiety. She hoped to be with the same Crew people again during her eighth grade year. Even though some of the Crew members were “mean” last year, Abby thought Crew was fun when they were able to play around and laugh. She joked that she would be willing to do more work in Crew as long as there was food provided; and all of the students appreciated the Bookies and Cookies initiative by the ELMS adults to reward the students with a cookie for every book read or Crew spent reading. Food seemed to be a universal treat for the case study students and it was a nice effort on the part of the teachers to encourage reading in a way that the students valued.
The only exception was Egan, who had a dietary restriction and was sad that on multiple occasions he was unable to eat the cookies provided; because of this, he felt forgotten. Abby shared that what she liked about Crew this year was the variety it added to her daily schedule. Hal had mixed feelings on Crew; in his interview he said it was both fun and not fun. He explained that Crew could be boring when the adults just made announcements, and felt that they just played a lot of games (which did not seem to be a positive in his eyes). However, he was happy about the Bookies and Cookies initiative.

Some case study students mentioned aspects of Crew that they found frustrating. They mentioned the tendency to shame or silence by using the phrase “we are Crew not passengers;” other students’ apathy toward Crew and/or lack of support for fellow Crew members; lack of follow through from leaders; feeling of embarrassment during certain Crew activities; and tensions around cultural diversity. These are issues that adults as Crew leaders could have an effect on, and they should know that their Crew members are struggling with these issues. Abby reported that her experiences in Crew could be silencing. She often felt like “every time it was her time to talk people talked over her” so “sometimes she just didn’t talk.” She also found herself feeling apathetic or “lazy” about participating in Crew. Some aspects of Crew were also “uncomfortable” for her. When she felt this way, she responded to prompts that students answered around the circle with “I don’t know.” She also never filled out the Thank You Notes. She had only received three from “the same people.” She explained that it was okay because she was “used to it” and she did not “really care.” It appeared to me that she did care, but had to put those feelings aside to manage the situation. She also found the Thank You Note writing
process “weird” and that she rather just “thank them in person.” Abby also reported feeling let down by her attempts to talk to her Crew leader about her RTI placement. She felt dismissed and lied to about the situation. Another subject she had tried to resolve by talking with her leader was her frustration with another Crew member who tried to interact with her in unwelcome ways (i.e. “trying to put a hula hoop over her head at lunch”). She felt that her Crew leader saw the hula hoop incident, but did nothing to support her. Because of this incident and others, she decided that “I just don’t talk to Mr. Ben that much” and when she “did he just repeated the norms and kept saying ‘we are Crew, not passengers’ and that saying can really get on my nerves; he just lectured.” Like Abby mentioned, the phrase “we are Crew, not passengers” was often used to have students take responsibility for their participation in the group. However, this phrase could also be used to shame students into the desired level of participation or camaraderie, instead of discussing the issues that were causing friction or discomfort. When the phrase was used this way, the teachers positioned themselves as above the students and silenced their voices. Thus, Crew became a euphemism for students, which positioned teachers out of the boat as coaches; they told the students how to row instead of co-creating knowledge together. For Abby, multiple aspects of Crew were not supporting her sense of agency. Her voice was being silenced, both in the group and in the larger community. I believe that because Abby felt unsuccessful in asserting her agency in Crew, she had developed a sense of apathy to distance herself from the situation. Fawn echoed Abby, Gina, and David in saying that other students could be apathetic about Crew, and that she personally did not look forward to Crew. Gina was
frustrated with other Crew members who did not participate because it ruined the efforts to become a team during the teambuilding activities. Their apathy took away from the opportunity to bond. Gina explained that part of the disconnect and apathy she sensed in her Crew from others could be due to the fact that this grouping of students was new, and that the school year had just started. She suspected that after the first trimester, students would begin to gel. This assumption was based on her experience in a different Crew last year. However, Gina explained that “if activities could help kids to understand each other better without making them uncomfortable, Crew would be better.” Gina saw the potential in Crew, but she also recognized its limitations if it continued to be led by adults who compromised the students’ agency by putting them into embarrassing situations. Some of those situations included activities or greetings. One of the greetings, which were like high-5’s, that students consistently complained about was the “milking” greeting. During this greeting, a student was instructed to position his thumbs like udders so that the other student could grasp them and “milk” them\(^\text{30}\). She also suggested that a good mixture of “rowdy” and “brainier” students would be good. She went on to share that although she felt “racist for saying this, usually the rowdy kids are black males.” Unfortunately, a similar version of this statement came from Fawn, who shared that her experience in Crew also reinforced stereotypes. She explained that starting with Crew last year, Crew “was hard because I was the only white girl” and “my dad had huge

\(^{30}\text{From my observations and conversations with teachers, I know that this greeting was not intended to embarrass the students. However, the students did consistently vocalize their discomfort with it and yet it was still used in an effort to enable the students to “take risks” with one another and to “relax and have fun” (field notes).}\)
stereotype about black people and I tried to be optimistic but I saw a lot of stereotypes being embraced and I didn't like it so I didn't talk to them this year.” Instead of building community and working toward the Design Principle of “Diversity and Inclusion” where “our differences make us stronger,” Crew was actually serving as a space to reinforce problematic stereotypes.

Of particular interest in the Crew data was the students’ abilities to distinguish Crew relationships from friendships, and student uptake of the EL language. The case study students reported appreciating the people that were in their Crew, but made careful note to explain that they did not have to be their friends. How exactly ELMS enabled students to make this distinction is not clear. It could have been through the Design Principles that emphasized community rather than friendship, or it could have been the teambuilding initiatives that were worked into ropes courses and CMs. However this concept was worked into the culture of the school, it was clearly taken up by the students. Specific EL language was also taken up and used by the students. Gina directly referenced the EL language when she wished that all students acted like Crew instead of like passengers. I observed other students responding to events with Design Principle language like “nature is our teacher” and “I take responsibility for myself.” Despite the adult/student binary perpetuated by structures at ELMS, students were also embracing and using the EL ideals that appealed to them.

Despite the tensions, the powerful role that adults took on as Crew leaders at this EL school created positive possibilities. Adults could have an extremely positive effect on students experience at ELMS. This goes for family members, teachers, and
administrators at ELMS. During observations and in interviews, the students often referred to school as family or church. They students reported to enjoy having an adult in the lead, especially if it was a positive experience that included choice, humor, effectiveness, accomplishment of work, and/or a bit of freedom to pursue their own interests.

**Silent reading.**

Silent reading was another example of the ways in which Crew and literacy at ELMS were more influenced by adults than students despite the model and philosophy of co-creation of community. As mentioned in previous descriptions of Crew, the students and teacher were supposed to read silently on Tuesdays and Thursdays during the entire Crew period. On a positive note, according to the data, many students were reading during this time, enjoying it, and in some cases, developing their background knowledge and their identity as a reader. However, for other students, this time was spent subverting the directions and contributing to their identity as a non-reader, even though they read widely in other spaces and with other kinds of texts. These two days over the past year were torture for Abby who shared that she was “still on her first expedition book because [she didn’t] read that much.” During silent reading time in Crew, Abby would do homework, color in pictures from the comics section of the newspaper, attempt to leave the room, or sit silently doing nothing. Reading in Crew reinforced her identity as a “reluctant” reader. However, Abby was anything other than a reluctant reader when it came to other modalities of language. She loved using her phone to access twitter, read web pages, and learn from her apps. She also wrote music in a special notebook. The text
requirements for silent reading days were not clear to me because both Crews did things differently, but it appeared that any kind of print based text was acceptable, including newspapers, magazines, chapter books, and picture books. Phones or computers were not allowed during reading days, but they might have helped to support Abby in her silent reading abilities.

For Cathy, the expedition novels and silent reading made reading possible in her “hectic” life. Reading “in Crew gave her time” to meet her reading goals because she “procrastinated at home so couldn’t get it done.” Cathy had already read her expedition book multiple times and was able to find positive things about it despite the fact that she initially did not like the author’s style or the introduction. This was a remarkable skill for someone who just a few years ago only read her first book because she was paid to do so. Ms. Georgia seemed to have helped develop her reading identity by supplying her with good books. Cathy explained that “now I have learned to start liking reading. I have read all of the expedition books and have read books from Ms. Georgia on my own.” I believe that this meant that Cathy completed her homework by reading her assigned expedition book for every past expedition, which was quite an accomplishment.

On a side note, I suspect that the quality of the books and the compelling topic of the expedition had something to do with helping students to read their novels. In between expeditions, the possible expedition books were researched and chosen by a local, well established, and knowledgeable book store owner. The books were then read and reviewed by different ELMS teachers across content areas. A meeting would follow in which the teachers shared their thoughts on each of the books. At this meeting, the group
of teachers involved in planning and teaching the expedition made careful decisions on the books’ applicability, appropriateness, and possible level of engagement for the students. Thus, the final books selected for the students to choose among were extremely well researched.

Cathy also reported developing a passion for reading urban fiction (a genre discussed in detail in Gibson’s (2010) work, like the novel, 16 on the Block. She “read that over and over again” because it was “very interesting and active.” Because of the ELMS faculty involvement in and dedication to planning Crew and selecting literatures, students like Cathy were developing their sense of agency in regards to reading.

Letter home.

Although I did not specifically intend to analyze communication between ELMS and students’ families, during one Crew observation, I witnessed a tense conversation between a large group of students and an ELMS Crew leader regarding a letter about new behavior consequences. I did not have the data to conclude if the tension I witnessed in this Crew meeting was representative of other reactions in other Crews, or if any other communications between school and families caused this much tension. However, the conversation between students and a teacher was rich with information about cultural diversity, student agency, and literacy at ELMS, so it was worth analysis in and of itself. The conversation and positioning of students and adults both directly and indirectly provided evidence for the argument that adults are determining the students’ experience of this school, despite the rhetoric that students are co-passengers and co-creators of school culture.
On 10/31/11, in an extra-large Crew due to other Crew leaders being out of school on fieldwork, Mr. Ben went into the reading portion of the Crew by saying that the reading for Friday was the letter going home. This letter addressed student behavior and a new after school detention policy. It detailed new expectations and consequences for behavior for the rest of the school year. The letter indicated that after the first two infractions, students would be asked to remain after school for an hour. From the conversation that followed, it appeared that a major concern was the possible transportation issues for students and their families. He passed the following letter out to the group.
Figure 4 The discipline letter

After the letter was passed out to the students, some students stopped to read it, others put it aside, and others seemed to have already read the letter and were prepared to speak about it. Many had strong opinions on it, as evidenced by passionate body language, side conversations, verbalized critiques, and questions that were extremely
thought through and, in some cases, hostile. These communications led me to believe that
this letter had been discussed in peer groups and at home with families, which also
indicated that this letter was sent home earlier that week, at least to some students.

In an effort to provide context to the reading, Mr. Ben explained that this was not
necessarily in reaction to one person, but that there were currently a number of students
that were consistently earning detentions. He explained that the staff just came to this
realization during the recent professional development day and that this letter was their
attempt to address this issue. He invited questions and comments, and many of the
students were eager to respond. Sonny asked when the after school detentions let out and
Mr. Ben answered 4:30pm. Sydney mumbled a comment to her neighbor. Sybil had a
side conversation with her neighbor. Sydney then raised her hand and asked, “What was
this ‘reentry to school meeting’?” Mr. Ben explained that the staff did not want a student
who had been suspended or given a detention to go right back to class. Instead, he
explained, the staff wanted to talk with the student to help them understand the situation.
He explained that right now at ELMS, “we have people with seven detentions,” which
was notable since the school had only been in session a little over one month. One
student replied in shock, “What the heck?!?” which reinforced the severity of the situation.
It was unclear what aspect of this was particularly surprising to the student. The student
could have been reacting to the outrageous lack of self-control of a student, the strictness
of teachers that would hand out so many detentions, or some other aspect of the situation.
In an effort to clarify, Mr. Ben explained that if a student violated policies he or she
would earn a detention. Sybil started a side conversation about the identity of the ELMS
administrator that did not work in the school; he was described as the “man who stands outside.” I suspect, in an effort to understand more about how decisions are made and who had the power in the school, Sonny inquired about the name of the superintendent. She then answered her own question with the name. Then she asked “who the behavior administrator? I thought you were the dean.” Another student asked, “What is a dean?” It was particularly interesting that a discussion that seemed to have the purpose of clarifying a letter was shifted by the students into a discussion on clarifying the decision making and power structures of the school.

Sonny then addressed Mr. Ben with, “Why don’t you… nevermind.” Mr. Ben answered with “I have…”, but I did not capture the exact wording. However, throughout the entire conversation, he appeared to be interested in hearing the students’ thoughts, clarifying any misconceptions, assuaging any worries, and validating their contributions. The overall context was that some of the students (perhaps the ones that were affected by this letter for behavioral issues) seemed to be bristling at the letter, and were trying to assert some form of agency in this conversation. One form of agency seemed to be putting the teacher on the defensive; another was demanding answers. Another form seemed to be gaining knowledge about the power structures of the school. As mentioned, not every student was involved in this discussion, and some did not even seem to be listening. I noted that one student was actually asleep during the discussion. This could be due to many reasons: it was the middle of the day right after lunch, it was a large group so it was easy to not be noticed, the lights were off, and/or the student did not feel that
there was any point in contributing to this conversation because the letter was already written, or even that the student did not usually get into trouble.

The conversation shifted into the idea of fairness for students at ELMS. Sonny said, “When are we going to start on a girls’ basketball team?” Another student added, “Why none for girls?” Another student said, “tsk (sound) you all sexist.” A conversation started about defining fairness between the students and Mr. Ben. They asked if he thought this system was fair. He asked for clarification on what was unfair. A student answered that there was the fact that you could get detentions. Mr. Ben answered that he and the other ELMS staff wanted to see students change, and that their hopes were that this letter would help motivate that change. No one asked what the staff wanted the students to change into, nor was this information offered. Sydney said that she also had expectations that were “not in that letter”, and that there should be “something about expectations on the teachers.” Mr. Ben said that he had thought about that same thing and that he had thought about that with particular teachers. A student explained that one time she got in trouble was because the teacher was just picking on her and that it was frustrating that the rules were different for every teacher. An example was offered when a student argued that Ms. Georgia was the only one who cared about gum (“she sees it and she hates it”). She received a detention for gum from Mrs. Georgia, even though other teachers saw her chew gum and did not care. She found this situation unfair, especially in light of the new policy where she could earn herself severe consequences due to chewing gum.
Students inquired about what would happen during the after school detentions. Sybil, in her first communication actually directed at Mr. Ben, said that he should make the students do something so terrible that they “wouldn’t want to get in trouble again.” Mr. Ben responded by sharing that he did that last year when he had students clean up and it seemed to work. However, he shared that he preferred to have a conversation about “who you are and your goals [rather] than have you clean.” He explained that he wanted to know what was going on for the student, how much they cared about their education, and if they wanted to be at ELMS. Sydney shared that she did not want to have a talk when she was in trouble because she would just want to calm down by doing productive things. If she were made to talk about her goals instead, it would be difficult for her to not get into more trouble from her anger. Sonny said that she would refuse to clean up if she got detentions for gum. Sybil suggested that if they were good, the students could have a bubble gum day. Mr. Ben suggested that she write a CM proposal about that idea, and Sybil was excited to do that. Sonny raised her hand for the first time and asked, “What does detention do for a child besides make them miss work?” For her age, using the word child to describe herself, as well as the philosophical nature of the question, made this question peculiar. It was as if it was a quote she cut from a conversation between adults that she liked and pasted into this conversation. I suspect she wanted to try it out to evaluate its effectiveness within this conversation, especially in an effort to distance herself from other “children” and place herself on the same level as an adult. Perhaps she felt that this statement could help her to assert her agency.
A conversation about family and school erupted. A detention that let out at 4:30 pm would make a student miss the school bus home and a family member would have to pick the student up. The students shared that this could cause a big inconvenience to a family member. In regards to involving family in the punishment, Mr. Ben’s responses seemed to indicate that he supported causing some inconvenience to the family when a student misbehaved. Although he did not directly say this, it could be inferred that parental discomfort would help to get the parents involved in holding students accountable. It could be assumed that he felt parents were not always on the school’s side in regards to discipline issues, and that the school and home values for behavior and education did not always match up.

Throughout this conversation there was a tension between students being positioned to help determine the culture of ELMS and the growing realization that they did not have agency in this situation. Perhaps if the adults consistently encouraged students to be a part of preliminary literacy events like the drafting of the letter so that students had a say in the consequences, students could be the ones that presented this document to the school. Perhaps then the conversation that followed would be less about shame and grappling for power, and more about encouraging students to do their part to protect the positive culture of the school.

I believe the sharing of the letter was framed the way that it was because it was presented in Crew as part of the daily (usually inspirational) reading. Because of this positioning, mixing the space of Crew which was guided by the phrase “we are Crew, not passengers” created tensions. The presentation of this letter seemed to be an effort to
consider the students as participants in the school, especially in terms of what happens in the school. However, the letter had already been written. Thus, the discussion was not so much about student input as it was about clarification. If this discussion would have happened before the letter was written, the discussion could have looked differently. Student reaction may have been more positive.

The students seemed to sense this tension because they asked the kind of probing questions that attempted to place the adult on the defensive. The students were asserting their agency despite a letter that seemed to be interpreted as diminishing ones’ sense of agency in a high stakes fashion. Students were especially concerned with fairness and the lack of consistency between teachers regarding behavioral infractions. Their reactions seemed to indicate that they needed support of the adults to follow the rules, and that that support should entail consistency in regards to enforcing the ELMS rules.

This letter also did not take into account cultural ways of being that may differ between staff and student. I believe it assumed a middle class and white perspective on education and family. By asking students to stay after class as a penalty for misbehavior, ELMS adults seemed to assume that there would be a family member home (like a stay at home parent) with a car to come and get the student. Another interesting aspect of this letter and the discussion around it was that the only people that were participating in the discussion were a white male teacher and several African American female students. There were about forty students in the classroom present at this discussion, yet only a few opinions were heard or offered. Without being able to ask students for clarification, I could only speculate as to why this lack of student participation occurred. From what I
witnessed in other situations, it appeared that many students did not feel comfortable participating or having their voice heard. Students like Fawn said that they check out when stereotypical behaviors are performed. In this case, the loud, angry, black female stereotype (Fordham, 1993) was being enacted, most likely in response to the letter which silenced them. I would suspect that this was a fall back mechanism for stressful times, and was not the way in which they truly wished to be understood or perceived. I suspect that there was pressure for these students to perform this way for each other, certain people in their communities, and the images they think they are supposed to live up to in popular culture. I wonder if the reason Abby did not participate more readily in these kinds of discussion was that she was not comfortable performing that version of class, race, or gender. Issues of class came up again in the letter and discussion. Students who were misbehaving would have to stay after school therefore losing any kind of public transportation home. The principal admitted that this was supposed to penalize the families, and most likely these were the families whose cultural ways of being did not match those of the school staff.

**Troubling language.**

The final way that adults at ELMS determined the students’ experience and sense of agency was the lack of comprehensive, consistent, and explicit language regarding cultural diversity in day to day instruction. I believe ELMS adults needed to trouble, or investigate the hegemony, in their language.

The next two pieces of evidence could go under the first claim regarding the lack of specific language around cultural diversity within the EL reform model. However, I
chose to put them here because I felt that, ultimately, the adults had the responsibility to address these tensions. Furthermore, the roots of our educational system stem from the same perspective as EL, so these tensions are applicable to all schools.

First, despite the Design Principle of “Diversity and Inclusion,” being an African American gay male at ELMS was a challenge. Burt, one of my case study students, was expelled for behavior issues. Another student was perceived to be gay by his peers and missed over a month of school due to “illness.” I personally witnessed bullying toward both of them, as well as their attempts to assert their agency. These attempts were not always within school sanctioned methods. It appeared that despite the best of intentions, ultimately, the adults at the school could not support a student at ELMS who was bullied due to homophobia. Burt dealt with this abuse the best way he knew how, and these methods did not align with the ELMS school setting.

Second, the adults at ELMS used language that was troubling. The expedition during the time of the study was entitled “Colonialism” instead of the more appropriate term “Genocide.” The guiding question was “What happens when cultures collide?” instead of “What happens when one culture assumes they are better than another?” or any other more culturally sensitive ideas. In addition, words like retarded and gay were often used by students in class without being addressed by teachers.

Although I believe language needs to be troubled at ELMS during the day to day operations and in the planning and implementation of expeditions, the ELMS Student and Family 2010-2011 handbook explicitly supported all students with inclusive language. Numerous pages specifically detailed the rules and consequences for harassment or
bullying of any individual on school grounds based on race, color, national origin, ancestry, sexual orientation, citizenship, religion, handicap, age or sex (p. 17-18, 36-41). The list of possible infractions regarding these aspects of cultural diversity was long and the consequences were severe. I was surprised to discover this policy because the severity of the document, including the strong stance it takes against bullying in any form, did not, in my opinion, reflect the reaction from ELMS staff when I reported the events surrounding Burt’s experience in Art class.

**Conclusion for claim 2.**

In conclusion, this claim considers the adults at ELMS as EL practitioners who made decisions about how the philosophies were presented to the students. These decisions affected the school schedule, the expeditions, the daily conversations, and more. During the study, I found that the students, who were positioned to be on equal footing with the ELMS adults in the often used phrase “we are Crew, not passengers,” were not given full opportunities to assert their agency. Clearly, this situation was fraught with tension. For example, at its core, ELMS was still doing school much like other traditional schools at this point in their development. Despite the use of and teaching of Design Principles throughout the school day, students did not have that much of a say in the design of the school or of the community. However, students were able to assert their agency and resist this binary through sophisticated and subversive means.

**Claim 3: Clearly articulated literacy rich spaces for some students**

The last claim is that EL schools provided space for a rich culture of literacy in the nontraditional spaces of Crew, CM, and Electives that often tapped into the students’
literacy filled lives, interests, and passions. I believe that this culture of literacy was due in part to the explicit and thorough guidance that EL provided to EL schools like ELMS. This guidance was evident in the Core Practice benchmarks, EL professional development, and in the daily happenings at ELMS. Thus, if this clear training and guidance was in fact responsible or connected to the ways in which literacy was taken up at ELMS, then other aspects of ELMS that have already been discussed (e.g. culturally diverse students experiences and the adults role in supporting student agency) could also be improved/addressed by the possibility of clear and specific goals set forth by EL. In other words, if this claim about literacy is correct, it could also be used as further evidence to support the argument that students in EL schools could benefit from the same attention and detail regarding their cultural diversity and agentitive experience as it flows from EL as a theory into ELMS as a practice. Perhaps, if EL valued cultural diversity and student agency as much as literacy and it took the necessary steps to communicate these values to EL schools, these efforts may relate into improved student experiences in EL schools.

However, the literacy practices at ELMS, although rich, did not seem to stem from an ideological view of literacy. Students, who were involved in certain literacies that were not valued or acknowledged in the academic setting, were unable to identify themselves as readers and writers. Some of these complicated situations were further compounded by a lack of attention to cultural diversity in terms of literacy. If reading and writing were not viewed by teachers as part of the raced, classes, gendered, and
sexualized experiences in students’ lives, then hegemonic notions of identity were reinforced.

**What does EL say in print about literacy?**

In this section, I reviewed foundational EL documents for mention of literacy, specifically reading and writing. The review returned explicit and thorough directions regarding literacy for EL schools. In the EL Core Practices (2011) document and the EL 2012-2013 National Professional Development Catalog (2012), reading and writing came up numerous times and in detailed descriptions. The information found in the Core Practices document is discussed first.

**Reading and writing in the Core Practices document.**

The Core Practices (2011) document may have profoundly affected ELMS in terms of literacy. The document provides specific and detailed guidance regarding directions for developing a literacy rich school culture. In this document, reading and writing are discussed across the disciplines because “each subject area requires students to learn from different kinds of texts” (p.36) and “though writing, students learn more deeply about content and communicate what they know” (p.38). Thus, literacy is everyone’s responsibility in an EL school.

**Reading.**

In regards to reading, students and teachers are called to develop abilities, language, and knowledge across all grades and subjects. The Core Practices (2011) document provides the following reading benchmarks for students:
• Reading should be linked with critical thinking and meaning making, both in school and in life
• Students are to learn to read while reading to learn
• Students should be able to articulate how they made sense of what they read in different contexts
• Students should be able to cite evidence informational and literary texts
• Students are to read every day, throughout the day, for a variety of purposes
• Students should discuss and write about what they read (p. 36)

Thus, students are called to become both critical readers and thinkers in ways that blurred the school/out of school binary. The reading skills and understandings that EL students possess should be carried with the students throughout their lives. Also, these skills and understandings should be developed through authentic tasks and texts. This means that students should be reading texts that inform their background knowledge during expeditions so that everything is linked to content. In addition, students should be developing metacognition about their reading process. EL students should know what they know, how to utilize strategies to improve comprehension, and how to articulate and give evidence for their knowledge. Reading should happen in EL schools across contexts and throughout the day.

All teachers in EL schools are called to incorporate reading into all aspects of students’ experiences. Content area teachers are to “explicitly teach and support students to be strong readers of text within their discipline.” Content area teachers should model the reading process by thinking “about their own reading and understand[ing] how they
use[d] comprehension strategies to make sense of what they read” (p. 36). In order for reading instruction or reading tasks to be efficient processes across the curriculum, teachers are to develop and “use common language to teach comprehension strategies” (p. 36). Throughout the school day and week, reading is to be “incorporated into Crew and other school-wide structures, such as CMs, to underscore the importance of literacy” (p. 36). Teachers are also expected to consider reading a complex process that includes “phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension” (p. 36). The complexity of reading is also supported by creating literacy rich environments where “evidence of student learning” is displayed through anchor charts, word walls, and through the use of diverse texts, genres, leveled readings, data sets, and texts that come from different perspectives (p. 36). Finally, teachers are to use a variety of assessment measures to support student understanding, including: text-dependent questions, reader-response journal entries, conferences, goal setting, formative and summative measures, and diagnostic test data to inform instruction (p. 37).

Writing.

Like reading, writing is considered a cross curriculum focus for all EL teachers. Many of the same benchmarks for reading are used for writing in order to help students “learn to write effectively to inform, to build arguments substantiated with evidence, and to write with literary power in narrative and poetic genres” (p. 38). Teachers are called to model their own writing process to help shape and guide students to become quality writers in a variety of contexts. Authenticity is considered vital to writing instruction, and these real purposes and audiences are intended to drive the need to know and inspire the
motivation needed to create quality products. In essence, writing is a “central vehicle for learning and communicating in all classrooms” (p.38). Specifically, EL sets forth the following writing standards to be met by teachers and students:

- Teachers explicitly teach the steps of the writing process: pre-writing, drafting, revising (for specific writing traits), editing (for conventions), and making the work public, and students understand these steps and can communicate them through common language
- Teachers and students have a common understanding of quality writing (e.g., 6+1 writing traits)
- Teachers design literacy-rich learning expeditions. They use expedition journals, synthesis statements, and written responses to facilitate learning about the topic, and they develop products to include quality student writing.
- In order to create a culture of literacy, students write every day for multiple purposes and students share what they write.
- Writing is assessed in a wide range of formats and over time to show growth

Thus, writing in an EL school is seen as a process which develops over time in relation to different contexts. Writing, like reading, is vital to the learning process in all subject areas, and all EL teachers are considered teachers of writing.

**Literacy professional development.**

The 2012-2013 Professional Development Catalogue (2012) lists four opportunities for EL educators to hone their craft in terms of reading and writing. These
institutes range from three to five days of intensive instruction and experience in EL professional development. They include:

- Common Core Literacy Instruction Writing (Primary grades)
- Common Core Literacy Instruction Writing (grades 4-12)
- Reading (Primary grades)
- Reading (grades 4-12)

These institutes are designed to equip teachers in research based writing and reading instructional practices. Teachers are introduced to different aspects of writing that could support their students, including: revision techniques, high quality products, collaboration with colleagues, writer’s workshops, 6 + 1 writing traits, and compelling topics (pp. 5-6).

In the reading institutes, teachers are equipped with instructional practices and a greater understanding of the reading process. The institutes cover: components of literacy acquisition including comprehension, phonemic awareness, decoding skills, fluency, and vocabulary; metacognition of the reading process; a variety of text types and strategies; and reader’s workshop.

Four other courses are offered, but literacy is only one aspect of the learning described in the catalogue. These courses are:

- EL Classrooms in Practice (Primary grades)
- Elementary Institute (K-5)
- Middle School institute (6-8)
- Secondary Institute (6-12)
These courses are designed to help EL teachers and administrators to develop an initial understanding of EL in particular grades. The topics of focus include: fieldwork, research, use of experts, final products, learning expeditions, literacy workshops, other lesson models, collaborative classroom cultures, Crew, and other flexible classroom groupings (p. 9).

Literacy in an EL school is supported with clear and detailed benchmarks for students and teachers. EL calls for EL schools to develop a comprehensive culture of literacy. This culture of literacy involves frequent and meaningful reading and writing activities across all contents and contexts. I believe this clear language regarding literacy helped ELMS to create a culture of literacy for students that permeated all aspects of the curriculum, including Crew, CM, and Electives.

**What happened at ELMS?**

Through observations, focus groups, and interviews, I discovered that students were engaged in rich literacy practices throughout the ELMS school day. I was excited to discover that this was true even in the less traditional academic spaces of Crew, CM, and Electives because these spaces seemed to work toward students’ sense of agency. Although these spaces were central to the EL model contexts, they were hardly studied in educational research, including the research specifically on EL schools. The data on literacy in these spaces helped me to answer the question:

What does literacy have to do with this? That is, what literacy events and practices are present during Crew, Community, Meetings and Electives, and how does literacy function to limit or enable different students’ agency?
Oftentimes in these spaces, I found students to be engaged in literacy practices that could be characterized by enjoyment, passion, self-motivation, and engagement. As I have already discussed, I believe that this state of affairs was due to the clear and thorough reading and writing EL benchmarks that called for literacy to be woven into every aspect of EL students’ experiences. The data also revealed that students were engaged in rich, complex, and powerful literacy practices, that if given an opportunity, could find a space in the curriculum and create positive experiences for ELMS students.

**Crew.**

Every day in Crew, students and Crew leaders engaged in some form of literacy. On three days of the week, Crews reflected on an opening reading. These reflections took the form of discussions, written statements, or a combination of the two. Most of these discussions could be characterized as non judgmental and open ended. David reported that these discussions in Crew gave people a chance to know him in a different way. He shared that he suspected people thought of him as “only a video game player.” He actually saw himself as a reader, and seemed to want people to know that and see that, too. Because the seventh grade Crew involved opportunities for students to read, to be seen reading, to share “golden lines” and other information from their books in a group discussion, and to hear what other students are thinking and reading in a non judgmental conversation, David had an opportunity to take stock of and perhaps challenge people’s assumptions about his interests and passions. Crew gave him an opportunity to voice his true nature to others, especially because he was invited to read anything that he wanted; he could follow his own interests and passions. This combination of student choice in
terms of reading selection, the discussion prompts to encourage metacognition, and the opportunity for students to share their voices with each other seemed to support students’ sense of agency. These same feelings were reported by Cathy and Gabby in the seventh grade Crew. For the short time that Burt was at ELMS, Crew did not seem to have an immediate impact on this sense of agency or literacy. According to what Burt shared with me in his interview, he did not see himself as a reader-instead, he said that he watched television. He did, however, complete an I Am poem, which was displayed in his Crew room, and clearly demonstrated his sense of humor, his ability to notice the world, and his ability to put those thoughts into writing.

Although the eighth grade Crew did not discuss their silent reading selections together like the seventh grade Crew, Egan described the silent reading times as an extremely relaxing and positive time for him during the day. He often felt stressed and pressured throughout the day, so this change of pace was a welcome respite. A disconfirming case was Abby. Silent reading in the eighth grade Crew, at least in the way that it was set up during the study, did not support Abby’s sense of agency or her literate identity. Instead, it rarified her identity as a struggling and reluctant reader. She attempted to do anything but read in order to assert her agency in subversive means. However, this non-reader identity was complicated by the plethora of texts that Abby reported was reading and writing. She kept a music themed notebook in which she wrote down her raps and lyrics. She said that she followed Nikki Minaj on twitter, searched the web, and chatted with random people online. This singer was extremely important and influential for Abby, and she seemed to relish any time she could talk about her. Abby reported that
she often had to defend her because she was misunderstood, but the times I saw her come up in both Crew and ROX, Abby was given the space to talk freely about her. This interest could have been used to facilitate Abby’s recognition of her reading and writing ability, but as far as I know, no one else asked or knew about her complicated feelings regarding her literate and academically literate identities.

Literacy events at ELMS were also sometimes used to explore diversity and each person’s place within a diverse community. Many of these explorations happened in spaces that were not mediated by an adult. Abby only described reading and enjoying one book during her lifetime. That book was about segregation and civil rights and was located on the shelf in the Social Studies classroom. This book was made available by the teacher, but it was not discussed in class. Instead, Abby found it on her own accord and read through it. She wanted to understand more about race and class issues, so she sought out a book that could help her do so.

While the Crew leader was out of the room, students who were engaged in writing initiated a brief conversation about race. During this Crew, students were told to use Sharpies to decorate a recycling bin with drawings and phrases. Abby was the last to select a Sharpie and noticed that it was black (the other students had every other color). Abby made a joke about the black Sharpie as the only one people did not want, and laughed. Sage laughed, too, and said, “You racist.” Abby responded, “Just playing, I have coffee every day.” Although the topic was breached as a joke, I believe that Abby was trying to discuss her experience of having dark skin. Abby shared during focus group that she felt like she was “too dark” to be considered pretty, and this caused her pain and
frustration. By bringing up this idea as a joke, she was attempting to engage in some kind of dialogue about her experience as an African American female with dark skin. After the Sharpie incident, Steve and Sage discussed a girl who changed her “voice” during the school year. Steve remarked that this student (who is a biracial, eighth grade girl) had suddenly started talking “ghetto” even though she started out the school year talking “white.” Although the students were not writing about race, it emerged during a literacy event because I believe it was something they were noticing and feeling, and wanted to discuss with one another.

Many literacy events in Crew were driven by a desire to build community or connections between people. During an interview with Mr. Ben, he shared that he saw crew as “a foundational element of our developing school culture” and perceived the literacy work in crew as an important formational feature of the culture of crew. He explained that ELMS valued literacy so much that they “decided to do the reading two days a week” as a staff. At the time of this interview, he felt that this use of time complimented their “focus of literacy.” Mr. Ben also commented that he liked how the independent reading time preserved classroom time toward developing reading skills and comprehension. He believed that the reading done in crew helped students to become lifelong readers. This was evident when he shared that ELMS teachers emphasized teaching the students to “make good choices” about reading. ELMS wanted students to consider reading as an “enjoyable” activity. He felt that ELMS staff have seen students buy into enjoying opportunities to read because they were not actually allowed to “read their assigned English books” (recorded interview 2/23/12) so they were forced to select
for-pleasure reading material. Thus, instead of reading for homework or an academic purpose during crew, students were encouraged to read for pleasure, and he felt that this helped students to become lifelong readers.

EL philosophy called for crew to be a special space in addition to the academic classes where students became life-long readers and members of a smaller community within the larger school community. In all crews, EL suggested that time be “used each week for literature circles and structured discussions based on short text or high interest books” and that leaders utilized “readers’ workshops” to “hone students’ ability to apply reading comprehension strategies to progressively more challenging texts” (EL document, 2004, p. 2). According to EL (2004), crew was meant to be a space where independent reading was monitored in order to help the student progress in exploring new genres or meeting independent reading portfolio requirements, as well as to build the relationship between leader and student, as well as the relationship between students (p.2).

ELMS took up some aspects of these suggestions in the crews I observed. Crews used an opening reading, which was usually a quote or short text in order to inspire discussion and, through discussion, students knowing one another. David, Cathy and Gina reported wanting discussion, particularly to hear how their Crew members felt about real issues or how they were doing. When one discussion on stress was drawing to a close, Cathy took on the role of Crew leader by asking the students who they talked to when they were stressed. Cathy asserted her agency as a Crew member to find out the information she was interested in knowing from other students. In a different
conversation in Crew, and another in ROX, Abby brought Nikki Minaj into the discussions, an action which was both a risk and an assertion of her agency. She often felt the need to defend her idol, so she rarely talked about her in school settings. In these cases, Abby wanted her Crew and Elective peers to understand more about both Nikki and herself, so she contributed more to the discussion than usual.

Crews also utilized a written or spoken prompt to encourage the students to share from their silent reading texts. These prompts were intended to help students share about themselves with minimal risk in an effort to position themselves as readers within a community of readers. These events were low risk for the students because the Crew leader modeled how to respond to the prompt correctly and every student was supported in finding a book that they could speak from and possibly enjoy. For example, in the seventh grade crew, students were asked to share a “golden line” from the text they read during silent sustained reading crew days. A “golden line” was any sentence or phrase that stood out to the student as memorable, humorous, exciting, or indicative of the story as a whole. On another reading day before the crew ended, students were asked to imagine themselves as a character in the text and to share the trials and tribulations of “their” life.

Crew leaders also encouraged the students to build community through writing events. Burt, David, Cathy, and Gina all wrote and displayed their I Am poems in their Crew room to share of themselves in an effort to reveal more about themselves and to know one another. Egan, Fawn, and Abby participated in a writing event in which they described something nice about each person on the Crew. During this event, students
wrote their name on the top of a piece of paper, passed it to the person next to them, that person wrote something nice, folded the paper, and passed it to the next students. This continued until the paper made it back to the original owner, who then read what everyone had to say about them. Fawn was surprised that someone complimented her hair, and Abby was surprised that someone thought she was funny. These kinds of literacy events contributed to a feeling of community in Crew. Another common writing event involved the creation of Thank You Notes in Crew, which were given to the recipients in CM. These events created or maintained connections to students and teachers, and contributed to a sense of community. For example, Egan attributed his growing friendship with David to a Thank You Note. Gina also felt that Thank You Notes made her feel cared for and a part of the community.

On other occasions, students were able to use literacy to explore cultural diversity in Crew with teachers. After reading a letter about donations needed for a newly immigrated African family, the students in the seventh grade Crew had questions about the specific hair products that were listed. In response, Ms. Georgia explained that certain products worked best for African hair and asked if any students wanted to provide additional information. Both Cathy and another African American girl offered additional explanations about black hair, and the diverse group of students listened attentively. Instead of talking around race, these teachers and students talked directly about it, and these discussions seemed to support students’ sense of agency.

Community Meeting.
The weekly all school meetings were also rich with literacy practices that I believe tapped into students’ interests and passions. Because of this connection, I believe that students had a more positive experience in EL schools.

Writing events were also before, during, and after CM to build community. Although students did much of the legwork to create proposals before the CM, proposals were shared in CM in an effort to create the ELMS community that the students desired. During this study, Cathy participated in many literacy events before, during, and after the CM in order to organize the dance, as previously detailed. Before another CM, Gail submitted a written student government application and was selected to represent her fellow students. During CM, Gina overcame her shyness to speak about her new position. During this speech, she shared that she hoped to stand up for the “little guy,” and encouraged students to come to her with their concerns. Another writing event came from a teambuilding activity in which students wrote a message with their finger on a Crew member’s back and passed the message along in the same manner. This writing event broke down physical barriers and worked again toward building community.

Egan, David, and Gabby reported that the Thank You Notes helped to build and maintain friendships which were important to their happiness at ELMS. Even though the Thank You Note process elicited critique from six out of eight case study students, I believe it allowed for students to engage in reading and writing to serve authentic purposes. These experiences seemed to be immensely satisfying and contributed to the students’ sense of agency and identity as literate beings. This authenticity also provided an opportunity for ELMS teachers to help students refine their Thank You Note writing.
ability. Possible lessons might have included friendship building strategies, proper ways to say thank you, or even grammar or sentence construction lessons. However, something needed to be done in regards to students not participating in the Thank You Notes tradition because they consistently did not receive any notes from others. It was a bit like having an awards ceremony every week where a large number of students (if the case study students represent at least in small part the general student body at ELMS) were not winners. The six students that critiqued the Thank You Note process said that it had morphed into a popularity contest rather than an opportunity to recognize acts of kindness.

As I have discussed, Cathy engaged in a number of literacy events that were completely self-motivated in order to bring about a school dance. Cathy went above and beyond to create documents, jobs, notes, lists, etc. to facilitate the creation of the Halloween dance. However, she also had to go through a maze of gate keeping tactics, many of which seemed designed by teachers to avoid “poor work ethic” from students in terms of students seeing proposals through to fruition. At all of the gates, Cathy went above and beyond what could be expected for a seventh grade student. Some of the gates included:

1. She typed and printed a paragraph about her proposal. For her family, this became a huge multiday ordeal.

2. She completed the proposal form which required her to consider schedule planning, budgeting, and party planning. She also collected more signatures from students and teachers than requested.
3. She stood up at CM in front of one hundred and thirty teachers and students to tell them about her vision.

4. During that time, she was in charge of running the meeting, calling on students to gather questions and ideas, and capturing those thoughts in writing.

5. She sought out answers to those questions from ELMS staff.

6. She shared that information with students at another CM.

7. With the help of her Crew leader, she formed committees, made posters, and came up with a slogan for the dance (Be Prepared to Scare).

8. Cathy also sought out donations, led lunch meetings, created invitations, coordinated with administration-sometimes through email, involved families as volunteers, created playlists, and dreamed about the dance.

Cathy was reading and writing, thinking and speaking for an authentic purpose—her dream Halloween dance. Her work even led to creating possibilities for other students’ sense of agency. During the dance, another student went up on the stage to perform his carefully written and practiced rap.

So why did Cathy never want to engage in the proposal process again? She explained that if the dance had been “better” she would have been willing to do so, but I believe the problem went deeper than she was able to articulate. I believe she felt that the process was not set up for her to succeed. She had to depend on adults who were already overextended and struggled to follow through, her ideas were taken over by others, and she lacked the power to do anything about this situation. Instead of using her two years of knowledge and experience to plan another dance during her eighth grade year, she
decided that two years of the same struggles was too much to handle. Supporting students’ sense of agency through the proposal process was an area of growth for ELMS, but it was positive that within CM and Crew, ELMS attempted to support and value student’s agency in regards to sharing ideas regarding the improvement of the school.

Another aspect of the school dance was the possibility it presented for a student like Burt to have an important “win” during times of stress. Burt was extremely excited about his positive social connection to Cathy and was willing to do anything to help her. He took it upon himself to visit with neighbors to solicit donations and go shopping. He made plans for how he was going to help with Cathy’s hair and costume. If this attempt was supported more thoroughly by an adult, perhaps literacy could have been woven into the experience. These reading and writing tasks might have been used to bridge learning, help him find a place in the ELMS community, and build a positive academic and literate identity.

On occasion, guest speakers tapped into students’ senses of agency in unexpected ways. I have already discussed the success of the dancers and drummers CM in regards to ELMS student and faculty participation. In addition, a presentation by a local police officer drew out participation from some students, especially Fawn. Fawn often sat silent during CM, Crew, or classes. She often had her head down and reported sometimes crying during those times. During this meeting, she answered questions, made informed guesses, and actually got up on stage to act out a scenario. Unexpectedly, the presence of guest speakers seemed to engage Fawn in ways that the “normal” school day did not. For some students, the presence of so many other people in CM was a limiting factor, but for
Fawn who often bemoaned her lack of friends in interviews and on her personal blog, it did not seem to limit her in any way. Perhaps it was the structure of the CM as an opportunity for give and take with an adult in charge asking questions that made the difference, but this seems like the same structure that was present in class.

Sometimes the group initiatives inspired literacy events as well as student participation and enjoyment. During one meeting, students were asked to stand up in their Crew groups and get into a line. In this formation, the students played “telephone” by drawing a message on each other’s backs and passing it on. The message sent by the students was an emoticon message in the form of a smiley face. Everyone participated and looked happy, which was an improvement from other meetings where Egan spent the entire time reading or drawing.

In conclusion, even though CM was unpopular with the case study students, I believe CM offered great potential and could eventually be recognized as a positive part of the week. However, for all of the case study students, Electives were a positive part of the week.

**Electives.**

There were two times of the week that students reported looking forward to consistently. Those times were the two days of Electives. The reasons differed: a change of pace from the normal routine of school, a chance to see friends and listen to music, the personality or style of the teacher, and the chance to do something the student was passionate about like drawing and telling stories. Students seemed happy in Electives, and the learning I witnessed in Electives made me happy as a teacher. Electives seemed
to inspire students, evaporate management issues, bring about authentic learning, inspire community, and open up the possibility of academically recognized success, which was an important area of growth for some students. In addition, Electives were worthwhile spaces because the literacy events and practices in them were rich and varied. In some cases, literacy in Electives created a bridge to support student academic success and interest.

Part of the success of some Electives seemed to come from the fact that they functioned as bridges between students’ passions to school sanctioned spaces and academic literacies. Egan kept a meticulous drawings and illustrations book, he read voraciously, and he referred to these things in and out of school. He often pulled out a book or added to his drawings rather than participate socially with other students in class, in Crew, and in CM, but never in Electives. Egan was present in his Elective which was not the norm for other classes; in Graphic Novels, he could always be found working on his book, sharing ideas, or connecting with other students.

Fawn considered herself an artist and was frustrated when she felt that the official Art teacher was not letting her do her own style. Whatever style she ended up using seemed to be recognized by the teacher because her art was displayed all over the Art room as exemplars for the different assignments. She kept meticulous notebooks of characters she created, as well as the worlds they inhabited. She was critical of herself when talking about her artwork and her drawings contained many pencil eraser marks; Fawn was committed to revising these images. Fawn also participated in the German Elective and many of these words were used in her work and everyday conversation.
There were possibilities for infusing literacy into the more physical Electives as well. Hal participated in the Ultimate Frisbee Elective, which he enjoyed. I am not aware of an ELMS Ultimate Frisbee play book, written versions of the rules, or illustrations of the different Frisbee throws, but all of these ideas could incorporate literacy into a mainly physical Elective that could support student’s academic literacies.

Even though not all students reported “liking” an Elective, I used data from my observations to draw conclusions. In the case of Abby, I felt comfortable in drawing the conclusion that it was a positive experience from my many observations of her participation in discussions. During one conversation, she was able to speak with authority in an official and school sanctioned space with her peers (a combination that I would suspect was the best of all worlds for many students, but maybe not for Abby) about things like violence and sexuality. I did not believe this typically unwelcomed or perhaps inappropriate knowledge would have had space to emerge in any other setting than ROX. Because of ROX, Abby’s agency was asserted through the sharing of her voice and knowledge, much like Erika, the student in Ma'ayan’s (2010) study. Erika on paper was failing school, yet she, like Abby, was involved in multiple rich literacies. The topics that Erika “discussed with passion-gangs, violence, and sexuality-were all considered taboo within the middle school setting” (Ma’ayan, 2010, p. 648). Ma’ayan suggested using culturally relevant and age-appropriate texts coupled with open discussions, which was a version of what was happening during my study with ROX.

For Cathy, her enthusiasm for writing was present, but in two cases she was not given an opportunity to voice her desires or see them through to fruition because of
teacher intervention. I believe that this Elective would have been a positive experience for her if she had been able to follow through on her own interests. For example, she was excited to interview the researcher for the Media Mojo Elective even though the assignment was to interview a teacher. Because she was not allowed to do what she was truly interested in, she did not interview anyone. She was also asked to write an article about the dance. I believe she would have been happy to write about the dance if it did not feel like such a disappointment in the end. Instead, she did not report about anything, and usually used the time in Electives to listen to music on the school laptops or talk with friends. On one occasion, she used the class time to email the principal to urge him to follow through with the dance preparations. Perhaps another factor for the lack of Cathy’s enthusiasm for her Elective was the use of laptops. The school provided students with laptops if the teacher brought up the laptop cart during class. During the study, teachers were challenged to help students use laptops efficiently in many ways: teachers did not have access to a program that would allow them to remotely view the student’s current screen; there were a large amount of students in the room-sometimes two different Electives trying to share the same classroom with only one teacher; it was the end of the day; and there were a large amount of students involved in the Elective that did not choose it.

During Cathy’s Media Mojo Elective, a student suggested that they inquire about each other’s race during student interviews. Before this suggestion, Mr. Harold, a white teacher, asked the students to generate possible questions for student interview. The information discussed in these interviews was going to be written in the reporter’s
notepad and turned into a biography about each student on the Media Mojo staff. Every other suggestion was acknowledged as a good idea or adjusted to work better, but this suggestion was met with resistance. With a tone of shock, Mr. Harold responded that the student could ask if it was important to him. Thus, the white teacher responded to an African American student in a way that shut down race as a discussion topic. During these literacy events, students wanted to talk about race, but the teacher discouraged them from doing so. This event aligned with Delpit’s (1988, 2006) assertions that those in the culture of power do not recognize that they are in the culture of power. If the students had been supported in their desire to discuss race, I suspect many more students like Cathy, who enjoyed those discussions, would have been engaged in the writing.

**Conclusion for claim 3.**

Under the EL model, ELMS created many opportunities for students to engage in rich and diversity literacies in the spaces of Crew, CM, and Electives. In order to take the literacy rich environment to the next level, ELMS and EL needed to consider students’ languages and literacies and create additional bridges to traditional academic notions of literacy. ELMS also needed to validate home languages and be explicit about instruction meant to give all students access to the culture of power. ELMS students will benefit when teachers consider what literacies are not being validated in school.

Chapter 4 provided a synthesis of the students’ experiences in respect to agency, literacy, and cultural diversity in Crew, CM, and Electives. In Chapter 5, implications for EL, ELMS, schools, and teacher preparation programs are offered.
Chapter 5: Implications

Thus far in the study, I argued that the EL model as it was taken up at ELMS provided a literacy rich environment. However, I also argued that the positioning of cultural diversity as “over there” or “in the past,” as well as the adult/student binary affected some students’ experiences in negative ways. Because of these findings, I believe that the EL model does many things for students in an EL school, but this model may also be limited by its theoretical foundations. First, it can provide a guide for co-creating community through Crew and Community Meeting. Second, it can support students to assert their agency within an educational institution. Third, it can provide authentic and relevant ways to learn about, investigate, and connect with community through expeditions, Crew, CM, and Electives. Finally, the findings in this study show that a rich culture of literacy can be created under the EL reform model because it values some of the multiple literacies of youth. However, that data also show that when cultural constructions of identity are neglected or actively ignored, some students were silenced, further marginalized, and in some cases, bullied out of the school. In addition, some students continued to believe that they were poor students or readers despite overwhelming evidence of the opposite.
These findings built off of the theoretical frameworks that foregrounded the importance of context. Theorists within sociocultural constructivism argue that learning happens in social contexts, New Literacy Studies theorists posit that literacy must be understood in social contexts, Lesko postulates that negative perceptions of adolescents have been shaped and reinforced by social contexts, and Delpit and others contend that power is enacted and resisted in social contexts. The theoretical frames for this study provided a view into the literature review and study data which revealed much about literacy, learning, power, and youth in an EL school.

Even though ELMS situated learning in a context like West Africa or in a seventh grade Crew, it was not enough to affect all students’ sense of agency in a positive way. Instead, learning must be explicitly connected to and actively value the raced, classed, gendered, and sexualized realities of the students’ lives and their literacies. Except in ROX, the El reform model, as it was taken up at ELMS during the time of this study, neglected both the historical and current power structures that affect all students’ lives both in and out of the institution of school. Because of this, some students’ experiences under the EL reform model suffered. However, there were also positive happenings and structures already in place like Crew, CM, and Electives. According to the data, efforts in these spaces worked to support all students, especially in terms of student agency.

These findings also echoed and extended what is known about cultural diversity, adolescent literacy, student agency, and Expeditionary Learning schools as detailed in the literature review. To briefly summarize the literature review, studies on cultural diversity revealed that many classroom and academic literacy standards were based on male,
Eurocentric ideals for beauty, behavior, and texts. When students did not conform to these standards, their academic identities could suffer.

Studies on adolescent literacy revealed that adolescents, even those who are labeled as struggling, are involved in multiple literacies and are capable of providing relevant view points. Educators are encouraged to recognize and support these literacies in the school setting. Educators could support students by providing text choices which connect with their lives, as well as by developing relationships with their students. Furthermore, many adolescents are using literacies to create, maintain, or negotiate relationships.

Studies on student agency found that agency can be asserted through school sanctioned and non-sanctioned means. Teacher respect for students’ interests, choices, and concerns were important considerations for educators who aim to support student agency.

Finally, studies on EL revealed that the EL reform model as it is taken up in schools emerged from the OB wilderness adventure model and were developed through ties with Harvard and CSR monies in the early 1990s. In addition, the effectiveness studies on EL schools found them to either be effective or promising, but based these findings on autonomous notions of literacy. Other studies on EL schools investigated aspects of the teachers’ experiences and seemed to consider learning as socially situated. These studies found that EL PD, expeditions, and Design Principles helped teachers to instruct in innovative and student centered ways, but teacher buy in and time with the
reform model were important factors. Lastly, EL schools were rich with literacy events, including multimodal literacy practices.

In chapter five, I answer the questions: What are the affordances and constraints of Crew, Community Meeting (CM), and Elective in terms of student agency? What are the implications of this study for thinking about literacy learning and teaching in EL schools, and schools in general? What do the findings suggest about teacher education? This chapter is organized in order to build off of the literature review in terms of cultural diversity, adolescent literacy, student agency, and Expeditionary Learning schools.

All throughout Chapter 5 are implications that speak to student agency because the student experience was of utmost importance in this study and a focus of the findings. The first section of implications combines cultural diversity and adolescent literacy. This structure is in place because the findings called for implications that address the ideological view of literacy, as well as the other theoretical frameworks which assert that micro and macro level contexts matter deeply in education. The second section focuses on EL through a discussion of Crew, CM, and Electives. In this discussion, I make suggestions for schools that already use these spaces, as well as suggestions for schools that could implement these spaces as re-conceptualized versions of homeroom, courses, and assemblies. The literature review revealed that these spaces were unstudied in educational settings, so these implications lend themselves to further investigations.

Chapter 5 concludes with the important theoretical and methodological implications that emerged from these data and this study, as well as possible directions for further research.
directed towards researchers interested in middle schools, adolescent literacy, and teacher preparation.

**Cultural Diversity and Adolescent Literacy**

The most important implication regarding adolescent literacy and cultural diversity is that teachers need to have explicit conversations with students regarding social constructions of identity, and that these conversations can be created through carefully selected texts. These discussions could have happened in the expeditions if teachers had prioritized connections between the topics and the lived experiences of their students. The expedition texts were carefully selected by teachers and included depictions of diverse youth actively resisting oppressive power structures, as Tatum’s (2008) study suggested. However, the students reported to be disconnected emotionally from the expedition. They struggled to connect the purpose of the expedition to current events, as evidenced by Cathy’s desire to study something “interesting” like Asia, or Abby’s disinterest in her expedition novel but excitement over another text on segregation. Explicit discussions regarding the connections of texts, expeditions, and the students’ lived experiences may engender interest and relationship to the course content.

I believe these conversations can help to bring about a more positive school culture, they can help students understand the relevance of historical topics like slavery and colonization, and they can help students to create emotional connections to subject content. This means that teachers need to have these conversations in their training programs and as a staff in their schools so that they are comfortable talking about these topics amongst themselves and with the students. Thus, both EL PD and university
teacher education and preparation training programs need to specifically address this need, and teacher certification should keep teacher dispositions on these topics in mind.

In addition, students need to have their school and non-school sanctioned reading and writing valued and validated by teachers. A specific way that teachers can value these literacies is to use the success and interest students show for them to bridge into other settings or academic demands. In order to create these bridges, I suggest that teachers know what their students are doing in terms of reading and writing throughout the day through conferencing and journaling, and that students know that these reading and writing events are valuable. For example, Egan, Fawn, David, and Gina were passionate about creating graphic novels, and these interests were validated and supported through the Graphic Novel Elective. In contrast, Abby’s interests in Twitter and writing music, or Cathy’s numerous literacy endeavors to create the Halloween dance, were not recognized or validated within the academic setting. As a result, Abby reported that she considered herself a poor reader, and Cathy considered herself a poor student. Jacobs (2008) argued that students come to school with knowledge of multiple discourse and literacies. In order to support all students, ELMS can work toward valuing and perpetuating literacies from diverse communities.

From the data shared in the focus group interviews and discussions, I also see the need for student ambassadors to support efforts toward cultural diversity in the school. Some students, like Cathy, shared that they want to learn more about these topics and continue talking about them with others, and some students, like Gina, shared that they want to educate others to create a more informed, and hopefully kinder, community. The
conversations in ROX demonstrated that students have a lot to say about cultural diversity and the student experience, and will do so in an academic setting. Like the high school that fashioned their student ambassadors after the Chicago peacekeeping efforts as documented in *The Interrupters*, ELMS ambassadors could take place in the form of a leadership group or student council. Students reported or demonstrated that they wanted to talk about race, class, gender, and sexuality. For example, all of the case study students were eager to participate in the focus groups, even when I told them we would be discussing these topics. Every case study student reported that they enjoyed their experience in the group every time, even when subjects were uncomfortable or the opinions differed. I suggest that students are trained in small groups to facilitate discussions concerning social justice issues by qualified adults who have done this work themselves.

The training for running these conversations would include seeking to understand and personally know members of different communities. Personal connection with members of particular communities seemed to help build empathy for others as evidenced by Hal’s participation in the focus groups. Hal, who I witnessed bully Burt, seemed to become more empathetic toward Gina after she revealed her sexuality to the focus group. At the beginning of the conversation, when she first shared her sexual identity, he spit out the water in his mouth and laughed. When the group rushed to protect her and admonish him for his actions, he quieted and occasionally asked clarifying questions or made connections to his experience and the discussion. Although our 45 minute conversation was not enough to bring about drastic change, Hal refrained from shutting the entire
conversation down with jokes and sexual innuendos. This was a drastic improvement from the ways he was reported and witnessed acting toward Burt in class settings. It appeared that knowing someone that was a member of the LGBTQ community might have helped him to focus more on understanding her experience rather than continuing to assert his hyper masculinity.

I suggest that the training also needs to include self-reflection on the part of the individual and the group in terms of group process and content knowledge. This suggestion aligns with Alvermann’s (2006) study which asks educators to consider students as capable to share knowledge and to give them an opportunity to do so with appropriate support.

**Compelling Spaces in Expeditionary Learning Schools**

**Community Meeting**

CM can be an effective way to bring literacy practices into the educational community, but the data revealed that CM at ELMS could be improved. In particular, CM at ELMS was not yet fully supporting student agency through socially situated literacy practices. For example, in order to prepare and execute her proposal for the Halloween Dance, Cathy created numerous texts. Despite these efforts and abundance of writing and reading activities, Cathy still considered herself a poor student and remained academically unrecognized for her efforts. The data and findings imply that careful planning and discussion about CM goals amongst staff, as well as feedback from students, is needed to improve CM. Such planning and discussions were not currently happening at ELMS in ways that informed one another.
The data suggested that students liked the possibility of CM, but often described it as a “waste of time.” These feelings echo the thoughts from the bored and disengaged students in Intrator and Kunzman’s (2009) study on adolescent literacies. When CM was geared more toward teacher directed announcements rather than community building, student engagement and interest seemed to suffer. All eight case study students reported that they enjoyed the teambuilding activities and would have liked more of them. On a related note, most case study students shared that they did not participate in the Thank You Note activity because they rarely, if ever, received notes. Much like the students in Finders (1997) study of middle school girls, the case study students found that other students were using literacy to maintain relationships and status. To the case study students, notes only seemed to pass between already established friends. Thus, the official school sanctioned goal for the activity of making new friends was consistently corrupted, and case study students became disinterested in the activity. As an alternative means of building relationships, both EL and Cathy suggest a time in CM for apologies. These could take the form of Cathy’s “I’m Sorry” notes, or in the form of EL’s public presentations.

Drawing on Cathy’s experience, as well as the students who were afraid to submit their proposals, the proposal process at ELMS is in need of attention. I believe Cathy should have been academically recognized for her efforts in CM. In addition, Cathy’s proposal process should have been debriefed so that the process could improve. Cathy was disappointed with the dance, which was surprising because it seemed incredibly successful. Perhaps if her efforts were validated with academic credit, if she received
consistent support from ELMS teachers throughout the whole process, and if she felt like the dance planning process was more in her control, she would have been willing to plan it again. Instead, Cathy was faced with gatekeeping tactics that were based on cultural ways of being that differed from her own. She was expected to type and print her proposal, an expectation which assumed that students’ families had this equipment in their home. In addition, that data suggested that there was no time given in school to work on proposals. If ELMS creates a feedback process for students, they might discover their need to follow through and support students in their efforts to bring proposals to fruition. If ELMS works to honor Cathy’s experience and hear her voice, her story may help teachers to further scaffold and organize the proposal process. A student like Cathy could serve as a model and guide for other students. At this point in ELMS’ development, there is no modeling of successful proposals.

Students also wanted to see more proposals presented at CM, but were afraid to share them. Many of the case study students had ideas for proposals but were reluctant to read them in front of the entire school. This data implied that students who have fear around public speaking could still participate in creating proposals if an alternative or scaffolded experience was offered. For example, gathering data from the ELMS community on Thank you notes/CM, analyzing the data, giving evidence for findings, and making suggestions and plans for future CMs could be a useful and effective expedition or Elective.
An expedition or Elective class at ELMS could be a positive way to incorporate this suggestion. An Elective could be offered that clearly outlined and demystified the proposal process from start to end. This idea incorporates EL philosophy in that it offers an authentic product with an authentic audience to drive the learning. It also speaks to Delpit’s (1998, 2006) call to provide students with access to power by sharing the rules of the culture of power in explicit and supportive ways and means. An Elective like this could support all students in having a voice in the school, and not just the ones who are able to get through the gatekeeping tactics because they already come from the culture of power and have this knowledge.

Crew

An essential feature to Crew that was missing during the study is a strong relationship between Crew advisors and their students. Even returning students and advisors did not currently seem to know one another well, which is a benchmark for EL Crews. By strong relationship, I mean the regular and timely collection and synthesis of student’s thoughts and experiences that are validated and used to inform a deeper understanding of the individual, as well as the way in which this understanding can inform school practices. Thus, a strong relationship is dialogical in nature; it seeks to understand the continually evolving and dynamic self in society. The data indicated that there was talking and there was listening happening as independent entities in the two Crews I studied. However, these “conversations” were not leading toward strong dialogical relationships, which are important for adolescent literacies and agency (Intrator & Kunzman, 2009). Conversations focused more around turn taking, and little around
validating, building on ideas, or responding. Taking turns is a positive practice for discussions to ensure that all voices are welcomed and that all students participate, but the next step for Crew discussions is to listen to understand each individual Crew member, their community, and their experience in society (Schultz, 2003).

If possible, including opportunities for one-on-one conversations between Crew leader and student would work toward the creation of a trusting relationship. In turn, this relationship can create the possibility for valuable exchange of information about how to best support the students and what is going on in the student’s life. These conversations could happen during reading days especially if a second Crew teacher came in to offer support or if the culture of the Crew was positive. By positive, I mean that students would be able to independently read while the teacher met with an advisee. These conversations should happen multiple times throughout the year as to track the students’ progress over the year, follow up on pertinent issues, and work toward building a trusting relationship. Ideally, they should be recorded in some way and transcribed so that the information can be captured and follow up efforts can be made. If applicable to the context of school, these transcriptions could be added to the student’s file so that the advisor can refer back to them, or so that future teachers could learn from them. To get good data on each student, an agreed upon set of questions could be asked, as well as questions that emerge from free flowing conversation. These questions could be both student and teacher generated. These conversations could work toward helping students to recognize their home literacies or areas of interest and achievement. However readers of this study take up this implication, I believe that the data showed that adults should meet with their
students to have conversations (much like the case study interviews) so that students know they have an adult who is available to talk with them, as well as an adult who knows and cares for them at the school. In order to facilitate dialogic relationships in the whole group setting, Crew advisors can incorporate the following implications. These implications could also support adolescent literacies and student agency.

Since Crews were already incorporating literacy practices like the “I am poem” and “golden lines” that worked toward building relationships, and these practices could be further developed. Students could extend the “I am poem” writing event by telling each other in pairs or small groups about themselves as presented in their poem, or about what the poem did not fully capture. For some students, this could be a way to work up to speaking to the whole Crew, and eventually the whole school in order to present a proposal. In this way, the students and Crew leader could present information about their background in a way that works toward a deeper understanding of each other. Further explorations could take shape in a variety of forms, including written and video journaling, keeping records of reading and writing activities, and like Kinloch’s (2010) research participants, students could become ethnographers of their school and their community, as well as their local histories, discourses, and lived experiences. These efforts would tie in nicely with the EL reform model and extend what ELMS is attempting to do with the expeditions.

Knowledge of each other and the community is important, but so is the knowledge of oneself as a reader and writer. It is important that students explore their literate identities that go beyond skills or strategies, which can reinforce the perception of
struggling or reluctant reader (Tatum, 2008). Much of Crew time at ELMS was spent reading, but my findings around this activity could be applied to other educational settings. According to the data, some students felt comfortable reading and enjoyed the reading days, while others avoided reading and did not like the reading days. These students became savvy at performing reading or creating procedural displays of reading (Bloome, 1986). The Bookies and Cookies idea seemed to be exciting for all of the students, but I do not have the data to indicate whether or not this did anything to improve reading interest, engagement, or comprehension. From my research and personal experience in an EL school, I think it is helpful for students to keep a reading log so that they can chart the books that they have read, and possibly compare their list to others. Abby might have enjoyed 16 on the Block if she had learned about it from Cathy. A student like Abby who has a passion for reading multiple texts, should not spend such an extraordinary amount of silent reading time not reading, which may have contributed to her notion that she was a poor reader. This suggestion aligns with Pitcher, Martinez, Dicembre, Fewster, and McCormick’s (2010) study which suggested that educators find out what the students can and cannot do and help them to set and meet goals. In addition, Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, and Morris (2008) cautioned against labeling readers as struggling. Instead, they encouraged teachers to select or provide texts that depict identifiable and resilient characters and/or offer social capital in the form of information gained from reading them. Fortunately, Abby self-selected and reported to enjoy a text on segregation that she happened upon in her Social Studies classroom. However, this was the only mention of enjoying a text at ELMS. Accomplishments like creating a graphic
novel, reading and making deep connections with twitter feeds, successfully navigating the web to find content, and reading one’s first chapter book need to be communicated and known by students, teacher, and families. This knowledge should be accounted for in the student’s story of literacy. Students knowing about other students’ literacy stories, including successes and areas of growth, are an important part of the learning process as shown in the focus groups. I also suggest that teachers continue to offer quality and diverse texts and time to read them; ensure that every student has read their first entire book; support students to read informational texts; and to provide authentic purposes for reading. Some of these factors were already in place at ELMS and were reported by the students to be important to the development of their literate identity.

Within the Crew structure, students like Abby could discover and discuss the ways in which students cope in schools, which was one of the implications in Brozo’s (1990) study. Revealing and sharing these coping mechanisms could help to bring about a positive change in students’ perceptions of themselves, as well as connection to other students. Brozo also suggested providing opportunities for students to work with others, and given the availability of laptops and internet connections in the school, the social networking site of Goodreads.com could enable students to list books they have read, as well as to share suggestions for future titles with one another. Although Goodreads.com focuses on only on books, and the students showed an interest in many kinds of texts, this idea could be extended into other kind of text reviews and sharing. By building on student interests, teachers could work to scaffold reading and writing, help students build metacognition, and contribute to the culture of literacy in the school. Lenters (2006)
found that students resisted reading most often because of lack of interest or text difficulty. Students may be able to help each other with that issue, as well as the Crew leaders who could better understand their students and their literacies. Franzak (2006) found that a lack of perception and understanding of one’s reading ability came from teaching literacy as only a skill. Crew is an appropriate time for leaders to mentor adolescents through literacy practices to help them understand and value the richness of their literate lives, as well as to create bridges to the more traditionally valued academic literacies.

It is important to note that teachers need to be aware that students in Crew are asked to take risks in front of each other on a regular basis. Many students found the greetings embarrassing. In order to be embarrassed, the student would have to feel the threat of looking strange in front of others, or the possibility of being criticized by others. Because students mentioned numerous times in the data that they were worried about being embarrassed, there must also be a lack of positive peer culture and community in Crew. This lack of community could be due to the early months of the school year in which the observations took place. However, students also reported feeling a lack of interest in or emotional investment in Crew. I believe these feelings of fear and apathy reveal a need for stronger community within the Crew structure.

**Electives**

Discussions about Electives created powerful responses from students. The students who participated in the Graphic Novels Elective loved it. They wanted more days of it during the week and wanted to see it continue throughout the year. Some of the
reasons the students stated for the success of this Elective included: they were able to choose the Elective, the teacher was passionate and knowledgeable about the topic, they were given freedom to talk and work, and the teacher incorporated humor into the classroom. It appears to me that these reasons connect back with student’s positive sense of agency in the Elective space. Other reasons not stated, but observed, were that students were able to engage in literacy practices that were of high interest for them, they had clear goals (like a ten page graphic novel due by a certain date), and the community within the classroom was positive. In addition, connections between students and faculty seemed to be made or strengthened in Electives, as evidenced in Graphic Novels. The reasons behind the apparent success of this Elective could be a focus for further study and possible application to other Electives and classes.

As a researcher and teacher committed to social justice, I really appreciated the work that was done in ROX. On multiple occasions, I witnessed a diverse group of girls sharing, hearing, and learning from other people’s experiences, which seemed validating for students. The students talked freely about race, gender, sexuality, class, and ethnicity. They worked toward seeking out and valuing multiple perspectives, and to avoid making assumptions or forming stereotypes. I was surprised that Abby said that she did not enjoy this Elective as much as she thought she would. This information was only taken from small part of one interview, so it might not be representative of how she really felt about the Elective. However, her response to ROX warrants further investigation because it could reveal more about Abby’s experience and possible areas of improvement for the
ROX program or Electives at ELMS. Her participation and motivation to accomplish work was high compared to what I observed in other classes.

Choice was an important aspect of Electives at ELMS. The students appreciated having a mixture of Electives from which to choose. However, students who were not able to get their first or second choice brought a different energy to their Elective. The data led me to believe that students will be able to discern a choice that is not really a choice, as in the Elective selection process. If teachers do not really give and follow through on student choices, students will recognize it and respond with resentment and frustration. I believe that these feelings can impact the students experience and the culture of the school negatively. Thus, students would like to get their first choice when picking Electives. Teachers should consider having more than one of each Elective if one is popular, instead of putting students in their second or third choices. If a student is put in a second or third choice, teachers should keep track of this so that students can be assured first choice next time around, as in the case with David. Furthermore, Electives as they were configured during this study, did not reflect student input on topics. Instead, Electives were offered according to teacher interest and knowledge. Both of these aspects to developing Electives seem important, and ELMS students and teachers could benefit from an improved and data driven process for selecting, designing, and possible reusing successful Electives.

**Directions for Further Research**

In this study, I observed an EL school in the first year and a half of its existence. I gathered data through observations of classes, after school events, and field work;
individually interviewing eight case study students; leading the case study students in focus group discussions; and document analysis of EL and ELMS materials. I believe these methods and my focus lead to a robust set of data with helpful implications for the field of education, but this research has also inspired me to consider further investigations.

There are many different areas that further research could extend. It would be useful to conduct research on this school after it has more time to mature in both its understanding of EL and its identity in the community. A comparison of different EL schools could be used to expand the populations, spaces, teachers, and classes studied. Also, I would have liked to go in depth into just one space. For example, CMs happened in many non-EL schools in the research area, as well as other EL schools in different states, so it would informative to look at those spaces across different schools.

**Conclusion**

Students, their literacies, their sense of agency, and the ways in which they experience social construction of identity are important aspects of the school experience. Also important are the spaces in which they learn, and the teachers who guide them through these spaces. This study aimed to bring those aspects together to learn more about students and their experiences in an EL school. It is my hope that this work will help to focus on spaces in schools that are working and making a difference in the lives of youth; encourage educators to make schools more inclusive spaces; push teacher education programs to equip teachers with the disposition and knowledge to support
students through issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, religion, and ethnicity; and continue to give space for students’ voices to be heard.
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Appendix A: Pseudonyms and Descriptions of Participants for Dissertation
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ava</td>
<td>White, female, teacher, LA, Crew leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>White, male, administrator, Crew leader, RTI teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cara</td>
<td>White, female, teacher, Science, Crew leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>White, male, teacher, Math, teambuilding, Crew leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eve</td>
<td>Biracial, female, teacher, Humanities, Crew leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francine</td>
<td>White, female, teacher, Wellness, Yoga, ROX, Crew leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>White, female, administration, Crew leader, RTI teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harold</td>
<td>White, male, teacher, Social Studies, Media Mojo, Crew leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigo</td>
<td>Biracial, female, teacher, Art, Crew leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>African American, female, Intervention Specialist, Crew leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerry</td>
<td>White, female, teacher, Social Studies, Math, German, Crew leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>White, female, secretary, younger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>White, female, secretary, older</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nate</td>
<td>Indian, male, Elective teacher, administrator for elementary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ogla</td>
<td>White, female, Intervention Specialist, Crew leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pete</td>
<td>White, male, IT Specialist and Network Engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>White, female, teacher, Math, Crew leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abby</td>
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<td>Cathy</td>
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<td>Stan</td>
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<td>Suphira</td>
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Appendix B: Case Study Interview Questions (Pre and Post)

Interview Information Goals
- What happens with respect to student voice, agency and power when students participate in Crew, Community Meeting (CM), and Electives in an EL school?
- What happens to students when a school works under an educational reform model that does not specifically speak to constructions of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality? What effect does this have on student voice, agency and power?

Pre Interview
- Tell me about yourself; what do I need to know to know who you are? What is important to you?
  Describe yourself.
- What do think about ELMS? What brought you here?
- What kinds of writing and reading do you participate in?

Final Interview
- Tell me about Crew, Community Meeting, Electives
- What do you like, not like? What is worthwhile or not for building community, helping with school? What other purposes you see for these spaces?
- Who are your friends/do you have more connections to others because of Crew?
- Who do you talk to? About what?
- How does Crew (& CM & E) affect the rest of your day? (at school and beyond)
- How does Crew (& CM & E) affect your relationships?
- What reading and writing do you do in Crew (& CM & E)?
- How does this connect with reading and writing in other spaces/places?
- What books are you reading for SSR? why
- How did you choose it? What are your purposes for reading it? For school and for self?
- Does it help you with something?
- How do you remember the story? Do you take notes?
- Which expedition book are you reading? Tell me about it.
- Describe Crew (& CM & E). What is important to know about Crew?
- Have you experienced anything like this in other spaces/places/times?
- What are the greetings? What is their purpose? How do they impact you and others? Which greetings do you remember? Why do those stand out? Find helpful? In what way?
- Tell me about community. What is it? is it here at ELMS?
- Tell me about the opening readings?
- Tell me about the activities?
- Why are Crews named as they are? How were they formed?
- What do they (& CM & E) do at ELMS?
- What would you change about them to make them better?

Continued
Describe yourself, include the information on this chart (or circle)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Identity Categories</th>
<th>Social Group Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Black, White, Asian, Latino, Native American, Multiracial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Female, Male, Intersex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Men, Women, Transgender, Genderqueer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, Mormon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Orientation</td>
<td>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Heterosexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Owning, Poor, Upper Middle, Middle, Working Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability</td>
<td>Disabled, Temporarily Able-Bodied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Elders, Adults, Young People</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- What are the ways in which you identify yourself? How do you see yourself? How do people see you?
- What does that mean (pretend you are describing that to an alien who knows nothing of our culture)?
- What does a boy have to do to be a boy? (the rules)
- A girl?
- Is there a spectrum for gender? Are there ways to be both?
- How are you similar or different from others?
- what kind of people are above or below you in terms of power (wealth, access, knowledge)
- Which similarities and differences do you feel comfortable and uncomfortable discussing?
- What would you want to discuss with the group if there were absolutely no consequences?
- What are the consequences for not following the rules of our society about gender?
- Do you know anyone who pushes back or resists those rules?
- What does this cost them?
- Are you ever afraid to stand with them? Why?
- Are you an agent of change?
- How does gender come into play at ELMS? What do people talk about in school that has to do with being a boy or a girl?
- Does being a boy or a girl come up in your lessons talk about it? Do your teachers?
- Do you ever hear any one talk about it? Resist it?
- Have you had a discussion like that about race with people from other races?
- What were the benefits? What were the drawbacks?
- What do you know about race? How does race impact your life?
- What are the rules for being a social group? What are the rules because you are a certain race?
- What will happen if you break the rules?
- How does race come up at ELMS? How is this the same or different from outside?
- Anything you want to say that you didn’t get to in the discussion? How has talking in the group expanded your ideas about race?
Thursday, October 19, 2011

Dear ____,

We will have our first case study student discussion on Tuesday, November 1, 2011 for one hour. We will meet upstairs on the third floor. I would really like you to be there the whole time (11:42-12:45) as this is a very important source of data for my research. Also, I will not be able to come find you like I did for our first interview so the responsibility to come after third period is on you.

Food: I will provide food and drinks during our discussions. If you already pack, you should continue to bring your lunch (but nothing that needs microwaved), but if you buy lunch I would like to you to just eat upstairs with me and skip waiting in line. I am doing this because I want to have as much time as possible to hear what you have to say.

Future Meetings: We will also meet on the following Tuesdays + Thursdays, so plan on being with me during Crew and lunch on Nov. 1, 3, 8, and 10. Lastly, we will have one last one on one interview during lunch and Crew on November 11.

Thank you!
Mrs. Heath
Appendix D: Focus Group Written Reflection Blank Form

name: Focus Group 1

Crew

community meeting

Electives

you want to say

the group

307
Appendix E: Focus Group Written Reflections Blank Forms (No Formatting)

Group 2
- your gender
- the rules
- what will happen if you break the rules?
- ways that gender comes up at GEMS—same or different from outside?
- you want to say
- the group

Group 3
- What do you know about race?
- How does race impact your life?
- What are the rules for being a social group?
- What are the rules because you are a certain race?
- What will happen if you break the rules?
- How does race come up at GEMS?
- How is this the same or different from outside?
- Anything you want to say that you didn’t get to in the discussion.
- How has talking in the group expanded your ideas about race?

Group 4
- we have talked a lot about the ways we are in the world according to how we look and how the ways that we look can sometimes end up in people making assumptions about us, especially according to our age, race, gender, sexuality, body/beauty
- Today we are going to talk about class, money, socio economic status
- We can talk about that by discussing what you have, or don’t in connection to:
  - clothes that you wear
  - the hair
  - what you spend and on what
  - allowance
  - own or rent
  - safety in your neighborhood
  - shopping
  - feelings about education
  - parents education and employment status
Appendix F: Student Work with Transcripts

Transcripts: All words are as the students’ wrote them in terms of spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.

Figure 1 Product of Abby’s performed reading during Crew
(left side) King Sundiato trust
(right) The middle heart means by god’s grace, all will be well. the story shows that by sundiata having belief that he will get better and not giving up. The late heart means return and get it just like when the quro and sundiata returning and defeting _____ The swords means swords of war just like in big war at the end.

I wonder why people wear ugly clothes.
I see crazy people.
I want every diamond in the world.
I pretend that I like school.
I feel so happy I got friends.
I worry about my family.
I am loved by everybody.
I dream to be famous.
I try to be good sometimes.
Figure 4 Cathy's invitation

Date: Wednesday 10/26/11  
Time: 6-9 pm  
Where: ELMS Gym  
Price: $2.50 in advance to the office, or at the door  
Highlights  
- Raffle  
- Blood Balloon toss  
- Dancing  
- Photos  
- Best Dressed Contest  
- And MORE!!!  
Costumes highly recommended, but not required. Price includes food, raffle ticket, and photo.  
ELMS address, logo, and information.

Figure 5 I Am poem by Cathy

I am __ , one of a kind, a friend
I wonder why stupidity makes the world revolve
I hear ignorance, birds chirping, police sirens and loud voices,
I pretend…..I don’t pretend.
I worry about life, the world ending and getting hurt.
I cry when I’m mad, sad, and annoyed.
I am __, one of a kind, a friend.
I understand that life isn’t easy, and that it is hard to find someone to rely on.
I say…that I don’t bite my tongue for nobody, express yourself.
I try to please everybody, it doesn’t work that way.
Figure 6 David's I Am poem

I am ___. Awsome and epic.
I see food, videogames and happiness.
I want to make machinima, to make a
game and have fun.
I worry about the economy, wars and death.
I cry for suffering, death and crime.
I understand life, the universe and everything. (42)
I say equality, antiwar and no hunger.
I try to help, do well and have fun.
I hope for a good life, a home and friends.
Figure 7 David’s drawing of “demons”
Figure 8 An excerpt from Egan’s graphic novel

(from left to right, top to bottom) frame 1: Master ___ (unlegible) Tokyo
frame 2: BOOM
frame 3: ?
frame 5: KSHEEE!
frame 3: AHHHHH! Foolish mortals! your weapons are useless against me! now witness the destruction of this city!
(from inner circle out) DON’T TRY TO CHANGE ME cause I’m not you. Fear me I hate pink All the good people who suffer injustice I pity you I really do care on the inside by you probably won’t see that. School is a place for knowledge to further your life I’m constantly depressed I don’t know why. Maybe it’s a natural state. I am plotting youre doom School is not a place for sociality. It’s a good life, so why y’all trippin, the good life slipping away. Only when you hold a tiny life in your handsthen you understand your position in the world. HER NAME. This little space is unimportant like me PREPARE FOR LOGIC! Beiber, you hate him or you love him or you’r just like me, you don’t care. WUNDERBAR! My favorite colors are Black and Blue, as in I’ll beat you black and Blue. I don’t actually mean that
I am curious, caring, and creative
I hear music, laughter, and wonder
I want love, hope, and joy
I am curious, caring, and creative
I feel soft, warm, comfortable
I worry about friends, family, and school
I am curious, caring, and creative
I dream about a world where everything goes my way
I am curious, caring, and creative
Figure 11 Artwork from Gina’s journal that is displayed in the Art classroom

(from the bottom up, left to right)
Tell.
Do Don’t
Fear Think Up Why Maybe
Run Now Yes No Down Run Week Love No Yes
Faster why scared lost for always Never Why Stop Lose For No Fast Cry Stops Win Lose
(the few remaining words are too small to read)
Greet and Thank
Good Evening and thank you for coming, my name is Hal and I would like to
Hi I am Hal and I am happy you were able to join us this evening

Step 1. was every thing about Africa we knew before we came to this school in the color green
Project or explanation of work
I am sharing the work I did with Social Studies document my work.

I have chosen my work on Africa to highlight this evening.
Learning Target
The target(s) that were met through my work were to tell us about Africa
I was especially proud of my work on the target of Africa
I could have done a better job on Nothing
This was how we learned about Africa.

Rubric/Menu/Peer Critique
Strengths
Questions
Are there any questions?
I would be happy to answer any questions you may have?

Closing/Thank You
Thank you for supporting our work at ELMS
I appreciate you taking time to honor our work
Figure 13 Hal’s poster

(from the inner circle in green)
Africa-dry; very hot; continent; lions; mines diamonds; not a lot of schools; some poor; not a lot of water; deserts; rivers Nile longest river

(next circle in yellow)
Africans were packed on a ship and there were slaves; exchange guns; lots of slaves; there was about 20,000,000 ___; Europe began trading 15 centure

(outer most circle in blue)
In the 1300s Timbuktu was great center for trade, religion, and culture; there was a lot of African kingdoms; Sahalian people have developed a complex livelihood system; systems are vulnerable to collapse if experience shocks; it is exciting for an African citizen when they receive American mail