CO-CONSTRUCTING CRITICAL LITERACY
IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL CLASSROOM

DISSERTATION

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By

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ABSTRACT

Literacy, viewed as a social and transactional practice, has the capability to raise awareness of culturally dominant systems of meaning, thus making difference visible and questioning why certain groups have been "othered" in historical and current times. Critical literacy seeks to interrogate issues of equity present in texts and society, for individuals to make applications to their own lives, and for individuals to take action towards social justice. The purpose of this case study was to explore and describe the teaching methods used to present critical lenses to sixth-grade English and Language Arts students in order to examine and interpret texts, specifically focused on issues of racism, gender bias, exclusion, and equity. Additionally, student participants of the Literacy Research Club, utilized as co-researchers both inside and outside the English and Language Arts classroom, aided the process of curriculum construction. Ethnographic methods were used to provide thick description of the teaching methods as well as to capture student perspectives in the classroom. Data were collected over a 9-month period and included observations of classroom activities and Literacy Research Club meetings, student work samples, and transcripts of Literacy Research Club meetings and classroom literature circle discussion groups.

Data analysis included inductive analysis to explore themes, patterns, and issues emerging from the data. The goal of the data analysis was to develop a grounded theory of enacting a critical literacy curriculum in a sixth grade English and Language Arts

classroom, and to explore the development of student awareness of critical perspectives and positions. Analysis revealed that written and oral language use illuminated positive or negative reactions to critical literacy including resistance to critical literacy, acceptance of critical literacy, critiquing the "norm," power relationships, cultural production, and cultural reproduction. Student resistance was often manifested through silence and incomplete class work.

The findings of the study demonstrated that while students will participate in teacher-developed critical literacy activities, the deeply ingrained cultural beliefs and attitudes are difficult to deconstruct. As students and teachers engage in co-constructing the curriculum, the thinking and learning that occurs suggests a developmental taxonomy moving individuals from identifying inequities towards productive social action. Teachers who wish to enact a critical literacy curriculum need to work alongside their students to interrogate hegemonic beliefs, providing space to explore, question, challenge, and reframe sociocultural assumptions. Engagement in critical literacy activities has the potential to increase students' sense of agency over their own lives and opportunities for independent transfer and transformation across all areas of life.

Dedicated to
my parents, Robert and Christine Pietrandrea,
my family, Beth, Andy, Calvin, and Aaron…
my support and my encouragement.

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FRAMING THE STUDY

Introduction

As a middle school English and Language Arts teacher, I have often encountered many notions in the classroom which appear to be taken for granted. Some ideas I have fallen prey to, such as the location of power, knowledge reproduction, and appropriate student behavior. Other ideas, such as gender roles and power structures, I have witnessed among my students. These observations and exposure to alternative viewpoints in doctoral coursework began my journey of questioning my own teaching practices and implementing critical literacy practices in my own classroom.

The climate of accountability runs rampant in school systems today, and teachers may not receive the support necessary in terms of furthering their own professional knowledge, workshops, book discussions, or reflection related to critical literacy (Lewison et al., 2002). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 mandates how schools should teach and what students must learn. Academic content standards are handed down by states and school districts, prescribing for teachers how their curriculum should be structured. Many teachers, both preservice and inservice, are often accepting of the status quo within the school settings "and …internaliz[e] the power structures within schools, not questioning the capricious nature of the rules thus set down. ... Schools were institutions, out there beyond the individual student-teachers, institutions that remained

locked into traditional models of literacy teaching," (Marsh, 2006, p. 169). Meeting mandated curricular standards also puts pressure on administrators and teachers, as well as parents and children, to perform well on standardized reading assessments, even though those tests put "constraints on the ways children are expected to read and show their success as readers," (Enciso, 2001, p. 168).

Access to reading and writing has sometimes been considered the key to empowerment to those individuals who have been marginalized by society. However, this access does not automatically translate into productive work for issues of social justice (Comber & Nixon, 1999). Rather, it is the responsibility of teachers to foreground power, inequities, politics, cultural systems, and counter silence that is caused by taken-for-granted assumptions of class, gender, age, race, abled-ness, family, sexuality, religion, and culture. Literacy, and literacy education, has the great potential for individuals to "discover their voices and their ethical responsibilities to use literacy for the improvement of their world," (Beck, 2005, p. 384).

It is a challenging endeavor for experienced educators to move into a curriculum of critical literacy. For teachers who have not been exposed to the notion that "all texts represent particular cultural positions and discourses, [and that we must be] aware of how texts (and how we are taught to read them) construct us as particular kinds of literate beings," (Leland & Hartse, 2000, p. 3), it can be awkward for them to move away from the idea that they should present literature in terms of neutrality and universal themes (Ketter & Lewis, 2001). It is also unsettling to move away from right answers and tidy conclusions. How do teachers, veteran and preservice, transform their classrooms into spaces that reflect cultural criticism, defined by Ketter and Lewis (2001) as "promot[ing]

an awareness of systematic inequities that show experiences to be anything but universal?" (p. 179). Teachers, myself included, must take responsibility to foreground power, inequities, politics, and cultural systems in order to interrogate and challenge taken-for-granted assumptions of class, gender, age, race, abled-ness, family, sexuality, religion, and culture within their classrooms.

Alvermann (2001) states that "culture constructs not only *what* counts as reading when reading really counts, but also *who* counts as a reader," (p. 689, original emphasis). It is important to "understand and make visible the norms, beliefs, assumptions, and roles embedded within what it means to be literate in different contexts," (Rogers, 2003, p. 2). Therefore, who gets to be a "literate" individual is tied up with patterns of a society's distribution of power and knowledge (Luke & Freebody, 1997). Gee (2001) states that "language is not about conveying neutral or objective information; rather, it is about communicating perspectives on experience and action in the world, often in contrast to alternative and competing perspectives," (p. 716).

The Importance of Critical Literacy in the Middle School

Before they even enter the school environment, children have developed ideas about how the world works, or what Gee (2001) calls "cultural models" and which Kress (1999) terms "shared meanings." Through these cultural models or shared meanings, children understand what counts as normal and what counts as inappropriate, especially with gender roles, at very young ages. These assumptions take on an even greater role as children enter the middle school environment. Positions and identities become solidified as children engage socially with their peers in the school environment. As a sixth grade

teacher in a suburban Midwestern middle school, I witnessed how solid these positions were among my students and how content my students were not to question the status quo. I questioned how I could work towards a curriculum of equity and social justice in a homogenous population while also struggling with the constraints of student resistance, curricular mandates, and a teaching environment that fostered cultural reproduction more than cultural production.

With teacher recognition of the meanings and values of the texts they expose to their students and to the world in which they belong, conversations can be created that allow children to go beyond "open-ended responses such as 'I think,' 'I wonder,' or 'I noticed,'…to move them to focus specifically on questions such as 'Who benefits?' and 'Whose voice is heard or not heard?'" (Jewett & Smith, 2003, p. 70).   Questions in which to explore gender roles could be, "What does this text show boys doing? Girls doing? What does this tell us about how boys and girls act? How can it be different?" Asking such questions and engaging in such dialogue helps all readers, both teachers and students, to "get a sense of which dominant systems of meaning were at work in the text they were discussing," (p. 70). As teachers, we must be conscious of the meanings, values, and assumptions embedded in texts and those which we promote through our own speech and actions (Leland & Hartse, 2000).

Literacy as a Social Practice

At the center of a critical literacy curriculum is the focus on students learning how to ask critical questions, how to support one another, how to work toward positive social change, and how to take individual action upon the world (Singer & Shagoury, 2005).

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Teachers and students recognize reading and writing as political acts, neither neutral nor innocent. Bausch (2003) states,

> literacy...is a social practice involving how and when and why language enables people to do things, share information, inquire, express attitudes, entertain, argue, have needs met, reflect, construct ideas, order experiences, and make sense of the world. This literacy is concerned with how people use language for real purposes in a variety of social and antisocial situations. (p. 217)

These needs and uses also highlight the need to change social discourses—local, institutional, and societal (Rogers, 2002). Because in addition to raising awareness of dominant systems of meaning, making difference visible, and questioning why certain groups have been "othered," critical literacy also asks individuals to make applications to their own lives and take social action (Lewison, Flint & Van Sluys, 2002). Critical literacy should be considered as an interactive process—"dependent upon the (local) interactions between the teacher and the student and the texts and curriculum (institutional), as well as on the discourses that are being discussed and critiqued (societal)," (Rogers, 2002, p. 784). This type of transactional view of reading and writing draws attention to the fact that "literacy [is]… a meaning construction process, and that within a given literacy event, both the text and the reader/author are changed," (Whitmore, Martens, Goodman & Owocki, 2005, p. 297). Literacy events here are taken from Heath's (1983) definition as events and activities which "bring the written word into a central focus in interactions and interpretations [which] have their rules of occurrence and appropriateness," (p. 200).

Barton and Hamilton (1998) have also conceptualized reading and literacy as a social practice, locating it within the interaction between people. They identify literacy as "one of a range of communicative resources available to members of a community," (p. 9). Additionally, as a social practice, Freebody, Luke, and Gilbert (1991) stress "that what counts as authorized reading is part of a selective tradition in elementary and secondary classrooms, and that this public accounting is enacted through classroom discourse," (p. 435).

Literacy as a mediating device provides curricular opportunities for members of the classrooms to explore how literacy practices and events allow them to act upon the various tools and signs in their cultural community in order to accomplish tasks or solve problems—a constant feature of human social life which allows people to communicate, plan, control, and regulate their own actions. Through these actions and reactions, "structures of distributed meaning and emotional links" are created (del Rio & Alvarez, 2002, p. 67). Mediation allows novice members of a culture to appropriate behavior through guided participation in the zone of proximal development. Since language is often the primary psychological tool through which actions and thoughts are mediated, though mediators can also include humans and cultural artifacts, people can work to discover the multiliteracies present in their lives. Multiliteracies signal "multiple communication channels, hybrid text forms, new social relations, and the increasing salience of linguistic and cultural diversity," (Schultz & Hull, 2002, p. 26).

The questioning of beliefs is necessarily complicated and multidimensional, but leads to either strengthening or changing those beliefs and to then take action based on those revised beliefs (Burns, 2004). Children must be given space to explore, argue,

listen, debate, expand on their opinions and those of their classmates, and take risks in their thinking and learning (Beck, 2005; Comber & Nixon, 1999; Singer & Shagoury, 2005). It is a slow and ongoing process to build communities of learners (large group, small group, or individual) who constantly work to negotiate meanings in their world. "What is needed...is an opportunity for students to challenge their assumptions, broaden their belief systems, and develop more complex understanding of literacy, diversity, and schooling," (Rogers, Marshall, & Tyson, 2006, p. 221).

Statement and Significance of the Problem

Engaging in critical literacy practices comes from the need to be aware of the power structures, societal inequities, and competing perspectives and boundaries within our worlds. This critical awareness demands that individuals look not at individual differences as deficits or gaps, but cultural and linguistic resources brought into the learning environment (Luke & Freebody, 1997). "A curriculum built on critical literacy is one that highlights diversity and difference while calling attention to how we are constructed as literate beings," (Leland & Hartse, 2000, p. 3). Students are no longer depositories for teacher-given knowledge; instead, teachers and students become problem-posers. To Freire, problem-posing education opens space in which "[p]eople teach each other, mediated by the world, by the cognizable objects which in banking education are 'owned' by the teacher," (1970, p. 61). Dichotomous activities are replaced by constant reformation and reflection, as consciousness and reality emerge.

In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find

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themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as reality

in process, in transformation. (Freire, 1970, p. 64, original emphasis)

Educators have a responsibility to help their students develop a language of critique

which enables them to enter into conversations that focus on the transformative process

of reality—conversations that question dualities, the construction of self as a social

subject, positionality, and what restrictions and limitations those positions carry with

them (Gilbert, 1997). By position and positionality, I take Enciso's (2001) definition that

"as we interact with one another we often assume certain social positions or expected

ways of talking and acting that enable us to locate who we are in relation to one another,"

(p. 166). These dialogues are important to understand how meaning is created, how to

decode those meanings, and how to use the knowledge of how language works in order to

create a world without oppression (Freire, 1970; Leland, Hartse, Ociepka, Lewison, &

Vasquez, 1999).

The tension between unconsciously accepting the status quo and consciously

working to engage in a curriculum that asks students to actively question their

assumptions creates a struggle for any classroom teacher. I believe this study will

reinforce the existence of this tension, but it is my hope that it will provide teachers with

pedagogy to enact a critical literacy curriculum amidst such tensions.

In this study, critical literacy will focus on using critical lenses to describe and

explore how students take up positions, or resist those positions, in relation to power,

justice, and the social practices of their literate lives. This case study will not focus as

explicitly on emancipation and liberation, though these are implicit with a critical

pedagogy (Lankshear &McLaren, 1993).

To explore how students take up critical lenses in the classroom, this study will pull on strands of research including sociocultural theory, dialogism, critical literacy, and the New Literacy Studies. First, however, I will define what I mean when I use the term "literacy" and what it means to be "literate." In order to construct meaning, readers must actively use "both their world knowledge (e.g., everyday experiences) and their domain knowledge (e.g., how biology differs from history in structure) to interpret print and nonprint texts," (Alvermann & Eakle, 2003, p. 14). Literacy includes reading, writing, speaking, and listening around texts. These texts include a diverse range of "print, visual, digital, audio, and oral," (Faulkner, 2005, p. 108) and the use of those texts varies and shifts across time and location (Schultz, 2002). Becoming literate is a fluid and dynamic life-long process (Neilsen, 1998). Indeed, as Hull and Schultz (2002) remark, "to talk about literacy these days, both in school and out, is to speak of events, practices, activities, ideologies, discourses, and identities," (p. 32). The situatedness and multiplicity of literacy requires that one view it "within social and cultural practices and discourses," as well as looking at the central role of power relations (Schultz & Hull, 2002, p. 21). Street (1993) also comments on the importance of taking into account "'how people themselves actually think about literacy and how they apply their literacy skills in their day-to-day lives,'" (p. 3).

Texts, both oral and written, are social constructions, imbued with political and cultural meanings, and potentially reproducing society's status quo. One way to view literary texts and the multiple contexts at work—"contexts of culture, curriculum, classroom, personal experience, prior knowledge, and politics," (Appleman, 2000, p. 3)—is through the use of literary theory. Literary theory can provide an array of critical

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lenses and interpretive tools through which to view text and the world. It can provide an avenue for students to see the factors shaping their world views and the assumptions they make when evaluating the perspectives of others (Appleman, 2000). In this study, the critical lenses with which students will engage will include critical multiculturalism, gender, and power. Gender, taken from Feminism, is based on patriarchal ideology which has limited women's realization of identity and sees women as "other" to the dominant male; Power, based on Marxism, reveals the economic, class, and ideological dominants in literature, with a specific focus on issues of money and power; and critical multiculturalism works to name injustice and reading is done to discover ideologies of domination and resistance within texts (Appleman, 2000; Yenika-Agbaw, 1997). Since there are multiple contexts interacting in the same piece of text, teachers should explicitly work with their students to view literature from more than one competing theory.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study is to explore and describe the teaching methods and constraints used to present critical lenses to sixth-grade English and Language Arts students through which to examine the ways texts can be used and interpreted. As a part of ongoing teacher research, ethnographic methods will be used to provide thick description of the teaching methods as well as to capture student perspectives in the classroom. In this context, critical literacy will be operationalized through the use of various lenses through which students and teachers can engage in ongoing dialogues to name, question, and reimagine the discourses surrounding issues of racism, gender bias, exclusion, and equity. These critical literacy practices will be further examined and

enhanced by utilizing students as co-researchers both inside and outside the English and Language Arts classroom.

Research Questions

1. To describe and explore the methods and constraints for enacting a critical literacy curriculum within a middle school context.

2. How do middle school students respond to and engage with critical literacy within the English and Language Arts classroom?

    a. How do the students feel about their experiences with critical literacy?

    b. What are the varying positions that students can take up as readers, writers, listeners, speakers, and actors in the English and Language Arts classroom? When and under what conditions are those positions available?

    c. How do critical literacy experiences and activities presented in the English and Language Arts classroom enhance the students' notions of literacy and enable them to acquire critical literacy tools?

3. How do students as co-researchers co-analyze and co-construct critical literacy activities and engagements within the English and Language Arts classroom?

    a. How do students actively engage in remaking the curriculum to reflect cultural production rather than cultural reproduction?

    b. What key issues emerge from the Literacy Research Club meetings that are then filtered back to larger English and Language Arts classes for discussion, debate, and analysis?

Definition of Terms

Critical Lenses – particular ways of viewing, reading, writing, and speaking about texts including, but not limited to, feminism, Marxism, and critical multiculturalism.

Gender Lens – based on the critical lens of feminism. This lens highlights the gender equities or inequities present in the social activities and structures of those texts, be they oral or written (Young, 2000).

Power Lens – based on the critical lens of Marxism. A Marxist lens looks at the material and economic inequalities at the individual, local, and larger societal levels. Applied to texts, the power lens aims to bring class inequities present in society to light at individual, local, and global levels.

Multicultural Lens – This lens asks readers to examine the positions of privilege that are occupied by those who are not considered people of color. Critical multiculturalism works to create ongoing social critiques of the oppression present in cultures and communities.

Literacy Events – events and activities which "bring the written word into a central focus in interactions and interpretations [which] have their rules of occurrence and appropriateness," (Heath, 1983, p. 200). These are events and activities that take place among multiple student groupings within the classroom environment and which involve individuals, partners, small groups (3-6 students), and the whole class.

Position/Positionality – social or expected ways of talking, behaving, and acting that locates individuals in relation to others.

Critical Literacy Engagements – any reading, writing, speaking, or visual activity with an explicit focus to interrogate assumptions and commonly held beliefs about what is "normal" or to challenge society's status quo. The activities may also require students to take on multiple and competing perspectives in order to reimagine societal discourses.

Summary

The following chapters will narrate the process of this study as I worked to examine the research questions. These chapters are provided to present the history and process of the study for the reader. An explanation of the related literature, methodology, context, findings, and discussion of the findings will compose the content of the remaining chapters.

In Chapter 2, a review of the literature will be presented. Within this review, I discuss the literature surrounding critical literacy and literacy as a social practice, as well as their application to middle school classrooms. Issues and approaches related to planning and enacting a curriculum of critical literacy will be examined. Research related to the co-construction of a critical literacy curriculum with sixth grade English and Language Arts students will be discussed. This chapter also examines the teacher-student interactions inherent with the collaborative nature of co-constructing a curriculum.

Chapter 3 includes descriptions of the methodology used to gather and analyze the data for this study. The research design, an ethnographic case study approach, will be explained. Description of the context of the study will be provided, as will descriptions of the various types of data gathered to inform the study. Methods of data analysis,

including the development of grounded theory, will be discussed. Provisions for

trustworthiness will also be explained.

Chapter 4 comprises the results of the data analysis. Designing and implementing

a curriculum of critical literacy will be described, as well as descriptions of student

engagements and responses to critical literacy activities, including student collaboration

as part of the Literacy Research Club. Chapter 5 is a discussion of the results. The first

section includes a summary of the results of the data analysis and the significant findings

of Chapter 4. The next section articulates the general themes that emerged from the

analysis of the data. Finally, limitations to the study and directions for future research

will be presented.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

In this chapter, I will describe research related to the central tenets of this study.

First, I will discuss the concept of critical literacy. Approaches to enacting a critical

literacy curriculum, both in classrooms generally and in middle school classrooms, will

be discussed. Following this discussion, research on utilizing students as co-researchers

will be articulated. My goal in this chapter is to build a case for the role my study will

have in filling gaps that exist in the research. In particular, how students and teachers can

create a collaborative environment in which to co-construct a critical literacy curriculum

in a middle school English and Language Arts classroom.

Critical Literacy

Before one can begin to define critical literacy, it is imperative to look at the

broader topic of literacy. While "[t]here is no single, uniform literacy, no linear path,"

literacy is generally believed to include reading, writing, speaking, and listening around

texts (McCarty & Dick, 2003, p. 115). Such texts provide a diversity of "print, visual,

digital, audio, and oral," experiences (Faulkner, 2005, p. 108) and the use of those texts

varies and shifts across time and location (Schultz, 2002). Barton and Hamilton (1998) provide a helpful definition of literacy, and specifically literacy as a social practice:

> Literacy is primarily something people do; it is an activity, located in the space between thought and text. Literacy does not just reside in people's heads as a set of skills to be learned, and it does not just reside on paper, captured as texts to be analysed. Like all human activity, literacy is essentially social, and it is located in the interaction between people. (p. 3)

> Luke and Freebody (1997), similarly defining literacy as a social practice, state

> To say that literacy is socially constructed, then, is also to say that it is institutionally located. Our position is that institutional context is not benign or neutral, but rather must be seen as informed by social contracts and historical projects for molding, making, and disciplining human subjects, populaces, and communities—and for shaping and distributing cultural and material resources. (p. 3)

The social construction and practice of literacy thus provides the potential for access or limits access to individuals (Luke & Freebody, 1997). Additionally, the literacy events provided in educational settings also have the potential to "capitalize or discount students' strengths and views of themselves," (Maloch, 2005, p. 140). Therefore, "[l]iteracy education plays a key role in influencing learners' access to and models for the mediational means and codes that situate them in relation to modes of information, and …means of production," (Luke & Freebody, 1997, p. 11).

Literacy viewed as a social practice also presents a "full and complex range of … literacy [which] is much more complex, dynamic, and sophisticated that what is

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traditionally encompassed within school-sanctioned literate activity. [Individuals] have

multiple and overlapping literacies," (Phelps, 1998, p. 1). With a continual overlap of

multiple, and sometimes competing, literacies, students and educators are challenged to

bring to the fore those literacies which may be undervalued or even marginalized. If any

individual is to gain agency, defined by Fecho (1998) as "the tendency for [people] to

choose that knowledge they must learn and eventually use" (p. 94), educators must work

with students to "co-construct transformative literacy practices that expand children's

multiple literacies," (McCarty & Dick, 2003, p. 115).

      Defining critical literacy has proven to be a challenging task. There is no simple

definition, no prescription, no formula, or set program to achieve goals of critical space

within the classroom. Instead, critical literacy is a multi-layered and evolving set of

characteristics. One must look towards the everyday world and examine what has

become classified under the broad heading of "common sense," (Belsey, 1980). Once

these notions are identified, one must then begin to interrogate and complicate the

commonly held "experiences and understandings about life," (Jones & Clarke, 2007, p.

109). Rosenblatt (1995) warns of the dangers of not challenging commonly held

notions. She claims that by not scrutinizing taken-for-granted assumptions, those ideas

continue to permeate "general attitudes toward human nature and conduct," (p. 14). By

questioning the nature and authority of such ideas as "common sense," one can begin to

find areas that can be explored through critical practices, with literacy as a both a way in

and a tool for study.

      Critical literacy also redefines educational practices. Moving past Freire's (1970)

notions of educational banking, individuals focus their reflection upon current societal

practices, reimagine the possibilities of such practices, and work to reform the status quo. Educational settings transform from rigidly structured hierarchical institutions to focus on the learning processes occurring within (Kress, 2007). Kress points out that,

> …the shift from teaching to learning speaks about challenges to and shifts in authority and power. And whenever social and economic factors are involved, we know that culture is implicated. This acts as a constant reminder that while global forces are at work, local factors will also be in often equal measure. (2007, p. 19)

It is therefore crucial that educators be aware of the forces and factors influencing their teaching, as well as how those forces position people in particular ways (Jones & Clarke, 2007).

Enacting a Curriculum of Critical Literacy

It is possible to explicitly teach the literacy skills required by governments and yet still enact a critical curriculum. How those skills are carried into making voices public and crafting projects with personal significance to students can transform a traditional curriculum into one that promotes critical literacy. Social studies content standards have benchmarks and indicators in which students are to explore the ways economic, political, and social issues have shaped governments, relations between groups, and their roles in conflict and cooperation. English and language arts standards also ask students to explain, analyze, and critique works of literature in order to become a strategic reader and achieve deeper understandings. There is space for critical literacy exploration, even in the face of mandated standards.

However, this space is fraught with tension. As teachers work with issues of power, equity, and critical classroom practice, they will encounter various affordances

and limitations. These may include, but are not limited to, personal frames, institutional frames, students' frames, and local issues or constraints. These factors will have an important affect on the teacher research work that ensues.

Teachers will need to revise, revisit, reform, and remake their literacy curriculum each year. New classes of students will vary not only in population, but also in what is important to them. Stakeholders (parents, administrators, teachers, government leaders) deem what is appropriate in terms of academic content, curricular standards, and grade level benchmarks and indicators. For teachers and students to critique these systemic and institutional frames requires careful and explicit questioning. This delicate balance between curricular mandates and critical literacy beliefs and practices will create an ongoing tension. However, by explicitly examining texts and opening up dialogue with students to discern what society has told them about what makes a good or bad reader, what constitutes a successful or unsuccessful student, and how they will be judged against standards not of their making or choosing, educators can potentially find spaces that exist within curriculum standards and critical practice.

Working within a mandated curriculum, though potentially limiting, teachers can still effectively create space for a critical literacy curriculum. This type of curriculum can take place at any age, grade, or ability level and should include the following general criteria. (I say general criteria because the nature of critical literacy is an evolution in thinking and action.) First, there are no or very few traditional exercises. Since critical literacy is based on larger systems social, economic, and political domination, there are no worksheets to complete or book reports to produce. Instead, students and teachers have conversations critiquing these systems and develop projects that enact social change

in meaningful ways, whether through reading, writing, or speaking. Secondly, issues of critical literacy must come out of students' own lives. Their questions, interpretations, and experiences in the world are the starting point for studies. Together, teachers and students decide how to examine those questions and issues, and how to find firsthand experiences in which to engage. Third, critical literacy classrooms and curricula offer safe places for all its members. Students need to feel they have the right to voice their concerns, opinions, questions, arguments, critiques, evaluations, and the teacher must protect all those voices regardless of their own personal beliefs. Fourth, a critical stance must be taken. This means "studying … exactly how decisions are made, or how a climate is created or how interactions take place, or how something happens in ways that either perpetuate or disrupt hierarchies based on race, class, or gender," (Edelsky, 1999, p. 27). This studying will not lead to easy answers; most likely to more questions regarding the systems in which people live. Lastly, critical literacy classrooms promote justice and equity. Teachers and students work collaboratively to actively seek projects that encourage the reinvention of cultural norms (Lewis, 2001). All members of the classroom also work to become activists by studying activists of all ages, how they tackled social problems, and then taking action on personally meaningful issues, even such as writing grants to receive funds for resources (Edelsky, 1999).

Personal & Curricular Interrogation

In order to enact a curriculum of critical literacy in their own classrooms, teachers must first distance themselves from their teaching practices and reflect on their own cultural ideologies and assumptions. Through a critical lens, teachers must interrogate and revise long-held beliefs (Lewison et al., 2002). What curriculum practices and

teaching practices have been privileged? What counts as literacy? Who decides what uses of language are sanctioned? What are the roles available in the classroom for teachers and students? (Singer & Shagoury, 2005). "Given everything else there is to do in the classroom, it often seems easiest to avoid the rough ground of incongruent beliefs and values and not step from the deceivingly smooth path of least resistance," (O'Quinn, 2005, p. 263). This leads to a critical question that must be continually asked: "What is it that our teaching practices do?" Do they reinforce the status quo? Do they inscribe roles upon students, thereby tracking them into/mapping them onto a predetermined future based on gender or class? Are voices silenced due to prejudice or privilege? (Hynds, 1997). Hinchey (1998) also offers starting questions for those educators wishing to enact change in their environments:

> To do well in my class, must students abandon their native speech and cultural habits? ...Who has what kind of power in my own classroom? Why? Who gains what, who loses what, because of my power arrangement? How might it be otherwise? … What classroom practice or school policy do I carry out even though I don't like or believe in it? Why? … What would be gained, what lost, in other alternatives? … Does my class help students learn to question current conditions and assumptions? Does it teach them to be researchers, to develop the critical literacies they need to become change agents? (p. 158)

As teachers and students journey to become critically literate, the realization that worlds are social constructions opens up opportunities to question, critique, and engage with those situated worlds and texts.

Personal and curricular interrogation is necessary, and educators will discover that there is no way to fix stable categories of race, class, gender into the "complicated social, cultural, and political arena of [the] … classroom; these terms [intersect] in complicated ways, none of which, in isolation, [define] students' identities," (Hynds, 1997, p. 261). Similarly, in an exploration of contemporary educational environments, Kress (2007) notes, "where there had been *stability* there is now *instability*; where there had been *singularity* and *homogeneity* there is now *multiplicity* and *diversity*," (p. 22, original emphasis). Moving away from the traditional canon of knowledge, there is now the need to "understand the new, constantly changing environments," and to prepare individuals for "transformative engagement with the world," (Kress, 2007, p. 23, p. 29).

One must then ask: how do students and teachers push themselves to be more critical? Are we silencing too many conversations in the claim of "political correctness" or neutral curricular content? These are serious questions that require educators to reflect on their own belief systems and the hegemonic norms of the society in which they live. Teachers must develop a critical perspective of their own if they want to create a critically literate atmosphere in their own classrooms.

Re-envisioning curriculum is not a simple task. "Schools and individual teachers must own the inequalities that exist, and must find their own ways to address them in local contexts. This requires commitment by individuals as well as whole-school support," (Comber & Nixon, 1999, p. 337). This, however, creates tension between what teachers are expected to accomplish within the span of one school year and the educational aims of critical literacy. "An essential component to this questioning is to cultivate a belief that things can indeed be other than they are, that the world can be

shaped by individual and collective effort," (Hinchey, 1998, p. 153). Categories, definitions, and ability groupings must be deconstructed. Differences must not lead to exclusion or silence. Students' questions move to the center of inquiry and long-term problematizing of culture and knowledge. Teachers should strive to work towards an "…understanding that their [students'] different experiences are socially constructed and not just based on their individual actions and choices," (Foss, 2002). Applebee (1997) argues that for a curriculum to be effective, it must re-envisioned to explore a "clash of cultures" (p. 28) through conversation and the tradition of knowledge-in-action. Applebee outlines general principles through which to structure an integrated curriculum including high quality language episodes, appropriate breadth of materials to sustain conversation, interrelatedness with what has been covered to ongoing experiences, and instruction geared to helping students enter into curricular conversations. Student engagement and negotiation moves students beyond reading comprehension and extension activities, facilitating the "...demonstrat[ion of] an understanding of the world as a set of related systems and analy[z]ing the causes and effects of power relationships within groups in the immediate community, the larger community, and the world," (Creighton, 1997, p. 442).

Classroom Practices

Using a transactional view of literacy in conjunction with literacy events enables teachers to examine how both they and their students "identify where knowledge comes (from social interactions) and how meaning construction is mediated by social experiences," (Straw, 1990, p. 87).

All texts are social constructions, permeated with political and cultural meanings, and have the potential to reproduce society's status quo. As Belsey (1980) states, "[b]ecause it is characteristic of language to be overlooked, the differences it constructs may seem natural, universal and unalterable when in reality they may be produced by a specific form of social organization," (p. 42). What is regarded as "typical" or "normal" can be attributed to enculturation, or the process by which individuals learn appropriate language use, social relationships, and systems of meaning of their community (Scudder & Mickunas, 1985). Scudder and Mickunas (1985) differentiate between the terms "socialization" and "enculturation," stating, "while socialization is a process of conforming the student to established norms of behavior, enculturation is the process of opening the ways of relating to the world," (p. 73). Ochs (1986) considers socialization to be "an interactional display (covert or overt) to a novice of expected ways of thinking, feeling, and acting," (p. 2). Ochs also states that novices actively participate in their socialization, organizing sociocultural information conveyed through the form and content of others' actions while also actively socializing others in their own environments. Therefore, educators must work together with their students to look at the enculturation present in their worlds, and rethink the definition of text. Rather than stable entities, texts should be viewed as "…plural, open to a number of interpretations. Meanings are not fixed or given, but are released in the process of reading, and criticism is concerned with the range of possible readings," (Belsey, 1980, p. 20).

Literary theory is one of many ways to view literary texts and the multiple contexts at work. Literary theory asks readers to look at

critically important social and political questions: what it means to be human; the

relative worth of boys and girls, men and women, people from various racial,

ethnic, and religious communities; the value of particular kinds of action; how we

relate to one another, and about the nature of community, and so forth. (Taxel,

1992, p. 11)

Through literary theory, teachers and students grow to

acknowledge that texts are *already constructed* by writers who write from a

particular perspective and promote readers to read in particular ways. The

resulting text does not become 'neutral' when it leaves the author's hands; instead

it continues to carry the ideological perspective and weight of the writer as it is

passed from reader to reader. (Jones & Clarke, 2007, p. 100, original emphasis)

This understanding is a vital step towards engaging critically with texts and to be

consciously aware of the ideological perspectives bombarding individuals each day.

In this study, the critical lenses with which students will engage will include

critical multiculturalism, gender, and power. In this study, I will use the terms gender,

power, and multiculturalism, rather than the terms feminism, Marxism, and critical

multiculturalism, to help my students understand more concretely how these lenses shape

our reading of the world around us and the texts presented to us on a daily basis.

Greenbaum's (1999) work finds that using lenses helps students to "find fewer

polarities and more similarities," among groups (p. 98). In this study, the primary texts

used will be fiction and nonfiction novels. These books will be used to "engage …

children in a conversation about one of the basic issues confronting our world today:

whether the lives of certain groups of people are to be valued over those of others…,"

(Taxel, 1992, p. 30). Since there are multiple contexts interacting in the same piece of text, teachers should explicitly work with their students to view literature from more than one competing theory. As Bishop (1992) succinctly states, "no one book can represent the literatures of an entire cultural group," (p. 47).

Explorations and engagements with texts are crucial because even before entering the school environment, children have developed ideas about how the world works, or what Gee (2001) calls "cultural models" and which Kress (1999) terms "shared meanings." Through these cultural models or shared meanings, children understand what counts as normal and what counts as inappropriate, especially with gender roles, at very young ages. However, the same texts that provide opportunities to deconstruct gender, power, and cultural assumptions can also be limiting factors. School-mandated novels and literature selections may, inadvertently or not, present certain worldviews and reinforce the authority of White, middle class, male-dominated, heterosexist power relationships.

In the classroom, children use cultural constructions to name their own and others' identities. One such cultural construction is gender and gendered identities, or what society expresses as to what it means to be female or male. These constructions are not static, nor are they binary relationships. Instead, a more appropriate conceptualization of "doing gender" communicates the complex nature of this work, which is continuously being negotiated, contested, and represented at "levels of the self, the social group, and at more generalized, distant cultural levels," (Anderson, 2002, p. 393). Hinchey (1998) remarks that,

[t]he experience of women is just one area that demonstrates how one group (women) has accepted a value system that grants another group (men) dominance over them. …In American culture, as in many others, men have long held hegemony over women, have long held the position of decision makers who shape events. (p. 20)

Using the critical lens of gender helps students and teachers "…interrupt dominant ways of talking about gender in various texts," (Vasquez, 2004, p. 55). Gender equity asks all individuals to "…challenge familiar stereotypes and even the [gender] boundaries themselves…," (Thorn, 1993, p. 133). To look at gender as a fluid, social organization requires explicit examination and interrogation of the contextual dynamics at play (Thorn, 1993).

The critical lens of power, based on Marxism, brings to light the class inequities present in society. Within our culture, "individuals are differentially enabled to act by virtue of the social, cultural, and institutional possibilities afforded them on the basis of their race, class, gender, and sexual orientation," (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995, p. 6). A Marxist lens looks at the material and economic inequalities at the individual, local, and larger societal levels. By questioning how we name and construct "ourselves as well as others…," we can bring "to visibility and existence that which was formerly hidden or kept silent," (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995, p. 18). In this study, the power lens will look specifically at how various groups divide power inequitably, how societies segregate different groups within the society inequitably, and how various individuals work within those power constraints.

Critical multiculturalism is a lens that asks readers to examine the positions of

privilege that are occupied by those who are not considered people of color. Differences

are not a marker for novelty, and valuing difference must go beyond merely celebrating

heroes and holidays.   When viewed through a multicultural lens, students and teachers

learn how to view "…how different texts offer different perspectives of the world and the

way the world works. …[This examination of texts speaks to the importance of thinking]

about other ways that a text could be written or presented and how the words chosen by

the authors of the text shape the way we think about an issues or topic," (Vasquez, 2004,

p. 115).

As part of the regular curriculum within the English and Language Arts

classroom, all students will be presented with texts with which to view using a variety of

critical lenses. These lenses will include, but are not limited to, gender, power, and

multiculturalism. All students will do work that asks them to read, write, speak, view,

listen, and use drama around texts in ways that encourages engagement on a more critical

level. Additionally, by using the lenses of multiculturalism, power, and gender

simultaneously during the school year, students will be able to explore interconnections

among such issues (Thorn, 2004). With multiple contexts and multiple social

constructions at work, trying to separate out power, cultural, and gender issues from one

another gives the illusion of neatly compartmentalized topics for discussion. In the

classroom, space for dialogue with students will be created in order to fosters a

community that, while respecting the voices of all members, recognizes the

> everyday tension and the regular give and take of conversation between members
>
> of a community who have differential needs, beliefs, patterns of interactions, and

positions of power or status—members who must share certain norms and standards of the classroom culture, but who are themselves participants in cultures beyond the classroom. (Lewis, 2001, p. 14)

It is important to explore the complexities, multiple realities, and shifting identities presented in texts (Bean & Moni, 2003; Harris, 1999; Yenika-Agbaw, 1997).

Novels, presented as whole-class read alouds or small-group literature circles, provide the opportunity for students and teachers to engage the students in constructing knowledge through interaction with the texts and each other (Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers should be aware that curricular or district mandates may place restrictions on the novels that can be presented to students in certain grade levels. However, since all texts are social constructions, students and teachers can analyze how to deconstruct and reconstruct the images and intents presented therein (Vasquez, 2004).

Pedagogically, one framework for using critical literacy in the classroom was developed by Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002), which presents four dimensions of critical literacy based on a synthesis of related literature: "(a) disrupting the commonplace, (b) interrogating multiple viewpoints, (c) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and (d) taking actions and promoting social justice," (p. 382). Bean and Moni (2003) also provide a framework for exploring critical literacy through young adult literature and youth culture. They ask students to consider structural prompts, subject and reader positioning, gaps and silences, and classroom transformations. It is necessary for students to consider the choices made in the creation of texts in order to challenge the readings of those texts, both oral and written. Bean and Moni's (2003) framework uses

prompts to focus discussions of young adult novels, but note that it is not necessary to use every prompt or use the prompts in a particular order. These prompts include:

> Where does the novel come from? (its historical and cultural origin); What social function does the novel serve? (discourse in fictional worlds often mirrors and sheds light on power relationships in society); How does the adult author construct the world of adolescence in the novel? Who is the ideal reader for this novel? How far do you accept this positioning? What other positions might there be for reading this novel? Who gets to speak and have a voice in the novel and who doesn't? What is left out of the novel? (this may include events that take place outside the school); How else might these characters' stories be told? These characters inhabit certain places and spaces where they construct their identities. What alternative places and spaces could be sites for constructing identity? How might we rewrite this novel to deal with gaps and silences? (p. 645)

By utilizing these prompts, teachers and students not only interrogate the assumptions underlying the construction of texts, including popular culture, they also work to recreate those texts and author their own stories. Through this process of authoring, people develop their identities. They take up positions, responding to and co-creating structures of cultural knowledge, and appropriate conventions of meanings—all of which can limit access to certain cultural and social spaces, activities, and resources, as well as providing a venue through which to evaluate themselves and others (Holland, Lachicotte Jr., Skinner, & Cain, 1998). Additionally, by using a variety of groupings, students are given opportunities to position themselves as active meaning constructors. Through collaboration and varying social structures, classroom members are potentially

empowered to transact with other members, different texts, and various stances toward literature, (Bomer, 1995).

Rogers (2002) writes that children need practice to learn to read the silences and absences within texts. This can be done with any text, not just those specifically written with themes of exposing marginalization, silence, and power discourses. Therefore, classrooms should also look at the ways in which popular culture provides sites of struggle, resistance, and social critique in order to "more carefully discern and interact with the messages that bombard them on a daily basis," (Morrell, 2003, pp. 44-45). Critically reading the messages for themselves, students and teachers decide the validity of representations and how they choose to situate themselves socially, culturally, and politically. Morrell (2004) argues that incorporating popular culture into classrooms can not only promote academic achievement and engagement, but also raise critical consciousness. Shannon (2002) also finds that "literacy practices—including media and other artistic endeavors—can engage people in transformative actions," (p. 415). Alvermann and Xu (2003) also state that

> developing students' critical awareness as they read, view, and listen to popular
> culture texts can help them see beyond the more familiar or personal connections
> they have with these texts. It can also lead to a better understanding of how they
> and others are positioned by texts within a variety of contexts. (p. 153)

Another area in which to focus critical literacy is students' written work. What topics are sanctioned, validated, or silenced by the teacher or by the school? Do children have to adopt another persona in order to be successful within the school environment? Jones (2004) argues for the "sanctioning of class-specific topics in the classroom as a

way to validate and value students' lives, rather than creating a disconnect through the silencing of these experiences," (p. 463). Children bring ideas regarding societal conventions to their explorations of the written language (Whitmore et al., 2005). This does not mean writing essays which demonstrate a close reading of texts, but rather writing that encourages students to look at larger social issues, examine competing narratives, and write counternarratives to dominant discourses (Christensen, 1999; Lewison et al., 2002). Fecho (2001) writes that "it is frequently through the writing of stories that people construct understandings that not only deepen and enrich their evolving perspectives but also allow their stories to gain their own textual authority," (p. 19). Through writing, children can take up different stances and "learn to recognize how perspective can mask or expose the social and political assumptions that influence reading and responding to texts," (Pace, 2006, p. 585). Being able to communicate effectively supports critical literacy because purposeful sense-making is crucial to understanding and resisting dominant ideologies present in the world.

This written work can also lead into opportunities for drama and role-playing, in which students can engage in manipulating situations and taking on multiple perspectives (Bean & Moni, 2003). Medina and Campano (2006) also stress the importance of using drama to open up critical spaces in which students can "negotiate diverse perspectives and generate knowledge," (p. 333). As a site for development, Vygotsky (1978) theorizes that play allows children to explore the "what ifs" of their society, thus providing an opportunity to engage in thoughtful participation—learning the norms, and tensions, of their culture. There are different forms of play. For example, play can be similar to the actual roles children see in their community or culture, although play is not

necessarily preparation or a rehearsal for life. Play can be imaginative, where children

create imaginative worlds and situations. Play is about possibilities—possible roles in

possible worlds. Being playful allows children to ritualize and problematize situations; in

other words, to explore and break the rules. Through play, children can questions and

challenge the dominant discourses that adults bring to their world. Dyson (1997) states

that "[p]lay creates a space between child intentions and physical reality and, in this

space, children do not always follow blueprints for cultural action. They improvise and,

in fact, sometimes deliberately violate expectations for certain words and acts just for the

joy of it," (p. 14). Play allows children to satisfy certain needs. Needs, motives,

inclinations, and incentives mature as children age, and it is through these changes that

play becomes a site for development. Vygotsky (1978) states that

> …play creates a zone of proximal development of the child. In play a child
>
> always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behavior; in play it is as
>
> though he were a head taller than himself. As in the focus of a magnifying glass,
>
> play contains all developmental tendencies in a condensed form and is itself a
>
> major source of development. (p. 102)

Through play, students will look at the various positions available to them as readers,

writers, listeners, speakers, and actors individually and in context with others. As Davies

and Harré (1990) state,

> when one is always an open question with a shifting answer depending upon the
>
> positions made available within one's own and others' discursive practices and
>
> within those practices, the stories through which we make sense of our own and
>
> others' lives. (p. 46)

Kress (2001) also notes that through transformative practices, including drama, play, reading, and writing, "we transform the set of resources as we transform ourselves in acts of representation and communication," (p. 407). By exploring various positions, students can see "images, metaphors, story lines and concepts which are made relevant" from new and varied vantage points, as well as the many contradictory positions available to them (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 46). It is these critical practices that allow students to become producers of knowledge, rather than simply passive consumers.

Assessment, however, is constantly on the minds of stakeholders. What defines literate growth? How do we know when change has come about? "What learning opportunities are we missing because my [the teacher's] own questioning has not gone deep enough to recognize injustices that should be addressed?" (Burns, 2004, p. 65). These questions do not have simple answers. Assessment of critical literacy can be gauged as teachers engage in ongoing dialogue with their students and other community members, by working through multiple contexts and perspectives by means of drama and written engagements, and by noticing how students take social action to become free and responsible individuals.

Sociograms are one informal assessment tool, completed by students, for teachers to chart class relationships (Hubbard & Power, 1993). This is helpful in order to understand the peer networks and relationships at work in classrooms and across contexts. By completing sociograms at both the start and end of the school year, educators are able to note any changes in social networks. Sociograms can also reflect the networks in each separate class, and the network that cross among the classes. The social relationship networks may affect class discussions and engagement activities in

terms of topics that are sanctioned, individuals who are sanctioned to take up or resist

topics, and other ways that emerge throughout the school year. Teachers who understand

such relationships can work with their students to name and rename the worlds they

inhabit. This, in turn, can spark transformative stances—reimagining possibilities,

repositioning selves, and discovering how to take up various opportunities for equity and

change.

While it will be difficult, if not impossible, to quantify student progress and

growth as critically literate individuals, teachers can use students' reading and writing to

inform the opportunities they provide in their classrooms. The language students use and

the ways in which they take up or reject certain issues can lead teachers to make

curricular decisions regarding which social justice or equity issues are relevant to this

particular group of students, as well as how to "interrogate, obstruct, contest, and/or

change inequitable situations," (Vasquez, 2004, p. 101).

Risk & Resistance

Engaging in critical literacy is not a quick or easy undertaking. This work is

threatening and uncomfortable to students and teachers. Teachers may feel that the

motivation for implementing a critical literacy curriculum is not worth the risk entailed.

There is a great deal of unpredictability and instability, but that should not prevent this

type of work. Through time and experience, teachers and students can gain fuller

awareness and appreciation of how critical literacy work advances the democratic

principles of participating in societal discourse in order to voice decisions, utilize and

allocate resources, and break down barriers based on discrimination (Edelsky, 2004).

The questioning of beliefs is necessarily complicated and multidimensional, but leads to

either strengthening or changing those beliefs and to then take action based on those revised beliefs (Burns, 2004). If teachers truly want their children to become active agents of positive social change, we must provide opportunities that

The topic of student resistance is a relevant concern when enacting critically literate curricular practices and has been documented by Fecho (2001). In his study of a small learning community of African and Carribean American students located within a larger comprehensive, urban high school. Fecho maintains that "although critical inquiry pedagogy exacerbates feelings of threat, it also allows for the transcendence of threat," (p. 9). Pace (2006) also found cases of resistance in her study of two female students in a college writing-about-literature class as they moved from initial responses of texts to interpretations informed by private journal responses, class discussions, and the production of analytic essays. From her study, Pace suggests

> that interpretive communities can conserve social norms and suppress critical literacies. When resistant stances to dominant ideologies are tenuous, as they often are, they may be easily abandoned if they are not privileged in community processes. ...Thus, even when teachers invite students to interrogate the status quo by assigning texts that offer diverse perspectives, students may not respond publicly to that invitation. ... The corrosive effects of recognizing cultural inequities and then suppressing that recognition may be one mechanism that alienates students from school literacies and supports the persistence of hegemonic structures. (p. 591-592)

So how do teachers and students transcend this threat? Students are "at home" in their world of predetermined roles and readings. Topics which appear to be "difficult" or

"uncomfortable" may garner silence rather than debate, deconstruction, and dialogue (Rogers, 2007). They have difficulty, at first, deconstructing the taken-for-granted assumptions of their society. They are often confused about how a discussion can move from "Who is the narrator of this story? How do we know?" to "How are girls' and boys' identities constructed through language in the text?" They may complain that all the questioning makes their heads swim, but future discussions have more depth as they read into how the stories of their lives are constructed. It is therefore crucial that teachers make their classrooms "safe." This safety may take on different meanings depending on geography, population, and previous work with critical literacy. However, as with the notion of community, safety can take on a naïve idealization. Hynds (1997) suggests providing students with the opportunity to form "coalitions," smaller groups chosen based on comfort level and affinity for collaborative work (p. 265). Children must be given space to explore, argue, listen, debate, expand on their opinions and those of their classmates, and take risks in their thinking and learning (Beck, 2005; Comber & Nixon, 1999; Singer & Shagoury, 2005). It is a slow and ongoing process to build communities of learners (large group, small group, or individual) who constantly work to negotiate meanings in their world. It takes modeling of clear expectations, encouraging all students to participate in ways that feel safe to themselves, and celebrating the work of all students. "What is needed...is an opportunity for students to challenge their assumptions, broaden their belief systems, and develop more complex understanding of literacy, diversity, and schooling," (Rogers, Marshall, & Tyson, 2006, p. 221).

Parents and administrators can also feel threatened when teachers and students explore issues of critical literacy. They could potentially ask "What if someone gets

offended?" or say "I don't want my child exposed to these types of issues" or even "I don't think my child will like that. It will make them uncomfortable." These are authentic and valid concerns. It is the responsibility of teachers to involve parents and administrators in shared decision-making. By opening up dialogue with stakeholders, such as parents and administrators, and inquiring into their concerns, teachers have the opportunity to demonstrate how negotiation of multiple viewpoints takes place in critical literacy classrooms. This dialogue should be ongoing, however, to continue to reconstruct how school systems create spaces for critical literacy. It is important to persist in working to challenge the hegemonic discourses so that tolerating threat does not happen at the expense of excluding some (Fecho, 2001).

Students as Co-Researchers

Using students as co-researchers has the potential to increase their "empowerment and efficacy" as well as reinforces the "subjective and constructed nature of knowledge," (Parsons, 2006, p. 493). This methodology is similar to Participatory Action Research, in which there is a collective commitment to investigating a problem or issue, the desire to either collectively or individually engage in self-reflective processes, and the emergence of clarity regarding the problem or issue under consideration (McIntyre, 2000). Oldfather (1995) states that when students are research partners, ideas about what counts as knowledge, whose knowledge counts, how learning environments are constructed, and questions of learning are changed. Similarly, Clark and Moss (1996) write that when students are engaged as more than just simply research informants, "they are, themselves, engaged in a project that revolves around purposeful, meaningful literacy activity," (p. 521). Fecho (1998) also noted the importance of establishing students as researchers. He

found that by engaging his urban adolescent students in researching "questions of language and its relation to race and access to mainstream power," a partnership developed that led to a classroom full of "individual inquiries into the nature of language" within his students' lives and continued to impact his own teaching long after the students departed from school (p. 97).

> Hynds (1997) states that an ongoing concern for researchers and educators is to challenge ourselves to discover which students linger on the borders of our classrooms.…We must oppose bigotry in all forms, while still caring for our students who have fallen victim to its invidious appeal. We also must recognize what so many young people today know: that the deck is stacked against them in ways that adopting a more mainstream language or developing more middle class literate behaviors cannot begin to ameliorate. (p. 270)

More research is also needed with children as the mentors to both preservice and inservice educators (Wolf, 2001). We must co-construct our knowledge through dialogic interaction to learn how our students, and ourselves, "can become decision makers regarding what resources and tools will best help them to engage in meaningful work," (Van Sluys & Reinier, 2006, p. 322). Children come into classrooms with diverse funds of knowledge—linguistic and literacy experiences and resources (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005), and acting as co-researchers with their teachers helps transform their worlds and further the literate journeys of all.

Filling in the Gaps

Many teachers and researchers have done work to demonstrate how critical literacy can work within classrooms of all age and ability levels. Bean and Moni (2003), Beck (2005), Hynds (1997), Jewett and Smith (2003), Morrell (2004), and Van Sluys and Reinier (2006), to name a very brief few, outline methodologies, provide transcripts of literacy events, detail the strengths and problems of lessons and activities, and give lists of children's and young adult literature and popular culture media that can aid in the exploration of critical inquiry. Younger children, with fewer limitations to their imagination and more freedoms from the constraints of the school or classroom environment, may show more acceptance towards the ideas of critical literacy and may also more freely take part in play that allows them to try on different positions. Older students, such as those in high school, may also be more open to exploring issues of gender and sexual identity equity, privilege and fairness issues, and conflicting viewpoints. Due to coursework that challenges this group of students to push beyond mainstream understandings of curricular content, there may be less resistance when engaging in critical literacy activities. Middle school students, sixth graders in particular, pose an interesting challenge for teachers attempting to move their curriculum towards critical literacy. With the understanding of established school and classroom routines, sixth grade students are very conscious about being perceived by teachers and peers as "successful" students. For most students, this act of procedural display, defined by Bloome, Puro, and Theodorou (1989 as

> …(a) the display by teacher and students, to each other, of a set of academic and
> interactional procedures that themselves count as the accomplishment of a lesson,

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and (b) the enactment of lesson is not necessarily related to the acquisition of

intended academic or nonacademic content or skills but is related to the set of

cultural meanings and values held by the local education community for

classroom education, (p. 272)

creates an environment that limits their capacity to truly "buy in" to critical literacy

concepts and may result in various forms of resistance within the classroom. While

certainly a complication to enacting a critical literacy curriculum, it should not deter

educators from engaging in critically literate practices. This study seeks to explore how,

if at all, acts of procedural display impact student behavior, attitudes, and action towards

critical literacy elements within the English and Language Arts curriculum and how

procedural display may or may impose limitations to critical literacy endeavors.

In addition, little research has been done to explore how students work with

teachers together to remake curricular activities, thus giving them the opportunity to give

their voice over the meaning that they are making, as well as providing me an insight into

what they

are putting their energy into, they ways in which they are approaching

knowledge of the world…; at the same time, it gives us [teachers and

researchers] a way to explore the patterns and assumptions that formed the

structure and content of …[one's] own teaching. (Ballenger, 1999, p. 14)

In this study, students will have space to discuss the in-class experiences with

critical lenses and classroom literacy engagements in order to further explore the social

structures, topical uptake, topical resistance, and equity issues presented. In addition,

students who participate as members of the Literacy Research Club will engage in

discussions to explore the perceptions, attitudes, and motivation of those students regarding the critical literacy activities completed within the English and Language Arts classroom.

Lastly, this study aims to provide teachers with the pedagogical tools, and underlying theory, with which to enact a critical literacy curriculum in their own classrooms. The limitations and constraints that will certainly unfold throughout the course of this study are those that are likely to be encountered in other classrooms, regardless of grade level or subject area. By providing thick description of teacher and student actions and reactions, other educators may anticipate the constraints and opportunities present in their own settings, thus making more informed decisions about curricular choices.

Summary

In this chapter, I have attempted to show that the definition of critical literacy is a fluid and dynamic, constantly changing to fit the social, political, and economic contexts, and the interplay of those contexts. I explored research related to the central tenets of this study, including approaches to enacting a critical literacy curriculum and research on utilizing students as co-researchers. My goal in this chapter was to build a case for the role my study will have in filling gaps that exist in the research.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter is divided into five sections. In this first section, the research

methods are discussed. The second section sets the stage for the context of the study,

providing a rationale for the selection of the site and participants. In the third section I

will discuss the collection of data, including the data collection procedures and the role of

the researcher. Data analysis procedures will be discussed in the fourth section. Finally,

the fifth section will address issues related to the ethics of the study, specifically

trustworthiness and transferability.

Research Methods

As a teacher-researcher utilizing an ethnographic case study approach, this study

attempts to "place specific encounters, events, and understandings into a fuller, more

meaningful context," (Tedlock, 2000, p. 455). Additionally, Dyson and Genishi (2005)

write that the case study researcher "uses particular methods of observation and analysis

to understand *others'* understandings (their sense of what's happening and, therefore,

what's relevant) and the processes through which they enact language and literacy

education," (p. 12, original emphasis). The use of case study in conjunction with ethnographic methods allows for teacher-researchers to re-envision curriculum in order to explore a "clash of cultures," (Applebee, 1997, p. 28), through conversation and the tradition of knowledge-in-action. As they are helped, by their teacher and peers, into curricular conversations, student engagement and negotiation moves them beyond reading comprehension and extension activities, thus facilitating the "...demonstrat[ion of] an understanding of the world as a set of related systems and analy[z]ing the causes and effects of power relationships within groups in the immediate community, the larger community, and the world," (Creighton, 1997, p. 442). Case study with ethnographic methods for this project fit meaningfully together as I work to create prolonged interactions in which to explore, negotiated, contest, reshape, and reset the social boundaries of race, class, and gender.

Context of the Study

The research site for this study involved a classroom at the suburban middle school where I taught. The context of the study was a sixth grade English and Language Arts classroom in which I was the instructor. This section will describe the research site, justify the choice of the context in which the study was conducted, and discuss issues of access and selection.

Choice of Research Site

The site selected for this study is a suburban middle school in southwestern Ohio. According to 2005-2006 district data, the total enrollment for the school district is 7478 with a graduation rate of 99.4% and an attendance rate of 94.9%. Based on the state

report card, the district is rated as "Excellent," based on the state rating system which designates school districts as excellent, effective, continuous improvement, academic watch, or academic emergency. The ethnic composition for the district is 93.1% white, 3.1% African American, 2.1% multi-racial, 1.47% Asian, 1.3% Hispanic, and 0.29% American Indian. 25.6% of the students are economically disadvantaged and 15.2% are students identified with disabilities.

The specific middle school selected for the research comprises grades six through eight and serves 679 students. The student population for this school is made up of 90.3% white, 3.7% multi-racial, and 3.4% African American. 23.5% of the students in the school are identified as economically disadvantaged, and 14.6% are students with disabilities. The school also has a rating of "excellent" on the state's rating scale. Site selection was heavily influenced by the fact that I am assigned to the building as a sixth grade English and Language Arts teacher.

Choice of Research Context

For several years I have taught sixth-grade students in a full-year English and Language Arts course. Students met with me daily for a block of two periods, approximately 90 minutes, or a single period, approximately 45 minutes for instruction in reading and writing. The curriculum has been developed by the school district to align with the state's Academic Content Standards. Course assignments, readings, and activities were designed to increase students' ability to decode and understand both fiction and nonfiction texts, as well as to develop their written expression skills. The students also received preparation for the state Achievement Test given each spring.

While teaching in this setting, I came to realize that my desire to enact a curriculum of critical literacy while balancing the demands of an already rigorous English and Language Arts curriculum would be a very challenging endeavor, beginning with the personal and curricular interrogation, previously discussed in chapter 2. Therefore, this classroom was an appropriate context to address the research questions because of the daily contact with my students and the ability to construct units to explicitly engage in issues of critical literacy. This ongoing classroom presence also afforded the opportunity to meet with students to discuss and plan future critical literacy explorations. This was also an appropriate context in which to observe and assess student perceptions, behaviors, and potential growth as critical consumers and creators of their worlds. As the classroom teacher, I was able to plan instruction to develop students' critical literacy knowledge, understanding, and application of critical literacy behaviors. Additionally, as the classroom teacher, this was an appropriate setting in which to explore how utilizing students as co-researchers could shape and remake curriculum, thus creating space for cultural production, rather than continuing to engage in cultural reproduction.

Gaining Entrance

In August 2006, I spoke with the principal of the suburban middle school about the possibility of conducting research related to co-constructing a curriculum of critical literacy in my English and Language Arts classroom during the 2006-2007 school year. He agreed to let me incorporate critical literacy activities and engagements into my teaching, with the stipulation that I must continue to adhere to the state Academic Content Standards and Grade Level Indicators in order to prepare my students for the state Achievement Test. He gave his full support to this study and was interested to see

how I was able to use a curriculum of critical literacy to differentiate instruction within the English and Language Arts classroom.

As the instructor for this course, I had daily access to the students and ongoing opportunities to plan instruction. I sent home an informational letter at the beginning of the school year outlining the novels to be read aloud, writing pieces, writer's notebook activities, and that our activities would also focus on critical literacy skills in order to look at issues in our books and world more deeply, and use the higher-order thinking skills of analyzing and evaluating their reading and writing engagements. This first informational letter also stated that a second letter would be sent home after IRB approval was received in order to better explain the Literacy Research Club and data collection procedures, along with a parental permission form. Both informational letters stated that any student participation in the study was voluntary and that the students could stop their participation at any time, with penalty to their grade or their standing in my class.

All 76 students enrolled in my class were given instruction using critical literacy as part of the regular English and Language Arts curriculum, but 33 (16 boys, 17 girls) were given parental permission to be interviewed and have their work samples analyzed. This became my data pool from which to examine trends, patterns, and outliers within oral and written responses. Each of the 76 students also had the opportunity to self-nominate into the Literacy Research Club. This group was to meet bi-weekly from April through June, excluding school breaks and field trips, during their scheduled lunch and activity period (approximately 40 minutes). The three students who consistently participated in the Literacy Research Club also received parental permission forms, and these students became the cases for this study.

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Time Period	Event
September 2006	Begin documentation (observations and field notes) in research journal regarding design and implementation of a year-long critical literacy curriculum
February 2007	Collect work samples for analysis
March 2007-June 2007	Literacy Research Club (LRC) begins meeting bi-weekly Audio-tape LRC meetings and transcriptions of discussions Collect work samples for analysis Audio-tape classroom literature circle discussions and transcriptions
June 2007-December 2007	Analyze data

Table 3.1: Data collection schedule

Participants

Student Participants

As part of the regular curriculum within the English and Language Arts

classroom, all 76 students (38 girls, 35 boys) were presented with texts with which to

view using a variety of critical lenses. These lenses included feminism, Marxism, and

critical multiculturalism. All of the students participated in work that asked them to read,

write, speak, view, listen, and use drama around texts in ways that encourages

engagement on a more critical level. Space for dialogue with students was created in

order to foster a community that, while respecting the voices of all members, recognizes

the

> everyday tension and the regular give and take of conversation between
>
> members of a community who have differential needs, beliefs, patterns of
>
> interactions, and positions of power or status—members who must share

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certain norms and standards of the classroom culture, but who are

themselves participants in cultures beyond the classroom. (Lewis, 2001,

p. 14)

During class activities, the entire class also explored the complexities, multiples realities,

and shifting identities presented in texts (Bean & Moni, 2003; Harris, 1999; Yenika-

Agbaw, 1997). Rogers (2002) writes that children need practice to learn to read the

silences and absences within texts. We also looked at how popular culture provides sites

of struggle, resistance, and social critique in order to "more carefully discern and interact

with the messages that bombard them on a daily basis," (Morrell, 2003, pp. 44-45).

Students were exposed to a variety of group work: individual work, partner work,

smaller peer-led discussion groups, and whole class discussions. These various

groupings were designed to reinforce the transactional and social nature of literacy.

Bomer (1995) states,

A reading is not a static artifact but a dynamic event in time…To any reading

event, the reader must bring knowledge from a wide range of sources, including

personal life experience, experiences with other texts, personality, culture, values,

the context in which the text is read and the political relationships of the people

involved, and the reader's purpose and projects. …Each of these contributing

agents brings pressure to bear on the reading event, and the meaning of the event

is determined by the exact way they come together. (p. 97)

Thus, to develop students' ability to read, write, and respond as critically literate

individuals, multiple groupings combined with multiple texts and lenses were crucial in

this study. To further assist and analyze this development, which will be examined in

Chapter 4, the peer-led literature circle discussions were audio-taped and student work was collected, not only for comparison among groups but also within groups.

Work samples from all classroom members were collected and analyzed by myself to look for patterns and themes. These work samples had student names removed when used for analysis purposes. Student literature circle discussions will be audio-taped at least once during each group's literature circle meetings. These tapes reviewed by the students for accuracy of content, and transcribed myself and an assistant. Student identities were protected by using pseudonyms on all transcriptions and work samples. For students who were not permitted to be audio-taped, they were still able to participate in the small-group discussions and engagements, but their voices were removed from the transcripts. Informational letters outlining this aspect of the ongoing, daily classroom activities were sent home to parents and guardians for their signatures to verify that they have read and understand the letter. In addition, permission for audio-taping students was requested on this letter, as well as contact information provided for parents and guardians who would like to ask any questions regarding the project. As the students participated in member-checks for audio-tape transcriptions, they are given voice over the meaning that they are making, as well as providing me an insight into what they

> are putting their energy into, they ways in which they are approaching
> knowledge of the world…; at the same time, it gives us [teachers and
> researchers] a way to explore the patterns and assumptions that formed the
> structure and content of …[my] own teaching. (Ballenger, 1999, p. 14)

Sixth-grade students from three English and Language Arts classes were given the opportunity to self-nominate into a research group. Students who viewed themselves as

engaged and motivated literacy learners were able to complete an application form, developed by the teacher (see Appendix A), and then submit it within one week. Once all applications were collected, I had the chance to review and select no more than fifteen students who make up a representative sample of gender, ability levels, race, and socioeconomic status. The selected students were then given consent forms for their parents and guardians in order to describe the purpose and methods of the study, to demonstrate that their children will not be harmed (physically, socially, academically, emotionally) as they participate in the study, and to inform the parents, guardians, and students that they may choose to stop their participation at any time. From this group of participants, I also looked for student cases that could supplement my own case study of teaching practices. As a system, with complexities and situated contexts, these cases may be telling or discrepant, and thus add layers of comparison to how students experience a critical literacy curriculum (Stake, 2000).

The Literacy Research Club had set meetings during the students' lunch period, approximately 40 minutes in length, twice weekly. During these meetings, students had the opportunity to discuss the in-class experiences with critical lenses. These discussions were audio-taped, then transcribed and checked by myself and the club members for accuracy.

Using students as co-researchers has the potential to increase their "empowerment and efficacy" as well as reinforces the "subjective and constructed nature of knowledge," (Parsons, 2006, p. 493). This methodology is similar to Participatory Action Research, in which there is a collective commitment to investigating a problem or issue, the desire to either collectively or individually engage in self-reflective processes, and the emergence

of clarity regarding the problem or issue under consideration (McIntyre, 2000). Oldfather (1995) states that when students are research partners, ideas about what counts as knowledge, whose knowledge counts, how learning environments are constructed, and questions of learning are changed. Similarly, Clark and Moss (1996) write that when students are engaged as more than just simply research informants, "they are, themselves, engaged in a project that revolves around purposeful, meaningful literacy activity," (p. 521). By continuing to raise the "student voice" (Clark & Moss, 1996, p. 545), this study seeks to add to the body of work utilizing students as co-researchers and validate their position as individuals who have knowledge, who negotiate that knowledge, who generate new knowledge, and who challenge and evaluate that knowledge.

Data Collection

All data (including tapes, field notes, and work samples) were stored in my classroom in a locked cupboard when at school, and stored in a locked closet at my home. Data were also stored on my computer and backed up on a flash drive, both protected with passwords. Data were stored on my computer and flash drive during data collection, data analysis, and the writing of the dissertation. Following the completion of the study, the data will be password protected on my computer and flash drive. The research questions addressed are presented in Table 3.2 along with the data collected for each:

Research Question	Data
1. Describe and explore the methods and constraints of enacting a critical literacy curriculum within a middle school context.	- Observation - Field notes - Class assignments and activities
2. How do middle school students respond to and engage with critical literacy within the English and Language Arts classroom? a) How do the students feel about their experiences with critical literacy?	- Observation - Field notes - Class assignments and activities - Sociograms - Work samples

b) What are the varying positions that students can take up as readers, writers, listeners, speakers, and actors in the English and Language Arts classroom? When and under what conditions are those positions available? c) How do critical literacy experiences and activities presented in the English and Language Arts classroom enhance the students' notions of literacy and enable them to acquire critical literacy tools?	• Exit slips • Audio-tape literature circle discussions and Literacy Research Club meetings
3. How do students as co-researchers co-analyze and co-construct critical literacy activities and engagements within the English and Language Arts classroom? a) How do students actively engage in remaking the curriculum to reflect cultural production rather than cultural reproduction? b) What key issues emerge from the Literacy Research Club meetings that are then filtered back to larger English and Language Arts classes for discussion, debate, and analysis?	• Observation • Field notes • Class assignments and activities • Work samples • Exit slips • Audio-tape literature circle discussions and Literacy Research Club meetings

Table 3.2: Types of data collected for each research question.

Classroom Observation

Using observation as a main tool for data collection was taken from the field of

ethnography. Ethnographers use observation to provide thick description which lends

meaning to the words and behaviors of subjects (Angrosino & Pérez, 2000). In this

study, observation was ongoing. As the classroom teacher, I had daily access to the

classroom environment and students. I used observation as a tool to watch how students

behaved in the classroom in regards to whole-class engagements, activities, read-aloud

novels, small-group literature circle discussions, and student interactions in both large-

and small-groups. I also used observation in the Literacy Research Club meetings to note

student-teacher interactions and student-student interactions and behaviors. Data from

observations were used in conjunction with field notes and student work samples,

including class assignments, activities, and exit slips, in order to further understand

student interactions, in addition to oral and written responses to critical literacy activities.

Field Notes

Field notes were used to record my classroom observations and perceptions

regarding the research questions, as well as student behaviors and comments in the

English and Language Arts classroom. Field notes were made at least once a week in my

research journal. Field notes were reviewed periodically to note themes, patterns,

personal reflections, questions, and ideas for future critical literacy activities.

Class Assignments & Activities

Class activities were designed with a focus on bringing to the fore issues of equity

in society and in texts. These activities included writer's notebook entries, journal

entries, extended response questions, symbolic representations, and literature circle

critical lens activities. Activities and assignments were ongoing throughout the 2006-

2007 school year in order to develop a language and attitude of critique, and to inform all

research questions.

Sociograms

Sociograms were compiled by students (see Appendix B) in each of my three

English and Language Arts classes in order to chart the student relationships within the

classroom (Hubbard & Power, 1993). This was to help me understand the peer networks

and relationships at work in my classroom and across contexts. I analyzed the

sociograms to note patterns of leadership, turn-taking behavior, and the sanctioning or silencing of topics within the large- and small-group class discussions.

Student Work Samples

Student work samples were collected from February 1, 2007 until June 5, 2007. The work samples were photocopied from the originals and had all identifying information removed. Samples were categorized by date and read-aloud unit. Student work samples were primarily used to gather information regarding research questions 1 and 2a-c, but also informed the Literacy Research Club meeting discussions and thus were also used to explore research questions 3a-b.

Student Exit Slips

Exit slips were another form of student work samples collected periodically from February 1, 2007 until June 5, 2007. Exit slips were written on 3" x 5" index cards or pieces of loose-leaf paper, and were typically completed at the end of a class session, and were collected by myself as the students exited the classroom. The exit slips were used to inform research question numbers 1, 2a, and 2c.

Literature Circle Discussions

Data from literature circle discussions were gathered through the use of audio-taping and work sample collection. Each small group had a common Holocaust-themed book, and would meet every few days within a four-week period to discuss what was read. In order to facilitate the discussions, the students completed a "Lens Sheet" (see Appendix C for Lens Sheets) to share their ideas and perspectives about gender, power, and cultural positions and roles within their books. Time was given in English and Language Arts class for the reading of the literature circle books, to complete Lens

Sheets, and for group discussions. At the end of the literature circle unit, students also completed a "Reflection Sheet" (see Appendix D for the Literature Circle Reflection Sheet) which detailed their experiences in their groups and developing understanding of the different positions available within the world and within the texts. The literature circle data was used to inform research questions 1 and2a-c.

Literacy Research Club Discussions

Data were collected during Literacy Research Club meetings through audio-taped discussions and field notes. During the 40-minute lunch period, the participants spent the first half of the meeting talking about topics of their choice, and the tape recorder was not recording. The second half of the meeting was focused on the specific research questions of the study, and the discussions were tape recorded. After each meeting, I would make field notes of my own observations and reflections, and make note of any key issues which emerged from the discussion. Data from Literacy Research Club meetings were used to specifically gain information on utilizing students as co-researchers (research questions 3a-b), but was also used to inform classroom assignments and activities and the design of a critical literacy curriculum, and therefore also informed all research questions for this study.

Role of the Researcher

I took on the role of participant-observer in this case study utilizing ethnographic methods. As the classroom teacher, I prepared and presented lessons to my English and Language Arts students that aligned with the state Academic Content Standards and that provided my students the opportunity to engage critically with the texts in their worlds. I

also documented my own teaching practices throughout the school year, reflections on those practices, as well as reflections on my changing roles as classroom teacher, Literacy Research Club member, observer, and researcher (Dyson & Genishi, 2005).

During the initial Literacy Research Club meetings, I needed to create an atmosphere among the club members that encourages and fosters the sharing of ideas, critiquing others in a positive manner, values multiple forms of representation, and encourages cooperation but not necessarily consensus. Since I was also the classroom teacher, I needed to be cautious in the club meetings that the students not view me as the leader or the agenda-setter. I also had to be cautious to make sure that another student does not step in to fill the role as "teacher." Instead, the leadership roles should rotate among all the club members based on perceptions of personal or topical expertise. These leadership roles may also prove to be grounds for investigating how roles are negotiated, contested, or resisted based on gender, social status, or ethnic background.

As a participant-observer, I kept a research journal to record my observations, field notes, analytical memos based on the transactions within the classroom environment and at the Literacy Research Club meetings, and personal reflections on my own positions and experiences which may influence my data collection and analyses (Hartman, 2006). In order to be self-reflexive, I reflected on my own cultural ideologies and assumptions, interrogating and revising my own long-held beliefs (Lewison et al., 2002). I define self-reflexive here as bringing to light personal biases, including points of view used and suppressed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). For example, what curriculum practices and teaching practices have been privileged in my classroom? What counts as literacy? What uses of language are sanctioned? What are the roles available in the

classroom for me and my students? (Singer & Shagoury, 2005). How am I working to

expose to the notion that "all texts represent particular cultural positions and discourses,

[and that we must be] aware of how texts (and how we are taught to read them) construct

us as particular kinds of literate beings," (Leland & Hartse, 2000, p. 3)? What is it like to

move away from right answers and tidy conclusions? How do I transform my classroom

into a space that reflects cultural criticism, defined by Ketter and Lewis (2001) as

"promot[ing] an awareness of systematic inequities that show experiences to be anything

but universal?" (p. 179). Bloome and Egan-Robertson's (1998) definition of research

also provides a helpful context for self-reflexivity:

> Research requires the generation of new knowledge and the production of
>
> new texts through which the new knowledge is shared. Research also
>
> requires a new "looking," a new search: Familiar phenomena viewed and
>
> understood in a new way, and unfamiliar phenomena newly encountered
>
> and understood both on their own terms and in familiar terms. Research
>
> involves a search and an understanding that is systematic, based on a
>
> history of thought about principles of inquiry and how they are related to
>
> various types of knowledge. And, in the sense of looking for alternative
>
> explanations and counter-evidence, inquiry is only research when it is
>
> rigorous and self-skeptical. (p. xii)

Data Analysis

Data analysis was ongoing throughout the study. I analyzed student work

samples and exit slips as they were collected. Field notes and observations were

reviewed to explore themes, patterns, and issues emerging from the data. The goal of the data analysis was to develop a grounded theory of enacting a critical literacy curriculum in a sixth grade English and Language Arts classroom, and to explore the development of student awareness of critical perspectives and positions.

Data Analysis for Research Question #1

The first research question stated:

1. Describe and explore the methods for enacting a critical literacy curriculum within a middle school context.

In describing and exploring the methods for enacting a critical literacy curriculum within a middle school context, I relied heavily on my own observations and field notes. These data were reviewed to construct a timeline of classroom assignments and activities, and to note patterns of critical literacy exploration. By comparing the assignments and activities that were completed during each read-aloud unit, I was able to prepare assignments and activities that scaffolded student understanding throughout the school year (Vygotsky, 1978). This comparison of my teaching practices enabled me to explore equity-related themes, patterns, and issues arising from class discussions and activities, and also allowed me to gradually build more opportunities into the English and Language Arts curriculum for students to extend their understandings of equity, injustice, and taken-for-granted assumptions in our world.

Data Analysis for Research Question #2

The second research question, and its sub-questions, stated:

2. How do middle school students respond to and engage with critical literacy within the English and Language Arts classroom?

a) How do the students feel about their experiences with critical literacy?

b) What are the varying positions that students can take up as readers, writers, listeners, speakers, and actors in the English and Language Arts classroom? When and under what conditions are those positions available?

c) How do critical literacy experiences and activities presented in the English and Language Arts classroom enhance the students' notions of literacy and enable them to acquire critical literacy tools?

Informing all parts of question two, the broad categories that emerged were language use, power relationships, resistance to critical literacy, acceptance of critical literacy, cultural production, cultural reproduction, and critiquing the "norm."

Categories of Student Reactions (with Abbreviations)
Language Use (LU)
• Reading Written Statements (RWS)
• Questioning Text (QT)
• Questioning Peers (QP)
• Collaborating (CB)
• Clarifying Statements (CS)
• Analyzing Text/Lens Sheet Statements (AS)
• Evaluating Text/Lens Sheet Statements (ES)
Power Relationships (PR)
Resistance to Critical Literacy (RCL)
Acceptance of Critical Literacy (ACL)
Cultural Production (CP)
Cultural Reproduction (CR)
Critiquing the "Norm" (CN)

Table 3.3: Categories of student reactions to critical literacy activities and experiences

Within the broad category of language use, several codes emerged from reviewing the literature circle transcripts: reading through role sheet statements, questioning the

text or other group members, collaborating with group members to resolve questions, clarifying statements, analyzing the text or lens sheet statements, and evaluating the text or lens sheet statements. These codes (see Table 3.3) were used to examine how literacy, viewed as a social and transactional practice, was made visible through small, student-led discussion groups. Language was the medium through which information was shared among group members and students engaged in knowledge construction, and therefore became a key category for use in this study. Through the varying of group size and the use of modalities such as verbal language, written language, and visual images, students' meaning making processes became visible in ways that would not have been possible with use of only one modality or only one type of group interaction.

Data Analysis for Research Question #3

The third research question, and its sub-questions, stated:

3. How do students as co-researchers co-analyze and co-construct critical literacy activities and engagements within the English and Language Arts classroom?

   a) How do students actively engage in remaking the curriculum to reflect cultural production rather than cultural reproduction?

   b) What key issues emerge from the Literacy Research Club meetings that are then filtered back to larger English and Language Arts classes for discussion, debate, and analysis?

To analyze the data for all parts of research question three, I focused specifically on the transcripts of the Literacy Research Club meetings and my observation journal entries. Again, the codes of language use were used when reviewing LRC meeting transcripts (see Table 3.3). Using the same codes with all group transcripts enabled me to

explore the patterns of interaction among the LRC members, topical issues raised, and student perspectives toward critical literacy engagements.

Trustworthiness and Transferability

As part of this research process, several steps were taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. The data collection for this study took place over a 9-month period. For the first 4 months, I documented my observations and plans for enacting an English and Language Arts curriculum built around critical literacy, and kept records of the class assignments and activities that were conducted. During the second 4 months, I collected student work samples, student exit slips, met with the Literacy Research Club, and audio-taped the students' literature circle discussions. Collecting data over a 9-month period resulted in numerous literature circle discussion transcripts, hundreds of work samples, and seven Literacy Research Club meeting transcripts.

Triangulation

Birnbaum, Emig, and Fisher (2003) state that to achieve triangulation "researchers use multiple perceptions to clarify meanings," (p. 193). In this study, triangulation of data was conducted by gathering student work samples, transcriptions of audio-taped discussions, and through personal research journal entries.

Member Checks

Member checks were conducted to ensure data validity as data were collected, transcribed, and analyzed. All student participants were able to add or delete information from their work samples before turning it in, and they were also able to listen to their audio-taped recordings and rerecord any areas in which they felt more clarification was

needed. Student participants were also given the opportunity to provide me with feedback regarding their taped conversations and the meaning I was making from the tapes during analysis. The students were able to give explanations and provide insight to their comments, thus confirming my hunches or causing me to reformulate my ideas. This feedback provided yet another method for utilizing the student participants as co-constructors of their curriculum.

Transferability

By making my process of collection, analysis, and presentation of the data visible throughout this chapter, and through the measures presented that increased the trustworthiness of my findings, the reader may determine the extent to which the theories I have formed will apply to other situations. As Dyson and Genishi (2005) state, case study research looks at "meaning perspectives and contexts," (p. 11) and therefore do not offer prescriptive methods that will work in all situations. Due to the detailed exploration of a case, however, this type of research can provide readers with "what is common as well as what is unique about the case," and therefore readers can look at the multiple contexts and dimensions presented within to find transfer opportunities in their own situations (Birnbaum, Emig, & Fisher, 2003, p. 193). It is the intent of this study to add to and refine our understandings of an English and Language Arts curriculum built on critical literacy, and in light of the particularities of this study, how student perceptions and participation within this curriculum are dynamic processes.

As the research process came to an end, I made decisions about how to share the report. In order to show the complexities of co-constructing and enacting a curriculum built around the tenets of critical literacy, and since my role was that of a participant-

observer, I have chosen to write this dissertation in the first person. This is to communicate to readers that I was intimately involved in all aspects of the research process.

Summary

The purpose of my study was to describe and explore the methods used for enacting a curriculum of critical literacy within the middle school context. In this chapter, I have presented the methodology used to gather and analyze the data for this study, as well as the research context. Embedded within was the purpose to examine student positions and perspectives as they were introduced to critical literacy engagements and to explore shifting ideas regarding equity as the school year progressed. In addition, using students as co-researchers added a deeper layer of ownership to the critical literacy curriculum with participants collaborating to develop new activities.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Introduction

The purpose of my study was to explore and describe the teaching methods used

to present critical literacy stances to sixth-grade English and Language Arts students, as

well as the constraints encountered during such explorations. Class discussions and

teacher-driven instruction provided students with the tools through which to examine the

ways texts can be used and interpreted. Ethnographic methods were used to provide

thick description of the teaching methods as well as to capture student perspectives in the

classroom. Critical literacy was operationalized in this study through the use of various

lenses through which students and teachers could engage in ongoing dialogues to name,

question, and reimagine the discourses surrounding issues of racism, gender bias,

exclusion, and equity. The specific lenses used in this study were multiculturalism,

power, and gender. In addition, further examination of these critical literacy practices

was enhanced by utilizing students as co-researchers both inside and outside the English

and Language Arts classroom. As stated in previous chapters, three research questions,

with sub-questions, formed the basis for my inquiry. To address question one, I

documented my teaching practices and classroom assignments and activities throughout

the 2006-2007 school year, then coded the data for examples of positive or negative language use, resistance to critical literacy, acceptance of critical literacy, critiquing the "norm," power relationships, cultural production, and cultural reproduction.   I then coded the data for themes and patterns in the student work samples, transcriptions of class literature circle discussions, and my own observations, thus responding to question two. To respond to question three, I coded transcripts of Literacy Research Club meetings and compared the codes from transcripts of classroom literature circle discussions in order to find areas that demonstrated areas of cultural production or cultural reproduction.

The results of the data analysis for each question will be presented separately. The data analysis for questions two and three will be presented using the four separate cases outlined in the following section of this chapter. By presenting the data surrounding my own enactment of a critical literacy curriculum first, and then presenting the data on a case-by-case basis, I hope to tell the story of each class as revealed in the data in a detailed manner, and then tie these understandings together through the analysis of the cases and highlighting themes that emerged.

Enacting a Curriculum of Critical Literacy in a Sixth Grade English and Language Arts Classroom

In the following sections, the methods for enacting a critical literacy curriculum within a middle school context will be described. First, I will outline the specific practices, classroom activities and engagements, and observations regarding the developing and enacting a curriculum of critical literacy in my sixth grade English and

Language Arts classroom implementation of this curriculum. Next, I will examine the

four specific cases that emerged during this study. Finally, I will highlight the themes

that surfaced from this year-long study.

Curriculum and Classroom Activities

In this section, I will describe the year-long map for engaging sixth-grade students

in an English and Language Arts curriculum, with connections between district- and

state-mandated standards and critical literacy components (see Table 4.1). Within this

map, I will describe not only my processes for developing and presenting lessons and

classroom activities to the students, but also the limitations I encountered during this

experience.

The school year begins in late August, and sixth grade students are typically

apprehensive about their new school building, lockers, new teachers, and switching

classrooms each period. Due to this apprehension and confusion, I spend the first two

weeks working with the students to build a community of learners. This community is

built on the foundation that each person, myself included, brings something different to

our environment, and that those contributions can only enhance our understandings.

However, this does involve some risk-taking; by sharing personal tangible items,

photographs, and verbal memories, each person opens themselves up to the risk that they

will be challenged by their peers. The goal is acceptance and understanding of one

another, but the potential for teasing and criticism exists. Bomer (1995) states "in these

first few weeks we are together, we are trying to construct the essential foundation of a

literate environment," (p. 28). Jones and Clarke (2007) also find that "knowing where

the [students] were coming from as they [enter] school practices is significant for

understanding their work as meaning-makers and readers within the literacy classroom," (p. 98). I also believe that if the groundwork for a trusting community is not laid in the first few days of the school year, any teacher trying to use critical literacy theories in their classroom will encounter resistance, more so than those teachers who consciously open spaces in their classrooms for risk-taking behaviors. Risk and resistance is inherent with critical literacy practices though the degree of resistance towards reading and writing about uncomfortable or socially difficult topics will most likely be to a lesser extent (Rogers, 2007).

Interestingly, these community-building practices also lay the groundwork for student and teacher power relationships. In this setting, I took on the role of "school expert," one who passed on her knowledge of the school building, school routines, school rules, and behavior expectations. While this provides an excellent example of Freire's (1970) banking model of education, one which I had previously written against with regards to utilizing critical literacy practices, I felt it necessary to arm my students with the tools they needed to successfully navigate this particular world of school. Certain aspects could have been negotiated with the students, such as developing our own classroom expectations. However, as a teacher dealing with time constraints and the expectations of other teachers, I made the decision to deposit this information into my students.

Sequence	Instruction Focus & Related Instructional Activities
September/October	Community-building Activities • *Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge* (Fox, 1985)& Memory Box Activity • *Thank You, Mr. Faulker* (Polacco, 2001) • Bio-Poem *Seedfolks* (Fleischman, 1997)

	Writer's Notebook Entries Reading Response Journal Entries Class Discussions *Marxist Lens
November	*Freak the Mighty* (Philbrick, 1993) Writer's Notebook Entries Class Discussions *Marxist Lens *Feminist Lens
December/January	*Pictures of Hollis Woods* (Giff, 2002) Writer's Notebook Entries Class Discussions *Marxist Lens *Feminist Lens
January/February	*Daniel's Story* (Matas, 1993) Writer's Notebook Entries Class Discussions Literacy Research Club Meetings *Marxist Lens *Feminist Lens * Multiculturalist Lens
March/April	Writer's Notebook Entries Reading Response Journal Entries Class Discussions Holocaust Literature Circles & Lens Sheets Literacy Research Club Meetings *Marxist Lens *Feminist Lens * Multiculturalist Lens
May	Preparation for State Achievement Test Wrap up of Literacy Research Club

Table 4.1: Year-long curriculum map for the study

The first two novels, read aloud to the students during the months of September

and October, were *Freak the Mighty* (Philbrick, 1993) and *Seedfolks* (Fleischman, 1997).

These novels were chosen due to the issues of difference, community-building,

acceptance, and overcoming obstacles. They were also chosen because of resource

availability and teacher-familiarity. Our middle school had class-sets of certain novels,

which enabled each student to keep and use one copy for the duration of the unit. This availability of resources also gave students the opportunity to practice the reading strategy of looking back into the text to provide support for written responses, aligning to standardized test preparation that was part of district curriculum. Teacher-familiarity was also a concern when selecting texts due to the shared class of students. My English and Language Arts teaching partner, in his second year of teaching sixth grade after working as a sixth-grade Intervention Specialist, was familiar and comfortable with certain novels, and, not wanting to overwhelm him, we compromised on only starting one new novel unit, *Pictures of Hollis Woods*. During each novel unit, however, I worked individually with my students to explore issues of equity and fairness, though this instruction was not carried into other classroom settings.

Seedfolks

  Seedfolks was introduced first by presenting key vocabulary to the students and asking them to work with classmates to sort them into three categories: "Don't know at all, Have seen or heard—don't know meaning, I know a meaning" (Allen, 1999, p. 127).

altar	latched	gnawing	vacant	thrive	crouched
glancing	spades	equation	bodega	plaza	gestures
trowel	goldenrod	obituaries	hauled	receptionist	pacifism
moist	spigot	advantages	slouching	deeds	idle
coincidence	alterations	wilting	blight	prams	dignified
haphazard	domestic	entranced	decisively	tremolo	solitary
refuge	decorum	disgrace	daze	dweller	
compromised	foes	pantomime	roamed	exploit	
homesteaded					

Table 4.2: *Seedfolks* vocabulary words

Students worked with the vocabulary in order to build their background knowledge and comprehension; thus, when they would encounter the words in the text, there is no interruption in reading comprehension. The development of word knowledge also provided students with the opportunity to begin making predictions about the content of the novel (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000), which they began recording on paper with the words or ideas that helped them to make those predictions. As the novel was read aloud, students were asked to confirm or reject the prediction they initially made and continue making predictions as the story progresses.

As the classroom teacher, I read aloud the story to two classes of students, while they each followed along in a separate copy of the text. This gave me the opportunity to stop for discussion purposes and to check for student understanding. The instructional focus for the novel was to increase student understanding regarding cultural diversity and the potential of cultural cooperation and conflict resolution. Prior to each read aloud session, I would give students printed copies of an extended response question that would become the homework assignment for that day. These extended response questions were designed to develop the students' ability to work within a taxonomy of comprehension (Bloom, 1956; Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), not only understanding what they are being asked to do and also how to formulate a clear response in written form that gives support with details from the text. The extended response questions were also based on questions found within the state Achievement Test, thus giving students practice and preparation for the standardized test in spring.

- Write from Amir's perspective. What do you see, hear, feel, touch, etc.? What do you think about your experiences? How do others treat you? Why do you think that?

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- Write from Ana's perspective. What do you see, hear, feel, touch, etc.? What do you think about your experiences? How do others treat you? Why do you think that?
- Why hasn't City Hall taken care of the lot on Gibb Street?
- Describe Leona's personality. Explain why you think that.
- In the space below, draw the vacant lot as you see it. Base your visualization on the author's description in the chapters of Kim, Ana, Wendell, Gonzalo, and Leona. Be as specific and colorful as possible!
- Describe Virgil's attitude at the beginning of the chapter and then at the end. Support your description of each attitude with a specific detail from the chapter.
- What problems did the gardeners encounter in Sam's chapter? How were these problems resolved?
- Is it fair to call the homeless man in the novel "crazy?" Explain your thinking.
- Compare and contrast the characters of Virgil and Sae Young. In your response, give 2 ways in which they are similar and 2 ways in which they are different. Be sure to focus on their character/personality traits, not just outside appearances.
- Write a summary of Curtis's chapter. Include the important ideas from the chapter in your summary.
- Explain why the author mentions on page 50 that Nora and Mr. Miles were planted in the garden. Support your answer with a specific detail from the selection.
- What is the author's purpose in writing this novel? What life lessons should the reader learn and apply to their own life? Be as specific and detailed as possible!

Table 4.3: *Seedfolks* extended response question prompts

Through the shared reading of the novel, the students and I were able to discuss confusions, share thoughts regarding key themes such as tolerance, acceptance, prejudice, stereotypes, and decision-making, and also make personal connections. The ongoing verbal discussion, combined with the writing and sharing of extended response questions, set a foundation for an open sharing and critiquing of ideas. The concept and acceptance of critique in the classroom was new to most students. By exploring these beliefs, teachers can begin to gauge the taken-for-granted assumptions that their students hold

and take the first steps to more closely examine those beliefs and the cultural, economic, and social origins underlying them.

During the *Seedfolks* novel unit, a great deal of probing was needed to engage students in discussions that challenged their ideas of "normal," "typical," and "that's just the way it's supposed to be." It was an ongoing challenge for me to phrase my questions and interrogations in ways that did not seem negative, personally judgmental, or accusatory. Since this unit was completed at the beginning of the school year, it was important for me to create positive spaces: a classroom where questions and risk-taking are encouraged, debate is done constructively, and assumptions are gently challenged. Along with the importance of community-building, it is equally important to ease students into critiquing texts as well as being critiqued themselves. Increased resistance to critical literacy experiences is a potential consequence of rushing students into the unstable world of social reconstruction, (Appleman, 2001).

The four-week *Seedfolks* unit culminated with a test that mirrored the state's yearly Achievement Test—another challenge for classroom teachers. However, preparing the students for a high-stakes reading assessment, while developing their ideas on literacy and growth as literate individuals, requires teachers to create a balance of literacy events and learning opportunities for their students. While there is often district and state pressure for students to perform well on such tests, by providing students with numerous opportunities to respond in writing to questions that ask them to extend their knowledge, support their ideas, and synthesize information, critical literacy can coexist with high-stakes assessments.

Since *Seedfolks* is written as a collection of individual and culturally diverse vignettes revolving around the vacant lot/community garden, the novel has the potential for teachers and students to interrupt mainstream thinking and to challenge societal hegemony. Teachers, however, cannot assume that students are willing to undertake such tasks or that they possess the tools necessary for this type of work. As a starting point, the students and I looked at how characters make "snap judgments" toward other characters in the novel, and how we also made similar judgments in our daily lives. Students at the middle school level are very adept at making personal connections and frequently share examples, such as, "I know someone who _____," or "I remember when I _____." These personal stories provided me with an informal tool to assess how my students viewed their worlds and what types of language were used to describe their experiences. Sharing personal experiences continued the community building activities, he focus of the first few weeks of school, and demonstrated to the students that their ideas and thoughts are valued in the classroom throughout the school year.

The notions of making "snap judgments," stereotyping, and labeling were concepts that would be revisited throughout the year and viewed through the contexts of historical fiction, realistic fiction, and current events. With *Seedfolks*, I had the students respond to the question, "Do you think it is fair to call the homeless man in the [Sam's] chapter 'crazy?'" The use of language, both positive and negative, to label individuals became a central point of study for each class. Frequently in large group discussions, students would use negative labels to describe individuals, groups of people, or events— labels which had been appropriated as slang terminology, such as "retard," "gay," and "psycho." For students to develop as critically literate individuals, exploration into this

type of language use and developing an understanding of inequities perpetrated by such language is an extremely important aspect of the larger study of critical literacy. As a method of cultural reproduction, language usage brings to the fore the beliefs and assumptions that a society takes for granted. Students must be taught how to expose and interrupt these ideas so as to break the cycle of cultural reproduction and focus instead on the production of a culturally responsive, culturally relevant, and democratic community (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

As students responded in writing to issues of inequity within *Seedfolks*, I found that the written responses fell along a continuum of "polite" to "honest." "Polite" responses were those that could also be termed "safe" or "politically correct:" carefully worded so as not to offend anyone. By contrast, "honest" responses stated what the person truly believes and provided a window into the person's taken-for-granted assumptions. "Honest" responses made visible commonly held belief systems and cultural values, which I used to informally assess the visible and invisible cultural beliefs present in my classroom community. Though I did use these findings to understand the cultural beliefs of my students and to plan discussions and instruction, teachers should be cautious when generalizing student responses since there is far too much diversity within classrooms to realistically generalize a few shared student beliefs to the entire classroom population; however, by allowing space for students to share their values, it may encourage other students to share items that may have otherwise remained hidden.

Table 4.4 summarizes the frequency of polite responses, honest responses, and responses that stated there wasn't enough information given in the text to make a judgment. It could be argued that the students who felt there wasn't enough information

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provided were therefore writing a "polite" response, since by not making a judgment either way, they were acting in a "politically correct" manner. Additionally, the responses viewed by a different reader may be categorized in a different way.

Is it fair to call the homeless man in the novel "crazy?" Explain your thinking.	Polite	Honest	Don't have enough information
Student response	16	12	1

Table 4.4: Students' written responses to *Seedfolks* question – Polite vs. honest

Students most frequently gave a "polite" response to the question. This indicates a culturally reproduced notion of "it's not nice to call people names." The students in this study may not want to be perceived by their classmates or teacher as someone who uses negative labels like "crazy."

The two responses below demonstrate "honest" responses. While both students agree with the judgment of "crazy," they explain the basis for their opinions, thus reflecting their personal belief systems.

Yes, I do think it is fair. I believe it is fair because when he [homeless man] saw the couch was gone he started to rip up and destroy other people [sic] things. He was so mad, he even had the police called to stop and hold him back. I do think it is fair to call the man crazy because he had no manners at all. He was completely rude and inconciderate [sic]. I believe that people who goes [sic] crazy like that over nothing earn the title of being crazy. That's what I think.

Tony's *Seedfolks* Response 9/29/06

I think it is fair to call the homeless man in the novel "crazy" because it is just

stating an opinion. We don't know enough about him to say that he is mentaly

[sic] challenged. He could of [sic] been using the term, and not being serious.

Some people call me "insane" because of my likes, dislikes, and opinion on things

are considered "strange" to them. Being called "crazy" does'nt [sic] mean

much without any proof. Just that he pulled plants out since his couch was gone

means that he is rebellious. Being called "crazy" is just an assumption, and he

could accually [sic] be insane, and he could not be insane, we don't know.

<div align="right">Kisa's Seedfolks Response 9/29/06</div>

The student examples below can also be termed "honest," since they illuminate
the children's value systems.

No, I don't think it is fair to call the homeless man crazy. I don't think I t is fair

because if Sam was the homeless man I bet he wouldn't like to be called crazy.

Also, the homeless man can't exactly control the whole part about being a

homeless man. The couch was the homeless mans [sic] property and they took it

away from him. So he wanted to make it even on taking away the peoples [sic]

plants that they planted. But two wrongs don't make a right. And the vacant

lot/dump was the homeless mans [sic] home and the [sic] destroyed it.

<div align="right">Calvin's Seedfolks Response 9/27/06</div>

I don't care really but if I did, I'd think it's pretty unfair and mean to call a

homeless person crazy. I think this because homeless people don't have any food

or a place to sleep or shelter. And plus the person who called him crazy is a

person who tries to make people feel better. That is what I'd think if I cared.

<div align="center">77</div>

Stewart's "honest" response also demonstrates how a student may work to take power in the classroom. He states that he doesn't care about the fairness regarding homeless individuals, but still responds to the question. Through his response, Stewart communicates to the teacher his power to disregard both the prompt and activity, but also that he respects the teacher's authority and therefore writes a brief answer.

> *I think that it is not fair to call that man "crazy." He probably didn't get any education when he was young and now he has to live in a vacant lot. I also think that he has to struggle to get the slightest amount of food. Now that the neighborhood has cleaned out the vacant lot he has no home. If I had to live like that I think I would be crazy also.*
>
> *I think that it is very uncharacteristic of Sam to say that. He was the person that was trying to have peace in the world and here he is calling a homeless man crazy. If I were encouraging peace I would definately [sic] not be calling people names. That is promoting violence!*

In his response, Ryley views his own reaction from the perspective of the homeless man, stating, "if I had to live like that I think I would be crazy also." By reimagining his own situation, Ryley demonstrates an attitude of cultural production whereby he looks at the societal issues that potentially cause the man to become homeless and expresses his view that equity is not achieved through violence.

The next examples of student responses fall into the "polite" category. These students seem to be hesitant to label the homeless man in the chapter as "crazy." This

may be due to numerous factors: knowledge of socially-sanctioned language, knowledge of school-sanctioned language, reactions of teachers and peers, and outside cultural or social influences.

> *I think that if a homeless person walks by you, you can't just call him crazy. If he jumps out and starts attacking you for no reason once [sic] so ever then I think you can call him crazy. I [sic] all depends on what happens. I think Sam went over calling the homeless man crazy but I dont [sic] really know if it's right to take out anger with ripping out the plants. I dont [sic] think he really meant calling him crazy.*

<p align="right">Chaz's Seedfolks Response 9/29/06</p>

Chaz qualifies his response by stating "[it] all depends on what happens." This statement demonstrates that he is aware of the cultural and social view of behavior that is based on specific contexts or situations; or to phrase it differently, in certain situations, it's okay to behave in either a positive or negative way.

> *I [sic] not really sure if it is fair or not. I think this because he's not crazy to sleep on the couch because it is the place he has to sleep it is much better than the ground. But also the part about how he started ripping other people's plants is a little crazy because he could have asked where it [the couch] went instead of ripping up the plants it is not there [sic] fault. So that [sic] what I think. Sam wasn't right and wasn't wrong. So I'm not really sure.*

<p align="right">Josie's Seedfolks Response 9/29/06</p>

No, I don't think that is fair. I think that because Sam wants everyone to be nice to everyone and, then he turns around and calls the homeless man crazy. I also

don't thinks [sic] that's fair because Sam is calling the homeless man crazy when

the homeless man might not be crazy. That is why I don't think it is fair. The man

might be homeless because he couldn't find a job or, couldn't keep a job long

enough. Another reason my [sic] be he doesn't have the money to pay for a house

of rent one either.

<div align="right">Brandi's Seedfolks Response 9/29/06</div>

Both Josie's and Brandi's responses illustrate a hesitancy to label others. By refraining from such judgment, the girls avoid any controversy that may arise from sharing their responses. Josie is "safe" from critique and interrogation because she stated that "Sam wasn't right and wasn't wrong." This also communicates the culturally reproduced notion that if someone says something negative about another individual, then something positive must also be said to balance out the statement. In this manner, no one's feelings should be hurt, and Josie retains a position of "polite student." Similarly, Brandi shows a hesitancy to label others, and provides possible reasons for the man's position. Brandi's "polite" response demonstrates consideration for the circumstances in others' lives.

When asking for responses, teachers should also be aware that students may share ideas to which they have been enculturated, rather than taking a risk to share new textual interpretations. As stated previously in Chapter 2, issues of risk and resistance are constantly present when enacting a critical literacy curriculum. It is likely that the more novice a student regarding critical literacy, the less likely they are to share ideas that challenge the "norm" and potentially place themselves in a situation in which to be teased or ridiculed.

Phrasing this question in term of fairness, students had potential opportunities to unlock the uses of language in everyday life and the judgments made about those in different circumstances than our own. Most students conveyed an opinion that it was not fair to label the homeless man as "crazy," and based their decision on not having enough information to make a definitive judgment on the character (see Table 4.5). In addition, through analysis of the written responses, I found that meritocratic thinking was prevalent; students believed that the man in the novel must not have had a good education and therefore lacks good manners and a job to earn money. The students also recorded in writing that this statement was only the character Sam's opinion, and therefore readers should not take it as a fact. Looking at facts versus opinions is a facet of the school curriculum, and students did show the ability to recognize the difference within texts. As a part of a critical literacy curriculum, looking closely at opinions in various texts would have been a natural tie to cultural production and reproduction. How do others' opinions affect the decisions we make regarding language use, acceptance of others, and acting justly? With the *Seedfolks* unit, however, I did not explore this topic further.

Is it fair to call the homeless man in the novel "crazy?" Explain your thinking.	Fair	Unfair	Both Fair & Unfair
Student Response	3	20	3

Table 4.5: Students' written responses to *Seedfolks* question – Fair vs. unfair

With this discussion, another avenue I could have explored was the gender of the homeless individual. How would the students' responses differ if the homeless man had been a woman instead? What reaction would Sam's statement receive if he called a homeless woman "crazy?" This line of questioning could also lead into such topics as who has the right to assign labels to people? How does the use of labels impact our own "snap judgments" of individuals? Is there a way to eliminate labels in our society? What could be done to reduce the use of labels in our lives? These questions were not explored, due to time constraints, although later in the school year, students continued to use negative labels to describe individuals or situations.

Language usage was a challenging area for this group of students. Social positioning and identities frequently took priority over academic success or equitable language use in school. Also, knowing that their teacher would draw attention to the negative language gave students power and attention in the classroom. Though students were able to judge what is considered a "fair" or "unfair" use of language, or facts versus opinions in a book, they do not necessarily transfer those judgments into their own lives and own speech.

> *I also need to work more on language usage. Kali shared her response about Hollis's decision to lead Josie to Branches and called one of the characters "psycho." She did try to qualify her statement and explain what she meant, but I did remark that we all need to work on the language and terms we use when describing people.*

Labeling has come up before (Period A, I think)--is this an area to focus on more

explicitly or will it become part of ongoing discussions of gender, class, and

race?

Observation Journal 2/1/07

Julia used the word "retarded" today to describe someone's behavior and I

reminded her to think about "language." How do I make that hit home? How do

I remove that word from their social vocabularies?

Observation Journal 2/8/07

These entries from my research observation journal demonstrate that language

usage was deeply embedded in the children's minds and took ongoing reminders from an

"authority figure" for such language to be noticed and revised. Children may still use

negative language labels in other environments, those not actively challenged by peers or

adults, and becoming yet another way that people position themselves or are positioned

by others. By making language use, including its historical contexts and ramifications,

visible in the classroom environment, students may be more likely to adopt a more

equitable stance when speaking in future interactions. However, there is no guarantee

that this type of transfer may occur. Teachers may not notice changes in their students'

speech within a particular school year or even after many years, but it is still crucial to

plant the seeds of equity so that the opportunity for growth is present.

In conjunction with these topics, the issue of power was explored through written

response questions and larger classroom discussions. For example, "What kinds of

power do you see operating in *Seedfolks*? Who's got it? Who doesn't have it? Why?

Where does power come from (both now & in the past)?" The taken-for-granted nature

of power is a central component of a critical literacy curriculum. Looking closely at power relationships in specific texts, and how those relationships are culturally constructed, opens up to the children how those relationships can be maintained, contested, and reconstructed (O'Brien, 2001).

While looking at power relationships, it is important to bring context to the fore. Teachers should take advantage of moments in the classroom where power or language is being used for positioning. By explicitly discussing how power exists in a situation or context, and then working with students to explore the ways that power can shift, the entire class is given the opportunity to reimagine possible positions.   The potential for deeper and continued reimagination gives critical literacy an active component, whereby all class members, including the teacher, can talk through how and why certain groups or individuals are privileged over others.

The Purpose of School

As one exploration of societal hegemony, students in the class were asked to respond to three questions in their Writer's Notebook and examples of those entries follow below. While I had envisioned exploring this topic, I waited for this issue of schooling to come up on its own, rather than forcing my own critical literacy topic agenda upon the class.

1. What is the purpose of school?
2. Why are you required to come to school?
3. What are you supposed to learn at school?

Table 4.6: Writer's Notebook entry: Purpose of school

While Table 4.7 summarizes the statements made by students in response to this prompt, the examples presented below provide a more detailed illustration of the commonly held beliefs regarding the purpose of schooling and education. From the student responses, I looked for similarities among ideas, and developed categories. Some of the categories are broad, such as **character education**, and can include ideas such as respect, responsibility, organization, and decision-making. **Life skills** include the ideas of manners, appropriate behavior, getting a job, adjusting to new environments, effective communication, and working with others while playing sports or instruments. **Academics** include the five core subject areas of math, science, Social Studies, English, and Language Arts, as well as moving through each grade, graduating from high school, passing standardized tests, and continuing their education with any type of college. If students repeated an idea within their entry, I tallied it only once in the table below.

The purpose of school is… Academics	to pass each grade	to learn the standards for each grade	to give teachers a job	to learn academic subjects	to be more intelligent
Included in response	3	1	1	17	6
The purpose of school is… Academics	to apply/go to college	to do well/be successful in life	to earn money	to learn new things	to attend because the law requires it
Included in response	4	4	4	15	6
The purpose of school is… Life Skills	to have new experiences	to help your family	to learn life skills	to help our country	to be independent
Included in response	1	3	4	2	1

The purpose of school is… Life Skills	to play an instrument	to play sports	to get a good job	to meet or make new friends	
Included in response	2	1	11	3	
The purpose of school is… Character Education	to prepare for your future/the real world	to learn how to work with others	to learn about yourself & character education		
Included in response	8	2	10		

Table 4.7: Students' written responses to "The Purpose of School" entry tally

The most frequent responses to this entry were that the purpose of school was to "learn things" and to learn about academic material, closely followed by getting a good job, learning about oneself, and preparing for one's future. Categorically, students wrote that academics were the most important reason to attend schools, followed by life skills and lastly, to receive character education. Below, examples are provided that illustrate these most frequent ideas.

> *I think the purpose of school is to learn so you can get a job. I also think that it's to help you in life experiences. For example, math, helps when dealing with money.*

> *I am required to go to school because I have to learn to have a better future. I also have to go because it will also teach me to start and finish. Also because you learn responsibility.*

I am supposed to learn at school not just Math, Science, Social Studies

and Language Arts, but also to be more independent and organized. It also

teaches you how to handle others, because of being close to so many people.

Student #1 Writer's Notebook Entry 9/21/06

What is the purpose of school? The purpose of school is to learn things.

If nobody went to school, then when you went to the grogery [sic] store nobody

would know how to count the money. OR, if you had to take music lessons you

wouldn't be able to count the beats you need to play.

Why are you required to come to school? You are required to come to

school because the government and your parents want you to be smart and get a

collage [sic] scholarship. Then you can get a good job and money.

What are you supposed to learn at school? You are supposed to learn

respect and good behavior. You are also supposed to learn about all of the

school subjects so you can go to collage [sic].

Student #2 Writer's Notebook Entry 9/21/06

To learn so that when I get older, I'm prepared for life in the big world.

We need to learn more about the things going on around us.

I have to come to school because the state says that I have to be in school

for at least 12 years. Also, It's fine to go to school if you have cool teachers.

I am supposed to learn reading, writing, math, science, social studies, and to make the right choices in life. Also, you learn to be someone you want to be rather than someone who can barely afford food.

<div align="right">Student #6 Writer's Notebook Entry 9/21/06</div>

I think the purpose of school is to help us learn and decide what we like to do. It helps us prepare for the future. We are required to come to school because school will help you become prepared for what lies ahead. Also so we can be sucessful [sic] in life. We are also required to come to school so that we can figure out our stregnths [sic] and weaknesses. In school you're suppost [sic] to learn stuff that will help you in the future. The main purpose of school is to get us ready for the real world.

<div align="right">Student #3 Writer's Notebook Entry 9/21/06</div>

What I learn at school is new and different math problems each day. I learned how to switch classes and be on time. I also learned how to be more organized.

The purpose of school is that it gets you ready to go from grade from grade. It also makes you more smart and more organized at school and in life.

Why I come to school is because I want to be the smart one and not the dumb one. I also go to school so I can go to college and get a job.

<div align="right">Student #5 Writer's Notebook Entry 9/21/06</div>

School, from the perspectives of students in this class, provides the necessary tools for "success" in the future. To accomplish the goal of success, the students realize that grades and learning are required. Students in this classroom continued to demonstrate a meritocratic way of thinking: if you do well in school, you will have a good job, a good career, and therefore, a good life. The experience of individuals from various backgrounds doing well at school, yet not being rewarded for their performance or behavior, was unknown to them.

Forming one basis for critical inquiry, student perceptions about schooling provide an opportunity to explore societal institutions, such as education. Hegemonic notions of what constitutes success and who achieves success can be investigated, and then interrupted and reimagined in order to demonstrate how it is possible to challenge the status quo regarding "success." The students hold the belief that they are in school to learn, but they do not express the idea that school is to help them critique the world around them.

Freak the Mighty

The second novel unit was *Freak the Mighty* (Philbrick, 1993). A story that deals with friendship, bullying, stereotypical judgments, adventures, and varying types of strength, one reason this novel was chosen was to provide students with an opportunity to examine their own viewpoints regarding those who are "different" from themselves. Teacher-familiarity and resource-availability were also factors in the selection of this text. As with *Seedfolks*, this novel also began with an exploration of vocabulary (see Table 4.7) in order to build a familiarity with the words and concepts students would encounter as the story was read aloud to them.

invention	crippled	opiate	teleportation
robot	puny	bloated	deprived
earthling	paralyzed	retrieval	spastic
bulkhead	camouflage	cretin	lofty
weird	racket	numb	poison
precious	procedure	scuttle	villain
facilitate	frantic	depleted	regurgitate
flittering	expel	edgy	evasive
tenements	cavalry	maniac	terminology
optimum	swill	strutting	ornithopter
scrawny	invincible	limitation	laser
elastic	quest	prehistoric	

Table 4.8: *Freak the Mighty* vocabulary words

- Do you think it is good that Freak and Max are becoming friends? Explain why or why not.
- What kinds of labels are used for characters in *Freak the Mighty*? Do you think it is fair to put labels on people? What happens when people are labeled? **(Marxism)**
- Explain what Mrs. Addison means when she tells Max, "You're going to be okay, Maxwell Kane. I'm sure of it now." What in the text helped you know this?
- Describe Kenny ("Killer") Kane's personality. Do you believe that he was unjustly imprisoned? What in the text helped you know this? **(Marxism)**
- In this novel, what roles are available for girls and what roles are available for boys? Are these the roles available in our everyday lives? Explain how roles for girls and boys are similar or different from those presented in *Freak the Mighty*. **(Feminism)**
- Why is Max convinced he does not have a brain? Is his assessment of himself as a "butthead" correct? Do our opinions of ourselves affect what others think of us? Do others' opinions of us affect how we feel about ourselves? **(Marxism)**
- Character Response: Choose a character from the novel, then choose one statement below. Write from that character's perspective in response to the statement. What would that character think about the statement? What would that character say? Be as detailed as possible.
  1. People who are different cannot be friends.
  2. If you aren't good at something, you should do something different.
  3. The personality we are born with cannot be changed.
  4. You should always be willing to turn the other cheek; in other words, if someone treats you poorly, you shouldn't fight back, but just keep on doing what you know is right.
  5. Good deeds are always rewarded.
  6. A person's appearance says a lot about who they are.
  7. It is okay to lie about a situation.

Table 4.9: *Freak the Mighty* extended response question prompts

As I read the story to the students each day, we would discuss issues of

stereotyping, discrimination, making "snap" judgments, and issues of power and gender.

Though I did not explicitly talk to the students about Marxism and feminism, these

concepts were incorporated into written extended response questions as well as ongoing

classroom discussions (see Table 4.9). During one exploration of the gender roles

available to girls and boys, the students noticed "that female roles were limited to

mother-type figures (taking care of others) or teachers. The roles or parts for boys were

that of bully, father, friend, hero, trouble-maker, smart person, or not-so-smart person.

More options were available for male characters in the book, but were still limited when

compared to the opportunities for boys and girls in today's society," (Observation Journal

11/30/06).

The use of perspective-taking, or putting oneself into another's shoes, was useful

in critically engaging the students. By taking a character's perspective, students were

given a safe place through which to reimagine situations and to see the consequences of

certain actions. Through such discursive activities, students may be able to move beyond

merely representing or retelling an experience to creating that experience within them

(Sumara, 2002).

As generally found with all aspects of critical literacy engagements, there was a

level of unfamiliarity with this task. Some students did not have prior experience taking

a character's perspective and working within that new persona; thus an activity asking

students for a written response from their chosen character's perspective may result in the

student writing what that character would say, not writing as that character.

> *A persons [sic] appearance [sic] says a lot about who they are. Max would say*
>
> *that is deffinately [sic] not true. He would say that because he looks so much like*
>
> *his dad and he is nothing like him. His dad tied him up after kidnapping him after*
>
> *he broke his restraining order when such a good guy like Max would never even*

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have a restraining order, he would NEVER tie a kid up and he wouldn't kidnap

anybody.

<div align="right">

Gunther's Freak the Mighty Character Response 11/20/06

</div>

If someone told Gwen, "People who are different can't be friends", [sic] she

would flip out on them because she would think the opposite because her son,

Kevin is very different from Max, but they are still friends. She would explain to

the person who told her the statement that they were wrong and would explain

why and would show them why they are wrong because she is very stubborn and

hot-headed.

<div align="right">

Kisa's Freak the Mighty Character Response 11/20/06

</div>

There were also many students who easily "transform" into a new perspective and

can write and speak actively as that new persona. With multiple, ongoing experiences all

students can develop their ability to take the perspective of various characters presented

to them. Some students are able to fully position themselves as a character, thus enabling

students to engage in a dialogic relationship with the text (Edmiston & Enciso, 2003).

I Kevin, sometimes called Freak, disagrees [sic] that "If you aren't good at

something, you should do something else. If you want to do something and your

[sic] just horrible at doing it, try as hard as you can. Finish the mission!

Vanquish the evil in it! Just work work work work work!! WORK!! Talking

hypitheticly [sic], you got a job cooking food. You always burn the food on fire.

Just try harder and you will make it.

<div align="right">

Alexander's Freak the Mighty Character Response 11/20/06

</div>

My character from Freak the Mighty is Freak…The statement that Freak would probably say is "Good deeds are always rewarded."} I would probably say that because I always likes [sic] the times when King Arthur ruled with Lancelot, knights, dragons, and damsels in distress [sic]. If you slay a deadly dragon, you are most likely be rewarded with a fair lady. If you fight with a ruler and kill/defeat him/her, you would probably get rewarded jewels, crowns, diamonds, and the title of king/queen. Sadley [sic] Max, the old fool isn't interested in them, he has no sense of taste. I expected to find rewards in the dirty purse, but Max and I didn't find jewels, diamonds, or gold, instead an id card. 'Tis wasn't much of a reward, it was quite the opposite. But that was just a coincedence [sic], other good deeds still would be rewarded, like when Max called someone to help me when I was choking on American Chop Suey, he'll get a reward sooner or later. But when knights in shining armor slay giant purple dragons, a fair lady will await him!

Poe's Freak the Mighty Character Response 11/20/06

People who are different cannot be friends, one of the most truest things ever. Look at me for instanse [sic], now say a trucker comes over to me. I'm the leader of a motorcycle gant, I don't like trucks. Since I don't like trucks, we're different, therefore, we shouldn't like one another so much. Although Kenny Kane's son, Maxwell, hangs out with that deformed midget, what is he called? Freak maybe? Wait…I'm off the subject. An example for people the same that get along are like

me and my gun. We get along and ride it out. I guess getting along means –

uhh…hang on – SHUT UP LORETTA!!! O.k. getting along also means what a

persons authority is. I guess – SHUT UP!!! I guess that police can get along

with people with their authority, or vice versa. Also, some fancy rich slob won't

like someone like me, just because my back—LORETTA!!! SHUT UP!!!—ground

is sketchy. Speaking of sketchy backgrounds, ol' Kenny Kane and Maxwell Kane

hardly get along with anyone. Awww crap. I hope he doesn't read this.

Wait…why am I writing this down anyway? It's not like some 6th grade teacher is

going to check it right? Right? RIGHT!? Oh wait, you can't answer that, right?

RIGHT!?

Michael's Freak the Mighty Character Response 11/20/06

These examples illustrate the range of responses possible with middle school

students. Students can be expected to fall somewhere in the continuum of outside the

character to fully within the character. It is important to note that the farther the students

are into the given text, the easier it may be for them to move into the persona of the

character. This may be due to the greater exposure students have had getting to know

how certain characters speak, act, react, and view other characters in the text.

Pictures of Hollis Woods

The next novel unit was *Pictures of Hollis Woods* (Giff, 2002). While dealing

with issues such as family, belonging, adolescent issues, and decision-making, this unit

also focused on textual elements of setting, characterization, vocabulary, main idea,

flashback, and visualization. In addition, the students continued to engage in whole-class

discussions during the teacher-led read aloud, work on written responses to higher-level

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questions embedded with feminist and Marxist issues (see Table 4.10), and create their

own picture book of Hollis Woods' story.

- - What are issues facing young adolescents today? How do you and your friends deal with these issues? What could help you deal with these issues better? Compare this with how Hollis and Steven deal with these issues. **(Marxism, Feminism)**
  - When you think of the terms "foster care," "foster home," or "foster family," what words/phrases and images come to mind? Describe your ideas and impressions about foster care in detail.
  - How is foster care portrayed in *Pictures of Hollis Woods*? How does this portrayal support <u>and</u> contradict your ideas about foster care? Explain. **(Marxism)**
  - Do you think Hollis made a good decision, leading Josie away from her home to trespass and live with Hollis in the Regan's summer home? Why or why not? What are the potential consequences of this action? **(Marxism, Feminism)**
  - Do you think someone is watching Hollis and Josie? Why or why not? Use details and clues from the book to support your answer.
  - Why do you think Hollis, often a child of trouble, fit into the Regan family so well?
  - Hollis told Emmy, the agency worker, "You want tough? I'll show you tough." What did Hollis mean? Why do you think it was important to Hollis that she "be tough"? **(Marxism, Feminism)**

Table 4.10: *Pictures of Hollis Woods* extended response question prompts

During this unit, I continued to ask the students to look at how characters in the

story label one another and why we, as well as the novel's characters, label others. This

was often very challenging for the students, who were comfortable in their positions as

sixth-grade girls and boys from a middle-class suburban community. Part of their

positions included labeling themselves and others in order to establish and maintain an

identity.

In Period C, when I got to the same line from Period B, ("No one knows you. You can be different, you can be good, know what I mean?" p. 6), I brought up the idea of reinvention. This class took longer to get to the "meat" of the issue, and it took more questioning on my part. We finally got to whether or not it's good to try on different personalities. Most of the students agreed that it depends. For example, they brought up the situation of someone who was always nice and kind who suddenly was rude, mean, and doing badly in school. The students then shared personal examples of people to whom this had happened. Tony then brought up that it wasn't good if a boy started wearing dresses, while laughing. This got a lot of response and reactions from everyone. Many students were in agreement with Tony, with Beyonce being extremely vocal. She agreed that boys should not wear miniskirts. I started asking why, and who decided that boys couldn't wear skirts. She stated that it was just normal. Again, I questioned who decided what was normal. I asked about that boy growing up to be an actor who wears women's clothes and other costumes as part of their job. This seemed to be okay, but for a boy to just wear a skirt or dress was not. I then brought up how girls are allowed to wear boys' clothes, to which Beyonce said that they didn't. So I pointed out how girls and boys both wear jeans, t-shirts, and sweatshirts, and sneakers. Beyonce amended her comment to say that at least the shoes were girly. Gunther replied that his tennis shoes were sold in the exact same style for both men's and women's sizes. Tony brought up the issue of kilts, which I then expanded upon, stating that they were very masculine. I asked the class to think about how kilts were different from skirts.

This example demonstrates how tightly some students held on to their perceptions of what is "right" and "normal." Without an individual present to challenge these culturally reproduced perceptions, the status quo is maintained and what counts as "different" is solidified. To interrupt these notions by one's personal actions or to challenge these ideas through one's speech is to place one's position in their world in jeopardy of ridicule and risk being ostracized by peers. As the classroom teacher, I used my position to introduce these risky ideas and challenge student comments. Tony had originally commented about how "it wasn't good" for a boy to wear girls' clothing, but later amended his remark to make kilts okay for boys to wear. His first statement positioned Tony as a student with potentially discriminatory gender views. Later in the discussion, with my affirmation about the masculinity of kilts, Tony was repositioned as a person who seemingly accepts "unorthodox" fashion choices by both genders. However, this use of power to redirect conversations and critique issues can lead to reluctance by students to actively debate such topics in a larger class discussion, rather than working towards an acceptance of critical literacy. Additionally, with my power as the teacher to affirm gendered identities, femininity, and masculinity, as well as my power to not raise issues of sexuality, I may have inadvertently located myself as the "ultimate" source of knowledge and the deciding factor in debates. My sanctioning of certain topics (e.g. constructions of gendered identities) and reluctance to pursue other topics (e.g. sexuality), does not demonstrate to the students that they are co-constructors of knowledge; rather, it reaffirms the students' belief that to be "successful" in school, they must adhere to the teachers' value systems, even if it conflicts with their own.

Another example of this use of teacher power is illustrated in the example below. Rather than allowing just the sharing of student stories or just the sharing of responses to the assigned question, I was challenged to balance the two and used my authority as the teacher to mediate the large-group discussions.

We had some good sharing in Period B and Period C with the in-class response about issues facing young adolescents (although some kids didn't know how to say "adolescent" or what it meant--I do like to expose the kids to more sophisticated vocabulary). Most of the verbal responses dealt with peer pressure---alcohol, drugs, smoking, bullying, dating, not doing homework, and skipping school. The kids really wanted time to share their personal stories, which was good, but I also wanted them to extend their thinking and connect to Hollis & Steven. It was hard to balance time discussing their own stories and making connections to the text.

Observation Journal 2/22/07

This example demonstrates the external pressures that teachers face daily in their classrooms. How much time do you allow for student discussion? Is it at the expense of other curricular goals? Does longer discussion time, in this case regarding personal stories, equate to a deeper understanding of the selected text? These questions are not easily or quickly answered. The critical literacy teacher does need to be aware of such questions and issues when planning novel units. By allotting time, either mentally or verbally, for student-directed discussion as well as teacher-directed discussion, teachers can initially provide more of a balance in their instruction, rather than feeling rushed to cover curricular material.

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The Holocaust and Daniel's Story

After *Pictures of Hollis Woods*, I began presenting the students with informational texts and picture books in order to build their background knowledge about the Holocaust. Our novel unit was *Daniel's Story* (Matas, 1993), in combination with Holocaust-based literature circle discussion groups, but one week was devoted to building an historical context about this period and a vocabulary with which to effectively understand and communicate about the Holocaust (see Table 4.8). The over-arching goal of this unit was to demonstrate to the students that the apathy that led to the events of the Holocaust is still alive in our world today.

To help the students understand the meaning of apathy without using the dictionary, I provided them with handouts upon which seven quotes were written. The students' task was to infer the meaning of apathy based on the quotes and synthesize the separate quotes into the larger theme of apathy.

> *Yesterday we worked on responding to apathy quotes -- for each quote, the students had to either write how the quote made them feel, what it reminded them of, or what it made them wonder. (I did tell the kids that they weren't allowed to ask "What does this quote mean?" or "Why did ___ say this?" Maybe I didn't need to, but I was worried that some people might not take it seriously or just try to get a laugh or try to annoy me). Period B did a great job, even though they only had time in class to respond to one quote & some shared. The rest had to be finished for homework. Period C was my smart-alleck group. Bob responded, "What does Miss P. think about this quote?" I was irritated because he was looking for the loophole around my instructions and told him so. I thought we*

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might be back on track when sharing feelings, questions, and connections--then

tied the overall theme of the quotes together to determine what "apathy" meant.

Jeffy asked if it was the opposite of sympathy. The kids did come up with the

notion of a person not doing anything, and that makes them "evil" if there is other

evil going on. I clarified to say that it's when you don't make a situation worse,

but you're not doing anything to make it better.

We then talked about examples of being apathetic seen in our daily lives. They

had some good ideas. Reuta brought up one I never considered -- how it's

apathetic when I, the teacher, ask a question and no one volunteers to answer, or

when I ask for people to share their Writer's Notebook entries and no one

volunteers. How true! How insightful! The fight example came up (which I

expected), but I brought up bullying and someone dropping their things in the

hall. We talked about whether laughing in response to someone dropping their

things was apathetic or not--decided it wasn't since it made the situation worse.

Observation Journal 3/6/07

Making connections to students' daily lives can make critical literacy issues more

relevant. Since school presently comprises the majority of the students' lives, creating

links to what's "typical" or "normal" in the school environment can have an immediate

impact on how students view issues of power, gender, and multiculturalism. Again,

students can be complacent about acting upon issues raised in classroom discussions.

The classroom may be viewed as a safe space; when inside that space, topics are

sanctioned and it's permissible for students to act equitably. However, when outside of

the classroom environment, to behave in ways that are empathetic or socially productive, that is, in ways which make a positive difference in the environment, may put one's reputation at risk. To create transfer from the classroom environment to the larger school community and wider society may be the greatest challenge to teachers working with issues of equity and critical literacy. To simply find instances of transfer from one academic class to another and from one grade level to another was extremely challenging. Students take on various positions in one classroom and other positions in other classrooms with other teachers. Again, it is not that the opportunities are not available for students to explore issues of gender equity, power equity, and multicultural equity; students may not be aware that it is acceptable for them to raise their voice and share their ideas regarding such topics.

As students learning how to look critically at the world around them, explicitly using the lenses of power, gender, and multiculturalism fit well into this unit of study. Because I felt that the students needed guidance and prompting, I created worksheets that gave instruction on how to analyze a particular text by viewing it through a certain lens. The lens sheets focused on gender, power, multiculturalism, and an additional sheet for students to create a symbolic representation of characters in the texts we were reading.

Using Vygotsky's (1978) theory of scaffolding within the zone of proximal development, I modeled the use and purpose of each sheet with Holocaust picture books or a chapter from *Daniel's Story* (Matas, 1993), going over only one sheet per day with a different book. When first introducing the lens sheets to the class, I had them brainstorm what types of lenses we use. The class responded with "binoculars, telescopes, glasses, a microscope, sunglasses, and a camera," (Classroom Discussion 3/28/07). Additionally,

we discussed how lenses could change how we see things, such as making something

"darker, clearer, or closer," and this avenue allowed me the opportunity to introduce the

students to how we can also use lenses to focus our attention of various things in texts,

such as power, gender, and cultural portrayals (Classroom Discussion 3/28/07). Students

worked alongside me, and as an entire class, we analyzed, discussed, and completed the

power lens sheet with a chapter from *Daniel's Story*. While I read a chapter aloud to the

students, I stopped frequently and asked the children to share their ideas about those who

have power and those who don't.

> *I was very impressed with the kids during Daniel's Story. They brought up the*
>
> *Jews & Nazis for an example of who has power and who doesn't, and for the*
>
> *different social groups in the story. They also then brainstormed other social*
>
> *groups: Hitler Youth, SS, Lodz Youth Group/Resistance, Gypsies, Poles, Aryans.*
>
> *When we got to the social ladder, there were more levels added as we talked*
>
> *about the events in chapter 10. Everyone agreed that Jews were on the bottom*
>
> *and Hitler on the top. There was some debate about whether Nazis were above or*
>
> *below SS; whether German citizens were the same as Aryans (not necessarily);*
>
> *were Hitler Youth higher than German citizens & lower than Nazis?; Kapos-*
>
> *higher than Jewish prisoners, but still Jews or political prisoners; skilled Jews*
>
> *(ex. Daniel & his father) being higher than typical Jewish prisoners; Poles and*
>
> *Gypsies also higher than Jews, but still Hitler's enemies. Instead of "ladder," we*
>
> *also used the metaphors of "steps" and "levels" to differentiate among groups.*

We also looked at who has power and who doesn't. The kids immediately

responded that the Jews had no power and the Nazis had power. I brought up for

them to think about characters who weren't supposed to have power, but who

tried to get it anyway. They were able to come up with Daniel taking power back

by sneaking a note to Erika and talk with father, even though both could get him

killed.

<div align="right">Observation Journal 3/28/07</div>

From the excerpt above, the students were demonstrating their ability to identify power structures and relationships from given texts. With teacher prompting, the students were able to identify characters within the text that attempted to reappropriate power. This could be considered a first phase in terms of critical literacy knowledge: identification of inequity. While it is an important first step, teachers and students should not be content with merely identifying inequity within situations and people. There must be critique of such situations, such as how the inequity began initially, what or who allowed the inequities to persist, what happens when inequity is challenged, and how inequitable situations can be reimagined. This critique can first be done with various texts and then move into current society, starting globally and working towards a more local and personal level. After critique, teachers and students should work towards encouraging equitable behavior, including speech and action, in their own lives.

As we moved forward with this novel unit, I continued to scaffold the students' knowledge of the lens sheets by working next with the gender lens sheet and another chapter from *Daniel's Story,* followed by the multicultural lens sheet and the book *The*

Number on my Grandfather's Arm (Adler, 1987). Last, I modeled the symbolist lens sheet using a chapter from *Daniel's Story*.

After each lens sheet had been modeled, I presented the literature circle books to the students for them to preview then rank in order of preference. The rankings were done on notebook paper, and then collected so that I could group the students to balance their choices with gender and reading ability. Literature circle groups met over a one-month period during class time to read, complete lens sheets, and discuss their novels. I initially set the lens sheet roles for each group, based on students' first initials. Therefore, the student whose name began with a letter closest to the beginning of the alphabet had the gender lens sheet, next in alphabetical order had the power sheet, then whomever was next in the alphabet had the multicultural lens sheet. For groups with four members, the fourth person took the symbolist sheet; for groups with only three members, the individual with the gender lens sheet also completed the symbolist sheet. These roles would then rotate for each subsequent discussion so that each student had the opportunity to view their literature circle book through each lens. The discussions were taped, reviewed by the students, and transcribed to capture not only the dialogue among the group members, but also to explore the use of the lens sheets and the perceptions of students engaging with this aspect of critical literacy. I coded the discussions to look at the students' use of language, such as clarifying comments, critiquing comments, analyzing comments, evaluating comments, positive and negative labeling comments, exploration of critical literacy issues, and group collaboration. Discussion excerpts are provided in the case studies of Periods A, B, and C below.

annihilate	gentile	liberation	Gestapo
scapegoat	Aryan	appeasement	ghetto
occupation	SS	anti-Semitism	Holocaust
assimilated	swastika	pogrom	Third Reich
kapo	persecution	the underground	Kristallnacht
discrimination	partisan	collaborator	intimidate
deportation	prejudice	martyr	selection
propaganda	führer	racism	Zionist
emigrate	Yiddish	concentration camp	

Table 4.11: Holocaust vocabulary words

As with the previous novel units, *Daniel's Story* (Matas, 1993) was also read aloud to the students, with each student having a copy of the novel from which to follow along and with which to complete homework. The students were given extended response questions prior to reading and had time to clarify the question's meaning or expectations (Table 4.12).

Another ongoing facet of the Daniel's Story unit was to explore the shifting positions of characters within the novel. Using a class chart and handouts with definitions provided, I would lead whole-group discussions regarding the positions of "Ally," "Bystander," "Target," and "Perpetrator," (See Table 4.13). Based on Christensen's (2004) and Laman's (2006) work with critical literacy and inquiry, an "Ally" includes anyone who helps the "Target(s)" in a situation where others are unfairly treated; "Bystanders" are those who do not acerbate the situation, but neither do they help; a "Target" is the person or group of people to whom injustices are directed; and, the "Perpetrator" directs verbal, physical, or social violence toward the "Target(s)." Before applying the shifting positions with the novel, I modeled this activity with the picture book *Rose Blanche* (Innocenti, 1985). During the modeling, I brought up the general

context of the Holocaust with the students, who were, in turn, able to identify the Jews as targets and the Nazis as perpetrators. However, one student named Melissa noted that, "position is directly related to your own perspective. To the Nazis, the Jews would be perpetrators," (Classroom Discussion, 4/10/07).

- Explain the importance of Daniel's photographs. Give at least two specific examples from the text that support your response.
- Daniel's grandmother made him a "Hitler Youth" uniform. This would have been a strange gift for a Jewish boy. First, explain why his grandmother might have given Daniel the uniform. Then, tell what Daniel found to be one benefit of wearing the uniform. Next, tell why Daniel decided to put the uniform away and not wear it anymore. Finally, tell what you would have done with the uniform if you were Daniel. **(Marxism)**
- Daniel states that his picture of the radio is also a symbol of defiance and resistance. Explain how a radio can serve these purposes. Also explain why resistance was so important to the Jews living in the Lodz Ghetto. **(Marxism)**
- Make an inference about how Daniel feels about Rosa. Include examples of the clues the author gives that helped you to infer how Daniel feels about Rosa. **(Marxism, Feminism)**
- From Daniel, Rosa, or Erika's perspective, write a letter to the factory director about the corruption in the soup kitchens. Explain what the problem is, then persuade them to change the conditions. Use specific reasons to support your position. Be sure to write in correct letter format. **(Marxism, Feminism)**
- How has Daniel changed during his journey from Frankfurt to Lodz, Lodz to Auschwitz, and Auschwitz to Buchenwald? Describe the change in his attitude at each stage of his journey.
- What examples of imagery (or sensory details) does the author use in chapters 11-13? Give at least four examples of imagery. Why do authors use imagery in their writing? Explain.
- What resistance efforts has Daniel participated in? Why is resistance so important to him? Explain your thinking and use examples from the text to support your response. **(Marxism)**

Table 4.12: *Daniel's Story* extended response question prompts

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│         SHIFTING POSITIONS IN  _____          │
│                                                                           │
│ Identify characters from the text that fall into the following positions.  Explain why │
│ the character fits into that position.                                     │
│                                                                           │
│ Ally/Allies:                                                              │
│ Bystander/Bystanders:                                                     │
│ Target/Targets:                                                           │
│ Perpetrator/Perpetrators:                                                 │
│ ︵︵︵︵︵︵︵︵︵︵︵︵︵︵︵︵︵︵︵︵︵︵︵︵︵︵︵︵︵︵︵︵︵︵︵   │
│ Allies – people who help the target(s) in a situation where others are unfairly treated │
│ Bystanders – do not acerbate the situation (make worse), but neither do they help │
│ Targets – the person or people to whom injustices are directed           │
│ Perpetrators – direct verbal, physical, or social violence toward the target(s) │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
```

Table 4.13: Shifting positions handout

Using the shifting positions activity provided students with another avenue into critical literacy. As students explored how characters in their novels can quickly shift from one position to another, they were also able to see how power is not fixed or stable; it can shift and be contested. For example, each class participated in a discussion about when it's okay to be defiant. Through this large class conversation, students determined that certain situations require different attitudes and actions (Observation Journal, 3/21/07).

> *We did shifting positions today with* Rose Blanche*. I typed up sheets with room to write the characters from whatever text, and the definitions at the bottom. I did this with Period B and C only. Period A is just starting the lit circles.*
>
> *Again, I am very happy with what my kids are contributing during class discussions. When I first introduced the positions, I brought up the general*

context of the Holocaust--the kids are able to quickly identify the Jews as targets

& Nazis as perpetrators. Melissa (Period B)) brought up a very good point that

position is directly related to your own perspective---to the Nazis, the Jews would

be perpetrators.

<div align="right">Observation Journal 4/10/07</div>

It is important for students to notice contradictions and tensions inherent in

literature and how those same tensions and contradictions are also found in our own

beliefs (Laman, 2006). The next step, however, is for students to build questions based

on their own cultural perspectives on everyday life, not just those issues selected by the

teacher for exploration (Vasquez, 2001).

At the conclusion of this unit, each student completed a theme response to not

only demonstrate their ability to support their opinions, but also to synthesize all of the

information over entire Daniel's Story and Holocaust unit.

Daniel's Story Final Response:
A theme is the meaning or moral of a story. Writers develop themes to express their ideas about life or human nature. Sometimes themes are stated directly, but often readers must figure them out. Any lessons learned by the important characters in a story can be clues to a theme.

What is the theme of *Daniel's Story*? Choose **one** from the list below and write your response in the space below.

- Many people died during the Holocaust
- Hope can help people survive
- Nazis are evil
- It is dangerous to remain silent, apathetic, and indifferent when others are being oppressed and discriminated against
- Family is important and you should stick together
- Governments often abuse their power
- It is difficult to live in a ghetto

Explain why your theme choice is the most appropriate for the story. Give several examples (at least 3) of events from the text that supports your choice. Explain why your examples relate to your chosen theme.

Remember to:
- ❏ Convince the reader why your choice is the best/most appropriate theme for the story
- ❏ Include a beginning, middle, and end
- ❏ Include examples that support your chosen theme
- ❏ Write at least one page (with paragraphs!)
- ❏ Use your book to find details that support your response

Table 4.14: *Daniel's Story* theme response

Students were given time in class to complete this activity, as well as their copy of the novel to use for reference. In addition, all theme responses were first evaluated by the students before they were turned in to the teacher. While it is not a new pedagogy in school classrooms, student self-evaluation is another way to share power in the school environment. I provided students with a rubric with which to read over and evaluate their

work, with the expectation that they make changes to improve the overall quality and coherence of their response (see Appendix E). By making the method of evaluation available to students, and allowing them to change their work, the teacher is no longer the sole possessor of grades or the sole evaluator of growth and progress. The power is now shared between student and teacher, with the student taking a larger role as the one who decides how they have met certain criteria and what mark they should receive.

Once the Holocaust unit was completed, I had Periods B and C write persuasive letters to determine which book would become the next class read-aloud. This idea was generated through the Literacy Research Club (LRC Observation Journal, 5/8/07), and presented as a class-wide activity to both periods. While this activity did enable all students to have a voice in what book was read aloud, it still raised questions in my mind about power and equity.

> *My question -- how will the students feel whose letters weren't persuasive*
> *enough? I told them that I (their audience) would be selecting not on quantity,*
> *but writing quality. Period B will be reading* May Bird & the Ever After
> *(Anderson, 2005) and Period C will be reading* Percy Jackson & the Sea of
> Monsters (Riordan, 2006)*, but many made good cases for their books & it was*
> *hard to choose! Will kids be turned off with my selections? Will they even care*
> *one way or another? How do they feel about my selecting books vs. giving them*
> *input? Is this a good compromise/sharing of power? Should I have done another*
> *round of lit circles to accommodate everyone's voice/choice?*

Read Aloud--should I have picked Indigo's Star (McKay, 2004) *because of the bullying issues? Would there have been more to explore with the lenses and positionality? Kids did request a female main character to balance out the read-alouds overall.*

Observation Journal 5/10/07

Additionally, I worried about not providing enough options for students to raise and explore their own critical issues. While examining multiple reading positions and equity issues is an important facet of a critical curriculum, there also needs to be space for students to find areas of inequity which have personal value and to create a sense of agency that results in action towards creating a more socially just environment (Rogers, 2007).

My main focus has been on gender equity among main characters portrayed in our novel readings. Freak the Mighty *had Freak and Max (both males),* Pictures of Hollis Woods *had Hollis (female),* Daniel's Story *had Daniel (male), and now Period B will have* May Bird & the Ever After *(May--female) and Period C will have* Percy Jackson & the Sea of Monsters *(Percy--male). In my classroom, gender seems to be the prevalent factor which determines socialization in the school. Girls and boys are expected to act in certain ways in order to maintain their "boyness" or "girlness," and the students are reluctant to challenge these notions. In light of this, I think that gender and class, and race to a lesser extent, will be the focus of critical explorations. I also anticipate that there will be more time for discussions, rather than a focus on Achievement Test-type response questions. I do plan to continue the Ally, Bystander, Target, Perpetrator*

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positioning activity, because I feel that it helps them to see that things do not exist

in binary relationships, as much as we would like them to.

Summary

In this section, I have attempted to describe the curricular English and Language Arts activities and engagements in which students participated that were used to introduce students to critical literacy concepts, specifically the areas of Marxism, feminism, and critical multiculturalism. I have also presented information regarding how students worked with those critical literacy concepts and my observations regarding the activities, engagements, and student behavior. The area of language use, which I believe makes visible student attitudes towards critical literacy engagements, will be further explored with each of the four cases, as well as in the discussion of the findings in Chapter 5.

Four Cases: Period A, Period B, Period C, and the Literacy Research Club

First, I will provide a description of the four separate cases: Period A, Period B, Period C, and the Literacy Research Club. Periods A, B, and C followed the curriculum map provided in Table 4.1 and I will discuss the types of responses to and engagement with critical literacy within the English and Language Arts classroom. Within that discussion, I will provide examples of how students feel about their experiences with critical literacy and the varying positions that the students can take up as readers, writers, listeners, speakers, and actors in the English and Language Arts classroom, as well as when and under what conditions those positions are available. Next, I will describe the

case of the Literacy Research Club and how those students engaged as co-researchers to co-analyze and co-construct critical literacy activities within the English and Language Arts classroom. Specifically, I will provide description of how those students actively engage in remaking the curriculum to reflect cultural production rather than cultural reproduction and what key issues emerged from the Literacy Research Club meetings which are then filtered back to larger English and Language Arts classes for discussion, debate, and analysis.

Period A

Period A met daily from 8:40-9:34 a.m., with a focus on English. Period A was comprised of 24 students: twelve girls and twelve boys. A male teacher worked with this same group of students for Language Arts. However, the other teacher and I planned units together in order to share both reading and writing curriculum responsibilities. This shared class did pose challenges that Periods B and C, with a 90-minute block, did not; students required more verbal review and direction to complete classroom activities, prompting to stay on task, and more time to complete activities and assignments. Additionally, I did not read every novel to them; this was also shared between the other English and Language Arts teacher and me. Situated at tables rather than desks, this class was very social and frequently engaged in discussions not related to classroom tasks. Classroom discussion opportunities with this group of students were more limited than either Period B or C, and when those opportunities did arise, the focus was on textual understanding and literary elements.

We began reading in Period A yesterday, but did not get to fill out the graphic organizer that accompanies each chapter. We did that today, and while it was

slow going – with me writing everything on the board for them to copy down – the

students did bring up how Hollis Woods labels people. I asked if these labels

were positive or negative, and they answered negative. I asked them to notice if

Hollis uses negative labels throughout the book, or if she also gives positive

labels to people. My initial feelings are that this class will not explore equity

issues as deeply as my other two classes. Many of them are not reading at grade

level, which I realize does not mean that I can't or won't bring up these issues.

However, due to the time constraints of this class (45 minutes opposed to 90

minutes), I worry that my focus will be more on story comprehension and story

elements, rather than critical literacy methods and issues.

Observation Journal 12/12/06

However, even with the time constraints and fewer opportunities for in-depth

discussion, Period A was still able to explore issues of gender and power, if on a smaller

level than Periods B and C.

Last night's homework was to respond to the following prompt in the writer's

notebook: What are your best and worst subjects in school? What do and don't

you like about them? In class today, Marty shared his entry, and remarked that

he liked gym the best, but that some of the girls probably didn't like it since they

weren't good at gym. Many of the girls in the class became "fired up" at this

statement and began to challenge Marty verbally. Andrea, Megan, and Ashley,

and even Derek and Nathan, all made comments that Marty's entry was sexist,

biased, and prejudiced. I stepped in at that point, so that the conversation

wouldn't get out of hand. Marty seemed to feel like he was just sharing his

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opinion, and I stated that we have to be careful not to make stereotypical

generalizations—that there are a lot of girls and boys who are good athletes, just

like there are girls and boys who are not good athletes, and also girls and boys

who are average athletes. I also commented that sometimes it depends on the

teacher as to how you perform in a class [whether you like a particular teacher or

perceive how that teacher feels about you], regardless of ability level.

<div align="right">Observation Journal 1/17/07</div>

Looking at the previous excerpt from my observation journal, this class demonstrated a critique of the "norm" – specifically that boys were better at sports and athletic activities than girls. Both girls and boys in this class challenged Marty, which shows a move from reinforcing a culturally reproduced stereotype to challenging that stereotype and producing a new cultural belief.

Period A was, however, often a source of frustration for me as a teacher striving to achieve a balance of power among myself and the students.

I got very mad at Period A yesterday. They insist on talking when I'm either

giving directions or reading to them--so I had them read the chapters silently to

themselves. I did feel bad, because so many of those students depend on hearing

text orally in order to comprehend it. That class is so social! They do need to

learn to "do school" in order to make it through the rest of school. My other two

classes--the ones who've already learned to "do school" and have adjusted to

border crossing--have more freedom, more allowances to get off topic, to make

random comments, to have fun because they can settle down when I need them to.

In those classes, I don't need to use my position as "The Teacher" in order to

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accomplish my goals and objectives, but I do in Period A. Are they missing out?

Or are they benefiting from a more structured routine?

I frequently questioned how my belief in the importance of "doing school," and the way that I located power within myself, conflicted with my belief in the importance of enacting a curriculum of critical literacy, which focuses on equity and fairness. I feel that it may have been contradictory and counterproductive to expect a certain standard of behavior while teaching and learning about justice, fairness, oppression, and marginalization. My attitude toward Period A may have marginalized that group of children and caused resistance towards their participation in the classroom activities and engagements I had designed.

Since Period A was split between two English and Language Arts teachers, they were frequently behind Periods B and C in terms of novel read-aloud units, writing projects, and literature circle discussions. This added pressure to get the district's curriculum covered and, consequently, Period A had the least time to participate in the same critical literacy activities completed in Periods B and C.

I didn't record Period A's literature circle discussions today. First, I didn't have

enough recorders with me, and second, I thought it would be more of a distraction

with their very first discussion. I prepped that group more than I did the other

classes with what makes a good discussion/conversation and what to avoid. I

gave them 15 minutes to talk about their books, and let them know they'd have 15

minutes. That group also wrote one paragraph describing what was good about

their discussion and what could be improved for next time. From walking around

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during the discussions, I think most groups had actual conversations, rather than just reading through each paper. Plus, expecting them to talk for the whole 15 minutes encouraged them to make comparisons to Daniel's Story and give opinions on whether they liked their books or not.

<div align="right">Observation Journal 5/4/07</div>

Again, with Period A, I demonstrated an unequal balance of power with the students. By giving this class such specific requirements and time limits, I may have removed the opportunity for critique and delving deeper into equity issues present within the literature circle books and our society today.

Period A had a distinct disadvantage of less time to work with critical literacy engagements, though I tried to help them achieve quality discussions and engagements in their shortened time with me. Length of time may not be directly correlated to level of engagement, or level of potential empowerment, but I do feel that our shortage of time had a negative impact upon Period A's knowledge and use of critical literacy practices.

Summary

In this section, I have described Period A students and their engagements with critical literacy during the year. The students had less time than Periods B and C, and were therefore at a slight disadvantage with their critical literacy learning opportunities. This class also had a population of students that benefited from a more closely structured environment, repeated instructions, teacher assistance, and extra time to complete assignments. While this class challenged my desire to share power more equitably among teacher and students, and had less of an opportunity to participate in critical

literacy activities, there was still space for exploration into gender, power, and racial justice issues.

Period B

Period B met daily for a 90-minute block of English and Language Arts class from 9:37-11:10 a.m., with a total of 23 students: eight boys and fifteen girls. This class was both verbal and social, and many of the students were formally identified as gifted and talented according to district standards.

When working with this group of students, I found their vocal nature to be conducive to engaging in critical literacy activities. This is not to say that a quieter class of students could not be receptive to critical literacy engagements, rather that it may take a more concerted effort on the teacher's part. Classroom discussions are an integral part of the English and Language Arts curriculum and with an emphasis on critical literacy, these discussions became even more important. While I often felt unsure that I was pushing them to look at the social, gender, racial, class issues enough, the students were receptive to exploring the topics I brought up for discussion with a variety of texts.

> *Good discussion in Period B today! We used the Kids Ink® section of the*
>
> *newspaper today and looked at voting. The goal was to make text-to-self*
>
> *connection, but what ensued was a very good discussion about gender roles and*
>
> *rights (feminist lens!). The kids noticed the line that "By about 1860, most white*
>
> *men without property were granted voting rights. But African Americans, women,*
>
> *Native Americans, non-English speakers and citizens between the ages of 18 and*
>
> *21 had to fight for the right to vote in this country," (Dayton Daily News p. A18,*

2006). The kids said this reminded of them that their female relatives were now allowed to vote, and that now women were also allowed to participate in other sports and professions that typically were male-dominated. Specific professional-level sports listed were football, baseball, bowling, golf, hockey, basketball, and soccer. Other occupations were also now more "acceptable" for women to participate in: government offices, etc, but that we are still waiting for a women president or a person of color as president. The topic moved from what women were now allowed to do, to what men were also acceptably allowed to do – such as, male cheerleaders, male gymnasts, and male nurses. We spoke about colors being assigned to certain genders, and that colors belonged to everyone. Pink has become more acceptable for males to wear without stigma. I also told them that we can still carry on this discussion about gender roles and positions (what boys do, what girls do, how boys are presented & represented in the text, and how girls are presented & represented in the text) as we read Freak the Mighty, *and they appeared to be receptive to this.*

Observation Journal 11/7/06

While this class had in-depth discussions, the students often perceived the discussion to be a single occurrence. Topics raised in one discussion were typically not raised in future discussions, unless I brought them up again regardless of how frequently I reminded the class that we could continue speaking about certain ideas.

Period B is a class that comes up with seemingly deeper thoughts regarding the plot, characters, and issues in the book. Not just this book, but with all the stories we read together. Today, Rusty and Alexander picked up some elements of

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foreshadowing ... The comments and questions raised in Period B lead me to the

questions I ask in Period C. However, the depth reached in Period B takes longer

to achieve in Period C, and with more teacher prompting.

Observation Journal 1/11/07

As the year progressed, Period B students developed skills to debate among their classmates and I was able to step back and take a role as moderator, rather than leader or challenger. Not every student participated in whole-class debates, but actively listened and if self-motivated, would raise their hands and wait for their turn to talk.

Interesting discussion yesterday in Period B: Eve expressed some strong feelings

about having a baby without being married first. This all came up because

Barfalemue mentioned how I would like to "fall in with" Gerard Butler (we were

going over vocabulary), and I mentioned that he was on E! News® the night

before. Brandi then shared that while she was home sick, she was watching E!'s

100 Best Celeb Bodies. Brandi said that [the singer] Beyoncé got #1 and I said it

should have been [actress] Angelina Jolie--which is how the whole child-out-of-

wedlock conversation came up.

Paris challenged Eve on her views. Eve did get somewhat flustered and made the

remark that "it's just not supposed to be that way" (having kids without being

married). I asked her if there was a difference between adopting kids without

being married and having kids naturally. Eve felt that there were moral issues

[my words, not hers] to this. I did make a comment saying that just because

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someone makes a bad decision (i.e., having a child out of wedlock), that doesn't

make them a bad person.

I've been trying to let the kids debate amongst themselves more--let them make

points, rather than me stepping in with my own views.

Observation Journal 3/2/07

Popular culture can be a powerful avenue into critical literacy explorations. Most groups of students are very willing to engage in discussions about topics which appear to not have anything to do with school. Therefore, a debate regarding a television show or popular song will likely elicit more participation from students, and from a wider range of students, than a debate based on a reading or writing assignment. In the example above, the situation of having a child out-of-wedlock was broached in *Seedfolks* earlier in the year. When reading Maricela's chapter in both Periods B and C, we talked about GEDs and making good and bad choices and learning from bad choices, i.e. unplanned pregnancies and dropping out of school (Observation Journal 10/9/06). There was student participation, but I was the leading force behind the discussion. However, when the conversation revolves around media celebrities, the same situation garnered much more attention and greater student participation from Period B.

In the example above, Eve's comment that, "it's just not supposed to be that way," is a very telling remark. It illustrates how deeply engrained dominant discourses of heterosexual couplings, marriages, and families are even among sixth grade students. Students who challenge this discourse tend to be among the minority. This comment would have been a good avenue into exploring the issues of single-parents and especially

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of persons who are not permitted to marry, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) individuals. In the same vein, when discussing the topic of having children out-of-wedlock, our class did not talk about LGBT couples having children biologically, through surrogates, or through adoption. There is a great deal of familial blending currently, so the social construction of relationships and family is a relevant topic for discussion. However, it is assumed that the dominant discourse for such constructions is a heterosexual one. A curriculum of equity needs to involve challenging the dominant discourse of heterosexuality as "correct" or "right" and explore how gender and sexuality are cultural constructions. Also, by not exploring LGBT families, those students who are a part of these families find themselves "othered," and potentially discriminated against. A curriculum of equity also needs to focus on how "…school-based discourses and text-based literacy practices can not only be powerfully disenfranchising for a population already marginalized [e.g. LGBT individuals]…," (de Castell & Jenson, 2007, p. 132).

In the next example, taking place later in the school year, students were again bringing popular culture into the larger class conversations. Topics such as heroes, heroines, and Disney® characters come forward and room is given to explore student observations.

> *The kids are starting to ask really good questions and make connections. I've also been more explicit about pointing out examples of our vocabulary words in our readings: propaganda, intimidation, Zionism, apathy. The kids were confused by the teacher in the book using propaganda in the classroom. It was suggested that maybe the teacher really believed in Hitler's ideas, and I suggested*

that maybe the teacher had to use a propaganda-filled curriculum or get fired or get sent to a concentration camp--more intimidation.

Eve brought up how Disney® characters aren't all blonde-haired and blue-eyed---Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, Anastasia---so it goes against what Hitler was saying. We talked about why Disney® would have more than just blonde-haired, blue-eyed heroes and heroines. Some mentioned how it shows diversity, helps us to see all the variety/variation in our life. We also talked about what characters would look like in Hitler's Germany---heroes and heroines with blonde hair & blue eyes; villains with dark hair & eyes. I am very happy to see them looking at the popular media in their lives!

Today's discussion also brought up some gender roles. In the '30's, women traditionally took care of the household, while men went out to work. Therefore, bachelors wouldn't be likely to know how to cook. We compared (or I compared and they agreed) that today, women & men can choose what role they take---women can go to work or stay home and the same for men.

The incorporation of nonfiction text with the historical fiction is very helpful. The kids are very curious about how this could happen and the nonfiction helps create a larger picture, helping us to learn from past mistakes.

<div align="right">Observation Journal 3/12/07</div>

From this excerpt, I was noticing a change, which could perhaps be termed growth or transfer, in my students from their earlier work with *Seedfolks* to this work with *Daniel's Story*. After approximately six months of critical literacy and equity exploration, the students had more tools with which to think and speak about such topics. Additionally, rather than bringing up exemplars myself, I sat patiently and waited for the students to share their own ideas. Due to this lengthened wait time, I believe that the students realized that it was not just a teacher-led discussion, but a classroom community discussion, and therefore appeared to take more ownership of discussion time and topics.

This conversation also demonstrates how students and teachers can work to interrupt commonplace ideas of their lives with the use of a variety of texts, including popular media. Though the teacher may have a slightly larger role in discussions, the students show that they are taking ownership of conversation topics and as the classroom teacher, I consciously worked with the class to help them elaborate upon their ideas and to help them explore the foundations of our commonly held notions. This is a slow, ongoing process, with moments of frustration, anticipation, and achievement -- frustration when it seems as if the students are unwilling to challenge societal assumptions or that the teacher must "spoon-feed" ideas for critique to them; anticipation when discussions show great promise of challenging the status quo and students begin to behave with acceptance rather than merely tolerance; achievement as students act for change in their world and initiate conversations that open up possibilities for repositioning themselves in their worlds.

During the Holocaust unit, literature circle discussion groups were formed based on students' rankings of various historical fiction and nonfiction titles. Once the groups

were set, each group met to determine how far to read prior to the first discussions, with the expectation that there would be at least three discussions. As stated previously in Chapter 3, I used categories of language to code student reactions in their literature circle discussions (see Table 3.3 below).

Categories of Student Reactions (with Abbreviations)
Language Use (LU)
• Reading Written Statements (RWS)
• Questioning Text (QT)
• Questioning Peers (QP)
• Collaborating (CB)
• Clarifying Statements (CS)
• Analyzing Text/Lens Sheet Statements (AS)
• Evaluating Text/Lens Sheet Statements (ES)
Power Relationships (PR)
Resistance to Critical Literacy (RCL)
Acceptance of Critical Literacy (ACL)
Cultural Production (CP)
Cultural Reproduction (CR)
Critiquing the "Norm" (CN)

Table 3.3: Categories of student reactions to critical literacy activities and experiences

The group reading *The Upstairs Room* (Reiss, 1990) had three female students. During their first discussion, the members engaged in a discussion focused on reading through the lens sheets and talking about the overall plot of the story. The group's comments demonstrate that the goal of this novel discussion was to ask questions regarding characters and plot, to clarify understanding, and to analyze and evaluate character behavior. The questioning was resolved through group collaboration, rather than one member taking on the role of "expert."

Line	Speaker	Dialogue	Language Use
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12	Gordina	My symbol? Okay, my character was the father and my symbol was the idea of the yellow radio…and I drew a picture of a radio because father always listens to the radio and he's always like yelling at it and being all mean to it. [laughter from group members] Yeah, and then everybody else gathers around like the family that lived across the street. They all gathered around the radio to listen to it. And then, I chose yellow because they're Jewish and the Star of David which is the symbol …. the symbol um…. it's yellow, which the Star of David, yeah, yellow. Which one are you doing? Which one do you want to do next?	RWS
13	Victoria	I don't know. Poe, do you want to go next?	
14 15 16 17	Poe	Sure. I was the multicultural lens, and um…..uh, some groups are privileged above other groups, um like the SS are privileged over regular Germans because they support Hitler.	RWS
18	Gordina	What does SS stand for again?	QP
19	Poe	Um,	
20	Victoria	It's like Black Shirts	CB
21 22	Poe	Black Shirts or something, some Black Shirts, some Black Shirts	
23 24	Victoria	Like, are they like, I think my book compared it to Hitler's secret service.	CS
25	Gordina	Yeah, Hitler's secret service	CS
26	XX	I don't know, I don't have anything.	
27	Poe	Okay, where did it come from? [pages flipping]	QP
28	Gordina	Yeah, I think it is Hitler's secret service.	CS
29 30	Poe	Uh, which characters experience discrimination? Um, Jewish characters like Annie and Sini	RWS
31 32 33	Gordina	Sihni or Seeni, I don't, I don't know how to pronounce it. I'd be like, I'm like xxxxxxxxx [laughter from group]	
34 35 36 37 38 39	Poe	Um, they face religious types of discrimination because they're Jewish. And how are cultures or ethnicities in *The Upstairs Room* the same or different from today's society? Uh, some cultures are the same, like some people are still Jewish. Um some are different because nobody is like supporting Hitler or	RWS
40	Gordina	Well some people are xxxx	CS
41	Poe	Well, yeah, sorry,	
42	Gordina	xxxxxxxx	
43	XX	xxxxxxxx	
44	Poe	Yeah, and well not much people are like SSes or kapos	ES

45 46 47 48 49 50	XX	Hey, wasn't um, there was some person like Lily or something like that, that he, that father worked for and he didn't want to buy stuff from him anymore because he was like Jewish, and they didn't mind but they didn't want to get, they didn't want people to not coming to him	QT/QP
51	Poe	People to stay away from him?	CB
52	XX	Yeah	CB
53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67	Victoria	'Kay, I did gender lens and um, some of the roles to women is peasants and mothers and like some of like the like women hide people, so I put hiding people roles, like cause some are, some are women and stuff and some are men so I put it on men too, and I put down socials for men and Nazis and fathers. And um, well, I did the social ladder so I put the Nazis on top then I did the soldiers and then I did the kapos and then I did SS guards and then I did people hiding Jews and then I put the Jews at the bottom. And then I did, um, it says um 'Is, um the gender roles in, in uh the story, *The Upstairs Room* um the same or different from the gender roles in today's society?' And I say no because xxx treated them mean and cruel and stuff and now we don't. We're like actually nice and	RWS AS ES
68	XX	xxxxxxxxx	
69 70 71 72	Victoria	And women have more jobs and so do men. And um, and no Holocaust, like we prevent that and stuff. We actually work it out and that's what I have for gender lens.	AS ES
73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82	Gordina	Yea power lens. Power lens, woo hoo. (Laughs) Okay, um…um some social groups represented in *The Upstairs Room* are like Polish Jews and then like farmers, cause like some people were farmers and then like some people aren't allowed to be farmers anymore, cause they're Jewish farmers, and then like Germans, either German or Germans citizens, and citizens of Holland.. that are evil, well not all of them, like they started attacking, and saying this chant, it's like 'Jews, Jew you dirty mole, someday you'll end up in a hole.'	RWS CS
83 84	Victoria	No, no, it's 'Jew, Jew dirty mole, xxxx in a dirty hole.' Um, xxxxx occupied by Nazis	CS
85 86	Gordina	Yeah, okay, and then there's Nazis, and…and then there's the Russians	RWS
87	Victoria	Yeah	
88	Poe	xxxxxxxxx	
89	Victoria	They helped the Americans try to save the Jews…	

90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99	Gordina	And then the social ladder, I wasn't sure if I was supposed to do it by the Nazis perspective or like the other thing? Yeah, it's uh, yeah. Uh well Nazis have the highest power then there's like German citizens then Russians, cause they don't like have all the power but they're trying to get the power cause then the Jews can have more power. And the citizens of Holland, farmers, and then Polish Jews. And then, for …some of the primary power struggles that are ..the text are like the people who have power…peeper	QP RWS
100	Victoria	Paper?	
101 102 103 104 105 106	Gordina	*People* that have the power are Nazis, the Germans, the Russians, the citizens of Holland except for like the Jews, and then the farmers except for the Jewish ones. Yeah. And then the have no power are the Polish Jews and all the other Jews. Which is kind of sad, cause everybody likes people.	RWS ES
107 108	Victoria	Well not really. Not the Nazis because they like think that Jews had done all the bad things	CS
109 110 111 112	Gordina	Yeah. I was wondering about one thing. Um. Who was that one family again? I can't remember. Wait, let me check my book. The family that was always around and then they were going to a new house?	QP QT
113	Poe	Ohh, ooh, I know who that is!	CB
114	Victoria	Gan's family.	CS
115 116 117 118 119	Gordina	Yeah the little.. xxxxxxx [laughing] Um but yeah the little chant is like 'Jews , Jews you dirt, ugly mole stick your face in a dirty hole, stick your face in a mustard pot, by tomorrow Jews will rot, Jews will rot.' Yeah it's kind of sad.	CS ES
120 121	Victoria	Yeah. I think, I think it was like really sad that people would actually say that about people.	ES

Figure 4.1: *The Upstairs Room* literature circle discussion #1 transcript 4/11/07

The group's discussion was centered on reading through the lens sheets. This

focused the discussion, yet still allowed room for clarifying comments, questions,

collaboration, and evaluations or social commentaries of character behavior. Each

member engaged in clarifying and evaluating statements, in addition to reading their

written lens sheet statements. Victoria was the only member to make analyzing statements. In lines 66-68 and 70-73, she commented,

> *And I say no because xxx treated them mean and cruel and stuff and now we don't. We're actually nice and…And women have more jobs and so do men. And um, no Holocaust, like we prevent that and stuff. We actually work it out and that's what I have for gender lens.*

By analyzing the differences regarding treatment of people and the employment opportunities available to both genders, Victoria demonstrates an ability, though likely a novice ability, to break down the "gender polarization, 'the male-female difference…superimposed on so many aspects of the social world…'" (Greenbaum, 1999).   While the other group members did not take up this thread of conversation to add their own analyses, the possibilities for gender roles has been reimagined. When collaboration did occur in this discussion, brought up by Gordina's questioning, it was regarding a definitive concept, the "SS." The members were able to look up a single definition in their novels to alleviate their own confusion, but this collaboration did not necessarily enhance the discussion regarding gender, power, and cultural equities and inequities.

I designed the lens sheets to provide a structure to guide my students as they investigated new equity ideas and to allow for conversation and collaboration. However, perhaps due to the students' past experience with handouts and worksheets, the lens sheets themselves became not a stepping stone, as I had hoped, but rather an object or assignment to be completed and shared, but not necessarily elaborated upon. As the classroom teacher, I may not have modeled the potential of the lens sheets to the fullest.

In my demonstrations, I may have failed to give enough time to sharing with the students how to use the lens sheets as a springboard for conversations, questions, connections, analyses, and evaluations of textual content and social issues. This may have given my students the impression that all they needed to do was to read their designated book sections, complete the lens sheets, and read through the sheets with their group members, rather than have conversations about equity issues present in their novels. Time constraints are again an issue, and to help my students explore equity issues, it would have been beneficial if I had taken more time to demonstrate additional examples of using the lens sheets for analysis and evaluation of societal critique and equity concerns, both historically and currently.

Another group, made up of three males, read the novel, *Milkweed* (Spinelli, 2003). During the group's first discussion, the focus was also on reading through written statements from the lens sheets.

Line	Speaker	Dialogue	Language Use
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11	Harry	Some of the rules for a woman in the lead is being a mom and if you're younger you can be children of course and you can be a daughter which is girls and adults. Some of the roles for men is being the dad, children boys and sons, boys and being the son adults and I did a social ladder and I'll go from the top social to the bottom social. First Nazis and then Arians then jackboots. Then citizens of Germany then there are non-Arians, then there are gypsies, and then Jews. The roles are the same because we have dads and moms, children, boys, and girls, and other adults.	RWS
12 13 14 15 16	Barfalemue	Okay since Harry is done I'm going to be doing the power lens right now. Some of the social groups in the book are Hitler, Nazis, citizens, gypsies, Jews and jackboots. Okay I also have a social ladder I'm going to go from highest to lowest liked people. Um on the	RWS

17		highest I have Hitler and next is jackboots, next is	
18		Nazis, and next is the citizens of Germany, next is	
19		gypsies, and Jews. And then now I have a chart that	
20		says who has power and who has no power. The	
21		people that have power are Nazis, Hitler, citizens, and	
22		jackboots. The people that have no power are Jews	
23		and gypsies. Now I'm also going to be doing the	
24		symbolist for Misha Pilsudski. Okay Harry one idea	
25		that you think it is. Why it is yellow and they are	QP
26		handcuffs.	
27	Harry	Why it's yellow and why they're in handcuffs. They	AS
28		are handcuffs because the Nazis like to arrest the Jews	
29		and gypsies if they talk back or something that the	
30		Nazis don't like.	
31	Barfalemue	For the next one….yellow, and what other one could it	QP
32		be?	
33	Harry	Oh yeah because um sometimes they would get caught	AS
34		by stealing food because they need to eat food and I	
35		remembered when they always would like steal a loaf	
36		of bread like everyday and give it to the poor	
37		sometimes. And that is all I can think about it.	
38	Barfalemue	Yeah you guys got em both. Now it is Jack	ES
39	Jack	Some of the cultures that are represented in	RWS
40		Jews, gypsies, jackboots, Nazis and some of the	
41		dualities present in the book are Jews, gypsies ,	
42		jackboots. Arians verses Jews and gypsies. Some of	
43		the reinforced stereotypes are the challenged, social	
44		stereotypes because we don't have discriminate and	
45		some of the social leaders are Nazis, jackboots,	
46		gypsies, and Jews. And some of the groups that are	
47		xxxx and Hitler convinces the Germans to hate Jews	
48		and gypsies, and some of the religions that are xxxx	
49		Misha and rest of the xxxx and they are xxxx, gypsies,	
50		and left xxxx Germans is that it.	
51	Barfalemue	Okay so we are done basically. …	

Figure 4.2: *Milkweed* literature circle discussion #1 transcript 4/11/07

One member, with the role of the symbolist, did engage the group with questions

regarding the color and choice of his symbol. This prompted an analysis of the choices,

although only one other member responded, rather than the entire group. In addition,

Barfalemue's questioning actively engaged the group, unlike the members of *The Upstairs Room*. The symbolist in that group read through her lens sheet and did not question her group members regarding the choices of color, shape, and character.

In the group's last discussion, the lens sheets were the central focus, but there were longer turns at talk and more questioning and analyses surrounding the content of the lens sheets.

Line	Speaker	Dialogue	Language Use
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12	Harry	This is our discussion group with Jack, Barfalemue, and Harry. And….And..uh, I get the power lens. And some of the social groups in *Milkweed* are Jackboots, Nazis, Aryans, Jews, and Gypsies. Uh, the social, social ladder, I went Nazis, Jackboots, SS, Hitler Youth... well no, Ary, Aryans then Hitler Youth, Gypsies, and Jews. And some of the primary or main power struggles… okay forget that. The people who have, have power are Jackboots, Nazis, Aryans, SS, Hitler Youth, and people who have no power are basically non-Aryans who are Jews and Gypsies. And….	RWS
13	Barfalemue	'kay, how does that relate to *Daniel's Story*?	QP
14 15 16 17 18 19	Harry	Uh, except for like the Jackboots, they uh, it's basically the same way without the Jackboots on the social ladder. Cause the, I, I haven't even heard of the Jackboots before. And, in *Daniel's Story*, we've heard of Nazis, Hitler Youth, SS, Aryans, Jews, and Gypsies. So…	AS
20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30	Barfalemue	Alright, well it's my turn. Uh, I have the multicultural lens. Um, okay. Some cultures and ethlic, ethinic groups, ethnic groups represented in uh *Milkweed* are Jews, Gypsies, Aryans, Americans, Germans, Poles, and Russians. Um, that is basically different because Americans weren't really a part in *Daniel's Story* except for freeing them from Buchenwald, and in this one he actually moves to America so, that's how it's different and he has a daughter and everything. Uh, some events, examples of inequalities represented in *Milkweed* are Jews	RWS

31		versus Nazis, which are basically like Aryans also	
32		Jews versus Aryans. Um, Poles versus, which is	
33		Polish people, versus uh, Nazis. And Americans	
34		versus Germans because of the war. And Russians	
35		versus Germans because of the war. Um, these	
36		examples *don't* reinforce society's stereotypes. Uh,	
37		yeah, and uh, because there's really no	AS
38		discrimination now other than in like Africa cause,	
39		uh, they have people going around killing people for	
40		no reason. And uh, that's not right, so we try not to	ES
41		do that here in America. Um, and now I have the	
42		social ladder. On top I have Nazis, Jackboots, and I	RWS
43		have like, all the Hitler Youth and all that kind of	
44		stuff. And then I have, Russians, then Americans,	
45		and down at the bottom they're all the same. [Harry	
46		yawns] Um, I have Poles, Jews, and Gypsies. And	
47		they're all discriminated against. And put into	
48		ghettos and death camps and all that kind of stuff.	
49		Um, some groups are priv, privileged above others	
50		because uh Hitler invaded countries and believed that	
51		like Jews and all them were like polluting Germany	RWS/ES
52		and like that they needed to be all dead so that they	
53		could be, true Germany or something like that and it	
54		was really weird um. But, and he was basically a	
55		dictator so he made his whole country believe that if	
56		they didn't believe that, then they were dead, so	
57		that's why. Um…like, uh, which characters	
58		experienced discrimination. Um, I have like Mischa	
59		and all of his friends, I have Big Head (laughs) and	
60		uh, basically like just everyone cause there was no	AS
61		one in the story who didn't get discriminated against	
62		that was a main character. So… yeah. And cultures	
63		and ethnics, ethnic groups in *Milkweed* are.. the same	
64		from today's society because, uh let my find my	
65		stuff, oh there it is. Yeah they're the same because	RWS
66		there's still Jews, Gypsies, Germans, Americans,	
67		Russians, and all that other stuff that I said earlier.	
68		So, now it's Jack's turn so, go.	
69			
70	Jack	I have gender lens and some of the roles that are	RWS
71		available to women in *Milkweed* is being a mother	
72		and sister and daughter. And some of the roles	
73		available in men in *Milkweed* are being a father.	
74		And, uh and uh, uh the social ladder is first is Nazis	
75		then Jackboots then xxx, and some gender ro, roles in	
76		*Milkweed* are um, for um the same gender roles	

77		influence xxxx is different for as jobs and……	
78	Barfalemue	That it? Sweet. We're done.	
79	Harry	That is the last and final message of *Milkweed*.	

Figure 4.3: *Milkweed* literature circle discussion #3 transcript 5/4/07

This group's last discussion continued to revolve around reading the written statements from the role sheets. However, compared with their first discussion (see Figure 4.4), the group members increased the length of their turn at talk, their questions about the text, analyzed their statements more, and had more elaboration regarding multicultural and power issues present in the text. For example, in lines 37-41 and 50-57, Barfalemue began reading his written statements, but elaborated by evaluating the statements he had written. With the longest and most detailed turns at talk, Barfalemue took on the role as group "leader," and this position was not challenged by the other members. Also, his position as "leader" did not necessarily encourage more discussion by Jack or Harry. His comments about the violence in Africa were not taken up by the others for further discussion, and neither was his analysis of a dictatorship. This may have been due to the group's excitement to be finished with the literature circle project or a lack of knowledge regarding the aforementioned topics.

Looking at language use, during the first discussion, only Harry and Barfalemue went beyond simply reading their written lens sheet statements to also analyze and evaluate the group's comments. Jack, typically a quiet student in the classroom, participated in the discussion, but only to read his lens sheet. He did not respond to Barfalemue's questioning or collaborate with his the other members to add his own analysis or evaluation of the unjust arrest of Jews during the Holocaust. Compared with

the group's last discussion, Barfalemue engaged with the most diverse types of language use, making analyzing and evaluating statements to expand, and possibly to open up the conversation to Jack and Harry, his own written statements. Both Jack and Harry's language use did not change from the first to the last discussion. Notably, this group did not collaborate to co-construct understandings from their novel. It appears that, in both discussions, when Barfalemue asked a question, Harry would respond to him; however, this did not develop into a critique of the norms present in the text and seems instead to demonstrate the enculturated notion of "doing school." As Barfalemue takes on the position of group "leader," the other members appear to view him as the "teacher": one to be listened to, not to argue with, and one to whose questions should be answered.

Summary

In this section, I have described how the students in Period B worked with activities based on critical literacy and how they responded to those activities. I have also provided examples of how Period B engaged in critical literacy work by bringing up social issues of which they had personal interest and how they worked to learn a language of critique. Though this class demonstrated less resistance to critiquing issues surrounding inequity, they also showed the need for developing and using a language of acceptance, inclusion, and empowerment.

Period C

Period C met daily from 11:13 a.m.-1:31 p.m., with lunch and activity period included from 11:15-11:56 a.m. Twenty-six students, eleven girls and fifteen boys, met for a 90-minute block of English and Language Arts class. These students were more

quiet and reserved, and it often took more teacher-prompting to get children to share their responses and ideas.

Among the three periods, this group of students was the most resistant to concepts of critical literacy. This particular class was often hard to get started into a large-group conversation, but once ideas began to be shared, they had some very strong ideas about what's "normal." An ongoing challenge as the classroom teacher was to help the students move past their tightly held ideas of "normal," as well as reflecting, questioning, and critiquing the status quo. Another challenge was to empower the students to lead their own large group discussions, rather than relying on the teacher to provide the direction.

Period C didn't explore [topics of foreshadowing] at all. That doesn't mean that students aren't thinking about predictions or foreshadowing, but they don't articulate these thoughts unless I specifically prompt them. The comments and questions raised in Period B lead me to the questions I ask in Period C. … I don't want to dominate the discussion, but we haven't gotten to the point where the students are leading the discussions in Period C.

Observation Journal 1/11/07

I really haven't been giving the kids time to discuss issues or themes being raised by our novel. I feel like I'm in a rush to get through the book, so as not to lose their attention. Yesterday, Period C worked on a response question asking whether they thought the foster care agency should take Hollis away from Josie because Josie neglects to send Hollis to school many days. They shared their responses today in class, and 2 people who shared (Laura and Hinka) thought

that Hollis should stay with Josie because they loved each other and Hollis was

finally happy again. Both thought, though, that it was important for Hollis to get

an education. I need to have this class do an entry about what they think the

purpose of school is. Mr. T also shared his response and said that Hollis should

be taken away since getting an education was very important.

I tried probing the students a little more in Period C yesterday when the kids

shared responses. For example, how would the foster agency know that Hollis

was happy, or that she and Josie had a connection? The students don't seem to

like when I challenge their answers. They will give a couple additional

explanations of their thinking, but then will usually say "I don't know."

Observation Journal 1/18/07

These examples illustrate how resistance to critique is encountered in the

classroom. Teachers cannot assume that students possess the tools necessary to verbally

debate a position or a closely held opinion. Teachers can neither assume that the same

issues with which they find critique-worthy are the same issues that their students would

volunteer to critique. It is important to work with the students in their zone of proximal

development to first notice types and locations of inequity, then look at multiple positions

from which the inequity can be viewed and the multiple meanings associated with those

viewpoints, and then seek to act upon alternatives (Vygotsky, 1978; Mellor & Patterson,

2001).

Period C also engaged in literature circle group reading and discussions. As with

Period B, the discussions were focused on reading through the lens sheets, and students

made comments within their groups to question, clarify, evaluate, analyze, and

collaborate as they worked to make meaning of the plot as well as examine potential

inequities present in their novels.

Line	Speaker	Dialogue	Language Use
26 27 28 29	Kisa	Okay, for the power lens…uh, uh for some of the social groups I have the Nazis, the Jews, the other discriminated groups and the people in the camps. Anything else you can think of?	QP
30	XX	The SS?	CS
31	Kisa	That's typically part of the Nazis, isn't it?	CS
32	XX	xxxxxxxx	
33 34 35 36 37 38	Kisa	Um, and for the social ladder, at the top I have Hitler which is absolutely obvious beyond belief. Um then the Nazis, the Aryans, I don't know what cause I erased a whole bunch there and I don't know what used to be there, the other discriminated groups, and the Jews. Xxxxxxxxx do that.	RWS
39 40	Gunther	Well, on my handout, some of the roles available to women in the book are their housekeeps	RWS
41 42	Kisa	Xxxx there is nothing like interesting for the women in this book.	AS/ES
43	Gunther	Uh, and then for the	
44 45	Kisa	Wait, isn't there like maids and the like factory worker women people? And the food serving girls!	QT
46	Gunther	Uh	
47 48	Kisa	And both men and women can be like the people stuck in the camps or Nazis.	CS
49	Gunther	Oh, okay.	
50	Kisa	Xxxxxx yes Kisa is xxxxxxx.	
51 52	Gunther	And then some roles for men are father obviously, farmer,	RWS
53 54 55 56 57	Kisa	Father should be at the top, yeah. Okay, so how did you get farmer? [laughing] It was one of those things where you couldn't think of anything so you just randomly wrote something down? [laughing]	ES CS
58	XX	Yeah.	
59	Kisa	That's okay, we all do that.	
60 61 62	Gunther	Okay, um and then for the social ladder I definitely put Hitler at the top, then Nazis, Germans, Kapos	RWS
63	Kisa	Kapo is a xxxxxx You didn't finish that!	

64	Gunther	I know but I xxxxxxx	
65	Kisa	Yeah, but you didn't finish it.	
66 67	Gunther	And then other groups that are like discriminated against are like Jews.	
68 69 70	Kisa	Xxxxxxx kept holding three fingers up saying 'I am not a Jew!' xxxx And she kept using that one word over and over again.	
71	XX	[whispering] I don't care.	
72	Gunther	Okay, um… the rest Crash.	
73 74	Kisa	Crash do you have absolutely anything down and or done?	
75	XX	xxxxxxxxx	
76	Kisa	I know. And they're the obvious ones.	
77	Crash	Uh Germans, Aryans	
78	Kisa	The other discriminated groups	
79	Crash	SS	
80	XX	[humming]	
81 82 83	Kisa	Are we done or are there any issues in the book that we don't understand? *Are there any issues in the book we don't understand?*	QP
84	XX	Um	
85 86	Kisa	Not for me. I don't get what the heck the Bodschon dude is.	QP
87	Gunther	Well	
88	Kisa	Is that the matchmaker dude?	CS
89 90	Gunther	I was confused about what went on in the beginning with like around page 80.	QT
91	Kisa	You're on page 80?!	
92 93	Gunther	No around page 80. I'm on page, I'm on page a hundred. But like around page like 70 or 80 I started to pick it up.	QT
94	Kisa	Yeah it was really confusing at the beginning.	ES
95	Gunther	I didn't get what was going on whatsoever.	
	Kisa, Gunther	*Discussion about confusion about beginning of book and purpose of the Bodschon man	
96 97	Kisa	Anything else we need to discuss like Crash's multicultural lens which should be done?	
98	Crash	It is done.	
99 100	Kisa	That is not done Crash. It's nowhere near done. It's not even a fourth of the way done.	
	Crash, Kisa, Gunther	*Discussion about amount of work Crash did & location of his work	
101 102 103	Kisa	I'm going to look at it and xxxxxxx. Okay, what examples of dualities are present in our book? That was xxxxxx	RWS

104	Gunther	Definitely Nazis/Jews.	AS
105	Kisa	xxxxx	
106	Gunther	Um, Nazi versus other discriminated groups.	
107	XX	And then humans.	
108	Kisa	But do they really explain the Aryans in here?	QT
109	Gunther	No	CS
	Kisa, Gunther	*Discussion about a three-fingered character	
110 111 112 113	Kisa	Uh, does this reinforce the society's stereotypes? Yes. Xxxxxxxxx stop it Crash. Okay, um, how does this reinforce stereotypes? Because it shows the hatred towards the Jews from the other groups.	RWS ES
114 115	Gunther	Yeah, it shows the hatred towards the Jews. Yes, you are right.	ES
116	Crash	Am I supposed to be listening?	
117 118 119	Kisa	Yes you are supposed to be listening! You were supposed to…This was supposed to be a group discussion.	
120 121	Gunther	A group discussion [spoken at the same time as Kisa], not a Kisa and Gunther discussion.	
	Gunther, Crash, Kisa	*blowing into the recorder, Kisa telling them not to do that	
122 123	Kisa	Okay I'm going to skip the social ladder since it's like the same one that's on everybody's	
124	Gunther	Yeah, it's on everybody's.	
125 126	Kisa	Okay why are some groups privileged and some groups not privileged? Because	RWS
127	Gunther	Because the Germans are not fair and mean	AS/ES
128	Kisa	And the Germans are weird.	AS/ES
129	Gunther	The Nazis, the Nazis, not the Germans.	CS
	Kisa, Crash, Gunther	*Discussion about noises & being recorded on tape	
130 131	Kisa	Okay, which characters experience discrimination? All the main characters pretty much.	RWS
132	XX	The main characters basically	ES
133	Kisa	No no, which characters? Specifically.	QP

Figure 4.4: *The Devil's Arithmetic* literature circle discussion #1 transcript 4/11/07

This example demonstrates that the three members used the lens sheets to focus their discussion, and while Kisa and Gunther engaged in questioning, clarifying, analyzing and evaluating comments, there was little collaboration regarding their questions. Both Gunther and Kisa also made generalized judgments regarding the Germans during World War II, though Gunther clarified the statements made in lines 129-130 with his comment in line 131. While Kisa tried to ask questions and facilitate the discussion, Gunther did not take up her critique of lack of available and equitable female roles and positions. The group was also not specific about the "other discriminated groups" mentioned in lines 26-29, 36-37, and 78. Crash contributed little to the group discussion, possibly because he did not have the assignment completed. This phenomenon was not uncommon in any of the classes. There were students who either did not read the text or complete the lens sheets or both. This poses a difficulty to the classroom teacher and for the group members who did their work. I attempted to alleviate this issue by giving the students class time to do their literature circle reading and to complete the lens sheets. However, this did not ensure that each student was prepared for the group discussion. Kisa, Crash, and Gunther's discussion is a good example of what can happen when members do not actively participate in their group's conversation. Having taught for a number of years prior to this study, I should have foreseen a situation such as this, and should have modeled to the class how to work within this to illustrate that conversations regarding equity can still take place, even if people haven't done their work. Though the power in the previous discussion was located with Kisa and Gunther, Crash could have shared his ideas about connections with our class read-aloud or with what he remembered from the literature circle novel.

However, Crash became disempowered by Kisa and Gunther's comments regarding his lack of work completion, and did not believe he had any knowledge to share with his group. I, their teacher, missed an opportunity to bring ideas about location of knowledge and power out to the entire class, and to illustrate how each person has ideas that can add to group conversations.

Another group, all females, read the novel *I Have Lived a Thousand Years* (Bitton-Jackson, 1997). In their first literature circle discussion, each member shared their lens sheet statements, with some clarification about characters.

Line	Speaker	Dialogue	Language Use
1	Josie	What's his name again?	QP
2	Kirstin	Ben Hass	CS
3	Josie	Oh yeah…I thought it was…	
4	XX	xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx	
5	Laura	No it was the other guy	CS
6	Josie	It was the other guy…oh yeah…graduated with	CS
7 8	Laura	And then who has power cause Hitler, the Nazis, they didn't mention very many people that…	CB
9	Kirstin	Christians…yeah	CS
10	Laura	Who else has power though?	QP
11	Josie	What's the one guy's name?	QP
12	Laura	What one guy?	QP
13	Josie	The teacher…Fernando	CS
14	Laura	He is Christian …who has power though?	QP
15	Kirstin	The teachers…Janis Novack…Fernando…Janis Novak	CS
16	Laura	He has power though…is he a German?	CS/QP
17	Kirstin	Well he is a Christian.	CS
18	Josie	He's a Christian	CS
19	Laura	Oh	
20 21 22 23 24 25 26	Kirstin	Okay I want to show you mine. I put roles for the woman as mother, like they feed the family, aunts, friends, and teachers and then for the…I couldn't find any for the men I just put father – protector of the family, brothers, friends, and guards cause…and I didn't know what to do for this so I just put a lot of people and then for the gender roles area mot really different because the	RWS

27		women are still mothers, aunts, etc., and the men are still	
28		fathers, brothers, etc…so that's what I put and then the	
29		symbolist I put a pillow and it's a pillow of course…and	
30		I chose this for Elli because her mom said she was as soft	
31		as a pillow. All right. Laura, go ahead.	
32	Laura	For power lens um…some social groups are Jews,	RWS
33		Germans, Nazis, Arians, and Hitler youth groups and for	
34		the social ladder last is Elli, then Bubi…and wait there is	
35		Bubi, Elli, they would probably all be brothers and then	
36		Inez is the person Elli Weiss likes and "my mommy" is	
37		obviously Elli's mom and "daddy" is Elli's dad. And	
38		they would all be on the bottom. The dad would still run	
39		the family.	
40	Kirstin	Yeah you're right.	ES
41	Laura	And then Hitler is on the top obviously.	AS
42	Kirstin	Okay	
43	Laura	And then it says "name some of the primary power	RWS
44		struggles that the text portrays. Who has the power and	
45		who doesn't?" People that have the power are Hitler,	
46		Nazis, Christians, teachers because they still teach. They	
47		still run the classroom even for the non-Jews and then	
48		the people who have no power Elli, Bubi, mommy,	
49		daddy, Inez.	
50	Kirstin	Okay	
51	Josie	I have the multi-cultural ones and some of the cultures	RWS
52		and ethnicities are Jewish, Nazis, Christians, and	
53		Germans and then some examples of dualities are group	
54		versus groups. I put Jews versus Christians, Jews versus	
55		Nazis, and Jews versus Germans. Then do these	
56		examples reinforce society's stereotypes or do they	
57		challenge them? I think they challenge them because	AS/ES
58		like society, every one is equal and none is like on a	
59		higher level. And then for the social ladder, I put the	
60		Jewish at the bottom, Christians and the Germans in the	
61		middle, because they don't have complete power, and	
62		then the Nazis and Hitler on top. And then some groups	
63		are privileged above others because of the things that	
64		Jews have and also………has and also probably	
65		because….. xxxxxx. And then, which characters	
66		experience discrimination and what types of	
67		discrimination they faced? Elli and her family	
68		experienced discrimination…they faced religious	
69		discrimination because of they were convinced the Jews	
70		were the cause of World War I and so…Jews the cultures	
71		and the ethnicities in *I Have Lived a Thousand Years* are	
72		the same as in our society because they are Christians	

73		and Jews also there are people like Hitler that are	
74		against….and it is different because there are no Nazis or	
75		Hitler.	

Figure 4.5: *I Have Lived a Thousand Years* literature circle discussion #1 transcript 4/11/07

Aside from questioning and clarifying the power-status of a character at the beginning, this first discussion focused solely around reading the written statements from their lens sheets. There was no interruption by other members as each student read through her lens sheet. Compared with the first discussions of Period B, this behavior was typical. Whether it was due to the novelty of the tape recorders or the desire to finish with the assigned task, the first literature circle discussions in this study can be classified as shorter, little interruption during turn-taking, and little questioning or critiquing of societal and equity issues.

In the group's second discussion, each member had a long turn at talk to read the written statements from the lens sheets. Again, there was little to no interruption by the other group members. However, this discussion also included analysis and evaluation of the power given to various groups of people.

Line	Speaker	Dialogue	Language Use
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	Kirstin	Some of the social groups that are represented in *I Have Lived a Thousand Years* are the Nazis, Jews, Christians, Hungarians, and Germans. And social ladder top I put Nazis, and then Germans, and then Hungarians, then Jews, then the dad, then Bubi. I put xxxxx. Then name some of the primary main power struggles that the text portrays. Who has the power and who doesn't. Has power Hitler, Nazis, xxxxxxxx , SS and guards. And has the power Elli, Bubi, mom, dad, xxxxx.	RWS

10	Josie	I have the gender lens and some of the roles that are	RWS
11		available to women is you could be a mom, you could be	
12		an SS guard, an aunt, a sister, or a cousin. And then	
13		xxxxxxx They have the supervisors. And then some of	
14		the roles available to men in *I Have Lived a Thousand*	
15		*Years* is you can be a father, you could be a Nazi, you	
16		could be a brother, you could be an SS guard, you could	
17		be Hitler, then you could be a xxxxx. And then for the	
18		social ladder, I put on the bottom step the mom, dad,	
19		xxxx brothers, sister, cousin, and aunt and I put the	
20		Germans, because not all Germans are Nazis, so they	ES
21		don't have a lot of power. I put the Hungarians because	
22		the Hungarians were not as mean. The Jews could also	ES
23		be on the bottom ladder too. And then I put the S …the	
24		Nazis and then the SS guards, then I put Hitler, because	
25		Hitler is xxxxx. And then the roles are….some of the	
26		roles are the same from today's society because um	
27		you're gonna be a mom, dad, or sister, brother, aunt, or	
28		whatever. There are no Nazis anymore, or no SS guard,	AS
29		or Hitler.	
30	Laura	There could still be Nazis living. Yeah but they're not	AS/ES
31		like big and powerful…they'd be like	
32	XX	xxxxxxxxxxxx	
33	Laura	Multi culture lens xxxxxx and this is cultures/groups are	RWS
34		represented in *I Have Lived a Thousand Years* – that's	
35		the Nazis, Jews, Germans, and Aryans.	
36	XX	xxxxxxxxxxxxxx	
37	Laura	What examples of dualities are presented in *I Have Lived*	RWS
38		*a Thousand Years*? It is Jews versus Nazis, Jews versus	
39		Germans, Jews versus Aryans.	
40	Kirstin	There is always Jews versus somebody.	AS/ES
41	Laura	Nobody really likes the Jews and because xxxxxx is	AS
42		called makes people think that the Jews are really bad.	
43		Propaganda yeah….then it says give these examples	RWS
44		reinforce stereotypes do they challenge them. And	
45		how… I said we challenge them because everyone	AS
46		should be treated equally. And on the social ladder I put	RWS
47		the Jews last, then the Germans, then the Aryans, then	
48		the Nazis, okay. Now I am supposed to explain how	
49		some characters are privileged above others in *I Have*	
50		*Lived a Thousand Years*. Some groups are privileged	
51		because they might not believe in what the Nazis want	
52		them to believe in even though it might be xxxxx. And	
53		then it says which characters experienced	
54		discrimination? What types of discrimination did they	
55		face? Okay um what discrimination did they face and	

56		why? Elli, mother, father, Bubi all experienced	
57		discrimination because they are Jews. They faced it	
58		because Hitler does not like them for their religion. It	
59		says okay culture/ethnic groups. I put xxxxxxx the same	
60		or different from today's society. They are the same and	AS
61		different but some people put people down for no reason	
62		whatsoever, maybe just because they are different skin	
63		color, or different religion, but they are different but	
64		people are not so cruel to people that they do not like,	
64		like Hitler and the Nazis did to the Jews.	
65	Josie	And um our symbol for *I Have Lived a Thousand Years.*	RWS
66		The character I chose was Aunt xxxx and I did a	
67		teardrop. The word xxxxx a SS guard it's a speech here	
68		xxx. I chose it because it seems depressing too, xxx	
69		cries a lot, the mean soldier had to separate them	
70		from…the mean soldier separated Aunt Serina from Tom	
71		and other xxx.	

Figure 4.6: *I Have Lived a Thousand Years* literature circle discussion #2 transcript
4/19/07

In the group's second discussion, the members made a point to analyze the power

allotted to large groups, such as Germans and Hungarians. Josie, for example, in lines

20-22, emphasized that not all Germans were Nazis, so a non-Nazi German would have

less power than a Nazi German. In lines 37-46 Laura and Kirstin talk together about the

discrimination the Jews faced during the Holocaust and that today our society believes

that people should be treated equally. Though it was not taken up further by the group,

the issue of equitable treatment could have been brought out to the larger classroom

environment and discussed in terms of historically and currently marginalized groups.

The last discussion, approximately three weeks after the initial discussion, was the

lengthiest, including collaborative conversations about discrimination. The interruptions

that did occur were collaborative in nature, where all three members worked through their

ideas about discrimination and power. The lens sheets appear to have kept the discussion

on track, but also allowed for the expression of thoughts, analysis of characters and their

situations, and evaluating the motives behind characters' actions.

Line	Speaker	Dialogue	Language Use
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15	Laura	*Hello?* Okay. I was the gender lens, aaannnd..(laughs) What? Okay. It says, "List some roles that are available in, to women in *I Have Lived A Thousand Years*." I put mother, aunt, cousin, sister, and daughter. And…and list some roles that are available in men in *I Have Lived A Thousand Years*. I put father, uncle, brother, nephew, husband. And for the social ladder, I put Elli on the bottom, then Bubi cause Bubi's older than her and he has more power I guess, even though they were still Jews and they were prosecuted and everything. And then mother, because she's still the, mother of them and the head of them. And then father. And then it says "How are the gender roles in *I, I Have Lived A Thousand Years* the same or different from the gender roles in today's society?"	RWS
16	XX	xxxxxxx	
17 18 19 20 21 22 23	Laura	"And explain, explain your ideas." They are the same, they are the same as there are mothers and fathers and everything just like today in our society. And I was also the symbolist. And…I picked the character Elli. And, for the symbol I put an American flag that is yellow because they were finally free from, uh, from the Nazis and Hitler, so, so the	RWS
24	XX	xxxxxxxx	
25 26 27	Laura	Yeah, and it's yellow because it represents that they are Jews and…an American flag is freedom and yeah. Bye! (laughing)	RWS
28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36	Kirstin	Okay, I had the multicultural lens. And cultures or ethnic groups represented in *I Have Lived A Thousand Years* are Hungarians, Jews, Germans, and Americans. And um, what examples of dualities are represented in *I Have Lived A Thousand Years*. I put Americans versus Germans, Jews versus Hungarians, Jews versus (laughing) Germans, and Hungarians versus Americans. And, uh, do these examples reinforce today's, society's stereotypes or do they challenge them and how? They	RWS

37		enforce society's, they *reinforce* society's stereotypes...	
38 39 40	Laura	Like, like, um they're like the same. Like people are still against some people just because of their different religion or color of your skin.	AS
41	Kirstin	Yeah. Exactly. So kind of like racist?	CS
42 43 44	Josie	And then they don't at the same time like, cause…they're not, it's not like during the Holocaust, you know?	CB
45	Kirstin	Yeah, you're right.	CB
46	Laura	Yeah, it's a different time period. Kay.	CB
47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68	Kirstin	Well, that answers that. All right. Well, "we've all heard the term social ladder. Try plotting some of the cultures or ethnic groups on the social ladder." At the bottom I put Jews, then Americans, then Hungarians, and then the Nazis, because they're like selfish because they're taking over like a lot of people. "Explain why some groups are privileged above other groups, in *I Have Lived A Thousand Years*." I put some groups have more power like Hitler cause he has like more power cause he can, because he can kill Jews and like stuff. Um, "which characters experience…discrimination and what types of discrimination do they face?" Like, uh, some of them like, like the Jews do. Like Elli and all that. And they face racial, religious, and gender discrimination. They face that because Hitler doesn't believe their religion and their gender, and he is racist, of course. So "how are cultures, ethnics in *I Have Lived A Thousand Years* the same or different from society? Explain your ideas." Cultures are different because people like Hitler they don't try to kill people because they are, are from a different religion. They more like treat them differently but not kill them. So, alright, bye.	RWS AS/ES RWS ES RWS AS ES
69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82	Josie	Okay, I have the power le, lens. Some social groups that are represented in *I*, in *I Have Lived A Thousand Years* are Jews, Nazis, Germans, Hungarians, and Americans. And "we've all heard the term social ladder, try plotting some of characters on the social ladder graph below." Um, at the bottom… I put Elli and Bubi and um, basically Elli's family and cousins and all them, and then I put the um, Germans, like the Aryans, and Christians, the blond-eyed, the blond-haired blue-eyed people who weren't discriminated against. Then for, then next I put um, the Hungarians for like the Hungarian soldier who was holding Elli's poems for her until the Holocaust was over. Then um, I put the American soldiers because they had more power than the Hungarians because the	RWS

83		Hungarians didn't really care. And then for the Nazis,	
84		well and then I did Nazis which is also like SS and	
85		Hitler, and yeah. And then some of the primary power	
86		struggles that the text portrays who has the power and	
87		who doesn't. For power, I put Nazis, Hungarians,	
88		Germans, Americans, Hitler, and SS. And then for no	
89		power I put um, Elli and her family	
90	Kirstin	Which is pretty much the Jews.	AS/ES
91	Josie	Which is, yeah, pretty much all the Jews and stuff.	AS/ES

Figure 4.7: *I Have Lived a Thousand Years* literature circle discussion #3 transcript 5/4/07

In their last discussion, members had longer and more detailed turns at talk. There continues to be little interruption from the group, and as each takes their turn reading through her lens sheet, they seem to share the role of "leader" in the group discussion. Additionally, certain assumptions about freedom and power became evident through the girls' conversation. In line 26, the American flag is said to equal freedom, not simply just represent or symbolize freedom. This hegemonic notion, especially with the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, is likely to be prevalent in all areas of the United States and extremely difficult to challenge in social and institutional settings. To critique the American flag standing for freedom could locate a person in the role of "unpatriotic," and therefore someone to be judged negatively. While this could have the potential to examine historical actions on the part of the United States government regarding discriminatory behavior and the lack of freedom towards Native Americans, Africans, and other immigrant groups, I chose not to pursue this particular thread. I felt that I would encounter a great deal more resistance to critiquing and challenging hegemonic ideas of freedom and patriotism. I made the decision to neither agree nor

disagree with the statement that the American flag equaled freedom, and to not bring it out for the entire class to discuss. This "neutral" stance was not an innocent decision on my part – I wanted to encourage my sixth-grade students to view texts differently, through critical lenses, for different reasons, but on an introductory level. If I were able to work with the same students for multiple years, then historical and societal issues of patriotism and freedom would be, in my opinion, more appropriate. In this setting, I did not feel comfortable challenging my students' hegemonic ideas of patriotism and believed that it saved a great deal of frustration on all of our parts.

Another point of interest demonstrated in this transcript looks at gender. When it is discussed, gender roles appear to be limited to family roles or positions; little is explored regarding gender-specific jobs. Gender "appropriateness" was a large issue in Period C, and would have also been a topic to explore more deeply. By comparing the jobs available to men and women in the context of the Holocaust with the other novels read throughout the school year, and then comparing the gender positions and roles found in the students' independent reading material and in their own lives, the students could have had the opportunity to look at the multiple roles and positions available. Due to my perceived time restrictions, we were not able to explore these gender issues more in depth.

Though literature circle group discussions give students power and choice within the classroom, the teacher should monitor the discussions as either an observer or a participant-observer. This may help students from forming stereotypes about characters or groups of people, and can inform the teacher regarding where further clarification may be needed with small or large groups of children. As students are learning how to

become individuals working towards social justice in their worlds, literature circle discussion observations can assist the classroom members to promote cultural production instead of cultural reproduction. The classroom teacher can also take the opportunity to bring key issues, such as past and present discrimination with its causes, to the fore and guide large-class discussion to examine the many causes and effects of discriminatory behavior.

Summary

In this section, I have attempted to describe the case of Period C. This group of students held closely on to their personal values and beliefs, and when challenged to critique those beliefs, demonstrated resistance. The students were able to share their ideas in both large and small group activities, but showed a preference to examining the characters in texts, rather than examining their own behaviors. These students also were able to notice issues of inequity and look at those issues through multiple lenses, but demonstrated critical literacy work must be consistent and ongoing before becoming internalized.

Literacy Research Club

The Literacy Research Club (LRC) took place from April through June of 2007. Its purpose was to explore research questions 3 and 4. Specifically guiding my interactions with the LRC members, I frequently sought to address how students as co-researchers worked to co-analyze and co-construct critical literacy activities and engagements within the English and Language Arts classroom, as well as how the students applied critical literacy tools in settings beyond the classroom.

This small group met typically twice a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, during the students' lunch and activity periods, which lasted approximately 40 minutes. Students were to self-nominate into this group by completing an application; however, the application process seemed to dissuade students, perceived as an extra assignment to complete, rather than encouraging participation in the club. The motivating factor for participation, from my perspective, was the opportunity to eat lunch with a smaller group of students outside of the school cafeteria environment combined with the opportunity to get to know their teacher on a different level. The LRC was comprised of three core female students, an additional two to three female students who stayed only for the lunch portion of the session and left to socialize with their grade-level friends during activity period, and me. Two of the three core students were from Period B (Rachael and Mave), and one was from Period A (Susie). All were European-American and from a middle-class socioeconomic background, similar to my own background, and I believe, another motivating factor for participation.

A typical LRC meeting followed a sequence of eating lunch combined with personal story sharing for approximately 20-25 minutes. The girls demonstrated an enjoyment for telling stories to each other and me, interrupting each other with new stories, and drawing on the classroom white board. They also continually vied for my attention and competed to tell me stories, ask me questions, and pretended to be the teacher. For the remainder of the meeting time, I asked personal research questions to gather data to inform the dissertation research questions. Though the sharing of personal stories was the preferable activity during LRC meetings, the girls were willing to answer my research-based questions.

Today, when it was my turn to ask questions, I asked for their opinions about the next read aloud (trying to answer 3a and 3b). I want them to feel that they are informing the curriculum and they had very good suggestions! I plan to use the ideas for our next read aloud, which will be a combination of my reading aloud to the class, and small group (like literature circles) reading. I also asked about continuing the lens sheets, and again, the girls had a great suggestion: Every time the group meets, each member will use the same lens – that way, they can have more conversations about what each member thought and their questions regarding the material. If the group can't answer a member's question, they can ask the whole class the next day. The kids do want to have answers to their questions, but I also need them to come to the realization that not every question will have a clear-cut answer.

LRC Observation Journal 4/24/07

Since LRC meetings took place during lunch and activity period, there were distractions that took away time from exploring research questions. For example,

Today, Mr. Smith came in and told Rachael that she needed to complete her math review packet during lunch, since she hadn't completed it last night for homework. Due to this, I did not ask Rachael, Mave, or Susie any LRC-related questions. I felt that it would have been too distracting for Rachael, who was distracted enough by Susie and Mave drawing on the board.

LRC Observation Journal 4/26/07

When we wereable to focus on issues surrounding class activities and
engagements, I found that the students shared ideas that I would not have had access to
without the LRC meetings.

> *I started out by asking what they thought of doing the lens sheets with their*
>
> *literature circle books and how they thought the discussions were going. First,*
>
> *they talked about the actual lens papers were set up, and how it explained things*
>
> *clearly. Next, the girls gave their opinions of the books, and I had to redirect*
>
> *them to think about gender and power in their books. I also tied in some elements*
>
> *of historical fiction characters (we'll get to that criteria tomorrow in class), since*
>
> *Mave commented that her book had some random chapters in it, and didn't really*
>
> *tie in too much to the historical events of the Holocaust. Rachael was*
>
> *disappointed to hear that there wasn't a sequel to* Behind the Bedroom Wall*,*
>
> *since it had a cliff-hanger ending, and you didn't know if the character was*
>
> *captured or sent to a concentration camp.*

<div align="right">LRC Observation Journal 4/17/07</div>

The ideas and information shared in the LRC influenced how I approached further
classroom activities in all periods. As the girls shared their perceptions regarding
literature circles and how their groups behaved, I could then make decisions about how to
clarify the discussion process and how to better utilize the lens sheets.

Line	Speaker	Dialogue	Notes/ Language Use
80 81 82	LP	Do you think that if I read one day and then your group read the other day, that your literature circle discussions would be more like conversations, instead	

83		of	
84	Rachael	Yeah, I thought	
85	LP	like, just reading through the sheets	
86	Rachael	kind of like ours	
87 88	Mave	Xxxxx that makes 'em like, they're not really *long* and you get it done... faster with the sheets	
89 90	LP	But are you guys actually *talking together*? Or are you just	
91	Rachael	Our group was like	Interrupting to answer LP's question
92	LP	reading through the papers?	
93 94 95 96 97	Rachael	Our group was like talking together. Like… like one of the sheets, I think because of Rusty and Eve, I think, um…like, there are things like I think Rusty said something and, like I didn't understand it and then he explained it and then Eve added stuff onto it.	
98	Susie	Xxxxx?	
99	LP	*No*.	
100	Rachael	It was…	
101	LP	Keep going.	
102 103 104	Rachael	Okay. It was actually like a conversation, instead of just like reading through of just like reading things. But that xxxxx	
105 106 107	Mave	Our group was just kind of reading the papers. I think it would be fine with the same book to do the group and the smaller group.	

Figure 4.8: Literacy Research Club meeting transcript 4/24/07

Another aspect of the Literacy Research Club was the joint decision making for future novel read-aloud units. In the transcript excerpt below, the members shared that for the next book, it was preferable to alternate large-group, teacher-led reading with small-group literature circle-type reading. This LRC meeting transcription shows that the kids seem to value the read aloud in the large group setting, because it gives them the opportunity to hear more opinions and hopefully find answers to their questions (LRC Observation Journal 5/17/07).

Line	Speaker	Dialogue	Notes/ Language Use
1 2 3	LP	Okay, um, we're going to be reading…you know, another novel, not next week because of the achievement test, but the week after,	
4 5	Rachael	Is it going to be one of the literature circles, like we have now, or, or is it going to be..?	QP
6 7 8 9 10	LP	Well that's what I want to know because I want to give you guys choice into what we read next. Would you *want* to do another literature circles, or would you want it to be a big class read aloud like *Daniel's Story*?	QP
11	Mave	I like the class read aloud.	
12	LP	Why?	
13	Susie	Class read aloud!	
14	LP	Why? You have to give your opinions.	
15	Susie	Um, it um, class read aloud, it gives..	
16 17 18	Mave	You're all together, you get to work as a group, and you know where everybody's at, and you get to talk about it with more people.	CS
19	xx	Can I sit on your desk?	
20	Susie	It's cool xxx	
21 22 23 24	Mave	Um, like if you have a question, like if you're in a small group and no one knows the answer, you can't really ask another group cause they're not reading your same book.	CS/AS
25	Rachael	Yeah, but you can also …	
26	Mave	What are you *doing* Susie?	Interrupts Rachael
27	Rachael	You can, you can also ask Miss P though.	
28	Mave	I know, but, have you read any of those books?	Directed to LP
29	Xx	xxx	
30 31 32	LP	Yeah, but that's a good point though. That you can get more opinions and more ideas when the whole class is reading together. Um,	CB
33 34 35 36 37 38 39	Rachael	I think we should like, maybe do both. Like, everything what we did with *Daniel's Story* and literature circle. I think, I like the literature circle cause you're in a small group and you actually get, like, all your opinions and questions answered and you actually get to say em because not as many people wanting to tell their opinion or question.	CB
40	Mave	But, I mean,	
41	Rachael	But,	

42 43 44	Mave	if like you don't know the answer to a question, or it's a really good question but nobody knows the answer, like, you can just go ask another group	CS
45 46	Rachael	But you can go ask Miss P., because she knows the answers	Power & knowledge still located within the teacher – ultimate source of knowledge/ authority
47	Mave	Yeah, but you want to *hear* from other people too.	CS
48 49 50 51 52	LP	Yeah, it is nice to hear all sorts of opinions because it helps you think of things that you hadn't thought of before. Even *me*, like, the class will share ideas that I had *never* thought of before, so it helps me too, because.	Trying to move power back to the entire class
53 54	Rachael	That's why I think, we should do both because that way we could still get a combination of both like,	Compromise of power?
55	LP	Okay,	
56 57	Rachael	Like, with all your opinions getting out and all your questions answered	
58 59 60	Mave	We should do it with one book instead of two, like, like we could um, every other day you would read with your group.	
61	LP	Okay, so like one day I read	
62 63 64	Mave	Like, like Monday you (Miss P.) would read and Tuesday you would be in your group. And read like another chapter.	
65	LP	Same book, but two different formats?	
66	Mave	Yeah, yeah	
67	LP	Oh, that's an interesting idea. Okay.	ES
68 69	Mave	Cause I like, like, it gives you more time to think of questions.	AS
70	LP	Okay,	
71 72 73	Mave	Cause if you're in your small group, and if you have a question and nobody the answer, you can always ask the big group tomorrow.	AS

Figure 4.9: Literacy Research Club meeting transcript 4/24/07

In this excerpt, I worked to share power among the LRC members, giving them the opportunity to voice their opinions on how to conduct the next novel read-aloud. By posing this question to the members, we engaged in curriculum production. Ideas and opinions regarding what went well with large and small group discussions informed how future classroom activities and engagements would proceed. This type of information could potentially be gathered by teachers through other channels, such as written reflections or one-on-one conferences with students; however the purpose and hopeful benefit of this club was to not only gain information regarding classroom practices, but also to foster a climate of co-construction among students and teacher, and for the students to see the reality of that curriculum co-construction in their classrooms.

During LRC meetings, I worked to balance student-topics with my researcher-topics. While the members preferred discussing their own topics, they would take the time to answer questions I had. Throughout the LRC sessions, I also had to work on how I phrased my questions to the group. Often, the members would misunderstand me, or what I was trying to explore because I had been too vague in my questioning. Because of this, I frequently rephrased my questions by first asking what I wanted to know and then providing an example of what I meant by my question. During one LRC meeting, I asked the two members who had started their new read-aloud novels, what they had noticed about their books. While I was hoping for a discussion to ensue about gender, racial, or social equity, Mave responded that her book contained a lot of similes (LRC Observation Journal 5/22/07). As their English and Language Arts teacher, I was pleased to note this analysis of literary devices, but as the researcher, I realized that I was being too vague in asking what they noticed. Therefore, I rephrased my question, and asked if they had

noticed any issues such as bullying or characters being treated unfairly. After this, the

members did share that the main character, May, was considered "strange" by the other

characters, such as her classmates, in the book because her behavior, clothing, house, and

family were not the same as theirs or considered "typical." Later in the fantasy novel,

May Bird & the Ever After (Anderson, 2005), this difference from the "norm" would

open up unique possibilities to May, that were not available to her classmates. However,

since this was a fantasy novel, such differences would not be "rewarded" in our current

society, and though this book had a strong female main character who empowers herself

through her choices, the LRC members expressed that if May went to our school, she

would also be picked on for being "different." The differences in May's character stood

out more to the students than her courage and personal style. Transfer of critical literacy

issues, when they occurred, happened with explicit teacher prompting and guidance.

In the larger class discussions of Period B, I attempted to bring up the strong

character traits of May. During this introductory stage of critical literacy education, I

found that the students required specific prompting to explore equity issues. Without

detailed questions, the students were very content to listen to me read to them and, when

they did ask their own questions, focused on clarifying aspects of plot, setting, or

characters.

On this same occasion, I asked the members if they found themselves examining

equity issues in other aspects of their lives, not just in our English and Language Arts

classes.

Another interesting topic today was that of being put into ability groups in certain

classes, such as their technology class. I tried to get them to explain how this

made them feel. Carrie shared her thoughts, but the others were reluctant to add

on to the discussion. Carrie felt that in some classes, grouping was okay, but in

other classes, it seemed unfair. In technology class, apparently everyone knew if

you were in the fast group or the slow group, depending on where you sat and

what book you used.

Observation Journal 5/22/07

Even with teacher prompting, I was not able to get the LRC members to expand upon their feelings regarding ability groups. It is possible that students in this community have been enculturated to believe that questioning teachers' groupings is not permitted. Though I worked with my students all year to encourage critique, to critique individuals in books did not transfer to critiquing their own life situations. The quiet resistance demonstrated in this LRC meeting enabled me to see that it would take careful probing to delve more deeply into the equity issues surrounding ability grouping. However, with the time constraints of the LRC meetings and the end of the school year, I did not feel there was adequate space to explore this topic and was also concerned that the students could potentially receive negative consequences from the teachers whose practices they were critiquing. In this particular situation, I believe that the social, and possibly academic, risk to the students outweighed the benefit of their journey for social and institutional equity, and therefore I did not pressure the students to expand upon the topic of ability groups.

By utilizing students as co-researchers, I attempted to gain insights into the meaning-making processes and perceptions of the larger classroom environments. However, since the LRC was comprised of only female students from similar

socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, it was not able to provide information

regarding male students, students from diverse cultures, or students from various

socioeconomic backgrounds. The homogeneity encountered was a struggle that I did not

foresee, and once it was in place within the LRC, I sought to work amidst its constraints.

This homogeneity created an overarching inability to collaboratively examine deeper

societal inequities. The members of the group, who experienced some form of

marginalization in the form of ability groupings, had no experience with marginalization

based on cultural reproduction. Without experiencing discrimination or marginalization

based on their privilege as White, middle class students, the LRC was unable to

deconstruct such issues to critically interrogate the status quo. This, in turn, resulted in

an inability to reconstruct equitable conditions within the classroom or school

environment locally, or within our larger community and society globally.

Additionally, within the context of the LRC, I maintained my ultimate authority

as the teacher, though the purpose of the group was to share power, knowledge, and

decision-making. This also limited cultural production opportunities since the students

did not truly view themselves as co-constructors of the English and Language Arts

curriculum. While I tried to make such connections and constructions visible to the LRC

members as I redirected our discussions with research questions, I feel that the social

aspect of the club was still the main focus for the participants.

The tension between my teacher-research aims and the actual discussions which

took place resulted, I believe, in further cultural reproduction. Originally, I envisioned

the LRC as a group interested in exploring how we could examine and reduce or remove

inequity in our classroom environment. Realistically, what ensued was a social group

that engaged in personal storytelling and vied for my attention and praise. My redirections back to my research questions were tolerated and answered, and though member responses were cursory, I was able to gather information that helped me to see how students in my regular classes were helped or hindered by the critical literacy activities and engagements that I presented.

Summary

In this section, I have attempted to show how all members of the Literacy Research Club worked to engage in co-constructing the English and Language Arts curriculum. Though the students demonstrated an enjoyment of the small group meetings at lunchtime for social reasons, they shared valuable ideas which were used to plan and prepare future classroom activities. The LRC meetings also illuminated that while the members were comfortable critiquing equity issues in the books they were reading, they were highly reluctant to transfer that critique to situations in their own lives. Additionally, while the students would engage in critique and challenging the "norm" presented in their reading material, it required explicit teacher questioning and ongoing prompting to explore issues in depth.

Summary

In this chapter, I have attempted to describe the curricular activities I used during one school year in order to work with my students in critical literacy engagements, as well as my personal struggles with such experiences. I have provided examples of student work to show how the classes participated in the English and Language Arts curriculum, and how I worked to balance the mandated curriculum requirements and

high-stakes reading assessment preparation with helping my students to develop as critically literate individuals. I have also described the four cases that emerged from this study, and how each of those cases presented unique opportunities for exploring social justice issues. Within each case, I have explored and analyzed the similarities and uniqueness of the language used by the students and the perceived growth and acceptance of critical literacy tools. A discussion of the results of this study, as well as implications for further study, will be explained in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, I will first summarize the results of the data analysis from chapter 4, situating them within the existing research. Next, I will discuss the major findings and implications that resulted from the data analysis. Finally, I will discuss the limitations of this study and directions for future research.

Introduction

The purpose of my study was to first explore and describe the teaching methods used to present critical literacy practices to sixth-grade English and Language Arts students over the course of one academic year, as well as the constraints and limitations of such engagements, with specific attention to the use of various lenses through which students and teachers can engage in ongoing dialogues to name, question, and reimagine the discourses surrounding issues of racism, gender bias, exclusion, and equity. Using ethnographic methods coupled with ongoing teacher research enabled me to provide thick description of the teaching methods, to capture student perspectives in the classroom, and examine how students acting as co-researchers, both inside and outside the English and Language Arts classroom, enhanced this study and resulted in four specific cases to

examine and analyze. Observations, transcripts, and documents were collected as data and were analyzed using a qualitative, interpretive approach throughout the course of the study. Specifically, data were coded for emerging themes and patterns that represented my own teaching perspectives and the language used by students as they participated in critically-based literacy activities in the English and Language Arts classroom. These analytical steps were designed to forward my research aims and answer my research questions:

1. To describe and explore the methods and constraints for enacting a critical literacy curriculum within a middle school context.

2. How do middle school students respond to and engage with critical literacy within the English and Language Arts classroom?

    a. How do the students feel about their experiences with critical literacy?

    b. What are the varying positions that students can take up as readers, writers, listeners, speakers, and actors in the English and Language Arts classroom? When and under what conditions are those positions available?

    c. How do critical literacy experiences and activities presented in the English and Language Arts classroom enhance the students' notions of literacy and enable them to acquire critical literacy tools?

3. How do students as co-researchers co-analyze and co-construct critical literacy activities and engagements within the English and Language Arts classroom?

    a. How do students actively engage in remaking the curriculum to reflect cultural production rather than cultural reproduction?

b. What key issues emerge from the Literacy Research Club meetings that are then filtered back to larger English and Language Arts classes for discussion, debate, and analysis?

My initial research aim concerned my experiences and challenges faced while enacting a curriculum of critical literacy within the English and Language Arts classroom over the course of one academic year. I documented my teaching practices and classroom assignments and activities throughout the 2006-2007 school year, collected student work samples, and kept an observation journal. Using inductive methods, I analyzed the data for themes and patterns among critical literacy interactions. Critical literacy interactions, in this context, were classroom-based activities which look at taken-for-granted assumptions about power, gender, and cultural issues, activities which work towards a conscious awareness of those individuals whom society has marginalized, and activities that encourage active participation in reconstructing equitable social worlds. As Dyson (2001) states, "[w]hen taken-for-granted human relationships [are] publicly questioned, they [can] no longer, in fact, be taken for granted," (p. 16). Analysis revealed that language use, written and oral, was the primary conduit through which students made visible their attitudes and reactions towards classroom activities. Analysis also revealed issues of teacher power and the procedural display of "doing school."

The second research question addressed how my students responded and reacted to their experiences with critical literacy issues within the English and Language Arts classroom. I collected student work samples, created transcripts of class literature circle discussions, and kept an observation journal noting student action and behavior from critical literacy engagements. I inductively analyzed the data for themes and patterns,

then coded the data for examples of positive or negative language use, resistance to critical literacy, acceptance of critical literacy, critiquing the "norm," power relationships, cultural production, and cultural reproduction. Analysis revealed that the students demonstrated a passive acceptance of critical literacy tools and issues. The students did not stray too far from their cultural values and belief systems, which included not questioning a teacher's practices and classroom activities, thus leading to a passive acceptance of the critical literacy engagements presented to them over the course of the academic year.

The third research question regarded the use of students as co-researchers in the production of the English and Language Arts curriculum and equity issues for discussion in the larger classroom environments. Data included transcripts and observations of Literacy Research Club meetings, which were analyzed and coded for examples of language use and power relationships. Analysis revealed that, when given the opportunity to respond to teacher-directed curriculum questions, the students were willing to share their ideas of what practices worked well in the classroom, encouraged student participation, and enhanced student understanding of material and critical literacy issues. However, power and knowledge were ultimately located with the teacher, and while students made various suggestions regarding classroom activities and explorations, the students relinquished final decision-making power to the teacher.

<div align="center">Discussion of the Findings</div>

<div align="center">*Curricular Activities & Student Engagements*</div>

Students in this study were presented with teacher-designed activities and experiences. Based around gender, power, and multicultural equity issues, I worked to

facilitate opportunities for the students to read, write, speak, listen, and act around various texts. These texts were selected based on existing state curricular standards, availability of resources, teacher familiarity, and their potential to act as an avenue into critical literacy issues. From these texts, literacy events ensued that granted openings to accept "…the notion of multiple perspectives and ways of knowing," (Harris & Willis, 2003, p. 831).

During the course of this study, the students and I worked within various, and necessarily situated, communities of practice as defined by Lave & Wenger, (1991):

> A community of practice is a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice. A community of practice is an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge, not least because it provides the interpretive support necessary for making sense of its heritage. Thus, participation in the cultural practice in which any knowledge exists is an epistemological principle of learning. The social structure of this practice, its power relations, and its conditions for legitimacy define possibilities for learning (i.e., for legitimate peripheral participation). (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98)

One struggle that came to light during the course of this study was how I used my authority and power as the teacher within these communities of practice. I made the decisions regarding what critical lenses to explore with what texts, what activities with which to engage, and at which time during the school year. Due to district and curricular mandates, I felt pressured to map out my critical literacy curriculum in order to be sure I was preparing my students for their other middle school classes and for the state's

standardized test. This contradicts the organic and evolving nature of critical literacy, where explorations come to light during the school year based on students' interests and experiences.

I did find Lave and Wenger's (1991) ideas of situated learning and legitimate peripheral participation to be an apt description of the engagements and learning occurring in my classroom. Both ideas reject a transmission model of learning, and instead posit that "…learning, thinking, and knowing are relations among people in activity in, with, and arising from the socially and culturally structured world," (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 51). Specifically, the notion of legitimate peripheral participation, defined by Lave and Wenger (1991) as "engagement in social practice that entails learning as an integral constituent….[with] multiple, varied, more- or less-engaged and – inclusive ways of being located in the fields of participation defined by a community," (pp. 35-36). This expands upon Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the zone of proximal development, which "…is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential developmental as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers," (p. 86). Working together in communities of practice, my students and I were able to begin interrogating power, gender, and racial equity issues within texts and, to a lesser extent, society as a whole. However, it was still my authority as the teacher which determined how classroom discussions would be taken up, in which direction those discussions would go, and which topics would be sanctioned.

Within the communities of practices that existed during this study, language use, written and oral, was found to be the prominent feature that mediated critical literacy

learning. Through language, "…interactions with others shape the very nature of the unique knowledge and ideas about the world that learners are able to construct," (Brock, Boyd, & Moore, 2003, p. 447). In the social context of learning, Vygotsky (1978) found that "…it seems both natural and necessary for children to speak while they act," (p. 24). Giving students access to multiple communities of practice, with explicit and meaningful instruction, can help children "…understand the ways that oral and written language function in school-based literacy practices," (Brock, Boyd, & Moore, 2003, p. 450). This necessarily extends to exploring sociolinguistic constructions of difference with regard to gender, ethnicity, and class. Through language, teachers and students can "…explore new roles and social identities, to affirm their cultural identities, to understand and negotiate human experiences, and to wrestle with vexing social and political issues related to improving the quality of their life and world," (McGinley, Kamberlis, Mahoney, Madigan, Rybicki, & Oliver, 1997, p. 61).

Language use within these communities of practice is an important finding because it reinforces the social nature of literacy. Marzano (2003) states, "…language itself represents a type of thinking. It is also a vehicle by which thought is mediated and enhanced," (p. 706). Barton and Hamilton (1998) write, "[t]exts are a crucial part of literacy events, and the study of literacy is partly a study of texts and how they are produced and used," (p. 8). This study utilized texts to examine the opportunities and limitations present within them, and also how students could make connections to various domains of life. Using oral and written language to create ongoing dialogues, members of the communities of practice are able to construct, reconstruct, and challenge their meaning-making processes (Rogers & Fuller, 2007).

A Conceptual Tool for Critical Literacy Learning

Originally inspired by Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) of thinking and learning, I found it helpful to look at critical literacy learning through a conceptual tool or framework (see Figure 5.1). This framework was helpful for me as a classroom teacher because it concretized many of the abstract critical literacy tenets with which I struggled to enact with my students. Additionally, this conceptual tool enabled me to informally assess student progress within my classroom and the LRC meetings, thus assisting me as I planned future engagements or sought to go deeper with respect to particular critical literacy issues.

Taking individual student abilities into account, I found that the majority of my students were in an introductory phase of critical literacy learning focused on identifying societal and institutional inequity and understanding the positions inherent in such inequities. Some students were beginning to move from understanding the conditions surrounding inequity to analyzing how and why such conditions existed and permeated throughout societies.
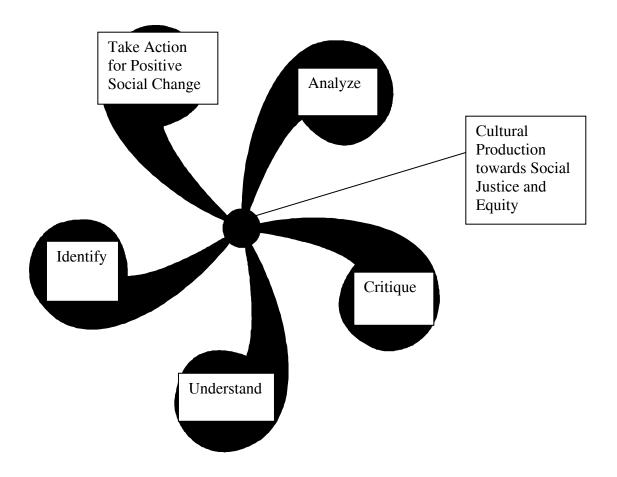
Figure 5.1: A conceptual framework for critical literacy thinking and learning

In the framework, I imagine an active system moving from identifying inequity to ultimately working towards social change. The spiral graphic in Figure 5.1 above illustrates the phases and non-linear nature of critical literacy thinking and learning, with cultural production towards social justice and equity at its heart. While difficult to conceptualize as a two-dimensional graphic, this framework attempts to show how teachers and students alike can move through the various phases in their quest to interrogate social justice and equity. Each phase within the framework can be expanded and can grow to overlap with other phases in order to more deeply explore personally relevant or societal issues, as well as moving into the center of the spiral towards the

ultimate goal of social justice and equity. Trying to capture the messy and non-hierarchical nature of critical literacy is difficult, and it is my hope that the spiral presented above will help both teachers and students in their aims to challenge society's status quo.

As with any conceptual tool, mine is not the only way to view critical literacy teaching and learning engagements. My hope in presenting this framework is that other teachers will use it as a starting point and then adapt it for their own critical literacy purposes. Though this framework is merely speculative on my part, and not without its limitations, this conceptual tool may prove useful as teachers plan their instruction in order to guide their students towards the more socially active and transformative aspects of critical literacy. For example, a teacher striving to move students from less-involved stances to more fully-involved, agentive persons may choose to focus instruction on one specific phase of the framework. If a teacher wants her or his students to explore how they can identify inequity present in texts and, in turn, their own lives and societies, the teacher may select familiar stories so that students can view them in new ways – ways that heighten awareness of marginalization and social constructions of difference. Through such exploration, the teacher and students can move from simply identifying inequity towards examining the ways these familiar stories can be used to problematize issues and contexts in order to produce new texts. However, this conceptual tool is not a measuring stick for progress; rather, it represents only one possibility of potential stances available to members of a community of practice. Using the term "phase" in my definitions of the framework's terms, my goal is to suggest a non-linear and non-hierarchical representation, thus providing an evolving framework for instruction rather

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than a series of steps designed to reach an ultimate level of critical literacy achievement. The conceptual framework presented above concretizes my personal thinking and understanding about enacting a critical literacy curriculum, and as such, may not be necessary for use by other teachers.

To define each phase more specifically, I pull on my experience in the classroom and such researchers such as Bloom et al (1956), Anderson & Krathwohl et al (2001), and Lewis (2001), to name a mere few. The first and broadest phase is for students to identify issues of inequity in texts, communities and society, and personal lives. This may include listing ideas or noticing, both verbally and in writing, imbalances within a given context. In my classroom, students utilized teacher-developed critical lens sheets focused around power, multiculturalism, and gender. With these lens sheets, students were able to identify which characters in books had power, what roles were available to them as a result of the gender or cultural background, and how they were positioned by other characters in the novels. In this study, identifying inequity was relative to texts only, and did not extend into the students' own lives.

Once students are able to notice that certain groups are "othered" or marginalized, teachers can guide them into the next phase, which I term understanding. Understanding how and why groups are marginalized looks at historic, cultural, and the constructed nature of difference. In my classroom, I worked with students during discussions to examine what situations occurring resulted in inequitable conditions for the characters and how current conditions created more equitable gender, power, and cultural positions. While more exploration could have taken place to look for areas of "othering" and

marginalization within current societal positions, time was a limiting factor and our class did not delve as deeply as we might have.

After understanding is the critiquing phase, though any phase could realistically take place alongside each phase of the conceptual framework. By critiquing inequities present in their texts and communities, students can then begin analyzing, the next area in the conceptual tool, how societal hegemony can be interrupted. This critique must include teachers and students looking honestly at their actions and language in order to examine the broader tensions and contradictions inherent in critical literacy. In this study, my students were not yet analyzing how to break down the status quo or privilege experienced in their worlds.

Analyzing leads into working to break the cycle of cultural reproduction and produce new ways of knowing and being in a society, with the ultimate goal of helping students take action towards social change—to develop just and equitable social relations. While this may seem a concrete ending point, critical literacy learning is an ongoing endeavor, constantly changing as new situations are encountered. This conceptual tool could be useful to those wishing to interrogate issues of inequity and privilege.

Researchers such as Bean and Moni (2003), Beck (2005), Dyson (2001), Hynds (1997), Jewett and Smith (2003), Morrell (2004), Sahni (2001), and Van Sluys and Reinier (2006) find that critical literacy explorations can take place with students of any age, and this conceptual framework should support that endeavor. The verbs used in this conceptual tool support constructivist aims centered on process, not product. Hinchey (1998) finds that with constructivism, "[t]he focus is not on facts nor on 'right' answers, but on how students process facts, on what meaning students construct using the facts at

hand, on how they make sense of information they receive," (p. 48). Engaging students with the framework, teachers can use students' individual interests and experiences to build their own understandings to "…move beyond the taken-for granted, …become more conscious of ideological choices and of the social consequences of words…[so that] we all benefit from interaction with those differently positioned in the social world," (Dyson, 2001, p. 16).

Nothing in this framework can be assumed. Without purposeful exploration to "probe and resist popular cultural texts in the same way that we teach students to interact with canonized texts," (Lewis, 2001, p. 180) students will not likely be able to challenge the dominant discourses of their lives. In this study, my students observably demonstrated identifying instances of inequity present within the novels they read during literature circle discussion groups. Our larger classroom discussions worked towards understanding why inequities exist, both in the story worlds and in our world today. However, we did not begin to collaboratively analyze and critique how we could deconstruct such inequities and move towards positive social action and change.

Resistance and Passive Acceptance of Critical Literacy

As students in this study examined issues surrounding gender, racial, cultural, and power equity, they also engaged in the procedural display of "doing school." At the beginning of the school year, students were reluctant to engage in critiquing the 'norm' when in large-group settings as well as small-group settings. This is consistent with the enculturated belief that to be successful in school, students should not outwardly challenge the teacher's authority, the teacher's beliefs, or the institutions within which they live. I often fell prey to this belief as well. As the teacher, I expected a certain

amount of respect from my students in addition to certain behaviors which I believed showed progress. This is similar to Bloome et al's (1989) findings that "…it was important to students, teachers, and parents that there be demonstration of progress of becoming certifiably literate…," (p. 283). In this classroom, I expected students to raise their hands and wait silently until I called on them before sharing a response or question. I expected students to listen quietly while I or another student was speaking. I expected students to speak loudly and clearly while they were sharing their thoughts. I expected students to take turns, not interrupt speakers, to phrase their thoughts in positive language (e.g. no derogatory comments towards individuals or groups, no stereotypical comments, etc.), and to listen to comments made by others in response to their statements. To me, as the classroom teacher, this demonstrated students successfully doing school and working to further their literacy education. In terms of procedural display, by engaging in these behaviors, students did not necessarily use any academic content knowledge to complete tasks within the lesson; rather, they modified their outward behaviors to fit the culturally accepted procedures that counted as doing school. This tension between doing school and working towards critical literacy was an ongoing concern for me. How was I creating an equitable environment with shared decision-making if I still expected certain student behaviors? I constantly questioned how my perceived teacher authority and the power I exacted in the classroom limited my research and teaching goal of enacting a curriculum of critical literacy.

I did find that during the course of the school year there was a gradual increase in critiquing behaviors demonstrated by the students in both large- and small-group discussions. However, it did require work to interrupt the traditional view of learning.

While it became more acceptable to challenge the views and statements of the other students, this did not seem to extend to challenging me, my authority, or the larger school institution. Students felt comfortable asking questions to alleviate their confusion, these questions focused on issues of plot, character, or setting. They did not use language (written or oral) to challenge my methods of teaching, my personal values and beliefs, my choices as the teacher, or question the power relationships within the classroom.

My students and I were caught up in our roles as "teacher" and "students," and as such, we behaved in ways that hampered deep engagement with critical literacy. My belief is that this engagement in the procedural display of "doing school" and "doing critical literacy lessons" led to my students passively accepting the tenets of critical literacy. The students' desire to be seen as "successful" by me, their families, and the school community resulted in actions that did not challenge the critical literacy beliefs and activities with which they were presented. Ironically, this act of procedural display during critical literacy activities reinforced the status quo relationship among teacher and students that we were trying to disrupt. Thus, "…the depth of their learning was constrained by [an] unwillingness to speak against prevailing Discourses and cultural models…," (Moje & Lewis, 2007, p. 43).

"Language can also serve as a tool for transforming cultural practices, and this process often involves tension," (Brock et al, 2003, p. 453). Resistance to critical literacy was most often illustrated through silence, demonstrated by not volunteering to participate in class discussions, by not completing homework assignments, or saying "I don't know" when called on by the teacher or while working with other students. These silences appear to be a way for students to regain power within the classroom. The

passivity expressed by students may also have been a form of resistance. If students merely tell the teacher what she or he wants to hear, without necessarily believing the statements, they resist interacting and deconstructing cultural assumptions with which they are presented. While educators "…need to acknowledge that we want students to read texts in certain ways because we hope to influence the sort of people our students will become," they also need to recognize that students may not accept those critical readings and positions (Lewis, 2001, p. 145).

Gender as a Mediating Factor

As the year progressed, the students demonstrated that gender issues and gender equity were the prevalent factors which determined socialization in the school. Girls and boys are expected to act in certain ways in order to maintain their "boy-ness" or "girl-ness," and the students were reluctant to challenge these notions.

In this study, gender became a main focus of critical explorations, with social class and multiculturalism as lesser foci. Among the main characters portrayed in our class novel readings the majority were males (Freak, Max, Daniel) and the storylines reinforced the approved dominant discourses of males as heroes. Males had the power in the books to rescue females, to overcome challenging obstacles, and to be seen by others as heroes. *Pictures of Hollis Woods* had a female protagonist, with a strong female ally in Hollis' foster mother, Josie. However, Hollis, with her courageous behavior and independent action, was not seen as the hero of the story. Even in Hollis' own mind, she wished to be a part of a family: a daughter who is wanted by a traditional heterosexual family, a daughter who happily accepts her role of younger sister. While gender roles, possibilities, and limitations were explored with the students in this study, there was no

discussion about how to disrupt the dominant discourse of heterosexuality and the powerful male-female binary.

Another area stressing the male-female heterosexist frame was how the male and female characters in the texts desired to have relationships with persons of the opposite sex. In *Daniel's Story*, Daniel seeks to begin and maintain a relationship with Lodz Ghetto resident, Rosa. Though Rosa is portrayed as a strong-willed female, she is also presented as an object of desire and one to be protected.

No character in any book presented to the students expressed homosexual, bisexual, or transgendered identities. In *Freak the Mighty*, though there was a deep friendship between the two male characters of Freak and Max, it was never suggested that they might have a relationship deeper than friendship. For my part, I purposely did not explore same sex desire, and the students in the study, while very concerned with constructions of feminine and masculine identities, did not bring up ideas of multiple gender possibilities. One reason I did not feel comfortable is akin to what Davies (2003) encountered: "The conscious mind might balk …since it has learned the adult-child binary, the innocent asexual nature of childhood…," (p. 121). To view my students as sexual beings was to move outside of my personal comfort zone and I felt to discuss constructions of sexuality was not appropriate teacher-student relationship building in the sixth grade. Another reason I felt reluctant to discuss topics of sexuality was due to district restrictions. Students in this school district do not receive mandated instruction in human sexuality until the spring of their sixth grade year. Students must also have permission from their custodial parent or guardian to receive this instruction. Since many of the critical literacy activities took place in the fall and winter, prior to the human

sexuality course, I would have needed additional permission to discuss issues surrounding sexuality with my students. I did fear that asking for such permission would result in fewer participants for this study and difficulty engaging in whole-class discussions. While that should not be a deterrent for exploration, especially since sixth grade students are "striving towards agency or adult forms of knowledge and control over their lives…[which] co-exists with their placement in the category of (non-sexual) child whose life is controlled by adults," (Davies, 2003, p. 123) it was a deterrent for me. Perhaps I wanted to preserve the "innocence" of my students by refraining from such topics. Perhaps I wanted to save myself resistance from school administration. By making this decision, I may have potentially created less tolerance for students who are struggling with issues of sexuality and gendered identities.

We also did not explore constructions of gender, moving away from fixed biological identities towards the social constructions that exist on a continuum of femininity and masculinity. This heterosexist frame of reference heavily shaped the work my students and I did within the classroom. The purpose of raising gender equity issues was to break down the systematic perpetuation of heterosexism and by association, homophobia. However, by not fully exploring how strongly the forces of heterosexism and homophobia influenced many aspects of our lives, I may have inadvertently legitimized these beliefs. By not constantly challenging my own assumptions regarding the gender binaries, heterosexism, and homophobia present in my classroom, in our school, and in our larger communities, I was not able to work with my students to deconstruct these beliefs and produce new societal discourses.

To move beyond the male-female gender binary, as well as heterosexist forces, is not an easy endeavor. Working towards more equitable agency among all those in the communities of practice requires careful construction of learning opportunities, so as to "…give authority back to the children, to constitute them as knowers, as people with the right to critically reflect on [their] activities," (Davies, 2003, p. 63). These learning activities should include a deconstruction of authors and texts with the purpose of finding

> …the silences and gaps in texts, and to question what it is the author understood as obvious and therefore not in need of saying. They need to understand the power of those silences to reinforce the obviousness of what does not need to be said. And, they need to find authors and texts who break the silences, who begin to say the unsayable. They need to become writers themselves, creating texts that disrupt certainties and open up new possibilities. (Davies, 2003, p. 160)

Lewis (2001) also notes that gender is performed in classrooms, reflecting the views of the larger culture. In the classrooms of this study, gender was explored in ways that encouraged readers to "…empathize with experiences of injustice and to reflect on such experiences in their own lives…," (Martino, 2001, p. 178). However, there was not further exploration to resist the dominant masculinities and femininities presented in texts and society, or the effects those dominant constructions of gender, heterosexuality, and homophobia have on power relations. In order to be critically literate individuals, students and teachers must closely examine the patterns of their behaviors in order to resist further perpetuation of such limiting forces.

Sahni (2001), in her micro-ethnographic study of rural Indian second-graders, found that

> As the children negotiated the curriculum and participated in structuring the events in the classroom, they learned to make decisions, take risks and make choices, and thus grew in autonomy. Most importantly, they acquired a view of themselves as persons with a voice that counted. They learned that they had the right to participate in structuring their classroom life. (p. 33)

This is the enormous potential of utilizing students as co-researchers and co-constructors of curriculum in the classroom environment. With students at the center of a critical literacy pedagogy, the social experiences which support learning and inquiry can ensure that "…student voices be heard," (Vasquez, 2001, p. 55).

As students take more agentive roles within classrooms, there can be work to "…reframe our students' diverse experiences as a profound intellectual resource," (Campano & Damico, 2007, p. 230). Similarly, Fecho and Allen (2003) write, "…what are we losing by not including them [students] as coresearchers? If teachers provide an *emic* voice on teaching, students must be the voices of learning, and resisting learning," (p. 243). Brause and Mayher (2003) also found that,

> [w]hen students collaborate with teachers in establishing and implementing the curriculum, there is real dialog in which the interests of students are paramount in identifying the enterprises in which students will engage, and the teacher finds ways to use these experiences to expand students' concepts about the world and strategies for learning. p. 298

In this study, students were used as co-researchers within the context of the Literacy Research Club. The females who participated in the LRC may not have fully realized their roles as co-constructors of the English and Language Arts curriculum, but their suggestions and comments during LRC meetings worked to shape the activities taking place within the classroom. Additionally, comments made by all students in this study, such as written and verbal responses, shaped classroom proceedings and activities. However, without explicit statements by the teacher explaining how student responses directly influence classroom activities, students may not fully realize that they are active co-constructors of the curriculum. Viewing students as active agents in their education can help all parties "…understand how their literacy practices are intimately tied to their social locations and help provide access to understanding a world we share," (Campano & Damico, 2007, p. 230).

Teacher Power and Student Power

One issue that frequently arose throughout my observations was that of teacher power and student power. I often utilized my power and position as "The Teacher" to guide, redirect, raise questions, affirm, or negate topics within the classroom community. Consequently, I worried that by studying issues of power equity but not sharing such power with my students, there was not truly any co-construction of the curriculum. In addition, by expecting my students to adhere to culturally sanctioned ways of behaving in the classroom, I frequently questioned how my belief in the importance of "doing school," and the way that I located power within myself, conflicted with my belief in the importance of enacting a curriculum of critical literacy, which focuses on equity and fairness.

Davies (2003) writes," [p]ositions of power and powerlessness are achieved through talk, through social practices and through social and architectural structures," (p. 201). It is through this talk that teachers and students can explore "…social relations and material conditions [which] shape how students make meaning of who they are and their relations to others as well as how they express themselves in the world," (Joseph & Duncan, 2007, p. 204).

However, it was my own decisions as a teacher, decisions which ultimately placed limitations on this study, which continued to enact power over my students. My choices (discussed in more detail below) in what texts and authors to include, which lenses to view those texts, and the topics which ensued from the critical literacy activities placed me, and kept me, at the center of classroom power. The students, with opportunities to explore the inequities present in texts, did not have the same opportunity to explore the inequities present in the classroom. Whether students were conscious of this or not, their power in the classroom was restricted. Moje and Lewis (2007) also found that there is a constant "…struggle over access to resources and that people within …communities are not always viewed or treated equally, one must then acknowledge that learning is shaped by and mired in power relations," (p. 17).

Limitations of the Study

Social Action

This study focused on introducing students to critical literacy issues in texts and their own lives; however, it did not take critical literacy work towards social action. In addition to raising awareness of dominant systems of meaning, making difference visible,

and questioning why certain groups have been "othered," critical literacy also asks individuals to make applications to their own lives and take social action (Lewison, Flint & Van Sluys, 2002).

Empowerment is one aspect of social action: the power to construct and reconstruct identities, relationships, and positions in the world (Sahni, 2001). Critical educators seek to "…foster in students a critical attitude towards texts, the curriculum, and their own socioeconomic positioning in the society," (Lin, 2001, p. 96). Critical readings of texts, and specifically children's literature, "…provides possibilities to support awareness towards the complexities of negotiating meaning within contested social and political realities embedded in notions of local and global citizenship," (Weltsek and Medina, 2007, p. 273). Students and teachers who engage in ongoing negotiations of "…equitable relations and designing ethical, possible, and productive social futures…," have great potential to dynamically respond to and enact societal changes.

Another aspect of action for social justice is that of self-selected projects designed to investigate personally relevant issues (Fecho & Allen, 2003). By involving students more deeply in their own communities, and by inviting community members into the classroom environment, the potential for social change increases. Working within such networks, "…students learn of their rich cultural heritages, and in the process, students often delve into equity and social justice issues affecting their communities," (Fecho & Allen, 2003, p. 242). Additionally, Lankshear and Knobel (1997) state, "[b]eyond merely calling for people to get involved…it will be necessary to *create and maintain*

institutions that will enable such participation, encourage it, and make it fulfilling as well as demanding," (p. 105, original emphasis).

In this study, however, students did not reach out to their own communities to investigate the institutions that shape their lives. As the classroom teacher, I did not design or present opportunities for such interactions, nor do I believe that students sought out such opportunities on their own.

Equipment

I question whether the use of the small, hand-held tape recorders reduced the amount of actual conversation during literature circle discussion groups. Because of the need to speak more directly into the microphone, students would need to take the recorder away from the speaker in order to make a point and keep passing it back to one another. This also raises the question regarding small-group discussions: Does the use of recording equipment deter meaningful conversations, or is group-make-up more of a contributing factor? While these peer-led discussions provide "…important interruptions of power that allowed for at least temporary transformations in participant status," the use of recording devices, and the knowledge that the discussions would be made public, may certainly have limited the natural and authentic character of the students' responses (Lewis, 2001, p. 85).

Authors and Writing

Another weakness of this study has been the lack of diversity among authors. For example, I did not present the students with novels by African Americans, although we read picture and poetry books. I also did not provide the students with books by traditionally marginalized persons. To only read a few picture books and poetry is not

enough to explore the writing of such authors or to challenge "notions of universality or parallels to their [European Americans] personal experiences. … [and therefore may have continued] the process of dismissing the unique conditions, created by racism, of those who have been 'othered,'" (Harris & Willis, 2003, p. 828).

I have also not explored why certain authors write about certain subjects in certain ways. Cai (1997) notes the importance of the cultural and historical background of authors, "[a]s their perspectives were shaped and conditioned by their times, [and] they might have unconsciously reflected in their works the prevalent prejudices of their times," (p. 204). For example, Hartmann (2006) writes, "[a]n even more important issue than whether female authors are equally represented may be how female characters and their experiences are presented in the literature that is available," (p. 86). Additionally, teachers and students must interrogate how race and racial identities are socially and historically constructed to maintain difference and power (Singh, 1997). To adequately explore authors' backgrounds, teachers must devote specific instructional time which may not be available, or appear to be available, due to the curricular constraints and state or national academic standards. As my students and I engaged in what I hoped were flexible and daily critical literacy practices, I felt the pressure of time and district requirements and did not give enough time to fully interrogate "…economically and culturally marginal groups…," author-portrayal of such groups, and the deconstruction of the "…assumption of a monocultural, gender-free literate populace…," (Luke & Freebody, 1997, p. 221). As a result, we did not truly engage in all of the alternate perspectives and multiple readings that our texts offered.

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Lenses

The lens sheets themselves may have been a limitation to the study. By confining the students to "fill in the blank" type papers, there is the possibility that the students focused on the existing hierarchical structures in their books, rather than working through how to break down those hierarchies. Had I done more with the Ally, Bystander, Target, Perpetrator position activity, it may have helped them to see that things do not exist in binary relationships or that hierarchies do not need to be stable constructions. Utilizing more dramatic play within the classroom may also work to deconstruct binary relationships and hierarchies. Because students must situate themselves in certain stances, then reposition themselves into new stances, there is deliberate and decisive action to reimagine possible discourses. This dialogic approach allows for the "…dynamic interplay of contested, yet interrelated, beliefs and interests with the potential for continual transformation of meaning," (Edmiston & Enciso, 2003, p. 868).

White Privilege

In this study, the students did not read texts with the purpose of engaging them in reflections upon their own privilege as White, European-American, middle-class persons. Fecho and Allen (2003) find that the process of inquiry has the capability to help students "…interrogate not only the issues of this community, but their [the classroom members'] own range of prejudices," (p. 236). While the read aloud novels (*Seedfolks, Freak the Mighty, Pictures of Hollis Woods, and Daniel's Story*) had elements of discrimination (e.g. race, age, gender, religion, ability), and though we looked at how our labels and judgments affected our perspectives, we did not explicitly examine how to challenge the privilege being White affords (Beach, 1997). The homogeneous population in the school

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reinforced the assumption that white privilege is the norm, and our activities with lenses and positioning did not "…explore how experiences in their [students' and teacher's] own lives, and with texts, are shaped by ideological forces….[to] then examine how their own behavior as well as those of characters are shaped by institutional racism," (Beach, 1997, p. 88).

Recommendations for Future Research

One recommendation for future study would be to conduct a longitudinal study over many years with one group of students. Tierney and Sheehy (2003) argue that "longitudinal studies [are] crucial to the advancement of our understanding of how literacy develops," (p. 187). Documenting change over time with a core group of students has the potential to look at broad critical issues or focus on one aspect of critical literacy. Such studies could "…demonstrate …awareness of language as a tool for critiquing status quo…[and allow] students the space to become autonomous learners who can create and critique texts (including their own)," (Comber, 2001), p. 277).

Conducting a similar study regarding a critical literacy curriculum with students from culturally or socially diverse backgrounds at various levels of schooling would also add to the body of knowledge in this area. Harris and Willis (2003) find that activities and texts that "…move individuals outside of their comfort zones, raise critical consciousness, and challenge the status quo…," are needed in order to "…critique the past and present and conceive of a hopeful future," (p. 829). Studying students who have been "othered" and their responses to equity issues has the power to further problematize

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the dominant societal discourses that have limited literate capacities for students (Martino, 2001).

Working further with students as co-constructors of curriculum would also provide researchers and teachers alike a challenge to "…rebuild our schools so that they actually help all children have…equality of access...," to all that society has to offer, (Brause & Mayher, 2003, p. 298). Brause and Mayher (2003) write that partnerships among teachers and students, where "…teams of students design and accept responsibility for accomplishing tasks and collaborating with peers and the teacher in the process of simultaneously accomplishing … [projects and becoming] increasingly educated," and the explicit research of such projects, are necessary in order to more deeply explore the co-construction of curriculum and the use of students as co-researchers (p. 298).

Lastly, another avenue for future research would be to design a study that focuses on the critical literacy taxonomy described above. A study which describes how students move through the phases of the taxonomy could aid classroom-based documentation of how critical literacies are constantly negotiated "…amid conflicting and changing cultural practices and expectations," (Comber, 2001, p. 277). Similarly, the taxonomy could be used to describe how teachers experience and negotiate critical literacy in their teaching and personal lives. Educators who concurrently explore the nature of knowledge and power with their students provide an invaluable resource for those who also seek to produce new curricula.

Summary

The results of this study showed that curricular activities and engagements predicated upon explorations of gender, power, social, and cultural equity has the capability to raise awareness of such issues within texts. It is important for teachers to be aware that their teaching activities have the potential to reproduce dominant cultural beliefs or produce new pedagogies of equity and justice. My goal in completing this study was to provide a way to teachers and students to interact critically with the English and Language Arts curriculum. This was facilitated through explicit critical instruction and text-based activities, small, peer-led discussion groups, increased student choice and voice, and through the utilization of students as co-researchers within the Literacy Research Club. With space to explore, question, challenge, and reframe sociocultural assumptions, students' sense of agency over their own lives and situations may increase. As Lewis (2001) notes, "…literature instruction should invite students to question the discourse that shapes their experiences as well as to resist textual ideology that promotes dominant cultural assumptions," (p. 16). Together with future research studies, the understandings gained through this study should impact the ways teachers design instruction and involve students as co-constructors of the curriculum, so that opportunities for independent transfer and transformation across all areas of life will increase.

APPENDIX A

LITERACY RESEARCH CLUB APPLICATION

Application for Literacy Research Club Membership

Please complete the following application neatly and in ink (blue or black). When it is complete, return it to Miss Pietrandrea.

Name: _____   Date of Birth: _____

Address: _____

_____

Please answer the following questions:

1. Why would you like to participate in this club?

2. Why are you a good candidate for this club?

3. Are you willing to meet in Miss Pietrandrea's classroom during lunchtime (both lunch and activity periods) on Tuesdays and Thursdays?

4. Interests:

APPENDIX B

SOCIOGRAM STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Directions: Please write the names of the classmates in response to each question.

1. If you could work with anyone in the class, whom would you work with?

       1st Choice _____

       2nd Choice _____

       3rd Choice _____

2. If you could play with anyone in the class, whom would you play with?

       1st Choice _____

       2nd Choice _____

       3rd Choice _____

3. Who is a good reader in this class?

       1st Choice _____

       2nd Choice _____

       3rd Choice _____

4. Who is a good writer in this class?

       1st Choice _____

       2nd Choice _____

       3rd Choice _____

5. If you could go to any person in the class for help, whom would you get help from?

       1st Choice _____

       2nd Choice _____

       3rd Choice _____

APPENDIX C

LENS SHEETS – GENDER, POWER, MULTICULTURAL, AND SYMBOLIST

Gender Lens

In your novel, pay attention to the different ways that male characters and female characters are portrayed.

List some of the roles that are available to women in _____.

-
-
-
-
-

List some of the roles available to men in _____.

-
-
-
-
-

We've all heard the term "social ladder." Try plotting some of the characters on the social ladder graph below.

How are the gender roles in _____ the same or different from gender roles in today's society? Explain your ideas.

Power Lens

In your novel, pay attention to the social structures that give power to different groups in society.

List some of the social groups that are represented in _____.

-
-
-
-
-

We've all heard the term "social ladder." Try plotting some of the characters on the social ladder graph below.

Name some of the primary (main) power struggles that the text portrays. Who has the power and who doesn't?

Conflict between:

Has Power	Has No Power

Multicultural Lens

In your novel, pay attention to the different ways that people of different cultures and/or ethnicities are portrayed.

What cultures/ethnicities are represented in _____?

-

-

-

-

What examples of dualities are present in _____? (one group vs. another group)

-

-

-

-

Do these examples reinforce society's stereotypes, or do they challenge them? How?

We've all heard the term "social ladder." Try plotting some of the cultural/ethnic groups on the social ladder graph below.

| |
| |
| |
| |
| |
| |
| |

Multicultural Lens (p. 2)

Explain why some groups are privileged above other groups in _____.

Which characters experience discrimination? What types of discrimination do they face (racial, religious, gender, cultural, social, economic, etc.)? Why?

How are cultures/ethnicities in _____ the same or different from today's society? Explain your ideas.

<u>Symbolist</u>

Create a symbol that represents a character from your novel. Be creative & be prepared to explain your creation.

Novel: _____

Character: _____

Sketch of your symbol:

Explanation of what your symbol is:

Why did you choose that symbol to represent the character (think about color, shape,

size, etc.)

APPENDIX D

LITERATURE CIRCLE REFLECTION SHEET

LITERATURE CIRCLE REFLECTION

Now that your group has finished the book, please write a response to each of the following questions.

1. What did you like most about reading your book?

2. What did you like least about reading your book?

3. How were your group's discussions? (conversations or just reading through the papers?)

4. What would you change to improve your literature circle discussion?

5. What did you think about using the lens sheets?

6. How did the lens sheets change your thinking when reading novels?

APPENDIX E

DANIEL'S STORY – THEME RESPONSE STUDENT RUBRIC

<u>**Daniel's Story**</u> **– Final Response Self-Evaluation Rubric**

*You will be rereading your final response for...

Meaning & Completeness:
- Does my response make sense?
- Have I left out anything important?
- Is my response organized so readers can follow my ideas?
- Did I provide enough details/examples from the book to support the theme I chose?
- Did I put forth my best effort on this piece of work? Am I proud of my work on this response?

****If you left anything out, or found other errors, **correct them on your paper** (in another color).

**Please give yourself an overall score based on your total work on this response.

4 – My final response stays on the topic of my chosen theme, and elaborates by providing many relevant details & examples from the book. My response is well written, well organized, and makes sense.

3 – My final response stays on the topic of my chosen theme, with some elaboration on the theme. I provide sufficient details & examples from the book. My response is organized and easy to understand.

2 – My final response stays mostly on the topic of my chosen theme. I provide some details & examples from the book. My response is organized and most of it can be understood.

1 – My final response does not stay on the topic of my chosen theme. I provided very few details & examples from the book. My response is not organized and is hard to understand.

0 – My final response is completely off topic or I did not attempt the response.

APPENDIX F

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SELECTED TEXTS

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SELECTED TEXTS

Community-building Texts

Fox, M. (1985). *Wilfred Gordon MacDonald Partridge*. La Jolla, CA: Kane/Miller
    Book Publishers.

    This book explores what a "memory" is through the eyes of a young boy and an
    elderly woman. Wilfred Gordon learns that a memory is something warm,
    something as precious as gold, something that makes you cry, something that
    makes you laugh, and something from long ago. I use this book with my students
    to create our own memory boxes, where I and the children bring in five objects
    and share them with the class. This book encourages the entire classroom to learn
    about some of the most important aspects of our lives, and can often lead into
    writing projects such as poetry and memoirs.

Polacco, P. (2001). *Thank you, Mr. Faulker*. New York: Philomel.

    Patricia Polacco writes and illustrates this book about her own experience as a
    child with dyslexia, coping with the loss of family members, a move across the
    country, the struggle learning to read, dealing with bullies, and challenges with
    self-esteem. I use this book to show my students how we all have strengths and
    weaknesses, the benefit of hard work and creativity, and how we can positively
    deal with peer-pressure and bullies.

Holocaust-related Texts: Picture Books & Nonfiction Texts

Abells, C. B. (1986). *The children we remember*. New York: Greenwillow Books.

    This book uses black and white photographs to chronologically describe what
    happened to Jewish children during the Holocaust. The dedication is especially
    moving and provides an excellent opening into the study of the Holocaust and
    injustices that still plague our world.

Adler, D. A. (1987). *The number on my grandfather's arm*. New York: UAHC Press.

    A simple story of a grandfather's and granddaughter's relationship, yet this book
    tells a powerful tale about human rights. After many years of silence, the
    grandfather finally shares his experience growing up during the Holocaust, his
    imprisonment at Auchwitz, and the loss of his family. Black and white
    photographs enhance the content of this book. Excellent as an introduction to the
    Holocaust or as a supplement to Holocaust studies.

Bachrach, S. D. (1994). *Tell them we remember: The story of the Holocaust.* New York: Little, Brown, and Company.

This nonfiction book has short passages with photographic illustrations that cover the many aspects of the Holocaust. It provides teachers with an outstanding resource with which to engage students and teach important facts about topics before, during, and after the Holocaust. The book is produced in conjunction with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Bunting, E. (1989). *Terrible things: An allegory of the Holocaust.* Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America.

I use this book at the start of the Holocaust unit. Eve Bunting's text, coupled with Stephen Gammell's illustrations, provides students with an easy-to-understand lesson that it is important to stand up for what you know is right, even if you are standing alone. The introduction to the book is something I often copy for my students to keep in their notebooks or binders as a reminder of the danger of remaining silent and apathetic.

Grossman, M. & Smith, F. D. (2000). *My secret camera: Life in the Lodz Ghetto.* San Diego, CA: Gulliver Books.

The photographs were taken by Grossman during his captivity in the Lodz Ghetto. Each picture shows aspects of life within the ghetto and demonstrates the range of emotions present. The photos can certainly speak for themselves, though there is text provided by Smith. This book is excellent as a supplement to this unit.

Hoestlandt, J. (1993). *Star of fear, star of hope.* New York: Walker & Company.

This book revolves around the symbol of the star. As the Jews were forced to wear a yellow Star of David sewn on their clothing and were being arrested, many individuals resisted the Nazis during World War II to save their Jewish neighbors. The text and illustrations are helpful for students to see how confusing and frightening this time was, and makes an excellent read aloud.

Innocenti, R. (1985). *Rose Blanche.* San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace & Company.

Though it is told simply, the text requires students to make inferences regarding the fate of Rose Blanche, a young German girl, during the last days of World War II. Her actions show students the importance of courage in the face of injustice. Beautiful illustrations enhance the message of this book.

Holocaust-related Texts: Literature Circle Books

Bitton-Jackson, L. E. (1997). *I have lived a thousand years: Growing up in the
          Holocaust*. New York: Scholastic.

          This is a memoir of a thirteen-year-old Jewish girl living in Hungary during
          World War II. Told in the present tense, the book provides a detailed account of
          transports, life in concentration camps, and liberation, among other aspects of her
          personal witness.

Cheng, A. (2002). *Marika*. New York: Scholastic.

          Marika's Jewish family lives as Christians in Budapest, Romania. Told from her
          perspective, Marika deals with her parents' separation, school issues, bullies, and
          the growing effects of war. The story is sometimes confusing for students, but it
          provides readers with a child's experience of the gradual realization of the horrors
          of war.

Garner, E. R. (1999). *Eleanor's story: An American girl in Hitler's Germany*. Atlanta,
          GA: Peachtree Publishers.

          Garner's memoir details the period of her childhood spent in Germany during
          World War II. After moving from New Jersey with her family, she lived in Berlin
          and provides readers with a civilian's experience and hardships under Hitler and
          the Nazi regime.

Lowry, L. (1989). *Number the stars*. New York: Yearling.

          Lowry won the 1990 Newbery Medal for this account of Jews escaping Denmark
          during the Holocaust. The novel fictionalizes the true story of how Danish
          citizens resisted Nazi authority to smuggle Jews into Sweden.

Reiss, J. (1990). *The upstairs room*. New York: HarperTrophy.

          This Newbery Honor book tells how two Jewish sisters in Nazi-occupied Holland
          must spend two and a half years in hiding. Separated from the rest of their family
          and restricted to a tiny room, the narrator, Annie, describes how she and her sister
          live on a day-to-day basis. The story is based on the author's own experiences
          during World War II, and though students may dislike the lack of action, it offers
          an excellent perspective on hidden Jews and the Gentiles who risked their lives to
          hide them.

Spinelli, J. (2003). *Milkweed*. New York: Laurel-Leaf.

          This story is told through the eyes of a young Jewish orphan boy living on the
          streets of Warsaw, Poland during the Holocaust. Amidst the struggle for survival,

the persecution faced at the hands of the Nazis, and the devastation of war, orphan Misha Pilsudski demonstrates innocence, kindness, and perseverance.

Williams, L. E. (1996). *Behind the bedroom wall*. New York: Scholastic.

Korinna is a thirteen-year-old member of Hitler's female youth group, the Jungmadel. She discovers that her parents are hiding two Jews in their house, and struggles with the decision to turn her family in to the authorities or to perpetuate the secret. While it offers readers an alternate perspective of young adults during the Holocaust, decisions are simplified into clear-cut issues of good and evil.

Yolen, J. (1988). *The devil's arithmetic*. New York: Scholastic.

Yolen's book tells of a present-day Jewish teenager who resists her heritage. At the Passover Seder, Hannah is transported back to 1942 Poland and lives among other Jews in a small village. She and the villagers are taken to a death camp where Hannah learns bravery and courage in the face of horror. It is helpful to explain to students the time-travel element prior to reading to reduce confusion.

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