

Class Conscious or Conscience Class: The Pedagogical Choices Teachers Make as
Critical Literacy Practitioners

Daniel R. Woods

Dissertation submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State
University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
In
Curriculum and Instruction

Mary Alice Barksdale Co-Chair
Patricia Proudfoot-Kelly Co-Chair
Sara B. Kajder
Robert H. Williams

March 31, 2010
Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: Critical literacy, critical literacy practitioners, teacher education, Literacy,
Critical Theory, English Instruction, Teaching Methods, Secondary Education.

Copyright (Optional)

Class Conscious or Conscience Class: The Pedagogical Choices Teachers Make as Critical Literacy Practitioners

Daniel R. Woods

ABSTRACT

In a time of high stakes tests and mounting pressures in favor of standardized curricula at all levels, teachers continue to work in the best interests of their students as is evidenced by their statements both public and private, their continued commitment to their profession, and their political actions. Indeed, many advocate loudly and repeatedly for their students and for maximal opportunities for those same students. Without doubt, many of these teachers aspire to help learners of all ages and from all sociocultural strata develop into not only critical readers, consumers, and even critical civic participants, but into citizens with active critical consciences and a lively critical consciousness of their own culture and the cultures of others.

In this study, the author observed and interviewed two middle school teachers and two high school teachers—all English teachers—for purposes of examining the participants' teaching practice for identifiable acts and statements involving the promotion of critical literacy among learners in the teachers' classrooms. The observations and interviews were conducted across a contiguous three-day period for each participant during the same class period each day. Participants self-selected dates and class period, and also were aware of the purpose of the study, i.e. to look for critical literacy practices in teaching. All observations and interviews were coded inductively and used Strauss and Corbin's (1998) three-step coding process for grounded theory of open, axial, and selective coding. Teachers' observed actions and statements were subsequently analyzed in a constant comparative analysis.

Dedication

For those of you that know me, it might come as a surprise that this part of the process has been the most difficult for me. How, in a few lines across a few pages can you say how much you appreciate people that have helped you achieve your life's dream? I have tried to acknowledge all of you that have meant so much to me, but there just isn't enough space to do it justice. Therefore, beyond this simple page, I will make time to tell each of you just how special you've been, and will continue to be, to me. I thank you all.

This dissertation is dedicated to Noelle, my wife, my best friend, and my strongest supporter. None of this would have been possible without you. Your unwavering support during this process has been a constant source of strength for me. I greatly appreciate all of the hours you spent being mother and father to the girls so that I could get this done. Thanks to you, this process has been one of the best times of my life. I love you. I also dedicate this to my amazing daughters Anya and Keira. You two are the source of endless joy in my life. Because of you I was always able to remember what was truly important in life. The two of you have been my inspiration from the outset. You are both amazing young ladies and I want you both to know that you can do anything you set your mind to. Daddy loves you very much.

To my mother. I would never have been able to achieve this dream had you not given me the gift of literacy as a young boy. Your love of books and endless patience in reading to me was the greatest gift I ever received. Without that, none of this would have been possible. I thank you, and of course, I love you. To my father, Nick, who always believed in me unconditionally and taught me to believe in myself. I know you are

looking down right now with a smile on your face. To my brother George, his wife Stacey and to Nicholas and Morgan, to my brother-in-law Mark and his Wife Jennifer and to Daisy and Annie, I thank all of you for your support and I love you all.

To Mike and Karen. I could not have asked for better in-laws. You have been a source of strength and support to me throughout this process. You all are like a second set of parents to me and two of the finest people I have ever known and I love you for it.

To my committee, the four of you gave so much time and effort that I will never be able to repay you for. Always know that I appreciate every moment of your time. Dr. Sara Kajder I appreciate your desire to push me to be the best researcher I can be and for giving me countless professional opportunities. To Dr. Pat Kelly, your kindness, wisdom and constant reassurance have been invaluable to me. Your ability to see the big picture and your willingness to guide me toward it is a source of eternal appreciation. To Dr. Robert Williams, you have been a teacher, a mentor, a colleague and friend; I would not be here without you. From the moment I stepped into your class as an undergrad you have had a faith in my ability that was unwavering and always served as an inspiration to achieve. Finally, to Dr. Mary Alice Barksdale, I feel as if I have known you a lifetime. You have taught me more through this process than you will ever know. You have been a guide, a mentor, a source of constant support and most of all a friend. You are the teacher that I want to be and the yardstick by which I will always measure myself. I will never be able to thank you enough, and I will forever cherish our friendship.

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction	1
Statement of Problem	2
Study Purpose and Research Question	7
The role of educators	7
Research questions	9
Researcher's Stance	10
Personal rationale	10
Assumptions and Limitations	13
Limitations	14
Discussion	14
Chapter Two: Literature Review	16
Introduction	16
What is Critical Literacy?	18
Critical Pedagogy in English Education	20
English Education	20
Critical literacy as educational tool	23
Educating future educators	26
Cultural experience	27
Whose truth?	28
Growing pains	29
Where teachers come from	30
University Classroom Structure	31
Social Constructivism	31
The zone of proximal development	32
Psychological tools	33
Language	34
Mediation	34
Impact of Preparation on Teacher Beliefs and Practices	34
Critical literacy education: Where are we now?	34
What they bring with them	37
Discussion	37
Chapter Three: Methodology	40
Introduction	40
Research Approach	40
Theoretical Design	42
Participant Selection	43
Setting	45
Gaining access/site selection	45
Data Collection	46
Interviews	46
Participant observation	47
Additional artifacts	48
Field notes	48
Reflexivity	49
Data management	49

Data analysis	50
Open coding	50
Axial coding	51
Selective coding	51
Memo writing	52
The Participants	52
Karen	53
Karen teaching vignette	54
Valerie	59
Valerie teaching vignette	61
Michael	66
Michael teaching vignette	67
Heather	71
Heather teaching vignette	73
Chapter Four: Reporting the Data	79
Introduction	79
Defining Critical Literacy	80
Participants work to define critical literacy	80
Digging deeper into the definitions	84
Literacy is tied to power	85
Literacy is an academic act	86
Writers write for a purpose	88
Critical literacy as a tool to develop student voice	89
Critical literacy as a tool for fighting social inequalities	90
Voices left unheard	93
LGBT	93
Women	94
Academic Skill	94
Critical literacy is a literacy skill	94
Academic goals for using critical literacy	95
Teaching Critical Literacy	97
Creating a critical literacy curriculum	98
Setting the stage	98
Famous quotes and philosophical questions	99
Pictures of visionaries from different walks of life	100
References to political activism	100
Responsibility to the students	101
Considering student ability	101
Discussions about language used in text	102
Responsibility to parents	104
Critical Literacy in Action	106
Critical literacy as a tool for textual analysis	106
The need to consider authorial intent	108
Understanding time, place, and culture in which a work was written	109
Source Material	111

Books and collected works	112
Multiple sources	112
Electronic media	113
Student's ways of working with books	115
Book discussions	116
Whole group discussions	116
Student-led discussions	117
Student-group-led discussions	117
Assignments	119
Journaling	119
Rewriting a text	120
Mock trials	121
Social justice	122
Social justice goals of participants	122
Student empowerment	123
Student voice	124
Social activism	125
The zine	125
The pyramid of hate	127
Something's missing	129
Summary	129
Chapter Five: Discussion	131
Introduction	131
Conclusions	132
The Findings	134
Alignment with NCTE/NCATE standards and CEE beliefs	134
CEE beliefs	137
Question 1	143
Level 1	148
Level 2	148
Level 3	149
Level 4	149
Level 5	150
Not quite there	150
Question 2	151
Context	151
Topics	152
Teachers' personality traits	154
Question 3	156
The power of multiple perspectives	156
Freire's dialogical	157
The critical literacy lens	157
Missing pieces	157
Gender	158
Sexual orientation	159
Question 4	160

Critical literacy practitioners or not?	161
In the right direction	162
Critical literacy pedagogy adapted	163
Critical literacy boot camp	164
Research implications	166
Practicing teachers	166
Administrators	167
Teacher Educators	168
Implications for the researcher	169
Recommendations for future research	171
Conclusion	173
References	175
Appendix A	182
Appendix B	183
Appendix C	184
Appendix D	185
Appendix E	186
Appendix F	187
Appendix G	188
Appendix H	189
 List of Tables	
Table 1	134
Table 2	138
Table 3	145

Chapter One: Introduction

If we teach today as we taught yesterday, then we rob our children of tomorrow.

~John Dewey

Critical literacy is the aspect of critical pedagogy concerned with reading, writing, and other forms of composing expression. Critical pedagogy as expressed by Shor (1992), explores the “habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions. To understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action” (p. 129). For our purposes, critical literacy pedagogy was defined and used as that portion of critical pedagogy concerned with literacy instruction. Furthermore, critical literacy and critical literacy pedagogy was used interchangeably and should be considered synonymous with one another.

The purpose of this research was to explore critical literacy practices of Secondary ELA teachers in an effort to better inform critical literacy methodological instruction of English Education preservice teachers. What was needed was an “understanding of the difficulties surrounding the use of critical literacy in today’s culture of accountability, and particularly for today’s new teachers” (Glazier, 2007, p. 376). The findings will inform English educator pedagogy for preparing our future students to become critical literacy practitioners, educators that can actively engage critical literacy in both theory and practice.

By gaining an understanding of the pressures of integrating critical literacy pedagogy and observing the way in which successful critical literacy practitioners have

navigated those pressures, English educators should be able to better prepare preservice teachers to become critical literacy practitioners ready to overcome institutional, peer, student, or parent pressures related to a pedagogy of critical literacy (Glazier, 2007).

It should also be noted that, while literacy and reading are often treated as being synonymous, critical literacy and critical reading are fundamentally different. Critical reading is based in positivist theory and is guided by the belief that language describes reality. Alternatively, critical literacy is post-positivist and asserts that language actually creates reality (Morrell, 2008). It is the creation of reality and the possibility for re-creation of reality that gives critical literacy its power of praxis. It is also important to note that critical literacy is not an exercise in evaluating a work as a matter of literary quality, though there is a time and place for that, but rather a critical analysis of the reality that framed the author, and thus the work. By encouraging readers to interact with a text, to consider it in a multitude of ways, we are strengthening the readers' literacy skills and capabilities.

Statement of problem

The written word and the power it is ascribed have a long history of acting as a tool for division and injustice, for denying some groups of people while validating others, whether because of gender, age, race, religion, sexual orientation, or political affiliations (Apple, 1995, 2003; Foucault, 1980; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Morrison, 1993, Shor, 1992). This is not meant to suggest or advocate an ideology that writing is bad or that the practice of writing as a whole is in anyway unjust. It is an effort to express the reality that unless all people come to "the word" with an equal opportunity, injustices can and do occur. Kutz and Roskelly (1991) insisted, "No one's language is neutral. The forms

chosen, at any instance, place them in relation to others and assert their meanings and intentions” (p. 148). As such, considering the *intent* of the word is as important as the consideration of the word in the first place. It is desirable that those ruled by the word come to understand the word and the multitudes it can contain (Freire, 2000). If the word is to be an authentic element of a democracy, it must be available to all.

One example that demonstrates the role of critical literacy in exploring canonical texts in the Secondary ELA classroom is James Fennimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans*. While the literary merit of this novel continues to be debated, its popularity continues more than 180 years after first publication. Cooper’s most famous, or some would say infamous, work continues to be stocked in schools and libraries worldwide, as well as enjoying Hollywood success several times over.

Why is this romantic tale in such need of revisioning through a critical literacy lens? Simply stated, because of the power of the word. James Fennimore Cooper was not a Native American, and as such he could never envision the world through the eyes of a Native American. The very best he could hope to do was to imagine, through his white, male, privileged-class experiences, what it might be like to be a Native American. Unfortunately, the simplicity of the aforementioned fact is oftentimes absent from the conversations surrounding this book. For many years this book and others like it were considered nearly anthropological in their representations of Native Americans, similar to African Americans in the case of Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Stowe’s work so deeply affected common impressions of African American culture that the term “Uncle Tom” is still used as a derogatory remark today.

These books and countless others (intentionally or not) have become the medium through which people believe they come to *know* another people. The romanticized image of the Native American as being somehow transcendent of humanity in a union with mother earth has perpetuated to the point that the average American's image of Native American has become a mere caricature of a people represented through turquoise jewelry, feathered headdresses, and the greeting "How white man!" (Aldred, 2000). With Cooper we can see the consequences of the power of the word when it is taught and accepted without question. There is a need to teach our students to consider more than the book, consider also the lens through which the book was conceived.

To be sure, this is not to suggest an overhaul of the canon, or the public castigation of any authors, but merely a shift in the perception of literature and the word as the ultimate truth, to include considerations of culturally diverse learners (Boyd, et al., 2006; Duffy, 2008; Giroux, 2009; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2006). English educators need to impart an understanding that any text used in a classroom carries implied acceptance and validation by the school and school system (Doubek & Cooper, 2007). To study *The Last of the Mohicans* as a representation of a 17th-18th century white man's perception of native people does far more justice to those people (and to the book I would posit) than the continued perpetuation of the word as representing absolute truth.

Because the dissemination of knowledge is often guided by, if not completely controlled, through the dominant social class of a society (Apple, 1995; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Giroux, 1992; hooks, 1994), it is a matter of consequence that it is the world of the dominant social classes that is reflected most deeply in the majority of our public schools (Giroux 1983; hooks, 1994).

This is most prominent in the ideology of a school's textbooks or the fervor with which canonical literature is defended in the public forum (Apple, 2003). It is difficult to ignore the fact that such practices work to maintain social hierarchies as we continue to see traditional (middle-class white) values and norms represented in classrooms in which a large percentage of students arrive from outside of that dominant class (Apple, 2004; Hill-Jackson, 2007). Again the status quo is maintained as those students outside of the dominate social class are subjected to state approved curricula (Doubek & Cooper, 2007) in which they and their ways of life are often under-represented, misrepresented, or worst of all, completely unrepresented in the literature of that *approved* curriculum (Morrison, 1991; Giroux, 1992; Shor, 1992).

This focus on conformity within education creates a hegemonic system designed to maintain current power structures rather than encourage democratic equality (Apple, 2003; Giroux, 1983). If we are ever to realize a true democracy, this trend must give way to pedagogy grounded in retaining individual cultures and considering the multitude of ways of knowing as expressed by those cultures (Apple, 1995; Banks & Banks, 1993; Boyd et al., 2006; Brice-Heath, 2006). Bishop (1992) maintained "If our society is to meet the challenges of demographic pluralism, all students need to recognize the diversity that defines this society, learn to respect it, and see it in a positive light" (p. 3). John Dewey (1985), in considering the role of democracy in education, expressed a multicultural vision nearly a century ago by stating that one of the guiding virtues of education should be "not only freer interaction between social groups (once isolated so far as intention could keep up a separation) but change in social habit -- its continuous readjustment through meeting the new situations produced

by varied intercourse” (p. 92). Adopting critical literacy pedagogy, I contend, is paramount to achieving these goals.

Teachers being prepared for classrooms of the future have had life experiences that are certain to be quite different from the experiences of the children they will teach (Au, 1998; Bruner, 1996; Delpit, 1991, 1995; Devine, 1994; Gee, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1999) and are likely, through no fault of their own, to view education through what Freire (1973) called a “naïve and magical consciousness.” This phenomenon is a Machiavellian mindset in which the world is perceived only in relation to one’s own personal experience. Knowles and Holt-Reynolds (1991) expressed that “Preservice teachers use their experiences as students as if these were prototypical” (p. 104). If contemporary preservice teaching candidates – as homogenous members of a dominant culture – have empowering educational experiences, then they will likewise assume that the majority of their students will as well, ... and regardless of the fact that large numbers of those students do not belong to the same, dominant culture. Consequently, taking a critical literacy stance may not be a natural position for a teacher accustomed to viewing the world through the eyes of the dominant culture.

Of course, merely recognizing inequalities perpetuated through the written word is no more useful than recognizing that one is being charged by an angry bull. Recognition without action is of little value. Just as the angry bull should inspire one to take action, so should critical literacy pedagogy. One form of action English educators can take is through the process of conscientization. This is the Freirian concept that all learners, no matter their level, must come to recognize the personal and social

components found within every aspect of learning, the emancipatory power of just such a realization, and then the inspiring of the learner to take action (Freire, 2000; Giroux, 2009). Conscientization comes from the Portuguese *consientização*, meaning “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire, 1986, p.35). For a student to become fully independent and self-determining should be the goal of all teachers.

Study Purpose and Research Questions

The role of educators. Educators at all levels play a vital role in the shaping of society, and as such they should be active participants in that shaping rather than being relegated to the role of replicators of the status quo. As Freire (1986) wrote, “Those truly committed to liberation . . . must abandon the educational goal of deposit-making and replace it with the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world” (p. 79). Preservice teachers need to feel empowered to seek out injustice, work to expose it, and even eradicate it when possible (Marshall & Klein, 2009). As an English educator, my goal is for my students to leave my classroom as teachers who hold the rights of their students above all else, to know that democracy does not end at the doorway of the school or classroom, and that they ultimately as teachers have the strength to stand up for what is right and to have a say in just how our world is written.

James Gee (2001) reminded us that all information is socially and culturally situated and that language and the study of communication, reflect deeply the social and cultural norms and values of an author and his or her cultural experiences. Critical literacy is one appropriate tool for such study, since it is a pedagogy that examines the sociopolitical factors that influence every work of human representation. The goal of

critical literacy is to teach students to expose and subvert the oppressive literary traditions that much of our education system is built upon (Freire, 1998; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Shor, 1992,1996). Teachers must work to expose those oppressive traditions and to empower their students to subvert that oppression through the same means by which it was originally delivered, in this case, the written word (Boyd et al., 2006). Lorde (1984) expressed the importance of members of a culture having their voices heard when she declared that “it is the responsibility of the oppressed to teach the oppressors their mistakes” (p. 114). To which Gerald Vizenor (1994) would add, “When the victims talk back, they stop being victims” (p. 85). In respect to his assertion, teachers at all levels must create the spaces that allow those voices to be heard (Boyd et al., 2006) and the Secondary ELA classroom is an excellent place to begin.

It is worth noting that the task of implementing wide-ranging critical literacy pedagogy faces several hurdles along the way, not the least of which is the fact that the vast majority of classroom teachers come from backgrounds that are privileged in traditional societal and classroom texts and are quite likely to be unaware that such injustices even occur. More than thirty years ago, Hanvey (1975) and Lortie (1976) each reported that most teachers in America were white, middle-class females. Entering a 21st century classroom, it is apparent that the demographics for teachers in the United States have changed little. Current reports state that 80 percent of teachers in the United States are white, middle-class females (Hill-Jackson 2007). What has changed, however, is the population of students inhabiting those classrooms. Recent predictions assert that by 2020 approximately 50% of the school-age population in the United States will consist of students from cultural backgrounds that are currently considered

minorities (Weddington & Rhine, 2006). From then on, the numbers of students representing culturally diverse populations will increase and soon become the majority (Au, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Sapon-Shevin & Zollers, 1999). In other words, as the population of public school teachers in the United States continues to be overwhelmingly homogenous, the student body grows ever more diverse with, students coming from one-parent homes; two-parent, same sex homes; ethnically diverse homes, religiously diverse homes; and socio-economically diverse homes. Consequently, teachers must expand their literacy practices to include a more diverse and divergent classroom population.

Research Questions. As an English educator, one of my goals has been to prepare my students to become informed, skilled, and confident critical literacy practitioners (Marshall & Klein, 2009). One approach for accomplishing this is the exploration of critical literacy practices and the use of those observations to guide our own classroom practices. To really understand the social dynamics of being a critical literacy practitioner, I was moved to explore how practicing teachers working from critical literacy pedagogy go about “teaching” critical literacy to their students. The goal here was to consider both theory and practice to better inform the teacher preparation methods courses. The following research questions were used to guide my study:

- How do English language arts teachers define critical literacy?
- What issues, public and private, must they negotiate to become critical literacy practitioners?
- How do public school English language arts teachers implement critical literacy pedagogy in their classrooms?

- What motivates English language arts teachers to adopt a critical literacy agenda in their curriculum?

Researcher's Stance

Personal rationale. This research arose from my own life experiences first as a working class kid, then as a nontraditional college student (who began college at age 23), and finally as I taught Secondary ELA to disadvantaged students at an inner-city middle school and then at an *alternative* middle and high school. Before entering the classroom as a teacher, I earned both a BS and MA in English with a focus on American Literature.

As I returned to academia to pursue a MAEd, and finally a PhD, my view on what and why students have to sacrifice in order to achieve in our society has changed greatly. I began to question the degree to which women, people of color, gay, lesbian, or transgendered students, and others that reside outside of the mainstream were forced to deny their own life experiences in order to assimilate to expectations of the educational establishment.

Additionally I had to consider whether I myself had been an accomplice to silencing those voices outside of the mainstream, i.e., those not in middle or upper social classes. Surely I had never silenced my students: I talked to them all the time; I was interested in their lives; I always saw them as more than just faces in the class. Realistically though, I have to admit that I may have silenced my students through the literature we read and the interpretations I expected them to make of those works. I was working from the perspective that each work had a “true” interpretation, that it was the students’ job to find it, and my job to gauge how well they did it. Essentially, I fear that I

took the student out of the learning. But that is getting ahead of the story a bit. To better understand this researcher, in relation to this research we have to look a little deeper.

Once, when discussing academic writing with a dear friend of mine, she commented that “you English majors always want to start everything with a story.” I chuckled at this assertion for two reasons: first of all, she was right; we English majors spend our lives relating the goings on of the world to the literature that we live and love so deeply; and secondly, I laughed because I had never thought of doing it any other way. It just seemed natural to me to ground my thoughts within the larger framework that guides and informs most aspects of my life. If I hear of a tragedy, I think of Macbeth; runaway children bring thoughts of Tom and Huck. To understand any researcher as a person, we need a bit of a story. So, as I consider my own story and the manner in which it manifests itself in my research, it often comes to me through that romanticized world of the English major and relates to the path of the central character in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*.

While I am not now nor have I ever been a criminal, as was so often whispered about Gatsby, I did from an early age have a great desire to leave my working class world and experience the financial freedom and security that inhabits the upper classes. Unlike Gatsby, I did not seek great wealth or fame, but stability and fulfillment. Moving from a working class world to a middle class life may not seem like a large leap to many, but I assure you that it is far more than merely earning a higher wage. Like Gatsby, my path was not direct, and there were many bumps along the way. But at the age of 23, I finally entered a college classroom, and from that very moment I felt as if I were at home. Gatsby finally reaches his pinnacle, if only for a short time, as he acquires great wealth

and enjoys a lavish lifestyle. Because of my college degrees, I am able to enjoy my career and experience the joy of living what is for me a very fulfilling life. My goals were not as monetary as those of Gatsby, nor I hope as fleeting, but there were chasms of social class to cross nonetheless. At the end of *The Great Gatsby* we learn through the scribbles in the back of a childhood book that from a very young age Gatsby understood the power of language in relation to one's ability to guide his or her life. Under the heading "general resolves," the young Gatsby takes an oath to "read one improving book or magazine per week" (p. 182).

Gatsby's understanding of literacy as an essential part of success has always resonated with me. In many ways I fit the profile of members of the lower socioeconomic class during my academic life, except in one respect: reading. As a child my mother read to me endlessly, and I developed a love of and strength for reading from a very young age. And while my story is only one of many, I directly attribute the success I have experienced to date to my ability to read and write. I should also add that I harbor no illusions of "knowing" what is the right path for other people; I merely suggest that the ability to read and write will give them some of the freedom necessary to pursue life as they see fit.

I do, however, subscribe to the romanticized view that in this world, education can be the great equalizer. Education allowed me to realize my dreams, and the ability to read and write critically allowed me to succeed in education. Consequently, I hold the ability to read and write critically in great regard and personally believe that if I were only able to teach my children one thing, it would be to look deeply and thoughtfully at the written word. Do I believe that my content area is any more important than math,

science, or any other subject? Of course not, but I do believe that it is the foundation upon which all of the others are built.

Therefore, as you have already no doubt surmised, I believe that it is of great import that all people, no matter their chosen path in life, be given the opportunity to learn to read and write critically, to consider why the world is perceived in the way that it is, and to question the authority of those constructing that worldview. My pedagogy is founded in the Freirian worldview that all people should have the opportunity to read and write their world.

Teachers have a profound and lifelong effect on students, not only on how students see others, but even on how they see themselves. This influence dictates responsibility, and that responsibility is to equip students with the skills needed to experience this world in the manner in which they desire (Marshall & Klein, 2009). It is not our place to tell students what opportunities they should want out of life, but to prepare them to pursue the life they want. Critical literacy is essential to that pursuit.

Assumptions and Limitations

Anytime we venture to understand the human condition, there are a number of assumptions and limitations that come with us. In the case of this research there was an overriding assumption that, through careful observation and investigation, the researcher could come to understand, to some extent, the factors involved in Secondary ELA teachers' implementation of critical literacy pedagogy. Furthermore, there was an assumption that those same Secondary ELA teachers would be able to articulate and demonstrate their understanding in a manner that would allow the researcher to record and analyze, in the hopes of making meaning out of those observations.

Limitations. The limitations of such a study are first and foremost the degree to which any researcher can come to know another, to understand their condition and the processes that created and influence that condition on a daily basis. All interpretations are individual, and the chance that a researcher would interpret an event in a manner other than it was intended is always a very real possibility. By providing thick and rich descriptions of the observations, a researcher hopes to strengthen those interpretations by taking into account the multitude of observable conditions at play during that precise moment. Such rigor provides a more informed and authentic interpretation of observed events, but ultimately it must be admitted that an interpretation is as close to being true as we will ever get.

Discussion

If we are to one day realize true equality in our nation, today's classroom teachers must work to first establish equality among students (Marshall & Klein, 2009). Teachers can instill in their students an understanding of equal treatment for all people: how to treat women, minorities, people of different races, religions and ethnicities, sexual orientation, or those with mental or physical challenges, everyone, equally. Of course, accomplishing such a monumental, but worthwhile task is far beyond the scope of the Secondary ELA classroom alone, but it must become the central pillar of education practices across content areas. For my interests though, I will focus on the critical literacy practices of four Secondary ELA teachers. If students are going to become critically literate, they must learn to look at a work and consider whose voice is represented, whose voice is missing, and what issues of power are represented in the piece. Finally, and most importantly, teachers need to give students the space and

freedom to do this.

Therein lies the goal for this study: building a methodological foundation of critical literacy practices that can be taught in English Education classes. Critical literacy is a pedagogy of change. For anyone to want to adopt and affect change, especially from within a system that has already afforded an individual many opportunities, that individual must be able to identify, on a personal level with those whom the change would directly benefit (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2005). It is not enough to merely show preservice teachers that there continues to be a hegemonic process of inequality in our education system (Apple, 2003). English educators must reveal those traditions and the oppression that has occurred to maintain those traditions (Freire, 1986; Giroux, 1983), while also equipping students to work to subvert such traditions. As teacher educators we must support those new teachers as they work to become critical literacy practitioners. We must instill within them the confidence that comes from knowing others are successfully adapting critical literacy pedagogy on a daily basis. Lastly, we must prepare our students to experience and overcome societal resistances to critical literacy.

This study was designed to inform English educators about the critical literacy practices that are having success in public school classrooms in order that current pedagogical practices can be adapted to better prepare preservice teachers to adopt critical literacy practices. Additionally, the study identifies some of the barriers that these teachers faced, and continue to face as they work to bring critical literacy pedagogy into their classrooms. Furthermore, we can learn the methods by which teachers worked to negotiate these issues.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

We can take the role of agents, makers and remakers of our world in a permanent critical approach to reality in order to discover the myths that deceive us and help us maintain the oppressing, dehumanising structures.

–Paulo Freire

Introduction

This review of literature examines the historical underpinnings of critical literacy, the role critical literacy plays in our English education programs, and the manner in which it then translates into the Secondary ELA classrooms. Essential to this review is the understanding that critical literacy pedagogy is an emancipatory practice that benefits students of all backgrounds. Critical literacy as defined by Lewison et al. (2002) “involves four dimensions: 1) disrupting the commonplace, 2) interrogating multiple viewpoints, 3) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and 4) taking action and promoting social justice” (p. 382). Critical literacy is viewed here as a pedagogical practice aimed at creating a more balanced literature education experience by revealing the power structures and societal assumptions that exist in all forms of human composition. The goal of critical literacy pedagogy is not to validate or invalidate works of literature, but to help students understand that the “truth” in a work does not have to be their truth (Lankshear & Knobel, 1998; Comber, 1999; Luke, 2000).

The goal of this research is to observe effective critical literacy practitioners in the field and gain an understanding of how they use critical literacy practices in their classrooms. Consequently, this literature review is intended to inform the researcher as he approaches the field to explore these questions: How do English language arts

teachers define critical literacy?, What issues, public and private, must they negotiate to become critical literacy practitioners?, How do public school English language arts teachers implement critical literacy pedagogy into their classrooms?, What motivates them to adopt a critical literacy agenda into their curriculum?

When the importance of critical literacy is understood and that all teachers enter teaching intending to improve the lives of their students, it naturally follows that English educators will consider how to assist preservice teachers in gaining the skills and experiences necessary to become critical literacy practitioners (Marshall & Klein, 2009). The proposition for this process is twofold: first, English educators must help their preservice teachers become critically literate themselves, and second, in so doing, they must equip preservice teachers with the skills and strategies to negotiate the misplaced resistance, whether from students, administrations, colleagues, or parents, that they might encounter. Make no mistake about it, critical literacy is an emancipatory act, and history has shown us that those in power are always reluctant to share that power.

This chapter first considers the history of critical literacy, followed by an exploration of the manner in which critical literacy ties into the field of English education. There is then a shift in emphasis toward understanding the critical literacy preparation of teachers within an English education program. Finally, the chapter looks at how that preparation influences preservice teachers' beliefs and practices as they move into the Secondary ELA classroom. Also included are several key studies for this research model, which are discussed in greater depth as they relate to this research project.

What is Critical Literacy?

The history of critical literacy is most often cited as being born out of the critical philosophy of both Emmanuel Kant and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (Giroux, 1985; Morrell, 2008). Kant and Hegel in turn influenced Karl Marx and his push for literacy as a guiding force for questioning social institutions and leading to social praxis that would create true social equality. Marx's work was adopted and continued by the Frankfurt School, where it eventually led to what is known as critical theory, serving as a foundation for critical literacy (Giroux, 1985; Morrell, 2008).

The Frankfurt School was a consortium of scholars working in the Institute of Social Research at the University of Frankfurt from the mid 1920's until the late 1960's, which included Max Horkheimer, Erich Fromm, and Herbert Marcuse as some of the more recognized names (Giroux, 1985; Morrell, 2008). While the members of the Frankfurt School could all be classified as Marxists, they did split ideologically with traditional Marxists' theory on a number of facets, including the Marxist belief in an inevitable proletariat revolution (Morrell, 2008). The Frankfurt School's assertion that emancipatory literacy leads to social praxis and cultural critique continued to influence many cultural and historical theorists, none of whom, one could argue, is more important to the modern usage and understanding of critical literacy than Paulo Freire.

It was through the work of Paulo Freire that critical literacy emerged as a powerful tool for self-actualization, emancipation, and praxis – what he called conscientization. As a method of education, Freirian critical literacy offered the student and teacher an opportunity to come together to, not only acquire the dominant discourse, but also to question that discourse and its role in perpetuating the system of class

divisions, both social and cultural. It was felt that those seeking to overturn a power structure must first understand how to function within that structure. That is not to say that they do function in that structure, but that they have an understanding of how others do (Freire, 2000).

Freire's groundbreaking work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), taught that the key to liberating oppressed people comes not from the educator, but from those who are oppressed. One cannot liberate another, but one can help another acquire the tools of liberation. For the educator, critical literacy is just such a tool. Freire also demonstrated that educators cannot merely deposit information into the minds of their students; they must give them the freedom to come to their own understandings, create their own world, and ultimately achieve conscientization.

Critical literacy considers "texts" beyond the idea of inert collections of facts or ideas and engages in exploration of those collected words in relation to the political messages found within those texts. James Gee (2000) reminds his readers that all texts are inherently socially and culturally biased, and that such biases always work to either empower or oppress others. As Knoblauch and Brannon (1993) assert, "Literacy never stands alone . . . as a neutral denoting of skills: it is always literacy for something" (p. 17). Ultimately, critical literacy works to make the reader consider how s/he positions him or herself in relation to those messages (Ciardiello, 2004).

While critical literacy resists a common curricular definition (Behrman, 2006), we do find across all critical literacy classrooms the common themes of acknowledging the power structures inherent in a society (Foucault, 1980), of working to subvert those power structures by revealing their existence (Bean & Moni, 2003; Goshert, 2008;

Marshall & Klein, 2009; Johnson & Ciancio, 2003; Rogers, 2002), and of empowering those not of the dominant culture to create their own literacies in writing the “word and the world” (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Aronowitz and Giroux (1985) believed that critical literacy helps us to understand the relation of knowledge and power, revealing that knowledge is socially constructed, valuing context-specific information and forms of communication (Lankshear & Knobel, 1998; Comber, 1999; Luke, 2000). Considering texts through a critical literacy lens allows students to gain an understanding of “the messages that texts communicate about power, race, and gender; who should receive privileges; and who has been or continues to be oppressed” (Hall & Piazza, 2008, p. 32). Once understood, those constructs can be subverted, and then reconsidered and rewritten in a more equitable fashion.

Critical Pedagogy in English Education

Critical literacy is appropriate across all content areas, but because of its basis in reading and writing, it resides primarily in the realm of the language arts. Because of this, it is of great import that we understand who is training future Secondary ELA teachers and how.

English Education. In considering what an English educator is and what role that educator could play in critical literacy education, we turn to the guiding organizations for the English Education and language arts classrooms, the National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE) and, the Conference on English Education (CEE). Since 1911 NCTE has worked to inform and guide English educators and practitioners of the language arts; it has become the organizational voice for professionals in the field at every level of instruction. Therefore, it was from NCTE that provided the

working definition of English Education as “(1) the teaching and learning of English, broadly and inclusively defined; (2) the preparation and continuing professional support of teachers of English at all levels of education; and (3) systematic inquiry into the teaching and learning of English” (CEE Summit, 2005). In addition, this study was guided by and aligned with four specific principles as laid out by the NCTE/NCATE Standards for Initial Preparation of Teachers of Secondary English Language Arts, Grades 7-12, that speak to critical literacy practices:

- Standard (3.3.2) Use a range of approaches to help students draw upon past experiences, sociocultural backgrounds, interests, capabilities, and understandings to make meaning of texts.
- Standard (3.5) Demonstrating knowledge of and uses for an extensive range of literature.
- Standard (4.4) Create opportunities for students to analyze how context affects language and to monitor language use and behavior to demonstrate respect for individual differences.
- Standard (4.8) Engage students in discovering their personal response to text and ways to connect such responses to larger meanings and critical stances.

NCTE’s support for critical literacy pedagogy is further evidenced by the *Eight Beliefs for Supporting Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Learners in English Education*.

These beliefs, as set forth during the 2005 CEE Conference on English Education and Policy Summit, are as follows:

1. Teachers and teacher educators must respect all learners and themselves as individuals with culturally defined identities.

2. Students bring funds of knowledge to their learning communities, and, recognizing this, teachers and teacher educators must incorporate this knowledge and experience into classroom practice.
3. Socially responsive and responsible teaching and learning requires an anthropologically and ethnographically informed teaching stance; teachers and teacher educators must be introduced to and routinely use the tools of practitioner/teacher research in order to ask difficult questions about their practice.
4. Students have a right to a variety of educational experiences that help them make informed decisions about their role and participation in language, literacy, and life.
5. Educators need to model culturally responsive and socially responsible practices for students.
6. All students need to be taught mainstream power codes/discourses and become critical users of language, while also having their home and street codes honored.
7. Teachers and teacher educators must be willing to cross traditional personal and professional boundaries in pursuit of social justice and equity.
8. Teaching is a political act, and in our preparation of future teachers and citizens, teachers and teacher educators need to be advocates for and models of social justice and equity.

According to Chou (2007), one of the highest priorities in teacher education programs should be to offer preservice teachers the opportunity to “acquire the attitudes, knowledge, skills, and dispositions to work effectively with culturally diverse students,”

(p.240). Sleeter (1991) declared that an empowering education program always looks to build on the experiences of their students and those students' life experiences (a central tenet of critical literacy), also noting that debilitating programs on the other hand take no consideration of those life experiences and seek rather to replace them with, or in some cases perpetuate, the thoughts and beliefs of the dominant culture. Here we see that researchers as well as institutions offer support for critical literacy in English Education and the language arts. Ultimately, Marshall and Klein (2009) believe that if our homogenous teaching population is to experience and be encouraged to adopt critical literacy pedagogy, it is up to us as English educators to provide that experience. It is imperative as well that English Education works to support those preservice teachers as they proceed to become critical literacy practitioners (Marshall & Klein, 2009). Adopting critical literacy pedagogy in English Education programs is one essential tool for meeting not only the assertions of Chou and Sleeter, but also in meeting the professional guidelines as set forth by NCTE and CEE.

Critical literacy as an educational tool. Research in the usage of critical literacy is widespread and varied, although two commonalities have proven to exist. Critical literacy can be used in a wide array of educational pursuits, and critical literacy demands that the instructor be willing to change and adapt his/her plans in relation to the growth of the students (Cohen, 2003; Lalik & Oliver, 2007; Morrell, 2008). As previously mentioned, a guiding tenet of critical literacy teaching and research is the goal of conscientization among the students. For this to become an authentic experience, instructors must honor it by allowing students the freedom to direct their own praxis.

In a study conducted by Lalik & Oliver (2007), the researchers found that at times it was challenging to resist directing students toward predetermined goals and topics, rather than to follow the path created by mutual understanding and creation. This moment of release can prove to be quite difficult for even the best intended teachers. According to Cohen (2003), it was not uncommon for teachers trying to step beyond the bounds of tradition to have to battle back the oppressive traditions inherent in their standardized curriculum.

Nonetheless, critical literacy is growing in our Secondary ELA classrooms and is experiencing great success, as was seen with Spector and Jones (2007), when they explored the Holocaust through a critical literacy approach to writings by and about Anne Frank. Likewise, Cooper and White (2006) researched the ability of critical literacy to assist high poverty students in achieving a more democratic education. Lesley (2008) also published a study in which critical literacy acted as a bridge between school-sanctioned and non-school forms of literacy to improve the literacy capabilities of a group of *at risk* high school students.

Lesley began her research as a weekly volunteer in a high school in the southwest United States, working specifically with students labeled as at risk for academic failure. She started out working with six students; while the group population fluctuated over the course of the two years she spent with them, the final number settled at five students, three of whom had been in the original group. By the second year Lesley felt she had really bonded with the students and was working with them beyond the walls of the school. During the second year she organized several field trips and even a few parties in which the parents were included. As she began gathering data, she noted that the

students were highly excited at the possibility of becoming “famous,” or even having a book written about them. Of course she made no such promises to them, but this illustrated the trust they had built in her. One student even stated to a local newspaper reporter that “being part of the literacy group ‘taught (him) to trust people again’”(Lesley, 2008, p. 175).

Lesley drew on three domains in literacy research to create her theoretical framework: (1) transactional theories of reading, (2) critical literacy, and (3) adolescent literacy. She further expressed that “[c]ritical literacy positions teachers and students into dialogues that create space for broader uses of literacy beyond what is typically presented in school settings” (Lesley, 2008, p. 177). It was through the combination of those broader spaces and the school setting that Lesley’s study was developed.

Lesley (2008) used qualitative research methods grounded in sociocultural theories to understand how students identified as being *at risk* responded to texts “containing themes of social critique and social justice,” as well as how “students’ personalities as readers evolve over time” (p. 180). Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, interviews with a “key informant” in the high school, and writing samples generated during the group sessions. Discourse analysis was used to analyze the data. Lesley ultimately concluded that by using texts that students identified with and by allowing them to use non-school forms of discourse to discuss those books, she was able to establish a bridge between students’ lives inside and outside of school. She noted that, once students were empowered to take a resistance stance, they were able to implement their non-school discourse in a way that strengthened their school literacy practices. She ended with the assertion that “much more research,

however, needs to be directed toward the pedagogical juncture of access to dominant forms of discourse for ‘at risk’ high-school students” (p. 188). These findings further my assertion that critical literacy is an essential part of school literature and a key to achieving conscientization. In addition, Lesley’s conclusions about other needs in the literature further validate the current research.

Educating future educators. How then do we as English educators encourage our students to embrace the work of Cooper & White, Marshall & Klein, Spector & Jones, and Lesley? For preservice teachers to develop critical literacy, they must begin with themselves. They must learn to understand themselves separate from the dominant discourse (Goshert, 2008). Apple (2003) believed that a revisioning of education as a tool for liberation rather than domination “is not crossed simply through a process of unmasking,” but first by seeing the world through the eyes of the oppressed (p. 108). This requires that preservice teachers acquire the skills that will allow them to reflect deeply and critically on the social and politically laden concepts that are commonly presented as facts (Morrell, 2008). Furthermore, true critical literacy involves not only being able to question those facts, but also to repudiate those issues and become coauthors of the narrative that defines their own lives (Shor, 1996).

The central charge of any teacher preparation program is to prepare new teachers to join the ranks of classroom educators. To achieve this goal, institutions have traditionally focused on the methodology of teaching, preparing teachers to engage their students in the learning process with the goal of advancing each student’s education, whether it is social, religious, informational, or mechanical (Dewey, 1985; Giroux, 1983). The goal has always been to improve the students’ knowledge base, but not without an

emphasis on conforming to the social norm (Dewey, 1985; Giroux, 1983). This emphasis continues to influence teachers as we see the resistance to exploring new and different ways of teaching. King & Others (1993) noted, in their research on practicing teachers and their resistance to implementing critical literacy, that time and again teachers expressed fear of retribution by parents and administrators if they were to attempt to teach outside of the prescribed curriculum. These teachers admitted being afraid of being reassigned or even fired if a parent brought a complaint to an administrator about how the teacher was teaching. However, upon further exploration, it was revealed that not one of the ten participants in the study had ever heard of a time when such an action had occurred, and certainly never experienced it themselves. King attributed this misguided fear to a continued culture of resistance to change in the public school setting.

Cultural experience. Another issue that must be addressed is the fact that the majority of teachers today fall into a social/cultural category that is often privileged by the mainstream. As such, the very concept of critical literacy pedagogy may seem foreign and even unnecessary. This is not an effort to demonize these preservice teachers in any way. In fact, that would be counter-productive, since it would only serve to put people on the defensive and serve to deter those in need of reeducating (Apple, 2003).

Both Vygotsky (1978) and Dewey (1985) emphasized the social nature of learning, that knowledge is built upon experience (mediation). It is therefore fair to say that the vast majority of preservice teachers, 80% being of white, middle-class backgrounds (Fernandez, 2003; Hill-Jackson, 2007) and lacking those social interactions, will have a limited frame of reference in relation to the life experiences of their students (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Within the same theoretical lens, it is also appropriate to

assume that those same preservice teachers will lack an understanding of the social and environmental influences that shaped those life experiences, as well as lacking initial understanding of why critical literacy pedagogy would be helpful.

Without a doubt, it is important that teachers are skilled in the discipline in which they teach. However, what is equally important is that teachers are skilled in understanding the lives of their students. As Freire (1986) wrote, “Those truly committed to liberation . . . must abandon the educational goal of deposit-making and replace it with the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world” (p. 79). No amount of teaching knowledge is sufficient if one cannot effectively engage his or her students (Dewey, 1985; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). Furthermore, it is up to the informed and enlightened educator to not only appreciate a multitude of cultures, but to act as an advocate for the those cultures when possible. By integrating critical literacy practices into their classrooms, teachers send a powerful message of equality that simple posters and political rhetoric cannot achieve on their own.

Whose truth? Understanding that there is no “one truth” out there, but in fact an infinitesimal variety of individual truths, demands that teachers design lessons and consider assessments that take into account the role of cultural relativism in each student’s learning process (Freire & Macedo, 1985). Yokota and Cai (2002) believed that “ignorance and prejudice are two main stumbling blocks to mutual understanding and appreciation among ethnic groups. To remove these blocks we need more culturally specific books that give readers insights into cultures other than their own” (p. 25). Educating preservice teachers to approach their instruction in a manner that not only values each student’s culture, but relies on it, will inevitably lead to more successful

students. When considering such an undertaking, it is important to remember that by challenging hegemonic traditions we are challenging those people who have benefited most from those traditions (a group the majority of preservice teachers fall into). Caution must be taken; research has demonstrated that there is a risk of alienating members of a group to point that they become blindly defensive, and any chance at inspiring change is essentially lost (Apple, 2003; Jetton & Savage-Davis, 2005). Jetton and Savage-Davis (2005) found as Apple (2003) had expressed: that it is important that instructors not take an aggressive stance toward the injustices they may be far more aware of than most of their preservice teaching students. They should instead model the teaching environment that they want their preservice teachers to aspire to. Bruna (2007) reminded her readers that the goal is not to make white kids feel guilty. She went as far as to tell her students that her multicultural teacher education classroom was not a place for studying the “Others,” but ultimately a space in which to “read the social meanings that shape our lives . . . as they relate to differences, similarity, and educational equity” (p. 115). This was a concern Apple (2003) expressed as well in considering the need to reeducate whites to a world in which *white* was also a race, and not the default for the human race, wherein all non-whites are viewed in relation to their lack of whiteness. Such an exploration needs to be approached in a supportive, non-combative manner if real change is to occur.

Growing pains. This is not to imply that there will not be uncomfortable moments. Quite the opposite: discomfort leads to growth, and the repositioning of dominant as “other” is a well-founded manner of literacy enlightenment (Apple, 2003; Freire, 1973; Greene, 1988). In fact, as we will see when discussing “social

constructivism,” one key to understanding another culture is the ability to envision one’s self within that culture. Oftentimes, such a vision is only brought on by strong emotional or psychological means. The key is to work from the ideology of student-teacher empowerment, rather than punishing the more fortunate members of the class. Bruna (2007) found that “white students too often sit in multicultural teacher education classrooms feeling as if the whole purpose of the class is to make them feel guilty” (p. 115). In such a case it is likely that the instructor has lost from the very outset any chance for encouraging change in his or her preservice teachers.

Without a change in cultural perception and classroom practices, these very well-meaning preservice teachers are doomed to repeat the very actions that allowed the racial divide in American education to persist to this day (Greene & Abt-Perkins, 2003). Cultural oppression has a long and deep history, and good intentions or a few afterschool seminars are going to do nothing to change that (Giroux, 1987). Two of the largest obstacles facing an educator trying to create change in the cultural beliefs of his or her students are first and foremost the personal histories of those students, and secondly the lack of opportunity to authentically experience a culture other than one’s own (Giroux, 1987).

Where teachers come from. According to Banks and Banks (2003), it is likely that the majority of preservice teachers have never experienced multiculturalism beyond the “additive curriculum integration,” such as the occasional ethnic celebration day intended to encapsulate an entire culture into one type of food (taco) or a single holiday (Kwanza). Consequently, the majority of preservice teachers remain sorely underexposed to the life experiences of other ethnic, racial, or cultural groups and wholly

misinformed and unprepared to understand those cultures beyond the most superficial of levels (Kalbach & Aguilar, 2000). Thus, the imperative that we as teacher-educators work to provide preservice teachers both experiences and the methodology through which they can better understand the cultural influences that have and will continue to shape their students' lives. By taking a critical literacy stance to traditional Eurocentric texts, English educators can begin to demonstrate to preservice teachers that there are in fact multiple points of view in the world and that each one is valid in its own right.

University Classroom Structure

Learning is a collaborative act, reliant upon discourse and exchange. Critical literacy relies on the dialectic as a foundation of learning. Freire (2000) believed that “saying that word [a true and authentic cultural descriptor] is not the privilege of some few persons, but the right of everyone. Consequently, no one can say a true word — alone nor can she say it *for* another, in a prescriptive act which robs others of their words” (p. 88). For this reason, I believe that social constructivist pedagogy lends itself nicely to the classroom dedicated to developing critical literacy.

Social Constructivism

Social constructivist classroom pedagogy relies on three of Vygotsky's most influential concepts: the zone of proximal development, psychological tools (including internalization and mediation), and the social nature of knowledge construction (Moll, 1990). Obviously preservice teachers cannot simply be instructed that “all students are equal; respect their cultures and cultural values as being as valid and worthy as your own.” Human beings need personal experiences to change and grow (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978).

Therefore, if we are to create change in the cultural perceptions of preservice teachers, it is imperative that we give them the opportunity to expand their experience base. By engaging in social constructivist pedagogy, educators can offer their students a space in which to experience and consider a multitude of cultural realities (Moll, 1990) in a way that incorporates their own life experiences as a guide for that understanding, thus creating a more thorough and authentic learning experience (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The deeply personal and interpersonal nature of learning inherent in social constructivism (Moll, 1990) creates an environment that allows students to practice critical literacy in a manner that integrates each student's personal experiences with those represented in the literature.

The zone of proximal development. The zone of proximal development considers a learner's ability level when acting alone and the developmental possibilities available through collaboration with an adult or skilled peer (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). This collaborative factor makes the zone of proximal development a keystone to social constructivist theory (Smagorinsky & Fly, 1993). The zone of proximal development is important to the critical literacy classroom because it defines a starting point for each individual student in relation to critical literacy awareness (Rogers, 2002). It allows for growth from that point at a rate that challenges the student enough to maintain his or her interest, while not going so far as to reach a level of frustration that would then lead to resignation from the task by the student. The ability to observe such development is paramount to the assessment of preservice teachers' evolution toward adopting critical literacy pedagogy.

Psychological tools. Another key component of Vygotsky's work in the critical literacy classroom is the concept of psychological tools. These tools are inherent and unique to every culture (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Moll, 1990; Vygotsky & Kozulin, 1986), and as such they encompass a vast array of expressionistic forms, such as art, number systems, language and signs (explicit and inferred), and of course literature. Smagorinsky, Pettis and Reed (2004) believed that psychological tools worked as a window into a culture, and understanding those tools allowed one to act within a culture. Consequently, the nature of these tools and the acquisition, or "internalization," and the usage, or "mediation," of these tools and the manner in which they act as a scaffold between cognitive and metacognitive functions (Moll, 1990) are of great importance to the critical literacy practitioner.

Psychological tools, such as signs and language, are the essence of any culture, and so any study of a culture and its practices must consider both. From the very mundane and specific, such as recognizing and correctly interpreting traffic signs, to the more sophisticated skill of understanding "gang tags" or being able to ascertain the level of seriousness of a "no trespassing" sign (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Moll, 1990; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). One's understanding of a society's psychological tools is essential to understanding that society. Consequently it is of the utmost importance that, when developing one's critical literacy, considerable effort is dedicated to the study of the sign systems (Semiotics) that govern the culture under consideration. Societies are full of signs that carry deeper meanings as ascribed by that society, and understanding that deeper meaning of a sign is part of being a member of a society (Vygotsky & Cole,

1978). The better one understands social and cultural signs, the better he or she can understand that society.

Language. Language is the most powerful of Vygotsky's psychological tools. One's ability to use language in its countless forms is often directly representative of the social status and level of success s/he can achieve within a society. As demonstrated by Mikail Bakhtin's (1981) concept of *heteroglossia*, societies are replete with set, specific dialects, reliant on shared meanings for mutual understanding. Whether it is the language of Wall Street, or the language of the streets, one's ability to effectively communicate (internalization) within a certain skill set influences the status that he or she will be able to attain within their subset (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Moll, 1990; Vygotsky & Kozulin, 1986).

Mediation. Lastly, the social nature of learning (central to the theory of social constructivism) must guide considerations of developing critical literacy. Understanding the social and cultural influences of a student's learning process is crucial to understanding how the learner internalizes the reality that the outside world desires to impose upon him/her (Moll, 1990). That is, in order to teach, there must be a common discourse that understands and values the opinions and experiences of the learner and the teacher from which to work (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Critical literacy empowers students to express their opinions and experiences in a manner that is authentic and meaningful to them as individuals.

Impact of Preparation on Teacher Beliefs and Practice

Critical literacy education: where we are now. While a review of the literature reveals that there are some advances being made in integrating critical literacy practices

into teacher preparation programs, that same review finds that much of that advancement is superficial and devoid of any real change. Today's preservice teachers are not acquiring the new dispositions that will in effect guide their professional pedagogy (Apple, 2003; Kemp, 1993; Sparpapani & Others, 1995).

The skills being taught are gauged toward a course-end evaluation (Locke, 2005) rather than informing students' consciousness. Therefore, such course plans do not lead the preservice teacher to develop a culturally responsive pedagogy, but rather a superficial consideration of varying cultures as illustrated by the continuation of theme days, such as "taco day" meaning to represent the entire Hispanic culture (Gallavan, 1998; Giroux, 1992). At issue here is how to affect current preservice teachers in a manner that will positively shape their pedagogy in relation to critical literacy practices.

One study that has proved to be valuable in the construction of this current research plan was conducted by Jocelyn Anne Glazier (2007) as she explored moving critical theory to practice with her preservice English Education students. Glazier is a teacher educator who describes herself as being committed to "preparing teachers to teach in socially just ways" (p. 375). Consequently, Glazier's research serves as an influential model for the current research project.

Glazier's (2007) case study begins with a preservice teacher in a critical literacy class that Glazier teaches. By following that preservice teacher through her first year as a Secondary ELA teacher, Glazier explores the transition from preservice to practicing teacher, as well as issues of bringing critical literacy along in that transition. Through this case study Glazier covers such issues as the conflicting worlds of teacher education

and the public schools, her student's personal experiences, and the common reluctance of new teachers to introduce a new curriculum or pedagogy into their classrooms.

To understand what barriers and supports exist for new Secondary ELA teachers as they prepare to become critical literacy practitioners, Glazier followed "Tesse" over the period of one school year as she taught middle-school ELA. Glazier (2007) noted that, while there is solid research on how critical literacy theory looks in practice, "what is left out of the discussion . . . is an understanding of the difficulties surrounding the use of critical literacy . . . for today's new teachers" (p. 376). Data collected and analyzed for her research included interviews, teacher and student artifacts, oral presentation data, and researcher field notes. The data were analyzed qualitatively using the constant comparative method. Some of the most interesting findings included Tesse's idea that critical literacy pedagogy was something that was implemented from time to time, but was not used on a day-to-day basis. Of particular note is the fact that Tesse was uncomfortable considering canonical texts through a critical literacy lens. Glazier also discussed examples of the stresses new teachers undergo as another important factor for the abandonment of critical literacy. Ultimately Glazier determined that even though Tesse left her critical literacy course as a believer in critical literacy, the overall progress of becoming a critical literacy practitioner, like that of becoming a teacher, is a developmental process that requires support along the way.

This research is so valuable because critical literacy is a powerful tool for student conscientization, and as Glazier noted, "It is often the innovative teaching practices such as critical literacy that rely on students' own experiences that are often among the practices abandoned in a time of teaching to the test" (p. 376).

What they bring with them. Building upon the fact that knowledge is learned through life experiences (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978), it naturally follows that the majority of preservice teachers enter teacher education programs with a lack of understanding of cultures other than their own (Hanvey, 1975). Therefore, it stands to reason that teacher educators can only expect that preservice teachers, even those with the best of intentions, come to us with ingrained middle-class experiences and sensitivities (Frankenberg, 1993; Sleeter, 1996) that greatly influence the manner in which they view the world. Hanvey (1975) believed that a white preservice teacher, functioning in what he terms the “unconscious stage” of cultural awareness, has only the most basic concept of other cultures and identifies most often with those cultural traits that differ significantly from their own. How then are we to help our preservice teachers gain those understandings so vital to the teacher student paradigm and empower them to adopt those practices as part of their critical literacy pedagogy? The answer lies in equipping them with the skills to become critically literate themselves and then building their confidence to carry those skills into their future classrooms.

Discussion

As examined within this chapter, an understanding of critical literacy and methods of implementing critical literacy into the ELA classroom is an essential aspect of a more inclusive educational experience. However, a lack of critical literacy pedagogy remains in many of our classrooms, and there appear to be a number of general reasons as to why this is so.

One of the most prevalent issues in adopting critical literacy pedagogy with preservice teachers is the reality that many of those teachers come from backgrounds of

relative privilege and, through no fault of their own, are unaware of the degree to which inequality still exists. Compounding that problem is the issue of educating those preservice teachers in a way that enlightens their worldview without imposing a culture of guilt or defensiveness in relation to the advantages they may have experienced. Making preservice teachers feel guilty about the lives that they have lived, that their parents have worked to give them, is no way to inspire them to adopt a pedagogy of change.

There is also a very real possibility that, after preservice teachers come to an understanding of critical literacy and adopt it as part of their personal pedagogy, they will meet resistance as they move into the K-12 classrooms. This resistance can come in many forms. Parents and students are potential resisters, as well as administrators; but the most common sphere of resistance to pedagogical change is likely to be other faculty members.

Therefore, if English educators are to expect preservice teachers to adopt critical literacy pedagogy and to carry that pedagogy into their careers, we must prepare them for the resistance they are likely to meet. To do this, we must look to practicing teachers that are critical literacy practitioners to gain an understanding of common issues of resistance that they have faced when adopting critical literacy pedagogy: from whom did they experienced such resistance, and how did they work to overcome that resistance? While we cannot prepare our preservice teachers for every potential issue they may encounter, we can gain an understanding of the common problems practicing teachers faced, as well as practical solutions, and thus devise methods to prepare preservice teachers to overcome those problems. This research is aimed at informing the field of English

Education about the current critical literacy practices of Secondary ELA teachers, in the hope that English educators will be able to better prepare their preservice teachers to overcome the hurdles that other teachers have faced in relation to teaching critical literacy.

Finally, as a part of preparing preservice teachers to be effective critical literacy practitioners, this study's research includes an exploration of pedagogical strategies with which participating teachers have had success over the years. There is ample literature on critical literacy teaching practices, but additional observations of classroom-tested lessons can be useful for teachers to adopt and implement in their current and future classrooms.

Chapter Three: Methodology

*Education is a social process. Education is growth. Education is,
not a preparation for life; education is life itself.*

--John Dewey

Introduction

This interpretivist participant observation study examined the ways in which teachers implemented critical literacy pedagogy into their classrooms over several days and which eventually led to a grounded theory of critical literacy pedagogy. One initial focus of the research included an exploration of influences that led those teachers to become critical literacy practitioners in the first place. The research also explored any barriers they encountered, and may still encounter professionally as well as personally, along their journey to become critical literacy practitioners. This research was conducted with four Secondary ELA teachers in middle and high schools in nearby school districts, each of whom have self-identified as being critical literacy practitioners. This chapter defines and explicates the methodology and techniques that were used for this study.

Research Approach

This research design allowed an interpretive participant observation model. The study was situated in the qualitative paradigm, as the intent was “not to confirm or disconfirm earlier findings, but rather to contribute to a process of continuous revision and enrichment of understanding” (Elliot, Fischer, & Rennie, 1996, p. 17). This study relied on emergent design flexibility, because it allowed the inquiry to be adapted to fit themes that emerged while moving deeper into the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Purposeful sampling (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was used since the nature and topic of the

research required participants to be self-identified as critical literacy practitioners.

Participants were each interviewed twice and observed for three consecutive days.

Textual analysis of lesson plans and assignment instruction sheets also occurred.

Interpretive participant observation was appropriate here because the goals of this research aligned with Erickson's (1986) assertions about its strength as a research method when one looks to better understand: "what is happening in a particular place rather than across a number of places and the meaning-perspectives of the particular actors in the particular events" (p. 121). More specifically, Erickson noted that this method of research is highly effective at answering questions such as "How is what is happening in this setting as a whole [i.e. the classroom] related to the happenings at other system levels outside and inside the setting?" (p. 121).

Ontologically, interpretive participant observation aligned with critical literacy research because interpretive participant observation looks to "discover the specific ways in which local and nonlocal forms of social organization and culture relate to the activities of specific persons in making choices and conducting social action together" (Erickson, 1986, p. 129). This ontology aligned naturally with this research because of the focus on considering how teachers' life experiences, past and present, affected the manner in which they engaged in critical literacy pedagogy: that is, to ask "What do these happenings mean to the people engaged in them?" (Erickson, 1986, p. 124). Ultimately this research was only intended to be able to yield interpretations of observed events; it never offered what would be considered a universal truth. However, because the researcher did not expect to find a universal truth, or even believe that such a truth exists, interpretivist participant observation was appropriate. It valued the individual

interpretation of observed events, realizing the wealth of data acquired from thick, rich descriptions can inform university classroom pedagogy working to prepare preservice teachers to become Secondary ELA and critical literacy practitioners.

The very personal nature of a teacher's pedagogy and the meanings that it carries to each individual required a methodology that allowed for interpretation of specific events and an exploration of those events and observations in relation to the participants' understanding of them. As such, this research was not bound by a specific theoretical design, but looked to inform through a grounded theory that emerged from the data collected.

Theoretical design. Grounded theory was appropriate for this study because of its inherent process of allowing themes to emerge from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) rather than imposing presumed themes upon them. Data correlated well with the spirit and intent of critical literacy, because "a grounded theory is derived inductively through the systematic collection and analysis of data pertaining to a phenomenon" (Bowen, 2006, p. 2). Grounded theory aligned with the foundational aspects of critical literacy pedagogy and thus became an obvious fit for this research. To assure triangulation of the data (Patton, 2002), collection methods included interviewing, textual analysis, and participant observation.

In line with Strauss and Corbin (1997) and following the "dialectic" of Freirian critical pedagogy, this research was a dialogue between preexisting theory and the data: that is, it was "a running text of theoretical discussion, using conceptual categories and their properties" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 31). Studying teachers' experiences of and intents for teaching critical literacy through a preconstructed theoretical model would

have run counter to the intent and purpose of critical literacy and only serve to perpetuate the preexisting power structures critical literacy works to subvert. Critical literacy is an act of questioning textual authority, rereading, reimagining, and reconstructing literary representations that have supported traditionally biased power structures and rewriting them through the lived experiences of the reader. Grounded theory was ideal in this study because the theory emerged out of the data; that is, it came from the lived experience of the participants and researcher.

This entrance into grounded theory came with the awareness that knowledge is value-mediated, socially constructed, and contains the implication that the “investigator and investigated object are assumed to be interactively linked, with the values of the investigator inevitably influencing the inquiry” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). The critical literacy correlative was that all works, this one included, are inherently value-laden and inextricably linked to the author and his or her life experiences. Reflexivity will be used to make these inherent values as transparent as possible.

Participant selection. Participants were selected using purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002). During the researcher’s visits to observe student teachers’ lessons and speak with their cooperating teachers, discussions of potential research ideas, and follow-up inquiries regarding colleagues that were critical literacy practitioners who might be willing to participate in the study, a targeted list of potential participants was created. The familiarity formed through this process, I believe, led to an increased sense of comfort for the participants, which improved reciprocity and thus yielded a richer collection of data than if teachers had just been cold-contacted from a wide variety of schools. The goal was to identify teachers that Patton (2002) called “illuminative” and

“information rich” because they were likely to “offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest” (p. 40).

In addition to the university Internal Review Board (IRB), all necessary district IRB forms were also completed and approved before working with participants. Data were maintained throughout the study and will be destroyed in compliance with IRB regulations.

Once IRB approval was granted, a letter (Appendix A) was sent to prospective participants. The letter outlined the research purpose and rationale, the time requirements for the participants, and the methodology to be used, such as interviewing the participants, observing classroom lessons, and analyzing classroom artifacts, including lesson plans and assignment descriptions.

Once participants indicated a willingness to participate in the study, individual meetings were scheduled to review all consent forms, including university and district IRB forms, and to set a time for the initial interview. In addition, each school’s administrative team was informed of the researcher’s intent and purpose within their school. Before any data collection occurred, participants chose the pseudonyms that they preferred to be used for the study. The master sheet of participants and selected pseudonyms remained in a locked filing cabinet in my home office.

The dominant demographic for teachers in the United States is largely homogenous, with 80 percent of teachers in the US being white, middle-class females (Fernandez, 2003; Hill-Jackson, 2007). While I did not intentionally seek participants to fit that demographic, the participant population was representative of those national averages.

Settings. The settings for this study were two public schools within neighboring districts in the southeast United States. Location 1 was a middle school, and location 2 was a high school. In this study the schools were referred to as Western Middle School and Eastern High School, or simply Eastern and Western. Both schools were fully accredited in accordance with the guidelines set by the No Child Left Behind legislation and the Virginia Standards of Learning. Western Middle School contained 853 students in grades 6-8 (422 males and 419 females) and was demographically identified as American Indian, 4; Asian, 66; Black, 59; Hispanic, 20; White, 692; 214 students qualified for free or reduced lunch. Seventy-four percent of the teachers at Western held advanced degrees in their field (VA DOE, 2008). Eastern High School contained 1,277 students in grades 9-12 (650 males and 627 females) and was identified demographically as American Indian, 1; Asian, 34; Black, 122; Hispanic, 20; White, 1,100; 306 students qualified for free or reduced lunch. Fifty percent of the teachers at Eastern held advanced degrees in their field (VA DOE, 2008).

Gaining access/site selection. Due to the very personal nature of qualitative inquiry and the importance of participant comfort, schools and school districts with which the researcher had previous professional relationships were specifically targeted. Acting as a student-teacher supervisor had offered the opportunity to build relationships with teachers and administrators at many middle and high schools within a 50-mile radius of the university campus. This familiarity within the schools helped to foster trust between the participants and the researcher. However, none of this study's participants had ever worked with the researcher as a cooperating teacher for student teachers or in any other manner. Of course, the fostering of trust is essential not only on an ethical

level, but also in relation to data collection and analysis. The relationship between researcher and participant directly influences the depth and accuracy of any informational exchange and is therefore essential to collecting dependable data (Jorgenson, 1989). Fostering a rapport of trust is most authentically accomplished by maintaining full reciprocity, high ethical standards, sincerity, and always following the maxim, “Do no harm.”

Data collection. The goal of this research was not to prove or disprove a preexisting fact or theory, but simply to delve deeper into a phenomenon by going where the data led. Hatch (2002) believed, “Qualitative studies try to capture the perspectives that actors use as a basis for their actions in a specific social setting” (p. 7). Consequently, a variety of data were gathered, including two face-to-face interviews with each participant, lasting no more than one hour each and three days of consecutive class observations (the same class period each day) chosen by the teacher. As well, pertinent lesson plans, assignment sheets, rubrics, and a list of texts accessed by the students were also collected. Finally, a member-check was used to verify the transcribed interviews.

Interviews. Two interviews were conducted with each participant, one taking place before any classroom observations occurred and the other after all observations were concluded. The goal of the first interview was to understand the participant’s definition and understanding of critical literacy pedagogy, and the second interview was to further clarify any questions about the observed critical literacy practices. Each interview consisted of semi-structured, open-ended questions crafted before the interviews and presented to participants in the same manner (Patton, 2002). This procedure increased the compatibility of responses and reduced researcher influences or

biases when collecting and analyzing the data. Variations occurred nonetheless, as probing was used to deepen responses and help the interviewee gain an understanding of the depth and richness desired from the responses (Jorgenson, 1985; Patton, 2002). Interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. After each interview, the electronic recording was downloaded to my personal computer and password protected. Additionally, the entirety of the interviews was burned onto a compact disk (CD), password protected, and locked in my personal filing cabinet.

Participant observations. Three observations occurred within each participant's classroom during a specific class period chosen by the participant. Such observations allowed the researcher to document the manner in which these teachers engaged in critical literacy practices with their students. Because discussion is a central theme of critical literacy pedagogy (Freire, 1998), observations of the teachers in their classrooms as they facilitated classroom discussions were quite valuable. One focus was how teachers brought attention to the critical literacy issues (power issues, portrayal of "others," etc.) within a text and how the teachers then guided the discussion. A guiding question was "Did the teacher maintain the power role in the classroom, or did they allow students equal access to interpreting the literature?"

As text representation and creation are two other essential aspects of critical literacy pedagogy (Morrell, 2008), samples of the texts to which students had access in the classroom, both for assignments and personal reading, plus assignment descriptions related to texts that students created, were valuable data sources. Because this research was not focused on determining to what extent a specific group of students embraced critical literacy, but on what strategies teachers used to support and encourage critical

literacy practices, the focus of this analysis was on the teachers' assignments for creating student texts. All observations were audio-recorded and included accompanying field notes. Recordings and field notes were then transferred to my computer and placed in a password-protected file.

Even though the participants selected the observation times, a fact that surely enhanced their chances of demonstrating instructional effectiveness, these observations were quite valuable nonetheless. Not only for informing personal pedagogy and addressing the research questions, but also as a factor in the triangulation of data. Participant observation enables the researcher to understand a phenomenon beyond the representations acquired through interview alone (Patton, 2002). During these observations copious field notes were created with thick and rich descriptions. The classrooms were described in thick, rich detail, including decorations, class layout, class library, and even seating arrangements, in an effort to analyze whether it physically represents a critical literacy space (Paugh, Carey, King-Jackson, & Russell, 2007). An observation matrix (Appendix B) was used to allow the researcher to note specific, reoccurring characteristics.

Additional artifacts. With the intent of informing English Education pedagogy, every aspect of the critical literacy classroom was of value. Consequently, all syllabi, assignment sheets, rubrics, and reading lists made available by the teachers were collected.

Field notes. Field notes were created by jotting down key words and phrases during observation, and then constructing a narrative of the entire event in the researcher's notebook as soon as possible after the observation, including in my car in the

school parking lot, a table of a nearby library or coffee shop, or at home. The goal was always to create the narrative while it was as fresh as possible. Time equivalent to time in the classroom was scheduled after each observation to allow for these narrative compositions. The initial observation list and the subsequent narrative were both explored during data analysis. As noted earlier, in an effort to assist with the narrative composition, every observed class was also audio-recorded. There was no anticipation of analyzing these recordings, but they were useful for clarifying a statement or response as necessary.

Reflexivity

An essential aspect of qualitative research is not only the researcher's experience during the data collection process, but also the impact of the researcher's life experiences related to the phenomenon being explored. I am a part of the research as much as it is a part of me. Reflexivity involves not only self-exploration and understanding, but also the consideration of the perceptual influence that such familiarity and understanding has on one as s/he experiences a phenomenon, or, as Hertz (in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) told us, "to have an ongoing conversation about experience while simultaneously living in the moment" (p. viii). Reflexivity involves placing one's self within the text, using the first person (Patton, 2002), and revealing to the reader the author's thoughts and experiences in relation to the research phenomenon.

Data Management

To manage the large volume of data, several forms of storage and transportation were employed. All interviews were recorded using a digital recording device. As expediently as possible, those recordings were transferred to a password-protected file on

my computer and backed-up to an external hard drive. Additionally, after being transferred to the computer, each interview was burned onto a CD, again password protected, and remained locked in a filing cabinet in my home.

For data other than that of the digital variety, a locked, hanging-file, portable steel file box was used. This allowed the secure transport of all materials, including the digital recorder, field notebook, calendar, and artifacts. This relatively small, portable file box kept the data organized and secure without being overly obtrusive to an interview or observation setting. The hanging files also transferred easily to the locked filing cabinet at my home. All typed data were backed up using the university online “file box” system and an external hard drive.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was done using constant comparative analysis, a form of analytic induction that facilitates the process of examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data. This inductive method added rigor and encouraged a systematic approach to qualitative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). All interviews were transcribed during the data collection period, and personal notes were maintained on how this process may have been coloring my thought processes related to the phenomenon. Data analysis was inductive and used Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) three-step coding process for grounded theory of open, axial, and selective coding.

Open coding. Open coding was the first step and involved the deep exploration of the text surrounding a phenomenon. Every textual representation of the research phenomenon was read, reread, and read again, line by line, all the while looking to understand, “What is really being said here?, What is going on here?” in an effort to

explicate ideas and themes within the text (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). From this questioning and comparing across texts, codes emerged that allowed the initial formation of categories through memo writing, and then for my proceeding into deeper analysis.

During the open-coding process, a broad list of categories emerged. They included understanding social inequalities, understanding the meaning beyond the page, students' interpretation and creation, making students aware, value of literature, value of literacy, social inequalities drive critical literacy, social justice projects (critical literacy specific), some projects are critical literacy heavy, others seek critical literacy out, adapting critical literacy to students' skill sets, critical literacy as an overarching goal-designed curriculum for, and critical literacy implemented into existing curriculum.

Axial coding. The second step in this coding process was axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this step, causal relationships between categories were explored. The goal in this step was to make connections between categories and subcategories to deepen the understanding of the phenomenon and discover how categories related to and relied upon each other. At this point categories began to narrow and become more manageable, including projects, personal philosophy, pedagogy, personal experiences, students, and parents.

Selective coding. In the third step, selective coding, the core category emerges (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Once the core category was identified, all other categories were systematically related to it, and through that integration the grounded theory emerged. Of course, because this step relies heavily on researcher interpretation, reflexivity was essential. The final categories emerged as defining critical literacy,

projects (specific projects) assignments, pedagogy, personal philosophy and experiences (leads to why), desired outcomes-goals, curriculum activities dictated by outside influences (SOLs, etc.).

In the first analysis process, categories were identified in relation to the research questions. That is, specific overarching categories, most often in response to the question sequence, were identified and color-coded. During the second round of coding, these categories were combined across all of the interviews into the six categories noted above. These groups were then coded in the third round for emergent themes, at which point each section was considered autonomous. The sections of emergent themes were then analyzed in relation to the overall research study and its guiding questions. Finally the categories were analyzed in these groups.

Memo writing. Throughout the analysis process, memos were created in a reflective journal to document changes in personal thought and theory. At times the memos became conversations between my internal researcher and myself. There were times when I doubted my choices and worried about codes. There were also times in which I simply wrote my thoughts in an effort to reorganize and clarify what I was seeing in the data.

The Participants

Because critical literacy practices were not mandated by our state, or by any of the districts or programmatic curricula by which the participants were bound, I believed that it was of the utmost importance to gain a deeper understanding of the participants in order to understand why they chose to become critical literacy practitioners. While I set out to understand the “how” behind critical literacy pedagogy in the hopes of informing

teacher education classes, it quickly became apparent to me that the “who” was equally relevant to the study. After spending time with the participants in interviews, classroom observations, email communications, and conversations, I was able to develop a better understanding of who these people were and how that was reflected so deeply in their critical literacy practices. Each participant description is followed by a vignette of their teaching practices as observed over the three days of the study.

Karen. A white female now in her seventh year of fulltime teaching, Karen (pseudonym) expressed a real desire for students to understand the art of literature, the “there are possibilities beyond the page,” and that the page itself can be the doorway to those possibilities. Karen taught eleventh grade International Baccalaureate (IB) classes at Eastern High School. Karen came to teaching later in life, although she was an active writer between her initial college experience and the time she became a high school teacher. She has had a wide array of literary experiences, not the least of which was publishing two novels, as well as writing professionally for magazines and newspapers. Karen saw those opportunities “beyond the page” because she had lived them. She viewed education as an experiential journey that leads one on to the next part of his or her life.

Karen wanted her students to succeed academically, but she believed that if they succeeded at being human beings, the academics would fall into place. She believed in transparency in teaching and used conversation as her primary mode for teaching. She reminded students that ultimately literature is confined to the page, so that any conversation about authorial intent or effect must go back to the text. She stated that students must use the text as the basis for the analysis. Karen required her students to

research authors and try to understand the time frame in which they were working, even asking them to consider ways that a similar text would be written today. Students were also encouraged, if not “made,” to look deeply at the message, intentional or otherwise, that the author’s work portrays. This consideration of the effect that a work has was central to my study. The goal in Karen’s class, and with critical literacy, was to consider the way a work influences and informs an audience: to always ask, “What message is being sent?”

Karen’s students also worked on understanding that, in any work, there is always a message and there is always an inherent power structure. She worked with her students to uncover both. A most telling note about Karen was that throughout the interviews and observations, she kept asking me what I thought critical literacy was, or what the “definition of critical literacy” was. Others had told her, and me, that she practiced critical literacy, but she had not yet acquired her own definition. In the end we came to the understanding that even though she had never set out specifically to teach critical literacy, she had been doing so her entire career. This revelation became very important as I continued my research. She was a very approachable teacher that, in the end, wants her students to enjoy literature and feels that to do so, one must also understand literature. She felt that her life had “lived on both sides of the page,” allowing her to help students understand literature and hopefully enjoy it. She believed that “understanding can be taught, but enjoyment is always a gamble.”

Karen teaching vignette

Karen’s classroom is a literary environment. Rather than use the installed overhead iridescent lighting, she has two floor lamps with silk scarves draped over them

creating a soft warm glow. Classical music and Jazz fill the air in between classes and when students are writing. The music isn't loud, in fact, the students have to be quiet to hear it at all, but when they do hear it feet tap rhythmically on the floor while fingers occasionally strike imaginary keys on their desks. Various posters and quotes decorate the wall and a collection of rolled up yoga mats fills one corner of the room. Several mornings a week, Karen leads a few students and other teachers in a morning yoga class.

As the students file into the room, Karen greets each of them by name and engages small talk with a few of them. The bell rings, the students are in their seats, and Karen moves to the front of the room. "Good morning class. Today we will continue our discussion of Flannery O'Connor's short story, *Revelation*. Before we get to it I want you to take a minute and look over the comments you've made in your journal and then highlight points for discussion." The students open their books and their journals and with highlighters in hand, they start marking (in the book and the journal) areas they'd like to discuss. At the same time, Karen walks up and down the isles quietly commenting on students' choices until she makes her way back to the front of the class.

"Alright, so who would like to get us started?"

Kevin, a young man in the center of the room raises his hand and at the same time says, "Why does O'Connor make Mrs. Turpin a fat, snooty, know it all? Isn't that a cheap stereotype for someone like O'Connor to use?"

Karen replies, "Hmm, good question. In what way is she a stereotype?"

To which Kevin answers, "Well, you know, why does she have to be fat? Why do we always have these fat redneck characters?"

From beside Kevin, Mandy interjects, "Well, you know people like that."

Steve, a tall skinny young man sitting near the door with his legs stretched into the aisle adds, “Yeah, well I know a lot more people that aren’t like that. How come fat people always get stereotyped like this?”

At this point the conversation has taken on a life of its own, and Karen’s smile relates how happy she is that the students are so engaged in the text. She fidgets from time to time wanting to interject her own ideas, but resists and maintains the role of facilitator while the students lead the conversation.

Kevin builds on Steve’s comment by adding, “I mean, c’mon, every southern novel has some mean, fat person in it. If it isn’t a fat, sweaty, racist sheriff with mirrored sunglasses, that is always calling black men ‘boy,’ then it is a fat, sweaty, red-faced judge sending some innocent person to jail. I just think it’s kinda cheap. I mean I know she wrote this a long time ago, but still, she could do better than that.”

After a quick pause to let Kevin’s sentiments sink in, Karen asks the rest of the class, “So what do you all think? Does Kevin have a point? Is this a cheap stereotype?” Karen calls on a young lady in the front of the class that has raised her hand. “Samantha, what do you think?”

“I think Kevin and Steve are right. We already know that Mrs. Turpin is mean and snooty; we already don’t like her, so why make her fat? It would even be different if there were other fat people in the story that weren’t mean, but she’s the only one. I have an aunt that is heavy, and she isn’t anything like that. She’s the nicest, sweetest person you’ve ever met.”

Steve jumps back into the conversation. “Right, that’s my point. This woman is a ‘B’ no matter if she is fat or skinny, and she’s just mean. But she’s now the mean fat

woman. She's not the tall, mean woman, or short, mean woman, but the fat one." With that the class slips into a few moments of silence as they contemplate the topic.

Once again Karen breaks the silence. "Alright, so you all have made some great points. I wish I knew why O'Connor chose to make Mrs. Turpin fat. Maybe she was modeled after someone that O'Connor knew in real life. Or, maybe she just fell victim to the ease of using stereotypes. Either way, it's obvious that you all don't think it was necessary to create her as such. So, here's what I'd like you to do. I want you all to get into groups of four and sketch out a Mrs. Turpin that isn't fat, but is equally mean. The key though is that you can't use stereotypes either. How does that sound? Can you do it?" The students agree to the task and get into groups.

The noise level in the classroom rises significantly as moving desks clang together, students choose group members, and they talk about what their assignment is. Soon, however, the room quiets to a loud hum like that of a busy beehive. As Karen moves from group to group, students can be overheard discussing the task and correcting each other. One young lady reminds her group that, "No, we can't give her a big nose with a wart on it, that's just a witch, another stereotype."

Karen overhears the comment and takes the moment to clarify the assignment. "Remember, Mrs. Turpin is mean because she is mean. It's an internal thing. She just happens to be fat. Being fat is not what makes her mean, just like a wart on the nose doesn't makes someone a witch." When she finishes the students refocus their attention on their groups and the hum resumes.

"All right Jessica, what about your group? Show us your Mrs. Turpin. Jessica stands but keeps one bent knee on the seat of her chair. "Ok, so, Mrs. Turpin was a

slender woman in her mid-sixties. Her mouth seemed frozen in the frowning position and people that have known her for years can't recall her ever smiling. Mrs. Turpin is very smart, but she lacks the intelligence to know when she should be quiet. She seems to believe that because she is smart it is her duty to comment on every conversation she overhears. And, after hearing a conversation she believes that it is her duty to find someone to share it with."

"Ah, very nice, so we see a Mrs. Turpin that never smiles, butts in to other people's business, and is a gossip. What do you think class? Would this Mrs. Turpin do just as good a job as the fat Mrs. Turpin? Raise your hand if you agree." The entire class raises its hands, and Jessica smiles at her group while sliding back into her seat.

"Ok, so we have time for one more before the bell rings, who'd like to go next?" Several students raise their hands and Karen chooses Austin, who has been relatively quiet the entire period. "Ok Austin, show us your groups Mrs. Turpin."

Austin stands and dramatically clears his throat and then surveys the class as if waiting for their undivided attention. "Ah hmm. Mrs. Turpin began driving a motorcycle when only biker gangs and soldiers were riding them. People said that she had never ridden on the back of a bike and had insisted that she always drive. In fact, some folks say that she used to make Mr. Turpin sit on the back of the bike on the way to church on Sundays. Even though she was almost seventy, she refused to have a push button starter installed and still used the kick-starter. Although she had never been charged, paperboys have sworn for years that she would swerve into their path making them crash and drop all of their papers. Most people believed that the police were too afraid to charge her. One

thing was for sure, Mrs. Turpin was hell on wheels.” Austin gave a half-bow as Karen smiled and applauded his groups effort.

“I’m not sure that you didn’t hit a stereotype or two, but it was definitely creative and entertaining. Very well done. Can all the groups pass their papers in and I’ll hold on to them. We’ll start with the final three groups tomorrow.” As the bell rings Karen adds one final reminder, “Make sure you are doing your reading and journaling.” As the students work their way out of the room she makes a point to stop Austin’s group and tell them how much she enjoyed their example of Mrs. Turpin. “Great job today guys, excellent work.”

Students from her next class began entering the room, and she greets them by name and engages some of them in idle chit-chat.

Valerie. Also a white female, Valerie (pseudonym) also came to teaching a little later in life. In her 19th year of teaching at the time of this research, Valerie taught seventh grade Secondary ELA and Social Studies at Western Middle School. Valerie was a political science major in college and only became a teacher after spending time volunteering in her children’s classrooms. Once her youngest child went off to school, Valerie followed. She initially considered being an elementary school teacher, but found that the middle school setting fit her best. Becoming a Secondary ELA teacher was also a bit serendipitous, as she had started out working in science and math. She was influenced by several professors to really pursue a career in the humanities, and now is her 19th year in education teaching both English and social studies. She enjoyed teaching both subjects because it allowed her to spend twice as much time with her

students and to really develop the relationships she believed were so essential to student learning.

For Valerie, literature was a gateway to the past; it allowed the reader to understand the world as it was happening, influencing the writer as well as the people of the time. Valerie noted on many occasions her belief that history is often written with a slanted view and that the literature of a time can help to realign one's backward gaze. Through novel study, propaganda explorations, discussion, and ongoing debate, Valerie worked with her students to develop a multi-dimensional view of a time period. Valerie encouraged her students to question the *status quo* and "singular" representations of events. Like the other participants, Valerie expressed a desire that students form their own opinions, with the only caveat being that they must do it in a cogent, well-informed manner. That is, the students were free to believe whatever they did about a work as long as they were able to support those opinions by referencing the work. In her own words, she did not "want them to argue along the lines of 'because I said so,' but more along the lines of 'it says this right here and to me that means'"

Valerie used a lot of novels in her classes and gave her students a wide array of options for choosing from those novels. She based her initial selections on thematic elements that tied into the class as a whole, such as using *The Diary of Anne Frank* when studying the Holocaust. However, she went one step further by adding selections such as *Maus*, *Night*, or other war novels, so that the students could form a more complete picture of the time in question.

Valerie teaching vignette

In between classes Valerie spends much of her time consulting with her Special Education aid, Mr. Garrett (pseudonym) to whom she refers to as simply “G.” Valerie and G discuss the lesson that has just concluded and brainstorm adaptations they may make for the next lesson. “Hey, G, I thought it went really well with you reading the book out loud and me sitting with them as part of the audience. Several students leaned over and asked me questions to clarify this or that, and it didn’t interrupt the flow of the story. Plus, you have such a great reading voice.”

“Ah, Valerie, flattery will get you everywhere. I thought that the Sting video went over really well too. You gotta love YouTube.”

“YouTube is great, except during SOL’s when they won’t let us use the computers.”

“I’ll burn a few of these videos onto a disc, so we can use them whenever.”

“That would be great for the ‘*Duck and Cover*’ videos because I like to look at them more than once.”

“Very well, I will do them tonight.” “Thanks G.”

In this school, bells are not sounded for class changes. The teachers are responsible for dismissing students from class at the designated times, and the students are responsible for getting to their next class within the allotted time. Still, Valerie is often in the hallway right before or right at the beginning of the period ushering a few stragglers into the room.

“Alright guys, time to pick it up, classes are starting. Raymond, you and Charlie can finish your conversation during lunch. It’s class time, giddy-up.”

As the last students file into the room and take their seats Valerie moves to the center of the room and starts her lesson. “Ok, gang, so we’ve been talking about propaganda, who can tell me what propaganda is?” Several eager hands shoot into the air. Valerie chooses a boy near the center of the classroom. “Eric, what is propaganda?”

Confidently Eric begins: “propaganda is a tool for making people think something that isn’t really true, but somebody wants them to think it is true so they use propaganda. Like those cartoons and stuff.”

“Alright, so Eric says that propaganda is a tool for making people believe something that isn’t true. Do you all agree or disagree? Or have something to add?”

Charity, a young lady seated near the door, offers: “well, it’s about convincing people of something, of changing their opinion about something or someone. Like Hitler did.”

Valerie continues, “Yes, ok, building on what Eric and Charity have given us, can someone give me a short tight definition of propaganda?” Raymond raises his hand and Valerie says, “Yes Raymond, what is propaganda?”

“I think it is using regular stuff to make people think differently about something, but not in a good way.”

Looking as if she had gotten everything out of these 7th graders that she would, Valerie tries to pull it all back together and offers her own working definition of propaganda to the class. “Ok, so taking in everything that you all have said (she moves to the whiteboard and starts listing these items) we can say that propaganda is a form of persuasion used to paint a picture of a specific group for political reasons. Agreed?”

(Several students, and G, nod their heads.) Today we are going to look at several other forms of persuasion, one in the form of a song, and the other is a book.”

Valerie moves toward the door and dims the classroom lights. “This video is by Sting and is written to Americans about the Russians. Sting wrote this song in 1984. Why would he write this song during that time? What have we been studying about that time period?”

Once again Eric raises his hand and answers, “the Cold War.”

“Right, the Cold War, and who was involved in the Cold War?”

Yet again Eric offers, “The Russians and us.”

Passing out copies of the lyrics to *Russians Love Their Children*, Valerie answers, “Excellent, so let’s see how Sting goes about trying to persuade the US. G, hit it.” Mr. Garrett hits play and a black and white video fills the projection screen as Sting’s lyrics flow from the speakers. Some students are focused on the screen while others follow along with the lyrics. When the music ends Valerie and G sit silently for a moment to add dramatic affect. Valerie rises and in a subdued tone she asks the class, “What was Sting trying to tell us? I mean, the song isn’t simply to tell us that Russians love their children is it? What is the point? The message?” This time Valerie ignores Eric and looks to another part of the room. “Crystal, you look deep in thought, what do you think he was trying to say?”

After thinking for a moment Crystal answers, “I think he’s trying to say that war isn’t good for anyone, that we all lose.”

Valerie’s appreciation with Crystal’s answer is visible as she smiles and nods her head. “Exactly Crystal. Sting is trying to tell the powers that be, that there is no point to

war and that in the end we all pay a price. Nice job, very well done.” Crystal’s pride is also evident, but more subdued lest her peers come to think that she is trying too hard. Content with Crystal’s explanation of the song Valerie moves on to the book.

“Ok, so taking what we saw with the Sting song, we are going to continue with a book by Dr. Seuss, called *The Butter Battle Book*.” Instantly chatter erupts among the students as several of them recall having heard the book when they were younger. Valerie assures them that “This isn’t a little kid book, well it can be, but it also has a bigger message. Since you all are so much older now, lets see if you can figure it out.” Several students ask if they can sit on the floor, and Valerie obliges as G takes the stool at the front of the class. G clears his throat and begins, “The Butter Battle Book, by Dr. Seuss.”

As G animatedly reads the book stopping to show the pages to the audience, the students engage with G’s performance. They sit quietly and listen until, somewhere near the middle of the book, one young lady sits up and says, “Hey, I get it, this book’s supposed to be teaching us something!” Valerie and G exchange smiles, and he continues to read.

As the book ends, students filter back to their seats and Valerie thanks G and says that he “should read books onto cd’s as a career. You really have a great voice.” “Alright group, so, what was Dr. Seuss trying to tell us?” Eric’s hand shoots up, but Valerie chooses another student with his hand raised. “Jason, what do you think Seuss was getting at?”

“I think he was trying to say that war is silly. Those people were fighting over the same thing.”

Valerie works to get Jason to expand his comment. “What do you mean, the same thing?”

“Well, one side eats their toast butter side up and the other eats it butter side down, but really it’s the same thing, they’re all eating buttered toast. Who cares if it is pointed up or down?”

Continuing to draw the comparison out, Valerie asks the class. “What do you all think? Is Jason right? Are they the same thing?” Students nod and Valerie continues. “So, what are they fighting? Why are they going to war?” Eric returns to the conversation as Valerie points to him.

“Well, I think it is about how we don’t always take the time to look at things from the other person’s side. If they looked at it they would realize it’s really the same thing, but they won’t take the time to talk about it. It’s like racism.”

“How so?” asks Valerie.

“Well, we’re really all the same, but some people look at differences on the outside, but inside we’re all the same.”

“Nicely done, Eric. What do the rest of you think? Do you agree with Eric’s assessment? (Students nod) And then how does that fit with the Sting video? How does it all tie together?” This time, before Eric has a chance to interject, Valerie calls on Beth, the young lady that mentioned that the class was learning something from the book.

“Beth, what do you think? Can we tie these two together? If so, how?”

“I think it’s all about taking the time to get to know people, to really get to know them and not just judge them. Like Eric said, we’re all the same, but people don’t take the time to find out. Everyone loves their children, and the butter thing, well it’s just silly.”

“It is a bit silly isn’t it?” Valerie adds. “But, aren’t all wars really silly? Would there be fewer wars if we learned to look at things from someone else’s point of view? Or took the time to get to know them?” with Valerie’s momentary pause the students begin packing up their books and supplies and move to the edges of their seats. Valerie tells them, “It’s time to go, but be thinking about which war you may want to pick your war novel from. See you tomorrow.”

The students quickly move toward the door and Valerie heads toward G who is now sitting at Valerie’s desk. She asks, “So, what did you think?”

Michael. A white male in his 25th year of teaching, Michael (pseudonym) recalled coming to pursue English as a major after spending one semester as an Elementary Education student. Michael taught 12th grade IB classes at Eastern High School. Other than that brief venture into another discipline, Michael has been in language arts since he graduated from college. Michael also believed that literacy was a cornerstone of democracy; he believed that it could change a person’s life and life choices and that it could offer a whole other world of opportunities. Michael also viewed literacy from more pragmatic angles, in that he saw it as a skill necessary for competing and succeeding in the modern job market.

No matter the field of choice, Michael encouraged his students to understand that literacy will be a valuable tool for them. He expressed his belief that critical literacy was an essential component of freedom. Time and again he noted the importance of being able to understand the deeper meaning of a text, whether that text was literary, artistic, legalese, politispeak, or advertising. Michael expressed the power of the written word and the necessity for understanding deeper meanings as a way of living and participating

within a democracy. Michael did not hold “lofty ideals” that every student was going to be a “world changer” once they gained a grasp of critical literacy, but he did think that students would be able to be positively functioning members of society that were not easily swayed by rhetoric, flashy ads, or misdirection.

Michael also mentioned that social inequalities played a large role in the way he taught and the goals he had for his students. However, he never took that final step of critical literacy practice with his students, choosing not to engage them in activities aimed at supporting social justice. Michael used poems, movies, fiction, and nonfiction to teach his students. He did not teach critical literacy as if there was a boogey man in every work that needs to be ferreted out, but that there was a message being sent and, if students worked at it and use the right tools, they could discover that message.

Michael teaching vignette

Between classes one would likely find Michael in the hallway directly outside of the doorway to his classroom. As he observes the comings and goings in the hall he takes the opportunity to visit with various passing students and colleagues. In the moments leading up to the start of class a student or two are making a last minute check to be sure the work they had done the evening before was complete and correct. Michael smiles and listens, assuring them when he can and offering advice when necessary. As the bell rings he files in behind a few lagging students and begins class.

Michael has the plans for the day’s class session outlined on the board and checks in with various students as they prepare their materials. “Joanne, did you remember that your group was pushed back a day and will be leading the discussion tomorrow instead of today?” “Ron, do you have that make-up work for me? Today is the last day to get it in

for full credit.” When the students are settled in and ready for class, Michael begins.

“Okay, so yesterday we were discussing Orson Wells’ *Citizen Kane*, and we ran out of time while Jessica’s group was leading the discussion of why Wells would want to base a movie on William Randolph Hurst. David was making the argument that Wells wanted to speak to the excesses of the upper classes.

David now joins in the conversation and recalls, “yeah, because Wells is talking about class issues and the fact that Hurst and others like him made millions while his workers lived in poverty.”

Michael reenters the conversation and opens the discussion to the class. “What do the rest of you think? What is Wells talking about? What does he want the audience to take away from his movie, and why?” The class fidgets a bit and several students hesitantly clear their throats as if they were preparing to talk, but none of them do. After a few moments of silence Michael jumps in to save them. “Okay, this is a tough one, why would Wells care about the workers?”

Finally a redheaded young lady in the back of the class says, “Its Marx, Wells is talking about the inequity of power between the classes like we saw when we read Marx.”

“Right,” says Michael. “And what was Marx trying to tell us? What is Wells now trying to tell us?”

“He’s showing us that those at the top have so much money that they don’t know what to do with it, they buy crazy things and build insane mansions,” offers another young lady.

“Yes, and what else? What does knowing that do?” asks Michael.

“It makes us hate them, that’s for sure,” says David.

“True, but do you think that is Wells’ point? Just to make us hate the rich?” adds Michael.

“It might make some of them feel foolish or guilty,” said Joanne. “Maybe that can help them see that they don’t need everything they have. Maybe they’ll learn to share a little more with the workers.”

“Those are all great points, but do you think a little guilt will makes someone change? Do you think they were unaware of the differences between themselves and their workers?” asked Michael. “Guilt usually isn’t enough to make a major change, and Wells knew that, so who was he talking to and what was he trying to say?”

“He was trying to show the regular people just how extravagant the super rich were living. It is one thing to hear about it, or even read about it, but when you see it, you really get it,” said Ken, a young man toward the front of the class that had been silent up to this point.

“Exactly!” Michael’s face lights up and he becomes more animated. “So, if the working class sees the excesses, sees how the rich live, what will this make them do?”

“Hate them, just like David said,” adds another young lady.

Still animated though appearing to be slightly frustrated, Michael starts again. “Ok, we have established that this will help make the working class hate the upper class, but that is almost a given. Wells was a smart guy and he also read Marx, so what do you think he was trying to do? What did Marx say was inevitable when one group benefits from the sweat of another group?”

The students seem to finally see where Michael is leading them and several students offer simultaneously: “revolution.”

Feigning exhaustion Michael half bows to the students and says, “Yes, Wells is trying to move the working class people to action. Maybe not revolution per se, but definitely toward unions and better wages and working environments.”

Having led his students toward the desired frame of thought, Michael moves the conversation into an activity. “Now, I want you to come up with your own image. Wells wanted his audience to see the excesses of his time. I want you to take a few moments to show us the excesses of your time. If Wells was to make his movie in 2009, what images might he use?”

“Are we going to have to read these out loud?” asks Ron.

“Of course,” says Michael, and then with a chuckle he adds, “but don’t let that stop you from writing about that sweet moped you cruise to school everyday.” The class laughs a little and then gets to work.

As the students work on their images, Michael filters around the room looking over students’ shoulders answering questions and offering suggestions. When it looks like all of the students have something constructed some ideas on their papers, Michael redirects the group. “Alright. Now that you have something to work with, I want you to get into to groups of 3 or 4.” Holding up his hand with all of his fingers spread out he continues; “this many is too many, and two is a pair, not a group, you need to get into groups.” The students, seemingly unfazed by Michael’s sense of humor, get into groups that do indeed have 3-4 members.

“Ok, now you need to share your images with the group and they are going to give you feedback. This is important because they are your peers, they see the world much like you do and if they don’t get your image it is unlikely that I will. So, share your images and see if the group understands it and then ask for suggestions.”

The students only have about 5-6 minutes to work in their groups as the end of the class session approaches. Michael moves to the front of the room and clears his throat before speaking. “Ok folks, it looks like we are about to run out of time again. So, here’s what I need you to do. Exchange your image with a person in your group and they will comment on it for homework. You don’t have to comment on the paper of the person who comments on yours. Just arrange for someone to read and comment on your image. Tomorrow we are going to discuss how Wells might go about moving people to action in our time. What needs to be addressed in our society?” The bell rings, but the students don’t leave. “Joanne’s group will lead the discussion on that tomorrow. Okay, you can go.”

The students, having already gathered their belongings, get up and quickly exit the room. Michael nods at a few of them and tells David “nice job today,” and then heads back out into the hallway to resume his post.

Heather. Also a white female, completing her sixth year of teaching, Heather (pseudonym) has taught eighth grade ELA at Western Middle School since graduating from college. Like Karen and Michael, she was an English major and then pursued a degree in education. Heather noted that, while she experienced critical literacy pedagogy in her teacher preparation courses, it was never explicitly noted as a methodology. Much

like the way that the other participants approached it, to Heather critical literacy just seemed “like the way to do it.”

Heather was never fond of the *right there* type of teaching and learning she experienced as a student in Secondary ELA classes, with right there being specific questions with specific answers in relation to literature, where no interpretation is needed, for instance, “Who was on the raft with Huck?” She saw critical literacy pedagogy as a key to democracy and social justice, as well as a manner by which students could gain a greater understanding of the world in which they lived. Heather believed that critical literacy could change the students, make them more active and less passive, about the goings on in their world.

Heather combined fiction, nonfiction, and historical texts to allow students to gain deeper understandings of times and events. Sometimes the book was the center of the study; sometimes it was on the periphery as more of a supplementary text. Heather also invited speakers into her class that could offer students a consideration beyond the page. Heather expressed that critical literacy was the foundation of her pedagogy and that she strived for students to become aware of the inequities in our world so that they could overcome, or avoid, continuing those inequities. Like Valerie, she felt that citizens should be aware of what actions were being carried out in their names and that ultimately being a critically aware person was being a responsible and informed citizen.

Each of the participants expressed the feeling that social inequalities in our world played a large role in what they teach and how they teach. What was less consistent was the use of critical literacy to address those social inequalities. While Valerie and Heather

actively pursued a social justice agenda, Michael and Karen appeared more comfortable with just bringing those issues to the attention of the students.

Heather teaching vignette

In between classes Heather is in the hallway interacting with students and peers. A casual conversation with a colleague about potential weekend plans is set aside when one of her students comes rushing up to her obviously flustered.

“Mrs. Heather, Mrs. Heather! My group is supposed to lead the discussion today, and Jimmy isn’t here. He’s absent today, and he didn’t give his notes to any of us. Do you think we could get into his locker and get them?” “Slow down, April. It’s ok. We’ll just make do. Are Courtney and John here?” “Yes, but maybe Jimmy left his questions in his locker.” “We can’t go through Jimmy’s locker, April. Don’t worry, we’ll manage.” She smiles at the other teacher. Soon enough it is time for class to begin, and Heather starts ushering stragglers into her classroom.

Heather’s classroom is a monument to human rights. As they enter the room, the students’ attention quickly fall upon the “Pyramid of Hate” a 4x6 monument taped to the back wall. The pyramid was created by the students to demonstrate that even the smallest occurrences of injustice have long ranging and far reaching consequences. The bottom of the pyramid is full of words in students’ handwriting such as tripping, teasing, kick-me signs, rumors, and gossip. A little higher on the pyramid we see the words bullying and prejudice. At the top of the pyramid in black permanent marker is the word genocide.

The students find their seats and check the board for the day’s outline. Below the SOL’s is written “Class for Tuesday” and in neat bulleted points the outline reads: recap of yesterday’s guest speaker, group-led discussion, text selection for the human rights

project. When the students are all settled in, Heather begins. “Good morning. So, Mrs. Sengali was here talking about the Rwandan genocide museum yesterday. What did you all think? Any lingering questions that we didn’t cover yesterday or that came to you after class?”

Makala jumps right in without even raising her hand. “I thought it was awesome to meet someone from Africa. She has been through a lot and is still such a happy person. I loved her accent.”

“I loved her accent and the way she dressed,” added Michelle. “All of those colors and that cool head thing.”

“Yes her accent was nice and her clothes were beautiful, but what else? What did you learn?” Looking around the room she focuses in on a boy in the back corner of the class. “Scott, what did you learn?”

Quickly looking up as if he’d been caught daydreaming, Scott offers, “Genocide, I learned that there have been many genocides in history, not just the Holocaust.”

“Excellent, Scott! Can you remember some that she mentioned?”

“Well, um, she talked about Bosnia, and she talked about the Indians.” With that a young man toward the center of the class shot his hand into the air. Heather acknowledges him but holds up a finger asking him to let Scott finish. “That’s about all I can remember.”

Heather turns to Paul, “Ok, Paul, you had a comment?”

“Yeah, the lady yesterday said that what happened with the American Indians was a genocide, but the definition of genocide we have says that it can’t be an act of war.”

“That’s an excellent point, Paul, and discussing that definition in more detail might be a great topic for your group project. I think you could make the case either way depending on the point of view you take. Let’s talk more about this when we start our group projects. Does anyone else have anything to add before we move to the discussion about Anne Frank?” Heather pauses a moment and then asks the students leading the group discussion if they are ready. “April’s group is going to begin the book discussion with a general overview.” With that, three students move to the front of the class while Heather takes a seat in the back corner.

April begins, “Jimmy isn’t here today, so it’s just me, Courtney, and John. We all know that Anne Frank lived in an attic with her family and some of their friends, and obviously she wrote a book, but we wanted to look at some of the things she went through on a daily basis. So, we want everyone in the room to remain absolutely silent for 3 minutes. No talking or anything.” April glances up at the clock and as the second hand approaches 12 she says, “beginning...now.”

As the class sits silently the little fidgets and twitches students make that usually go unnoticed now become the focal point. Soon the students notice that one boy is nervously moving his knee up and down without even realizing it. As they all begin to look at him he just smiles and shrugs his shoulders. Each student seems to be at war with his or her own body as they try to remain silent and still. Finally, when John says, “Times up,” the class lets out a collective gasp. Students are talking about how hard it was to be so quiet and how they could hear every little fidget. Heather sits silently smiling as Courtney tries to regain the group’s attention.

“So, what did you think? That was hard wasn’t it? Our first question to the group is could you remain silent all day long?” Again, the prospect of prolonged silence inspires the group to begin their own conversations. Some students shake their heads no, while others explain how hard it would be for them. Finally, Heather comes to the rescue. As she begins to talk, the class quiets back down and refocuses its attention to the group. “I guess that’s your answer.” Heather says with a laugh.

John stands, clutching the index card containing his question. “What do you think you would have done in Anne Frank’s situation?” he asks the class.

One student asks, “Do you mean about being quiet, or just in general?”

“In general. Just having to live that way. How would you have handled it?” The class is silent for a moment, and then a young lady near the back raises her hand.

“Well, I know one thing, I wouldn’t be able to put up with the Van Dams or that other guy. I mean, Anne’s parents are being really nice letting all of those people stay there and that don’t seem to appreciate it at all. My mom wouldn’t put up with that.”

Another student adds, “Yeah, but if they kick them out they could tell the Nazi’s where the Franks are hiding. They’re kinda stuck with them.”

April now joins in. “So, what would you do? They are mean, but you don’t want them to tell where you are what do you do.”

The first young lady replies, “I guess I’d have to find a way to deal with them. I know my mom would hate it and probably end up punching Mrs. Van Dam in the nose,” and the class chuckles.

April stands once again and asks, “Would you ever get to the point of just wanting to leave no matter what?”

Scott shakes his head and says, “no way, I’d do anything to stay out of those camps and those gas chambers.” After a brief moment of silence Heather interjects.

“Remember though, they didn’t know what really went on at the camps. They knew it wasn’t a resort, but they didn’t know how bad it really was.”

“Well, maybe in that case. Being in that attic with those people was like a prison anyway. At least if I left, I’d get to be outside. I’d go crazy being locked up like that.”

April asks, “What about the rest of you, how many would go crazy up there and just have to leave? Raise your hand.” Half the class raises their hands and this creates another little stir of conversations as students comment on their choices and the choices of their friends. April ends the discussion with, “I think I’d go crazy too. That’s a long time being cooped up.”

As the group moves back to its seats, Heather stands and compliments the group on its questions and preparation. She reminds tomorrow’s group that it will be covering the first three chapters and need to have a question from each chapter. Noting that they can’t be “Simple yes/no or right there, questions, but questions that make us think.” She checks the clock and tells the class, “Ok, with the remaining ten minutes I want you all to start looking through the books and try to pick a book for your human rights project. Each book has a sheet inside of it with a mini-synopsis from each of the students that have read the book before. Don’t lose those sheets. I have copies on the computer, but I don’t want to have to keep printing them out. So, look through the books, read some back covers and the synopsis, and try to pick one that sounds interesting to you. I’ll be right here to answer any questions you have.”

The young man with the fidgety knee earlier approaches Heather and asks, “Do you have any books that talk about those kids that are forced to be soldiers like that lady was talking about yesterday?”

Heather smiles, “I have the perfect book for you. It’s called *A Long Way Gone*, and it’s about a boy soldier around your age. We have several copies of it. Let’s go find it.” Heather walks the boy to the bookshelf and proudly hands him the book. “I think you are going to like this.”

While the period winds down Heather makes her way to Scott’s seat and tells him that she “thought he had a good point about the definition of genocide, and will be happy to help out if your group chooses to pursue that topic, or if you just want to talk about it more. One thing to think about is the distribution of power. Is it a war if people are just trying to defend themselves?” Although there are no bells to indicate class changes, the students have kept an eye on the clock and start packing up and moving toward the door.

As the students leave the classroom their attention is drawn to an eye-level poster of *The Declaration of Human Rights*. It is the same poster that is on the side of Heather’s desk, but in this case it is larger and uses various colors. Heather follows the students out of the room, finds her fellow teacher, and continues their conversation about weekend plans from earlier.

Chapter Four: Reporting the Data

Arriving at one goal is the starting point to another.

- *John Dewey*

Introduction

This study investigated the use of critical literacy in the Secondary ELA classroom. As such it encompassed not only the curricular and pedagogical choices made by the teachers, but also explored how teachers framed critical literacy practices within the larger scope of a public school environment. I sought to understand how these teachers integrated critical literacy into their everyday practices while also working to understand why they chose to become critical literacy practitioners. After all, none of the curricular guidelines assigned to these teachers required them to adopt critical literacy practices; in fact, the term critical literacy did not even appear in the state mandated “standards of learning.” So, why had these particular teachers chosen to integrate critical literacy into their classes? Furthermore, what had these teachers hoped to accomplish by adopting critical literacy practices? Lastly, how had these teachers gone about integrating critical literacy into their teaching curriculum?

All of the lessons observed and discussed were pedagogically sound and aligned with state standards as well as NCTE and NCATE recommendations for critical literacy instruction. The data reflected the distinct imprint of their teachers’ pedagogy and life philosophy. In the interviews each teacher regarded his or her work as a tool toward something more, something beyond sentence-level understandings and recitation of facts. During the interviews these teachers also declared their desires that students become aware of the world around them, that they see the power of the written word in this “becoming,” and that they become more socially just as a consequence.

The first section of this chapter focuses on the philosophical, the teachers themselves, their definitions of critical literacy, and the stated goals for their students; academic as well as personal growth. The second section focuses on the manner in which the teachers implement critical literacy practices in their classrooms to achieve those goals. The final section is a look at what was missing in these classrooms.

Defining Critical Literacy

As noted in earlier chapters, the very nature of critical literacy is to abhor stagnant, power-laden definitions in an effort to remain fluid and evolving. Nonetheless it was important to explore each teacher's understanding of critical literacy as a foundation for the study. While there are several distinct characteristics of critical literacy pedagogy, it has not been so clearly defined a topic as to allow the quick utterance of a one-sentence definition. Consequently, I found that some participants had difficulty defining critical literacy.

Participants work to define critical literacy. Karen, the writer, novelist, and IB teacher, struggled the most with her definition. Time and again she would ask me what my definition of critical literacy was, and each time I would assure her that my definition was not important, that I was interested in how she defined critical literacy. Finally I promised to tell her my definition after the study was over so that I would not influence her actions in any way. Karen's uncertainty was apparent from the outset, as we saw from the initial interview as she worked to answer the question, "What is your definition of critical literacy?"

Well, my understanding of it is very, very limited so I may be way off, but my sense of it is that, in developing critical literacy, we are developing the ability for

students in the classroom to appreciate and understand the context of the literature, and the affect of it, and that's about all I can say. Can you help me with more?

Karen's definition at this point was wholly based on critical literacy as an academic tool, a way of deconstructing a text. Later we will see that Karen's classroom instruction involved examinations of social inequalities, the rights of individuals, and power relations within a work, but it does stop short of engaging students in social action.

Michael, like Karen, first defined critical literacy as an academic tool for the Secondary ELA classroom. Michael's first attempt at defining critical literacy clearly demonstrated this "academic tool" belief:

As I understand it, it's having the intellectual tools to look at something critically. To look at the parts of something, and look at how those parts relate to the whole. To look at a motif in a novel and not just say, "Oh there's a motif," but actually forming some sort of interpretation of why that motif is there and what the author is trying to communicate through it. Is that close (laughs)?

Through continued discussion, observations, and follow-up interviews, both Karen and Michael eventually expanded their definitions to include aspects beyond the classroom and out into the world. Karen was most comfortable, as we will see later on, expressing her understanding of critical literacy by discussing the methods through which she teaches.

Michael, now in his 25th year of teaching, was more intent on defining critical literacy and continued to edit and revise his definition during our time together before

settling on a working definition that internalized critical literacy as a life skill in which he compared viewing a painting and reading the written word.

It's a reflection of who I am as a reader, and what my perception is, and what it takes to have a real understanding of what somebody's done. I remember the first time I went to London; I went in the British National Gallery in London because I knew that Van Gogh's "Sunflowers" painting was there. I'd seen it in books, but it's only when you get up close to it that you can see that he laid some of those colors in there with a palette knife. And, when you look at it up close, it is more than just this array of colors (oh how nice it is), but he's also slapping colors on there, giving a real texture to it. And the same thing happens in poetry, the same thing happens in literature, and it's the difference, for me it's the difference between walking by something and going "oh" and really digesting it. And for students, I think it is a process, but it's the same thing. You don't walk by it; you digest it. But also seeing similar aspects in a lot of different situations that you also need to ask: you know, to digest. So it's a reflection of me.

Even though this definition settled with Michael for a while, he continued to verbalize alterations and revisions of his definition during my time with him. Nonetheless, he always noted core elements of critical literacy in each iteration of his definition. This ongoing search for THE right definition was also reflected in Michael's pedagogy. While he worked to help student's develop their voices and express their own opinions, it was clear that he knew the "correct" answer and the student opinions he held in highest regard were those that most closely matched his own. He was aware of this and even jokingly commented to me about students that question his interpretation of a work. He laughed as

he recalled telling his class: “I do know more about this than you because I’m a nerd and I sit around and read biographies of John Donne.”

Valerie and Heather, both members of their school’s social justice group, had an easier time defining critical literacy. Valerie, completing her 19th year in teaching defined critical literacy thusly:

So I think, critical literacy to me, is addressing ... To me it is like thinking about, on a higher level, putting to use your skills of reading and writing. It’s not just literacy, being the ability to read and write. Critical literacy is the ability to examine it, to think about it, to explore the “So what’s?” of what it is you are reading or writing. So taking it to a place where it’s useful to you.

For Valerie, the “so what” idea was a central tenet of her pedagogy and a lynch pin in her critical literacy practices. She expressed often that it was not enough for students to be able to answer a question, but that they needed to understand why the question was posed in the first place and be able to discuss the questions in depth. In her initial interview, Valerie also shared with me this belief:

Critical literacy about a topic would be that connection, to be able to have a conversation about it, to be able to ask more questions. The kids always look at me like I have three heads when I tell them that. I think you know a lot when you have more questions. I’m like, “You can’t ask questions if you don’t know anything.” The more you know the more questions you have.

Valerie was very politically active and expressed frustration with people who were not. She believed that it was the responsibility of every citizen to be actively involved in their government and to question what that “government was doing in their name.”

Heather, completing her 6th year of teaching and the only participant who attended a teacher education program after the term “critical literacy” was adopted into the lexicon, gave the most confident definition of critical literacy, stating

I would say it means not taking anything at face value and understanding that everything is written for an audience, for a purpose. Even something that we might accept as truth, we can’t necessarily accept it as truth because it’s one person’s truth or one group’s truth. And, yeah, I guess that’s really the essence of it.

No matter the exact phrasing or confidence with which it was expressed, it was apparent that all four participants had a grasp of some common components of critical literacy pedagogy. Across the group, participants noted the fact that all works are written from a specific perspective, during a specific time, to a specific audience. They acknowledged that authors had inherent biases and that biases worked to shape each author’s writing. Each participant also cited the necessity for Secondary ELA teachers to share these understandings, and impart the tools with which to view them, with their students so that they too would become informed citizens of the world. Finally, and most importantly, each participant expressed an understanding that literacy equals power, and that to be literate and have control over the written word is a power that should be available to all people. Valerie summed it up nicely when she expressed her belief that “ignorance is the enemy of democracy.”

Digging deeper into the definitions. When asked to define critical literacy, each participant initially gave a quick “textbook” answer as to his or her understanding. Each later expanded on his or her initial definition with a broader definition that included

examples and goals of critical literacy practices. While these definitions varied, several common themes did emerge: a) literacy is tied to power, b) literacy is an academic act that encompasses more than simply reading and writing, c) each text is composed for a purpose by an author that has a very specific life experience, d) critical literacy is useful as a social tool, capable of helping students develop informed opinions and become active members of our society, and e) critical literacy can be a tool for fighting social inequalities. Karen, Valerie, and Heather expressed their feelings that it is the responsibility of each citizen to work to create a more equitable world. Valerie said, “That’s what I think critical literacy is: finding out how to make your own opinions educated informed opinions; not just, you know, ‘I think this is stupid.’”

Literacy is tied to power. All four participants expressed the belief that literacy is power and that it was their job to teach students how to harness that power. Each of the participants also articulated that the power of literacy manifested itself in several ways. One such way was the ability of the literate person to better influence his or her own life. Participants believed that literacy offered a person more job opportunities, better chances for advancement within those jobs. The other form of power mentioned as being inherent in literacy was social equity. While each participant discussed these aspects of literacy as power in varying degrees, Heather’s comments best encapsulated the perceptions of the participants as a whole:

I think literacy is power. I think a lot of kids like to discount the necessity of literacy in our society, but I think, even if you are a technology-driven person you have to be literate in order to make sense out of all the information that’s coming at you.

Heather further expressed her belief in the power of literacy by saying what she believed it meant to be literate, and addressing the multiple literacies that exist in our lives:

I think, that also takes into account the idea that literacy is not just reading print. Literacy is looking at video. Literacy is understanding that, when somebody says something in a speech, what are they really meaning? What are the underlying messages and euphemisms and that sort of thing? What are the persuasive techniques that somebody is using in an advertisement to sway your opinion and get you to do something that they want you to do?

Heather concluded our discussion of *literacy as power* by sharing her beliefs about the way that illiteracy can have a social and financial paralyzing effect on people.

So, when I think of all of those kinds of literacy, I think the powerful people in our society are the ones that make sense out of those things and can do it independently. I think the dependent readers are the ones that I can see that, if nothing changes, they are going to be dependent on other people for information for the rest of their lives.

Heather's views on literacy and the power it has in our world were representative of the data as a whole. While occurring to differing degrees, all of the members expressed a belief that literacy is tied to power and that one must be literate in order to be empowered.

Literacy is an academic act. Another theme that emerged from the data was the belief that literacy was an academic act that encompassed more than simply reading and writing. While each participant acknowledged a certain responsibility to standards and curricular requirements, each also expressed distaste for what Heather called, "right

there” questions that often populated standardized tests. Heather believed that such questions required no real thought or analysis on the part of the reader, but merely the ability to answer a superficial question related to an event within a work. Each of the participants doubted the academic validity of “right there” questions, but also shared a belief that tests of this sort were not going away any time soon. Still, each teacher felt that teaching students to identify only the shallowest of meanings in a work was not only a poor pedagogical choice, but a detriment to the learner as well. Heather tried “very hard to look at Bloom’s taxonomy, to look at those other sorts of organizing frameworks to say, ‘ok, it’s not enough to say what; it’s more important to say why, how you know, for what reason.’” Participants noted that critical literacy was a way to get beyond the “right there” and really explore what is going on in a work, while also preparing students for required curricular or state assessments. Valerie felt that

That’s where critical literacy comes in. Here are the facts, or what we know, or a perspective on something. Now, over here is an assignment to do something. So it might be a sensory assignment, or it might be an illustrative kind of assignment; it might be a, ‘what do you think’ or ‘take a stand kind of assignment.’ The notebook is full of them. We just kind of try to think of them and create those, and so I think that’s a component of critical literacy. Here’s a body of information. Do something with it: use it, and change it up, and then make something new from it. When students can do that, they can easily answer SOL questions.

Consequently, Valerie, like the other participants, avoided simple true/false or multiple-choice answers and opted for projects and discussions that allowed students to represent their understandings in a multitude of ways. At one time or another, each teacher

expressed a disdain for those “right there” questions that asked students to do no more than perhaps identify the characters involved in a specific scene in a book. The participants shared the belief that asking and answering such questions did little to support literacy development in students.

Writers write for a purpose. During my interviews, each teacher noted on more than one occasion their belief in the importance of teaching students that each work is written for a purpose and by an author that has a very specific life experience. As an author, Karen had a unique perspective to bring to the classroom. “I’m a writer, and so I think that I bring that sense of intentionality that, so that to be able to help them to develop the skills, because I know them from the other side of the line.” Michael said that helping students to be able to analyze an author’s purpose, whether it was to educate, influence, or entertain, was an essential skill and one he worked to teach his students. When discussing authorial purpose he said,

I like for them to be aware of. It’s more than being aware of politicians speaking euphemistically, you know, because that’s a given. It’s to be aware of, simply continuing with that example, what it says about a politician if he’s able to communicate verbally. Does that person sound sincere, or are they obviously reading something that somebody else wrote? And, if they are reading what somebody else wrote, what about what that person wrote?

Whether during interviews, or observations, the need to consider the purpose behind a work was prevalent across the data. What was disconcerting though, was the amount of writing students were asked to do without any apparent purpose. While there were many occasions in which students used writing to question a text, to persuade, or to inform,

there were as many instances in which they were asked to write simply to prove they had done the reading.

Critical literacy as a tool to develop student voice. All four participants expressed the need for students to develop their own informed opinions and become active members of our society. Additionally, each teacher expressed that one of the most powerful aspects of critical literacy was the ability to help students develop and express their own opinions. Heather, Michael, and Valerie each declared that they wanted their students to be able to disagree with them, as long as they could back it up with evidence from the text. Michael noted that

They come in here really timid in their writing because they don't want to write something that I will think is wrong. I say, "Well, it doesn't matter if I think it is wrong. It's a, do you think it's right? Do you have something to say about this?"

Heather shared a similar sentiment: "they can tell me that a book sucked, I'm fine with that. I just say you have to have support for that. It's not just it sucks because I didn't have a chance to read it." She worked to have students understand the value of detailed expression, getting them to work toward saying, "it sucks because the author did this or because this character did this and I didn't like that." Like the other teachers, Heather felt that it was important that students learn to express themselves effectively. "You know it's giving them the language to actually be critics, instead of critical. I think the critical part does come naturally. I'm trying to give them the language to be constructive with their criticism, to be helpful." I observed these sentiments in action during my time in each of the teachers' classrooms.

In one instance, during an observation of Karen's class, students debated whether a character in a Flannery O'Connor story was a stereotype, and if this lessened the value of the character, and possibly the work. The character was a "fat, snooty, know it all," and one particular student felt that O'Connor's depiction of the character as fat was an unnecessary and negative stereotype. Karen opened up the discussion to the class, and they debated whether or not the depiction of the character truly did detract from the work. Students discussed the stereotypes of fat, southern, racist sheriffs with mirrored sunglasses or the fat, red-faced, racist judge seen in so many movies. In the end, the students seemed to agree that the character's description of being fat was in fact a negative stereotype and not necessary to achieve the overall goal. This discussion in no way changed the intent of the author, or the outcome of the book, but as Karen later told me, "it empowers the students when they can call an author to task. They aren't changing the book, or devaluing it, but they are reacting to it." Such interaction is a cornerstone of critical literacy.

Critical literacy as a tool for fighting social inequalities. On more than one occasion, the teachers each spoke to the value of critical literacy as a tool for fighting social inequalities. Additionally, each member of the study expressed his or her hope that students would use these skills to actively address issues within their lives and their worlds. This method did take on many forms in the classrooms, and, while it was more directly addressed in one school than the other, expression of the potential for critical literacy to act as such a tool was observed in all of the classrooms.

Valerie and Heather stressed from the outset that critical literacy as a tool for social justice, was a core tenet of their pedagogy. They also shared a belief that social justice

was an essential component of democracy. Valerie declared that “democracy can’t work without an educated electorate; you can’t have social justice at the forefront without people knowing what the heck is going on.” This belief had a profound effect on her pedagogy and was reflected in the textual choices she made for her classes. Her shelves were lined with a wide array of novels, historical fiction, non-fiction, autobiography, and graphic novels. Titles included *The Grapes of Wrath*, *All’s Quiet on the Western Front*, *Night*, *Tears of a Tiger*, *Sunrise Over Fallujah*, and the works of Dr. Seuss. Authors such as Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn were also represented. Valerie’s class library was both vast and varied. While she articulated on more than one occasion that she supported students reading whatever they liked, she also noted that her own literary interests may not be considered “traditional” for a Secondary ELA teacher. Addressing that point further, Valerie told me that she “appreciate[s] all kinds of genres, but I don’t marvel at a lot of classics, I’m not sucked into Shakespeare; I’m not. So the kind of language arts or English I like is really edgy, social activist, kind of literature.” Social justice is at the core of Valerie’s pedagogy.

When I asked Heather to what degree social inequalities in the world affect her adoption of critical literacy practices, she noted that

[It] is probably the root for wanting to undertake critical literacy because I think for so long only one side of the story has been told. And I can think even, it hasn’t been that long since I’ve been out of school, but, the way that things like Native American history and the Holocaust and slavery were taught, to me, were not necessarily the best ways for students to get a grasp of the unfairness that is embodied in our society: American society and the global society.

Both Valerie and Heather used their classes as a space to develop and engage in social activism. Whether it was in the books they chose, the classroom activities they designed, or the assignments they created, Heather and Valerie placed an emphasis on helping students develop into socially conscious citizens.

However, Mike and Karen also had strong feelings about the value of critical literacy as a tool for social justice. As Michael and I discussed the potential for critical literacy to act as a tool for social justice, he expressed to me that

If you can look at a film or a piece of writing critically, you can look at pretty much any situation critically. And I think a lot of oppression and a lot of conditions that cause those inequalities. For the average person, I think they go by unnoticed because they haven't learned to look at things in terms of how the sum of the parts make up the whole. Instead of seeing just poverty, for example, as a situation, instead of being able to critically conceive the sort of tacit class system in this country. You can see the certain aspects of politics that contribute to poverty, or also contribute to wealth. It's one way you can put rich and poor on the same level; you can put right and left in the middle. If you have the ability to look at any situation critically, then you have the ability to engage in real dialogue, and not just throwing words at each other.

Karen also felt that social justice was tied to her teaching practice as she expressed

I think that it affects my teaching of literature because I feel it is very important that students understand how social inequalities affect the creation of literature, as well as them personally. So I set out, when I begin teaching a book, to be aware

of them myself, and then to find ways to unobtrusively make that apparent as we discuss the literary merits of a work.

For Karen, as well as Michael, social justice was achieved when students became aware of the injustices. Heather and Valerie encouraged their students to take it one more step and actually try to create change.

Although definitions varied for the participants when considering critical literacy, each participant's definition included the same five themes. These common sentiments were evident during my interviews and class observations as each teacher referenced the importance of literacy to a person's career goals as well as their lives, or as Karen put it, "as citizens of this planet." What was different among the participants was the manner in which they approached their critical literacy practices and the depth to which those practices were influenced by forces outside of their individual classrooms.

Voices left unheard. Although critical literacy is a tool for emancipation, it is still up to the critical literacy practitioner to guide students toward that emancipation. Teachers become the guide toward enlightenment and emancipation as they choose which groups will be the focus of the critical literacy lens. Undoubtedly, there will be people, or populations that teachers are not able to address within the school year accompanied by valid arguments for the inclusion or exclusion of the groups at that time. Two topics that were absent from this data were activities relating to the textual representation of women, and members of the sexual minority: lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and the transgendered.

LGBT. While there have been significant strides in consideration to the rights of members of our society who are lesbians, gays, bisexual, or transgendered, they have yet

to achieve the equality promised by our democracy. Critical literacy is an excellent tool for examining the social constructs that still support the prejudices those citizens face on a daily basis. However, nowhere in the data were there any representations of the participants using critical literacy in an effort to address those prejudices.

Women. Making up half the world's population and long the victims of misogynistic textual representations, the study of the manner in which women were represented in literature, was absent from this data. Other than a brief mention of an Egyptian feminist activist, women's rights and struggles were not addressed by these participants.

Academic Skill

While much of the literature focused on the ability of critical literacy to act as a tool for student empowerment, social justice, and social activism, critical literacy has also been a strong tool for academic success. Critical literacy has allowed readers to deconstruct a text and in turn reach a deeper, more thorough understanding of that text. Using critical literacy practices as a tool for social justice or for academic success was not, as mentioned previously, mutually exclusive. The data reflected that some participants focused on the academic qualities of critical literacy, while others chose social justice as their primary focus of textual instruction. We begin this section by reporting on the role of critical literacy as an academic tool.

Critical Literacy is a literacy skill. Participants viewed critical literacy within the academic realm as a powerful literacy skill that would be an asset to their students throughout their academic years and beyond. Michael shared with me, and later that day with his students, that he's

Had a number of people over the years who are captains of a variety of local industries tell me that the problem they have to face is finding a good candidate for a position who can write a cogent memorandum, and put sentences on a page without comma splices and stuff like that. I try to tell my students, you never know who you're going to be writing for, who knows something about that, who will be able to recognize a comma splice, and be able to, you know, down you in some way for it. I want them to be able to write coherently; I want them to be able to write with precision.

Valerie shared a similar sentiment with her students as she told them that no matter if they were “texting, writing a love note, a letter to an editor, or a job application, the ability to express one’s self clearly was always a valuable skill.” Michael viewed literacy first and foremost as an academic skill that would prepare his students for life after they left his class. Valerie, alternatively, considered social justice to be the greatest value of literacy. They however, agreed that the ability to write clearly and concisely was a valuable asset for all students to gain, and that critical literacy practices were excellent methods with which to do so.

Academic goals for using critical literacy. The academic value of critical literacy was strongly acknowledged by all participants. Whether it was to allow students to better understand a work or to create a work of one’s own, each participant placed a high value on critical literacy as a pedagogical tool. The teachers expressed specific academic goals for their students and further discussed how critical literacy helped in achieving those goals.

When discussing academic goals for his students, I asked Michael what he hoped his students would learn from him, what they would take with them beyond his classroom doors. Without mentioning state standards or the IB curriculum, Michael declared that he hoped they would

Head back out with an appreciation for what you can really do with words, knowing words and knowing the definitions of words, and how to use them as different parts of speech. You know, how it can really add up to communicating something. Part of that involves trying to make them aware of how little is communicated in some situations, in some circumstances. But a lot of it for me has to do with just looking at how people have communicated with words over the centuries. And everything from appreciating a good, well organized, and well written essay, to having some appreciation for the nuances of poetry. And, part of it is learning the rules of the game, so they, I want them to be, what I envision for them, what I hope for, is that when they go to college or even into the work force, that they become aware of how much they know.

When Valerie was asked specifically what goals she had for her class, what she hoped students would take away from her class in an academic sense, she also had no difficulty in finding an answer. She quickly and confidently told me that she hoped they would

Use exposure to books, novels, or non-fiction. We read a lot of articles and non-fiction pieces as well. I don't really care so much what they read; I just want them to keep reading. I want them to read to stay informed, to not get their information from only one source; the television or the Internet. But to also, you know, to engage in that fantasy, fictional part of life. That is always good too,

because it gives balance. You see possibilities from fiction that you might not if you just don't read. And so I hope they do see that literature does offer ideas for how to live. And, maybe, offers a perspective of empathy, depending on what it is they're reading too, which I think is a very essential human characteristic.

Like Michael, Valerie's words and actions all expressed a deep belief that school was for more than regurgitating answers on a standardized test, but a place in which students should be able to grow academically as well as personally. Valerie's comments also alluded to the social justice nature of critical literacy practices.

Critical literacy as a tool for social justice was also a common theme, and while they will be discussed separately, the lines between the academic and social justice values of critical literacy were often blurred. Some of this was attributed to the fact that critical literacy was not a skill taught piecemeal, or as a specific unit of study, but that it infiltrated every aspect of the critical literacy practitioners' classroom. Therefore, the academic and social justice aspects of critical literacy were destined to intertwine and overlap from time to time. As noted in Chapter 2, effective critical literacy practices are pedagogically all encompassing and the participants' understanding of this was apparent from the outset. Whether their focus was academic first, or social justice driven, each participant tapped into a vast array of critical literacy practices.

Teaching Critical Literacy

Thus far, reporting of this research has focused on the thoughts of the participants in relation to critical literacy pedagogy and its potential to improve student learning and living. Participants offered definitions and gave pedagogical and ideological reasons for those definitions. Having established the "what" and "why" of critical literacy

instruction, we now turn to the “how.” This section reports just how the above beliefs manifest themselves in the English classroom. As such, we explored just how it is these teachers went about creating a critical literacy curriculum. From awareness of responsibilities to students, parents, and outside curricular standards, to working with texts, assignments used, and even the design and décor of each teacher’s room, this section looked to identify just how it was these teachers “did” critical literacy.

Creating a critical literacy curriculum. There was abundant data representing the understanding that critical literacy was not a skill meant to be taught independently from other academic skills, but that to be effective it must be interwoven with a teacher’s day-to-day classroom practices. None of the participants expressed a feeling or belief that critical literacy was a situation-specific tool that would be approached in a mini-lesson or one-time project. Furthermore, I did not observe any isolated lessons in relation to critical literacy while in their classrooms. For these participants, critical literacy was simply the way they did things. Whether it was the quotes on their walls, the texts they chose to use, or their desire to help their students become active, engaged members of their communities; critical literacy was a way of being for these teachers.

Setting the stage. Each teacher’s classroom was a unique space designed to express not only who a teacher was, but also who he or she hoped to be. The way a teacher decorated his or her classroom was a reflection of who he or she was and offers an insight into the teacher’s view of the world. While each of the participants’ classrooms was as unique as the teachers themselves, a few common themes did emerge as I reviewed my field notes. Each of the teachers decorated their walls with a) famous quotes and philosophical questions, b) each classroom was adorned with pictures of

visionaries from different walks of life, and c) references to political activism. These rooms were not designed by accident, but quite purposefully, as Valerie shared with me:

You know, I got those guys up there, that Apple (the Apple computer logo), and those people are all revolutionaries in their own ways (talking about pictures on her walls) and their own kind of spirit, and [students are] always curious about that. I try to put up provocative quotes around; we have a quote of the week, kinda too; sometimes they're fun, and sometimes they're like, "What does that mean?" You know, just to kinda get them going.

Karen also expressed the intentionality of her room design as being a part of her overall critical literacy practices. As we walked around her classroom, she told me

Pretty much in everything I do, from selection of text to the physical appearance of my classroom. You know, occasionally with the posters and the bumper stickers I have, one could take exception. But I find that instead they become discussion tools, and people and the kids like them. I think a lot of learning that is done in the classroom is done, is often done when kids are not paying attention to what I am saying and they're looking around visually at what's happening.

Famous quotes and philosophical questions. Several times in interviews and observations, each of the teachers expressed a desire for their students to develop their own voices. One method of modeling that desire was in the form of posters and pictures. Michael had a poster quoting T.S. Eliot's line, "Do I dare disturb the universe?" Valerie and Heather each displayed bumper stickers asking that the reader, "Question the dominant paradigm." Intermixed with these were quotes from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Albert Einstein, Gandhi, Steve Jobs, and Henry David Thoreau, to name just a few. No

matter the source, the message was clear that these teachers wanted their students to question the world around them.

Pictures of visionaries from different walks of life. Without quoting the often-cited value of a picture in relation to the written word, it is true that a picture is capable of making a powerful statement. The pictures these teachers chose to adorn their walls told a lot about each of them, not only whom they respect and admire, but perhaps whom they also hope would influence their students.

There were far more pictures than can be chronicled or analyzed here, but, there were a few themes that did emerge. Civil rights was the most prevalent theme; each teacher's classroom had at least one picture of Dr. King, as well as pictures of Malcolm X, the young Chinese student confronting the tanks in Tiananmen Square, or Gandhi. Pictures of various marches, sit-ins, and protest rallies were also common.

Another reoccurring theme was "creative expression," with pictures of Bob Dylan, Jim Henson, Sting (with the lyrics to his song "Russians love their children too"), Dr. Seuss, and various other artists, as well as literary quotes or poems, were plentiful. The voices of the socially conscious mattered in these rooms.

References to political activism. To varying degrees, each of the participants displayed their own representations of political activism. Some of these expressions were subtle in their approach, such as Michael's placement of the T.S. Eliot quote next to a picture of Malcolm X pointing at some "unknown" outside of the photograph. However, in this configuration, Malcolm X is pointing directly at the United States flag mounted on the wall next to the picture. When I asked Michael about that particular grouping, he smiled and said that he "likes to see how long it takes students each year to

ask him about it.” The other participants were much more transparent in their designs. Heather had two copies of the Declaration of Human Rights posted in her room, while Valerie and Karen each displayed bumper stickers stating, “Wouldn’t it be wonderful if schools had all of the money they needed, and the Air Force had to have bake sales to buy bombs?”

Only Valerie noted anyone ever taking exception to her classroom décor. She recalled one instance in which a parent suggested that she was pushing a liberal agenda, but no formal complaint was ever made. Each teacher told me that they wanted their rooms to inspire students to find their own voices, and not, as Michael put it, “to become little clones of the teachers.”

Responsibility to the students. As much as each teacher hoped that their students would begin to see the world through a critical literacy lens, those teachers also acknowledged that such a transformation was a process and ultimately an individual choice. The participants stated on more than one occasion that they worked hard to consider students’ points of view and rights to their own opinion. During my observations I documented many episodes of students engaged in dialogue with the teachers and with each other in an effort to understand a text. In none of my observations did I ever see a teacher shut down a student that had a different interpretation of the text. Although I must also report that I never observed students with interpretations that were so far “out there” that a teacher might be inclined to put an end to the discussion.

Considering student ability. The teachers also expressed a belief that critical literacy was a skill that required a higher level of literacy development, and as such they took their students intellectual capabilities into account. Heather noted, “I honestly have

to say that there are some kids, especially when basic literacy is not there, we're not going to get to critical literacy; we're just not." And in such cases, meeting the student's literacy learning needs was always given consideration. Heather again noted her effort toward differentiation:

There are kids that are struggling with what I'd call basic vocabulary, like the word "wade." They don't have a mental picture for what that means, therefore it takes them longer to read things. They get fatigued, and they stop reading things on their own. And that's one of the reasons I try to do things like the mock trials, because that's a way for every kid to be participating in critical literacy to the best of his or her ability.

Such efforts to include students of all skill levels were reflective of the emancipatory nature of critical literacy pedagogy. Critical literacy is a skill of inclusion, meant to empower people and as such must always meet a person at whatever skill level s/he possesses. To deny a student the opportunity to work within a critical literacy setting would be contradictory to the goals upon which critical literacy is built.

Discussions about language used in texts. Another method of supporting student learning is by having open discussions about potentially disturbing aspects of a text.

Karen offered an excellent example as we discussed teaching *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and the pervasive use of the word "nigger." Karen believed that it was important for the class to discuss an author's choice of using a word that is so offensive and to decide as a group how they will handle the word during in-class, out loud readings. That is, students would decide as a group whether they verbalize the word as written, or

decide on an alternative word to use in its place. Such discussions are crucial to critical literacy instruction.

Rather than let authorial language choices limit textual choices, Valerie also expressed the need to discuss “language” with her students. Furthermore she had a policy that any book that the students checked-out from the class library that had potentially offensive language, must involve a discussion about the language between the student and the parent. Valerie made it clear to the students that it was their responsibility to initiate that discussion with their parents. She further explained that she did not like to “send notes home that put up red flags about books because there are some people that won’t take the time to read the book. If it is in here, I have read it, and consider it a very worthy book.” Valerie felt that placing the onus on the students to start the discussion with their parents would be one way to involve parents in a discussion that might carry over, in a positive way, to the classroom.

Another aspect of the consideration of offensive language in literature involved understanding the context of the language in both the time the story is set and the historical time period in which it was written. Karen discussed her thoughts on people who refused to use a book merely because of language they deemed offensive declaring that

I think that’s sometimes where we miss the boat; it’s where we get stuck. You know in Huck Finn, Jim gets mistreated, and that’s bad. But there are places in Huck Finn where Jim calls Huck to account in a way that is absolutely empowering. And so that’s one of the strategies that I use too, being sure that it’s

always a point-counterpoint presentation, you know. Again always going back to the text. What is it, what is it that makes Jim cry?

Karen told me on more than one occasion that she believed that it was much more effective to discuss an author's choice of language and the way it affected the book and the reader, rather than just "cast it aside or let it be someone else's problem."

Responsibility to parents. While none of the teachers could recall ever having a parent object outright to the use of critical literacy in the classroom, they did acknowledge the occasional question or curiosity. Heather attributed those questions to the very nature of critical literacy:

Because I think with critical literacy there is not necessarily a cut and dry answer, there are always questions, and so I think they don't like the kind of discussions that emerge. Because I can't script what's going to happen if I'm asking the kids to come up with their own questions about the book, and what didn't you understand, and what questions do you have about the character's motivation, and how does this connect to our lives today? When you are trying to do that stuff, there's not really a kind of "Okay this is the way the conversation is going to go," and we know everything's going to come out.

Michael also acknowledged that classes conducted around critical literacy can be somewhat difficult for parents to understand. This is not so much because of the content, but more so in relation to classroom structure and assignments. Critical literacy does not offer simple binaries that are easily tested and assessed. He noted

It's just the way that the class dynamic forms. But, if the student is struggling, and the parents want to know if my expectations are valid, then administration,

you know, they're going to have the same wonders. But, over the years, it's just all kinda evened out. I always have parents ask me questions.

Ultimately, he believed that open communication with parents and administrators was always the best way to address such concerns. He even expressed an appreciation for parents that question his methods, noting "if a parent is going to come and confront me in defense of their child, in a way it's a good thing, because it's nice to see somebody being a parent."

Karen reiterated the importance of engaging parents in a dialogue. The only issue that she consistently had parental concerns about was Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, which was required reading in the IB-1 syllabus. In each instance she "asked the parents to come in and talk to me about their concerns, and I listen to them, and we talk about how the book is handled in class, and they have agreed to let their children read it." Only once had she had a parent still refuse after such a discussion. In that instance the student's mother declared, "I won't read it; it's filth." In that case Karen gave the student an alternative text.

Ultimately, each of the participants spoke of the importance of dialogue in critical literacy studies and their responsibility to discuss concerns with students, parents, and administrators that could have a different perception of what literacy instruction should be. Critical literacy is meant to be an emancipatory practice, and as such it was important that dialogue was invited and valued. Additionally, critical literacy's emancipatory goals required that teachers always considered the needs and abilities of the student. The teachers all embraced these concepts in their daily classroom practices, and their interactions with students, parents, and administrators.

Critical Literacy in Action

Critical literacy practices within the classroom varied from class to class and day-to-day, but across the data, the teachers all focused on critical literacy as a tool for textual analysis. Participants stressed in their classes that, when working with any text, students must always consider authorial intent, especially in relation to the author's target audience and through the literary devices employed. An emphasis was also placed on considering the time, place, and culture in which a work was written. Students worked to understand the social norms of the time in which a text was created, including grasping common words and usages of the period. Heather noted

I try to get them to think about the social context in which stories are being written as well, and how the author's insights inform what the author's writing, and how, the way that, the way that society at large receives a piece of writing can influence the message that it sent.

Asking such questions of a text is essential to critical literacy and supports the students' ability to become independent critical literacy practitioners. These tools were intertwined, and during my observations students' use of these tools never appeared in isolation. However, they were distinct and warranted individualized attention as discrete components of critical literacy practice. One use of critical literacy was as a tool for textual analysis.

Critical literacy as a tool for textual analysis. One aspect of using critical literacy for textual analysis is in the questions a reader asks of a text. The suggested questions varied between teachers, but a few common questions were observed across the data, such as, Whose voice was privileged? Whose voice was left out or misrepresented?

What was their social position? How did that exclusion or mis-inclusion shape the character? Did a characterization rely on, and even build upon, stereotypes? Such questions are a key facet of critical literacy pedagogy and are of value to the reader, whether the focus is purely academic, or if it also involves a component of social justice.

Although she spoke about her appreciation for the social justice aspects of critical literacy, for Karen critical literacy was primarily an academic tool for textual analysis.

She emphasized this point when she said

You are going to see. Over and over, again I'm going to say, "find a place in the text." So you know, for example, if somebody starts saying, "I don't think it's fair. I don't think it's fair that this character said that to this character," we will inevitably go back to the text and say, "Let's see the language used, and then see if the author is using any hints to us to help us make judgments on that. What are we supposed to understand, based on the way it's presented in the text?"

In such instances, the class was focused on what was in the text specifically, and, to a much lesser extent if at all, about how the text influenced the world around it. These practices were observed in Karen's class, as discussed earlier, in relation to the character in the Flannery O'Connor story. Karen was not the only participant to engage in critical literacy practices in this way; all of the participants demonstrated similar practices during my observations. I was able to observe Michael's students analyzing the class and social commentary in *Citizen Kane*, Valerie's students as they worked to relate Dr. Seuss' *The Butter Battle Book* to the Cold War, and Heather's students working to understand the underlying social and gendered messages in fairytales. Each participant strove to teach

his or her students the importance of asking such questions of a text in an effort to gain a more thorough and contextual understanding of a text.

The need to consider authorial intent. Considering authorial intent is a conversation loaded with potential tripping points. Philosophers have argued for ages trying to answer questions such as, “Can a person ever truly know the intent of another? Can a person even know his or her own intent at all times?” Thankfully, answering those questions was not the goal here. Knowing an author’s intent, though not a traditional tenet of critical literacy was important in the teachings of these critical literacy practitioners. Additionally, for the participants, knowing an author’s intent was not an exercise in philosophy, but a consideration of what had influenced an author to create a text. The determination of authorial intent need be no more revelatory than an author’s desire to merely tell a story. Of course, such a determination could also disclose that the author’s goal was as deliberate as working to directly sway public opinion and influence the beliefs of a population. The key for critical literacy is to understand intent and audience, and not necessarily to identify an author’s existential effort at finding his or her place in the universe.

Therefore, when working toward understanding an author’s intent, critical literacy practitioners seek to understand those “knowable” influences that have shaped the author. Karen noted that, while “studying Flannery O’Connor, [they’ve] had some interesting discussions on the whole, the Catholic concept of grace, and how that can affect a writer’s choice of subjects.” She also shared that while reading Othello, the class “talked about the role of race in that play, within the context of the Elizabethan era.” Such

conversations about considering an author's life experience in relation to authorial intent were observed across the group of participants.

Heather also stressed the importance of considering the author in relation to the text through the activities designed for students. She told me that

I ask them to write a script or do an interview with a character that requires a deeper understanding of the character, of the author's motivation. You know, the fact that the character is a puppet of the author; the fact that anything a character says leads to some other event or happening or something else is going on in the book. I think it helps them too. I think it forces them to do a different type of thinking than if I just said, "write a paper about how this and this are related."

And I know that's what they are going to have to do when they get to high school, but I feel like maybe my job at this point is to get them, to make them, capable of questioning things and using the text to support whatever opinion they have.

Because the characters in a text can never be separated from the author, an understanding of the author's own experiences can lead the reader to a clearer understanding of a text.

Understanding time, place, and culture in which a work was written.

Explorations of an author's life experiences were not reserved for discussing inside the classroom. Each participant also assigned projects in which students worked to explore the time, culture, and lifestyle of the authors. Such explorations considered O'Connor growing up a Catholic woman in the Deep South during segregation, John Donne walking along the Strand in the late 16th and early 17th centuries London. Students also studied the literary influences of the Cold War and Vietnam, or Nawal El Saadawi the modern day Egyptian women's rights activist and author. In each case, the teachers

encouraged their students to envision the time and place in which the author was living so that they would in turn have a better understanding of the lens through which the author is viewing the world.

With El Saadawi as one example, students engaged in “preliminary research that involved cultural research on Egyptian history, and the history of power in Egypt, as well as the waves of feminism in Egypt, which definitely affects how the, you know, how the story was written.” Additionally, I observed students studying propaganda, including instructional videos of “how to spot a communist,” and pro-America cartoons from the World War II era, as well as protest songs in relation to America’s involvement in Vietnam. This effort was aimed at understanding and deconstructing the propaganda used to rally or dispute domestic support for those wars. Such understandings are essential to critical literacy as the time and place in which an author works obviously has a tremendous influence on that work. Understanding the author’s world is a step toward understanding the author’s intent, and that is a key aspect of critical literacy for these participants.

Of course there is no way to know exactly why any author created a text in a particular way. Teachers know this, and students know this as well. So how does a teacher encourage such a line of inquiry in a manner that is academically valid, while also not trying to imply that the teacher’s interpretation is the only one that is valid? Michael offered one potential response:

When they ask me the question, “How do you know the poet intended this, how do you know the author intended this?” With poetry, it’s a little easier because I can say, “I don’t know,” I can’t get the Ouija board out and ask William Blake

why he put all these images of nature in there. But I do see a pattern of imagery form, and then I get to make an interpretation. And as long as I'm basing it on what William Blake, or John Donne, or W.B. Yeats has in their poetry and in their world at the time, then I can say, "that's valid." If I'm backing it up with actual text, then I'm ok. I can't say I'm 100% right, because I can't talk to these people. Critical literacy relies on one's ability to consider the many possible points of view of a writer, including those influenced by their own life experiences. To really begin to understand a text and place it in a social and cultural context, one must look beyond the author alone and try to understand the world in which the author was writing. Sometimes this is a matter of merely considering an alternative point of view to one's own; at other times, one must learn alternative meanings for words, research a time and place very different from the one in which they currently live, and try to view the world through a lens other than their own.

Source material. Critical literacy pedagogy requires the use of multiple texts to analyze a situation, rather than taking one interpretation as being representative of the whole. Texts, as mentioned previously, include a wide variety of representations meant to express meaning. These include, but are not limited to, books, magazines, newspapers, websites, ezines, movies, videos, graphic novels, advertisements, blogs, wikis, chat rooms, and so forth. During my observations, students and teachers engaged in critical literacy practices most often with novels, but they also spent time working with a movie (*Citizen Kane*), propaganda videos (*Duck and Cover*), a documentary (*The Lynchburg Colony*), as well as reviewing speeches, songs, the Declaration of Human Rights, and

first-person accounts of the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide. Critical literacy was used in a wide variety of ways during my time with the participants.

Books and collected works. As previously noted, novels made up a significant portion of the “texts” used during my observations. Analysis of my field notes and participant interviews reflected, as one would expect in an English class, a primary focus on novels, short stories, and fairytale collections, as well as poetry and historical and biographical nonfiction.

Multiple sources. One of the most important aspects of critical literacy pedagogy is teaching students to seek out and examine multiple sources on a given topic. This was one of the most represented critical literacy practices across the data. Each teacher, on more than one occasion, referred his or her students to “outside” sources that were used to help students gain a deeper, and hopefully clearer, picture of the events taking place in the primary source.

For example, Heather noted that “It’s important to get them to understand audience and purpose, and to understand that there are many sides to any story, and that there are primary source documents as well as novels as well as all that sort of thing.” In an effort to accomplish this, she had a guest speaker that shared personal experiences:

About Rwanda and some of the genocide museums in Rwanda; that is what she comes to share with us. Basically here’s the situation, here’s a timeline, here’s some of the things that lead up to it. And then we get into some primary source documents like interviews with the killers, and the Hutu 10 commandments, and have them thinking about those. But she also ... One of the things from the

genocide museums was listing 14 million people killed in North America from the time Columbus landed.

Heather noted the immediate response of the students in relation to the statement that the European invasion of the Americas was genocide. One of her students asked Heather and the guest speaker, “Didn’t it say in the definition that genocide couldn’t be an act of war, where soldiers are fighting against soldiers?” This led to a discussion, as Heather recalled, about the “equitable distribution of power and delineating the difference between a war (relatively equal combatants) or a genocide, in which an overwhelming force imposes its will upon a people.” Such dialogue represents the power of critical literacy to question the accepted “norms” in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. These experiences offered students a chance to exercise their “voices” and hopefully begin to feel a sense of empowerment in relation to their opinions. Heather, as well as the other participants, admitted that it took far more than a single exchange to allow students to re-visualize the world in which they live.

Electronic media. Movies and videos were two other “alternative” sources used during the observations. Electronic media allowed students to consider a topic in a different way. Rather than imagine what an author wanted a reader to see, the viewer was given an image and must then interpret its meaning.

Michael’s students viewed *Citizen Kane* and used critical literacy skills to interpret Orson Wells’ work in relation to “class consciousness, the drive for power, and social status.” During these discussions, students made several keen observations, including the lack of people of color in the movie and the varied speech patterns of characters according to social class. Critical literacy was not being used merely as a tool

for finding faults with a work. To the contrary, critical literacy in this example, as well as many other such interactions I observed, was also a tool for understanding the author's message. Michael believed that

If you can take a critical look at what Orson Wells does in *Citizen Kane*, then you can take a critical look at a case study, or take a critical look at text, and look for good, and look for bad. If you can look at the components of any situation, you're going to be smarter than the other people.

After the viewing of *Citizen Kane*, I observed the students and the instructor discussing how Wells and Mankiewicz used the film as a social commentary on the excesses of the time, particularly in relation to William Randolph Hearst. In the end, the students seemed to agree that Wells' and Mankiewicz's film was essentially a work of critical literacy as it intended to question the social class structure of the day.

Valerie's class also engaged in a critical literacy discussion of a piece of electronic media as they explored the use of propaganda during the Cold War. They analyzed two videos from the *Duck and Cover* series that was viewed by students across the United States from the late 1940's to the early 1960's. Valerie's students quickly questioned the reasoning behind hiding under a desk or covering one's self in the case of a nuclear blast. The students found the videos to be "silly" and felt that they were made that way so they would "not scare children to death." Nonetheless, with Valerie's guidance, students also started to explore the idea that these videos were intended to make people "worried about the atomic bomb, but not to the point of questioning our own humanity in using it." Because the students being observed during this research were still very young (7th graders) Valerie felt it was inappropriate to show them pictures of the

victims of Hiroshima. She did spend a few minutes, however, explaining the power of an atomic bomb in terms that they could understand. She used common landmarks of the area to denote the general level of destruction and numbers of deaths that an atomic bomb would cause.

These participants did not rely on one single source for information, but sought and encouraged their students to seek, multiple sources for information. Participants used sources that were readily available to their students, such as works of historical fiction, novels from the same time period, biographies and autobiographies, electronic media, and primary documents. Teachers also introduced students to valuable though less common sources, such as living witnesses who could recall first-hand experiences during an event. Teachers were not selecting multiple sources to simply imply opposing viewpoints. The goal of these participants, and therefore their choice of critical literacy, was to make students aware that there are always alternative views of every event. If one is to make an informed interpretation of an event, whether it is an author's portrayal or a history textbook's lesson, those working within a critical literacy framework must always consider those alternative viewpoints.

Students' Ways of Working With Books

Participants used a wide variety of sources, and while none of them ever declared a preference for one form of text over another, it was obvious that the written word was the central focus for these teachers. Of course, this is to be expected, as the participants were Secondary ELA teachers working in English classrooms. Previously, it was noted that teachers taught their students to ask specific questions of a text, as well as the ways they led by example by encouraging students to seek multiple sources and the way they

modeled their beliefs in relation to students developing and expressing their own voices. It is important to look at how students used these skills, in class as well as on larger assignments and group projects.

Book discussions. By far the most commonly observed critical literacy practice involved open discussions of books. Book discussions appeared in each of the teachers' classes in one form or another. Whole group discussions were observed in all of the classes. Student-led and student-group-led book discussions were observed to a lesser extent. Either during observations or interviews, each participant noted using these three discussion formats to differing degrees throughout the year.

Whole group discussion. The most prevalent form of discussion was "whole group," which was directed, at least at the outset, by the teacher and often focused on deepening students' overall comprehension of the book. Whole group discussions were observed in each teacher's class at least once. While none of the participants used the "right there" questions discussed earlier, these teacher-led discussions appeared to be goal-oriented and scripted. Each teacher had several sections of each class in a day, and a certain amount of scripting was to be expected.

In my observations, the scripts served mostly as talking points to reenergize or refocus discussions that had lost momentum or wandered too far off topic. None of the teachers appeared to be tied to the script's, they varied their questions in each class and quickly abandoned the script as long as students kept the discussion moving. At one point in my observation of Michael's class, he moved to the seat next to mine and just watched as the students debated the imagery in John Donne's *Go and Catch a Falling Star*. He told me that he loved being part of the discussion, joking that he "really only

does this job because [he] like[s] to talk about literature.” But, he added that he does find it “rewarding to step back from time to time and watch them go.” After the students reached a stalemate on one particular image, Michael re-entered the discussion and guided the students toward thinking about what John Donne saw on a daily basis, living in London, walking along the Strand, and watching the ships coming and going.

Student-led discussions. Several examples of “student-led” discussions were observed in both Valerie’s and Karen’s classes. These discussions differed from the whole-group discussions in that students were required to arrive to class with prewritten discussion questions that would be handed in for a grade at the end of the period. Such discussions often started off resembling a question and answer session between the students, but with a little teacher guidance, these discussions broke the surface and moved toward deeper meaning. One such example, as mentioned earlier, was when Karen’s class undertook the discussion of O’Connor’s depiction of a character as being a “fat, snooty, know it all.” The question about O’Connor’s use of a stereotype arose from a single student, but quickly became a topic for class discussion that ultimately led to the students deciding as a group that this particular depiction was a stereotype that added nothing to the story.

Student-group-led discussions. The third form of book discussions I observed was student-group-led and were only seen in Heather’s class, although the other participants stated in interviews that they used these types of discussions as well. For instance, between class periods while inquiring about the class discussion I had just observed (reported above), Michael told me

In IB we do ... were dealing almost exclusively, as a classroom discussion goes, we're dealing almost exclusively with literature. And when we get to that third poet, which this year will happen to be Yeats, I turn it over to them. I put them in groups, and they have to ... the simplest way I put it to them is that they have to do with their poem what I do. They have to lead the class in looking at the poem and getting to some sort of understanding, some sort of interpretation.

In Heather's class, a student-group-led discussion was observed. Like the student-led discussions mentioned previously, student-group-led discussions also required the students to come to class with prepared questions that would be turned in at the end of the period. In this case, the students took on a much more authoritative role, as each group was meant to lead the class in discussion with little, or no interjections from the teacher. During these discussions, Heather moved to a table at the back of the room, and the group that was in charge moved to the front of the room, taking the position of power.

For these activities the group was tasked with creating four or five questions about a common text that would spark discussion, while also trying to get the class to consider the text within the larger context of a thematic unit they were all working within. Each group had crafted these questions during the previous class period. While Valerie did not require that the group turn their questions in ahead of time, she did tell me that the groups were allowed to use her as a resource when crafting the questions. Questions observed in Heather's class included, "What do you think you would have done in Anne Frank's situation? Could you remain silent all day long? Would you ever get to the point of just wanting to leave no matter what?"

Assignments

The participants reported using a wide array of engaging assignments for students throughout the year. When asked, none of the teachers differentiated any of their assignments as being specifically critical literacy assignments, nor did they identify any as being traditional English class assignments. Across the data, each assignment involved students' demonstrating their critical literacy skills in one way or another. None of these assignments would be considered new to the English classroom, but they are valuable to the research because they demonstrate the manner in which a teacher can adapt a "traditional" curriculum to create a curriculum based on critical literacy practices. A few of the assignments observed included journaling, rewriting of a text, and even staging mock trials of characters from a text.

Journaling. The participants shared a belief that having students explore a work through the use of a personal journal was a good way to allow students to meaningfully engage in a "dialogue" with an author. For Karen, journals were a consistent part of her classes throughout the year. Periodically students would submit those journals so that Karen could review, comment on, and grade them. At times she would give the students specific prompts in relation to a text, while at other times she would ask them to free write, even asking students to "imagine themselves as the author while asking and then answering their own questions about a text." I asked Karen why she had them do this and how she came up with the idea in the first place. She felt that for critical literacy to be effective, it was of the utmost importance that readers work to connect with authors. She noted

The whole concept of, you know, authorial intent: what is the intention? Let's look and see, let's trace it, and how it gets built. That, you know, is a way to develop readers or writers, (laughs) and to allow them to understand that, finally. This is not ... literature is not something that stops when they leave my classroom; that it is a life survival skill and a way of seeing the world that will serve them very well whatever they go into. And to make connections with people, and I'm not talking about IBM business connections. But I'm talking about the shared humanity that we all have to comprehend in order to coexist.

On several occasions, Karen expressed her belief in the importance of the reader developing an understanding of an author in order to better understand the text. By having the students take on the role of "author," she was asking them to consider how they themselves might come to write such a work. According to Karen, being able to internalize a work allowed students to become critical literacy practitioners, as reflected in their capacity to answer (to a greater degree) the questions critical literacy pedagogy requires of a text. As Michael expressed earlier, most often we can not ask an author why he or she wrote what he or she did the way he or she did. Michael added, "I guess that's what it all boils down to. You don't have to know; you don't have to get it from the horse's mouth; you just have to know what you see." Imagining one's self through the lens of the author was one way in which these teachers supported students in learning to "see" a text.

Rewriting of a text. In a vein similar to envisioning one's self as the author, there is the act of actually becoming the author of the text. Critical literacy practitioners

see the act of rewriting a text to be most empowering. In fact, it is often considered one of the central tenets of critical literacy.

On more than one occasion, Valerie mentioned her fondness for the work of Paulo Freire, even stating that [*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*] “should almost be a bible for education programs.” On several occasions she asked students to rewrite or rework a passage of text in an effort to make the voices of those excluded from the text heard. Her goal was to help the students acknowledge those members of a society who were not included in a text, even though they existed in the time and place that a work was written. One example she gave was that of having her students rewrite the court scene from *To Kill a Mockingbird* from the point of view of Tom Robinson. She also did this by having her students read memoirs of Japanese-American citizens’ experiences in American internment camps during WWII or discussing the role that Chinese workers had in building America’s railroads. When I asked her to further clarify the value of such acts as critical literacy practices, she mentioned that she considered herself a “political animal” and that her personal experience of feeling “disenfranchised in law school” made her even more conscious of the plight of “the other” in society and that “rewriting a text can be a form of empowerment.” She also laughingly shared that one act that would really exemplify critical literacy to her would be to “rewrite the *Last of the Mohicans*, from the point of view of the Native Americans.”

Mock trials. Although staging a mock trial is by no means a new concept in teaching, Heather used mock trials for characters in fairytales as an introductory tool for critical literacy. While I was not observing classes during the right time of year to

experience the mock trials in-person, Heather discussed them at length in an interview. Heather explained how mock trials were planned and carried out.

Student teams identify a crime that's taken place, and then they take two sides of the issue. And then they collect evidence, and they create interviews with characters and figure out what their point of view would be on it and how that would affect what they say ... and it's really cool to overhear their conversations when they are talking they are like, "Well, if we say that this guy saw this, then is there evidence from the text?" Or they really can't find evidence from the text, and so I tell them that everything they say has to be supported by the text.

Heather was the only participant that noted using mock trials on a regular basis. Valerie and Michael mentioned the use of mock trials, but neither noted having used them in recent years.

Social justice

When it came to critical literacy as a component of social justice, the participants all expressed the belief that critical literacy was in fact a valuable tool for those working toward engaging in social justice. However, while each of the participants expressed an understanding that critical literacy can be a powerful tool for social justice, only Heather and Valerie indicated that they actively used critical literacy with such intent in their classes. Consequently, the majority of this section will focus on how Heather and Valerie worked to move their students toward social action.

Social justice goals of participants. Heather and Valerie operated under the belief that it was the duty of all people to work to improve the lives of those less fortunate. When observing Michael and Karen I never had an opportunity to see lessons

aimed at moving students toward social justice. Alternatively, social justice was at the center of everything Valerie and Heather did in the classroom and should be considered the axis of each of their pedagogies. The primary methods through which these teachers engaged their students in social justice activities were by working to empower students and then by moving them to action. Heather and Valerie definitely subscribed to the idea that once a person knows about social inequalities s/he must act upon them. Both teachers rejected the idea of just sitting back and waiting until students were moved toward social action.

Student empowerment. Before a person can be moved to act, he or she must first feel empowered. Heather and Valerie reported that they worked all year at helping students develop a feeling of self-empowerment. To accomplish this, they each noted modeling a respect for student opinions during discussions, assigning projects that required students to develop and share their opinions, and efforts to instill a sense of value for student opinions through the manner in which the teachers conducted class. Heather created a lesson in which her students

Wrote letters to government officials or the newspaper and a lot of them got responses back. So I thought that was very validating. Even people who did not consider themselves writers were like “Look what I got.” And actually the principal pulled aside a group, some of them were my less motivated folks, and so they got feedback from it. And I think seeing writing as a ... getting to the point where they can see writing as a tool for accomplishing something that you want to accomplish.

Valerie also shared a desire to help students develop their own opinions and learn how to express those opinions. During one interview she told me

I would say that that is probably the motivation for wanting to spend time on critical literacy. It is about helping students to develop their own opinions about everything. I think that that's ... I think once you can get kids past the reading comprehension stage, that that's the next most important thing. Once they can understand what they read and that they can make informed decisions about the information that they're reading, it is a citizen's job to keep their mouth open. So I want these kids to understand why it's important to be up-to-date on current affairs. To understand as best they can, and then ask questions. Ask question after question after question about what their government is doing in their name. Because student empowerment was such an important aspect of Heather's and Valerie's pedagogies, developing student voice was a central focus of both teachers.

Student voice. When students' opinions differed from the teacher's or from classmates', both Valerie and Heather expressed the need to give the students a space to articulate those opinions. The teachers did this by insisting other students show the same respect that they would want shown to them and by engaging in an open dialogue with the entire class.

One such experience, which was discussed earlier, occurred when a student in Heather's class questioned the validity of defining the European colonization of the Americas as genocide. Ultimately, Heather told the student, "This would be a great topic for your society (part of a class project). Here are the definitions of genocide, and maybe

you can talk about the way Native Americans do or don't fit into that definition." Even though Heather did not agree with her student's opinion,

I kinda also was glad that he didn't just accept what it was saying. That tells me that he feels comfortable, even if I don't agree with him personally. He felt comfortable bringing that up and didn't feel like other people were going to tell him that he was stupid.

Heather demonstrated an appreciation and respect for student voice by validating his opinions and encouraging him to explore the term further. She did not challenge him to prove his point, only to further develop his understanding and express his belief about the term genocide.

Social activism. Within the data, there were several examples of students "practicing" social activism. These efforts were labeled "practice" because they were largely limited to the school context and were not intended to engage people outside of the classroom anymore than a persuasive essay assignment is meant to truly persuade someone in the real world. Specifically, students were working to hone a skill; they were practicing social activism. In practicing social activism within the class setting, the students tackled several intense issues by engaging in discussions, putting oppressors on trial, writing letters, doing group presentations, and finally creative expression. The acts of creative expression included a "zine" that explored the oppression of children worldwide and a "Pyramid of Hate" that illustrated the manner in which even the smallest of inequalities could ultimately lead to oppression, war, and even genocide.

The zine. Valerie believed in taking a multisided approach to any issue and encouraged her students to explore and express through a multitude of methods. The

“zine” (a self-published magazine) is one such effort. It allowed students to express their understanding of a topic, while also offering their opinions about that topic. At times, students combined drawings, photographs, essay, and poetry in an effort to deepen and convey their understandings of a topic. As described by Valerie,

[Students] create this thing called a zine after we ... I have ways to introduce them, dabble, sort of, into child soldiers, into, “Do you know where your chocolate comes from?” “Do you know how your soccer ball is put together? Let’s look at the labels on all our clothing, or shoes at home.” And so we do little investigations and presentations about these kinds of inequities that exist in the world. And then more research into even the human trafficking, which is shocking to kids. I try to keep it, like with the child [being] a soldier; that also is very shocking to them. They’re their age and younger even. Doing that and creating this personal zine, which is a statement; sort of like a blog, but it’s a hard copy. I make it with cereal box covers, that’s a little technique so that it doesn’t come unbound, and use duct tape to make hard covers. And they’re really cool books, and they have pages that go in there. I think that is one thing to really expose those kinds of inequities.

By asking students to represent their understandings through the creation of a zine, Valerie was allowing students to express their understandings in a manner that was both personally authentic and relevant. In just one assignment, Valerie demonstrated to her students that (a) they have valid opinions, (b) they have the right to express those opinions, and (c) it is appropriate if they express opinions in a variety of formats. She was valuing student voice and encouraging student empowerment.

The Pyramid of Hate. In Heather's classroom, this project was not an expression of hatred for other people or cultures. It was an actual representation of the manner in which small acts of hatred that go unchecked by society can eventually lead to oppression on a global scale. The Pyramid of Hate was a large triangle (3 feet high) drawn onto a larger piece of paper that occupied one whole corner of the classroom and which was part of a larger human rights project. Heather told me that "the pyramid of hate, which comes from the SHOA Foundation, works with the basic idea that prejudiced attitudes lead to acts of prejudice, which lead to acts of discrimination, lead to violence, lead to genocide." She noted that her students only thought of one historical event as a genocide. She said, "When I ask them to list genocides all they could think about was the holocaust." She pointed out that the holocaust was a valuable point of study, but it was also important for students to realize that this particular genocide was not an anomaly, but that genocide had before, and continues to, destroy human rights in the most horrific ways. Speaking of the human rights project that had included creating the Pyramid of Hate, Heather declared

That is the unit that ... It's the unit I'm never willing to let go of. I think that it makes students examine the idea of inequality and injustice. And think of it as not just something that happens in other countries and that other people do. It helps them make that connection between little things, like putting a 'kick me' sign on somebody's back, and putting a Jewish star on somebody's shoulder. The leap from that to that is not that big, and I think that they tend to just shrug it all off and say, 'Oh I was just teasing.' You know, or whatever, but if you can get them to make that connection, between here's that little type of bullying. But it doesn't

stay little for long, because of the prejudiced attitudes that go into it and feed into it.

Heather's class used the Pyramid of Hate to demonstrate how things that are seemingly small at one point in time can become the base upon which atrocities are eventually built. Heather liked using the pyramid because of its visual power and the fact that students could work with it throughout the year. Working with the pyramid across an academic year allowed Heather to

Meet them where they are, and then getting them to think about deeper issues as we move through the year. I think, as a way of scaffolding them to a point where they are able to, I don't feel like at the beginning of the 8th grade year they'd be able to handle ... you know, some of them still aren't able to handle it the way that I would like for them to. At least to start thinking about it in a larger context and understanding that idea that prejudiced attitudes lead up to genocide. And I think that if you asked any of them, "What is the idea behind the Pyramid of Hate?" At least they would be able to tell you that. So that little things lead to big things.

Heather felt that this project represented the need for and power of both critical literacy and social justice. No matter if it was examining a text that misrepresents a population, or acknowledging seemingly minor acts of cruelty, Heather believed it was imperative that students learn how to identify, and hopefully speak out against, such instances wherever and whenever they encountered them.

Social justice was not stated as a specific goal for the participants as a whole, but it was acknowledged as being a valuable component of critical literacy by each of them.

I believe that all of the participants engaged in social justice to some extent whether it was through the critical lens with which they taught their students to view texts, or, if it was more explicit in nature, teaching students the skills to become social activists and giving them the space in which to practice those skills. Social justice was a component of each of their critical literacy pedagogies.

Something's missing. Missing from the data were any instances of resistance to critical literacy practices. The literature cited many reports of complaints and resistance to critical literacy practices from students, parents, administrators, and colleagues as well. However, neither through interviews nor within observations was any form of resistance to critical literacy practices documented. Each participant could recall an occasion or two in which they had to discuss their pedagogical choices with parents or administrators, but none of those discussions related to critical literacy. In fact, when asked specifically: "Have you met any professional resistance to implementing a critical literacy pedagogy?" Each participant simply answered "no," twice followed, after a long pause, with stories about parental complaints in their careers. These stories however, did not reflect any issue with critical literacy and I attributed them to the participants desire to answer the question I posed. One teacher recalled an instance in which a student disputed the grade a teacher had recorded, and the other case was discussed earlier in relation to Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*.

Summary

At the outset, participants struggled to provide a definition of critical literacy. However, through a combination of discussions and actions, each proved to be a critical literacy practitioner who embraced the core tenets of critical literacy in their classrooms.

According to the participants, working to develop a curriculum that promoted critical literacy practices while also conforming to the expectations of prescribed curricula, responding to student needs, and meeting parental and administrative expectations posed a challenge. Critical literacy was important enough to the participants that they were willing to put in the extra time and effort it took to integrate critical literacy into their classes.

Developing student voice and supporting students as they grew to develop and express their own opinions were two key focal points for the four participants. The goal of understanding the value of questioning a text, and as such the author, was central to each participant's pedagogy. These teachers sought to educate their students to the one-sided nature of representation, that they should not take one point of view as being superior, but that they should seek a multitude of opinions before committing to a belief themselves. Social justice was a fundamental principle in Valerie's as well as Heather's classrooms. The social justice component of critical literacy was missing from Michael and Karen's classrooms. While Michael and Karen each considered social justice a valuable aspect of critical literacy practices, they did not engage their students in activities aimed at promoting social justice.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Washing one's hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral.
— Paulo Freire

Introduction

Paulo Freire believed that literacy was essential to social equality. Freire's life's work was based upon the idea that literacy's greatest benefit was the power it gave people, of all races and across socioeconomic boundaries, to work to shape their own world as well as their place in that world. As our schools come to reflect America's growing national diversity, it is imperative, as noted in chapter 2, that teachers work to adopt teaching practices based on equality and an appreciation for the multiple cultures populating their classrooms (Banks & Banks, 2003; Bruna, 2007).

As a teacher, I adopted critical literacy pedagogy because of its ability to promote equality and help students develop an appreciation for multiple cultures. However, as a teacher educator, I knew that my experiences alone were insufficient to inform my instruction of preservice teachers on critical literacy. Additionally, there was a lack of research about how teachers used critical literacy to provide information for the dominant social classes to become more socially aware. Traditionally, as seen in chapter 2, critical literacy has been viewed primarily as a tool for empowerment, but it should also be considered as a tool for enlightenment (Foss, 2002).

In chapter 2 it was reported that the overwhelming majority of teachers in America are white and middle-class, (Fernandez, 2003; Hill-Jackson 2007) and they've rarely had a reason to question the power structures that exist in our country, let alone in the texts they experience on a daily basis (Banks & Banks, 2003; Bruna, 2007). My goal

as a teacher educator and researcher was to explore how best to introduce critical literacy to my preservice teaching students in a way that not only encouraged them to adopt critical literacy pedagogy, but also inspired them to become critical literacy practitioners themselves. In order to accomplish this, it was important to observe firsthand how a variety of classroom teachers used critical literacy practices and to better understand why those teachers made the choice to become critical literacy practitioners in the first place.

The following questions guided my research:

- How do English language arts teachers define critical literacy?
- What issues, public and private, must they negotiate to become critical literacy practitioners?
- How do public school English language arts teachers implement critical literacy pedagogy into their classrooms?
- What motivates English language arts teachers to adopt a critical literacy agenda into their curriculum?

Within this chapter, the research findings are discussed and situated within the literature. The implications of this research for the practices of teachers, administrators, school districts, teacher educators and the researcher are also discussed. Finally, several suggestions for future research are offered.

Conclusions

The results of this study aligned well with the literature at times, especially with relation to effective classroom techniques such as: (a) open classroom dialogue, (b) consulting multiple sources, (c) encouraging student voice, and (d) entertaining multiple viewpoints (Behrman, 2006; Lesley, 2008; Lewison et al, 2002). When related to the

NCTE/NCATE standards and CEE beliefs the data reflected several gaps in relation to critical literacy practices. These data also reflected several distinct shifts away from the common literature. Some of the most important deviations from the literature appeared in relation to the participants' working definitions of critical literacy and the lack of resistance that the participants experienced relative to their use of critical literacy practices. Finally, a significant finding was the lack of discussion around the textual constructs of women, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and the transgendered, which likely factored into the lack of resistance these teachers experienced. As disappointing as it was, the cloistered nature of our society made it of little surprise that public school teachers were avoiding LGBT issues. However, it did come as a great surprise that none of the participants noted any effort toward using critical literacy to help offset the inequality women continue to face in our society.

There were many reports in the literature of conflicts experienced by critical literacy practitioners in the classroom, the teachers' workroom, even from parents and administrators (Apple, 1995, 2000; Glazier, 2007; Jones and Enriquez, 2009; McNair, 2002; King, & Others, 1993; Schmidt, Armstrong, & Everett, 2007). Resistance to critical literacy practices was not topic specific. The issue of resistance to critical literacy was so prevalent in the literature as demonstrated in chapter 2, that an initial focus of this study was on finding ways to support teachers dealing with the various types of conflicts related to critical literacy practices. However, after a thorough examination, it was apparent that no such conflicts of this kind were present in the data. This was significant as it brought into question one of the predominant reasons new teachers cited (Glazier,

2007; Jones and Enriquez, 2009) for not continuing critical literacy practices beyond the university setting.

The Findings

Alignment with NCTE/NCATE Standards & CEE Beliefs. As discussed in Chapter 2, this inquiry was guided by and aligned with four specific principles set forth in the NCTE/NCATE Standards for Initial Preparation of Teachers of Secondary English Language Arts, Grades 7-12, as well as CEE’s *Eight Beliefs for Supporting Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Learners in English Education*.

NCTE/NCATE Standards

- Standard (3.3.2) Use a range of approaches to help students draw upon past experiences, sociocultural backgrounds, interests, capabilities, and understandings to make meaning of texts.
- Standard (3.5) Demonstrating knowledge of and uses for an extensive range of literature.
- Standard (4.4) Create opportunities for students to analyze how context affects language and to monitor language use and behavior to demonstrate respect for individual differences.
- Standard (4.8) Engage students in discovering their personal response to text and ways to connect such responses to larger meanings and critical stances.

Table 1 illustrates whether participants demonstrated an effort to address these standards.

NCTE Standards	Karen	Michael	Valerie	Heather
NCTE Standard (3.3.2)	The data did not reflect participant’s practice of this standard	The data did not reflect participant’s practice of this standard	Interviews referred to book choice and variety of assessments	Interviews referred to book choice and variety of assessments

NCTE Standard (3.5)	Observations and interviews reflected the use of a wide variety of texts, genres, and sources	Observations and interviews reflected the use of a wide variety of texts, genres, and sources	Observations and interviews reflected the use of a wide variety of texts, genres, and sources	Observations and interviews reflected the use of a wide variety of texts, genres, and sources
NCTE Standard (4.4)	During interviews the participant noted classroom practice of Discussing authorial choice of language and the way that those choices affect the text. Also gave the class the opportunity to use a substitute word for a socially offensive word such as “nigger.”	The data did not reflect participant’s practice of this standard	During interviews the participant noted classroom practice of Discussing authorial choice of language and the way that those choices affect the text.	During interviews the participant noted classroom practice of Discussing authorial choice of language and the way that those choices affect the text.
NCTE Standard (4.8)	Interviews and observations reflected the participant’s efforts at developing student voice and respecting student opinions	Interviews and observations reflected the participant’s efforts at developing student voice and respecting student opinions	Interviews and observations reflected the participant’s efforts at developing student voice and respecting student opinions	Interviews and observations reflected the participant’s efforts at developing student voice and respecting student opinions

In relation to the NCTE/NCATE standards for English Education as noted in Chapter 4 we see that teachers are adequately addressing standards aimed at using a wide range of literature (standard 3.5) as each participant demonstrated, either in interviews or observations, the use of texts from various cultures and genres. Not bound by the IB curriculum, Heather and Valerie were also able to give students opportunities to choose

texts in relation to group and unit projects. This was observed, as described in Chapter 4, in Valerie's class in relation to the WW II unit and in Heather's class relative to the Human Rights Project.

Although Michael never indicated engaging in specific practices toward teaching students that the context in which a work is written affects the language (Standard 4.4), his classroom, as depicted in Chapter 4, did represent a respect for other cultures and points of view. Karen, Heather, and Valerie addressed this standard in each of their interviews with Karen's example, noted in Chapter 4, of allowing students to choose an alternate word for one that they deemed socially offensive, was the strongest representation of meeting standard 4.4.

While each participant expressed a desire that students explore their own understandings of the world and learn to express those understandings in a way that was personally meaningful (Standard 4.8). There were instances, as discussed in this chapter in relation to Teachers' Personality Traits, in which teachers at times suppressed student voices that did not specifically agree with the opinions of the teacher. Having gained an understanding of the participants and their beliefs about equality and social justice, I believe that these moments of suppressing student voice are most likely subconscious acts toward directing students in the "right" direction. Nonetheless, such actions do run counter to critical literacy practices (Lesley, 2008; Morrell, 2008, Wilhelm, 2010) and should be a point of focus for English Education programs.

The omission of practices aimed at addressing Standard (3.3.2) "Use a range of approaches to help students draw upon past experiences, sociocultural backgrounds, interests, capabilities, and understandings to make meaning of texts," was indeed glaring.

Although the student population of these classrooms was certainly homogenous in relation to race, each class was nonetheless populated by individuals with specific life experiences that influenced their personal worldviews, teachers need to tap into those experiences to create authentic learning spaces (Au, 2003; Chou, 2007; Foss, 2002; Moll & Others, 1992).

These data represented a continued need for English Education programs to better prepare teachers to teach in diverse classrooms and to use that diversity as a way to engage their students and enrich the learning environment (Boyd, et.al 2006; Chou, 2007; Sleeter, 1996). Because these standards are both NCTE and NCATE approved, they should be considered non-negotiable in any English Education program and warrant further attention and research.

CEE Beliefs. Although the *Eight Beliefs for Supporting Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Learners in English Education* are “beliefs” and not standards for accreditation, their value as a guide for English Education programs should be noted as well. A group of English Educators with years of classroom and research experiences, collectively constructed these beliefs in an effort to further guide English Education practices. These beliefs were conceived by English Educators for English Educators in an effort to address the growing need for supporting our diverse learning populations.

CEE Beliefs

1. Teachers and teacher educators must respect all learners and themselves as individuals with culturally defined identities.

2. Students bring funds of knowledge to their learning communities, and, recognizing this, teachers and teacher educators must incorporate this knowledge and experience into classroom practice.
3. Socially responsive and responsible teaching and learning requires an anthropologically and ethnographically informed teaching stance; teachers and teacher educators must be introduced to and routinely use the tools of practitioner/teacher research in order to ask difficult questions about their practice.
4. Students have a right to a variety of educational experiences that help them make informed decisions about their role and participation in language, literacy, and life.
5. Educators need to model culturally responsive and socially responsible practices for students.
6. All students need to be taught mainstream power codes/discourses and become critical users of language, while also having their home and street codes honored.
7. Teachers and teacher educators must be willing to cross traditional personal and professional boundaries in pursuit of social justice and equity.
8. Teaching is a political act, and in our preparation of future teachers and citizens, teachers and teacher educators need to be advocates for and models of social justice and equity.

Table 2 illustrates whether participants demonstrated an effort to address these beliefs.

CEE Beliefs	Karen	Michael	Valerie	Heather
CEE Belief 1	In interviews and during observations the participant			

	demonstrated an appreciation of cultures other than their own	demonstrated an appreciation of cultures other than their own	demonstrated an appreciation of cultures other than their own	demonstrated an appreciation of cultures other than their own
CEE Belief 2	The data did not reflect participant's practice of this standard	The data did not reflect participant's practice of this standard	The data did not reflect participant's practice of this standard	The data did not reflect participant's practice of this standard
CEE Belief 3	The data did not reflect participant's practice of this standard	The data did not reflect participant's practice of this standard	During interviews the participant referenced several practitioner texts and noted adapting their pedagogy as informed by those texts	During interviews the participant referenced several practitioner texts and noted adapting Her pedagogy as informed by those texts
CEE Belief 4	Interviews and observations reflected the participant's efforts at developing student voice and respecting student opinions	Interviews and observations reflected the participant's efforts at developing student voice and respecting student opinions	Interviews and observations reflected the participant's efforts at developing student voice and respecting student opinions	Interviews and observations reflected the participant's efforts at developing student voice and respecting student opinions
CEE Belief 5	Observations and interviews demonstrated the participants' understanding of and subscription to this belief.	Observations and interviews demonstrated the participants' understanding of and subscription to this belief.	Observations and interviews demonstrated the participants' understanding of and subscription to this belief.	Observations and interviews demonstrated the participants' understanding of and subscription to this belief.
CEE Belief 6	Did not have the opportunity to observe and was not discussed in the interviews.	Did not have the opportunity to observe and was not discussed in the interviews.	Did not have the opportunity to observe and was not discussed in the interviews.	Did not have the opportunity to observe and was not discussed in the interviews.
CEE Belief 7	The data did not reflect participant's practice of this standard	The data did not reflect participant's practice of this standard	The data did not reflect participant's practice of this standard	The data did not reflect participant's practice of this standard
CEE Belief 8	Participants were outspoken in observations and interviews as to their political views. The manner in which they decorated their rooms also reflected their beliefs in social	Participants were outspoken in observations and interviews as to their political views. The manner in which they decorated their rooms also reflected their beliefs in social	Participants were outspoken in observations and interviews as to their political views. The manner in which they decorated their rooms also reflected their beliefs in social	Participants were outspoken in observations and interviews as to their political views. The manner in which they decorated their rooms also reflected their beliefs in social

	action.	action.	action.	action.
--	---------	---------	---------	---------

When analyzing the data relative to the NCTE/NCATE standards there was evidence of minor deviations in and among the participants' demonstration of those standards as a whole. However, when analyzing the data in relation to the CEE beliefs it was only in relation to Belief 3 that we see any deviation among the participants. Although their methods varied, in every instance other than Belief 3 the results reflected homogeneity among the participants.

Throughout the interviews and observations the participants demonstrated a clear understanding of the need to respect their students as well as those students' cultures (Belief 1). Demonstrations of Belief 1 ranged from the subtle such as decorating one's classroom with iconic figures from a wide variety of cultures to the overt, such as lessons designed to explore and gain an appreciation for a variety of cultures. Valerie's class assignment in which students explored Egyptian culture before reading a book by an Egyptian author is an excellent example of the ways in which participants' actions demonstrated this belief.

As mentioned several times thus far, the populations of the observed classes were overwhelmingly homogeneous. It is not clear as to whether that played a role in the participants' lack of demonstrated effort toward engaging students in activities designed to access the funds of knowledge (Belief 2) that every individual brings with him or her. The feeling among the participants may have been that since the majority of students came from similar backgrounds, lessons designed for one would fit all. No matter the reason for this oversight, it is important that students have the opportunity to demonstrate their cultural knowledge as they work to make meaning in the school context (Moll, 1992).

In relation to Belief 3, Valerie and Heather each noted seeking out current practitioner works by well-known authors in the field such as Jim Burke and Kyleene Beers after hearing about them during staff development session. And, although the book is no longer new, Heather and Valerie each noted an admiration for Nancy Atwell's *In the Middle*. Valerie even expressed a predilection for reading practitioner works rather than modern fiction or the classics.

Conversely, neither Karen nor Michael made mention of any form of continuing education or engagement with practitioner or teacher research. However, because the interviews contained no questions referencing forms of ongoing education, there is not enough data to posit a theory as to Karen and Michael's pursuit of practitioner or research literature relative to the ELA classroom. Further inquiry with this specific group would be necessary before interpreting these data as representing a need for additional focus by English educators.

Because CEE Belief 4 so closely reflects NCTE/NCATE standard 4.8 the findings discussed relative to standard 4.8 are synonymous with the findings in relation to Belief 4 and should be referenced as such.

Across the data were examples of participants merging beliefs 5 & 8. As discussed in relation to the "make-up" of the participants' classrooms, each teacher demonstrated the need to be an active and informed citizen (Belief 8) that respected other cultures and social practices (Belief 5). Valerie expressed during interviews and demonstrated in observations her belief that was the duty of a citizen "to question what is being done" in his or her name (Belief 8). Heather's class practiced activism and was constantly working to see the world through the eyes of another (Belief 5). Both Karen

and Michael's classrooms reflected their beliefs in social activism and their dedication to challenging the status quo. Although this did not manifest itself in relation to the assignments students engaged in, observations revealed the participants' willingness to model socially active and culturally responsive behavior in their teaching and personal lives.

Because an overwhelming majority of the students in the observed classrooms came from homes in which the dialect of power was the common dialect, there were no opportunities to observe interactions with students using dialects outside of the mainstream "approved" dialect of school (Belief 6). The only mention of student usage of dialect outside of the approved was in relation to students writing in text-speak. Valerie made it clear that the use of text-speak in academic papers was inappropriate. Other than that there were no observations or discussions related to student dialect.

It was in relation to CEE Belief 7 that the biggest lapse in the participants' efforts toward critical literacy practices was observed. As demonstrated several times in relation to beliefs 1-6, & 8, the teachers were willing to model a pursuit of social justice and equity as well as pursue it in their personal lives. What they were unwilling to do was to engage their students in activities intended to create social justice. At times they "practiced" social action, but ultimately none of them pursued it from within their classrooms.

What is now in need of most attention by English Educators, as clearly demonstrated in Belief 7 and through the entirety of this research, is an understanding of why these participants stopped short of engaging students in acts focused toward authentic social action. At no point in this study did any of these teachers push for

authentic social change through their role as educator. I have posed several potential reasons for the lack of social action by participants in their classrooms, but ultimately these data do not offer a clear enough understanding of that aspect of the phenomenon to posit any specific reason or reasons. In fact it may be that the reasons are individual and something that must be addressed by each individual in relation to his or her critical literacy pedagogy.

Question 1. How do English teachers define critical literacy? As seen in chapter 2, many theorists agree that a curriculum and pedagogy for critical literacy can be derived from three tenets (Behrman, 2007). First, literacy was understood as a form of political practice. Second, the development of critical literacy is intimately related to considerations of issues of equity and social justice. Finally, there is a transformative component: practitioners of critical literacy work toward creating change in themselves and their societies.

A similar understanding of the topic was not expected or required of the participants and merely served as a general guide for the research. While exploring a teacher's definition of critical literacy it was important to remember that even critical literacy theorists and scholars, most often avoid rigid static definitions of the subject in preference of noting the common pedagogical attributes of the theory and the overarching goal of social action. When each teacher was asked what his or her definition of critical literacy was, the focus was aimed at collecting the attributes they mentioned and the goals they hoped those attributes would address.

As discussed in chapter 2, it was expected that the participants might struggle in defining critical literacy and that those definitions would vary across the group

(Behrman, 2006). Both expectations proved true to varying degrees with the largest difference appearing in relation to participants' perception of the overall purpose of critical literacy. Although they mentioned the potential of critical literacy to work for social action, two members considered the apex of critical literacy in their classrooms to be superior academic performance in relation to reading and writing. The other two participants valued the academic merits of critical literacy, but took the process one step further by teaching their students ways to use critical literacy as a tool for social justice through social action.

For critical literacy scholars, the move to social action is of paramount importance if one is to be considered a true critical literacy practitioner (Apple, 1995; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Giroux, 1992; hooks, 1994; Janks, 2010; Morrell, 2008; Shor, 1996). Marshall & Klein (2009) noted that experts in the field believe that educators in the United States “are failing to prepare students to become active citizens in their neighborhoods, cities, states, nations, and world” (p. 218). Of course it is not the job of the Secondary ELA teacher alone to prepare students to become active citizens, but the job of all teachers in all schools. Sleeter (1991) believed that “Empowering education programs work with students and their home communities to build on what they bring; disabling programs ignore and attempt to eradicate knowledge and strengths students bring, and replace them with those of the dominant society” (p. 5). Using critical literacy to engage students in social action is one way for Secondary ELA teachers to do their part.

Also revealed in the participants' definitions of critical literacy was blurring the lines between critical literacy and critical reading. For some of the participants, those

two terms seemed interchangeable at times. The theoretical differences between the two are discussed briefly in Chapter Two, and further illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3

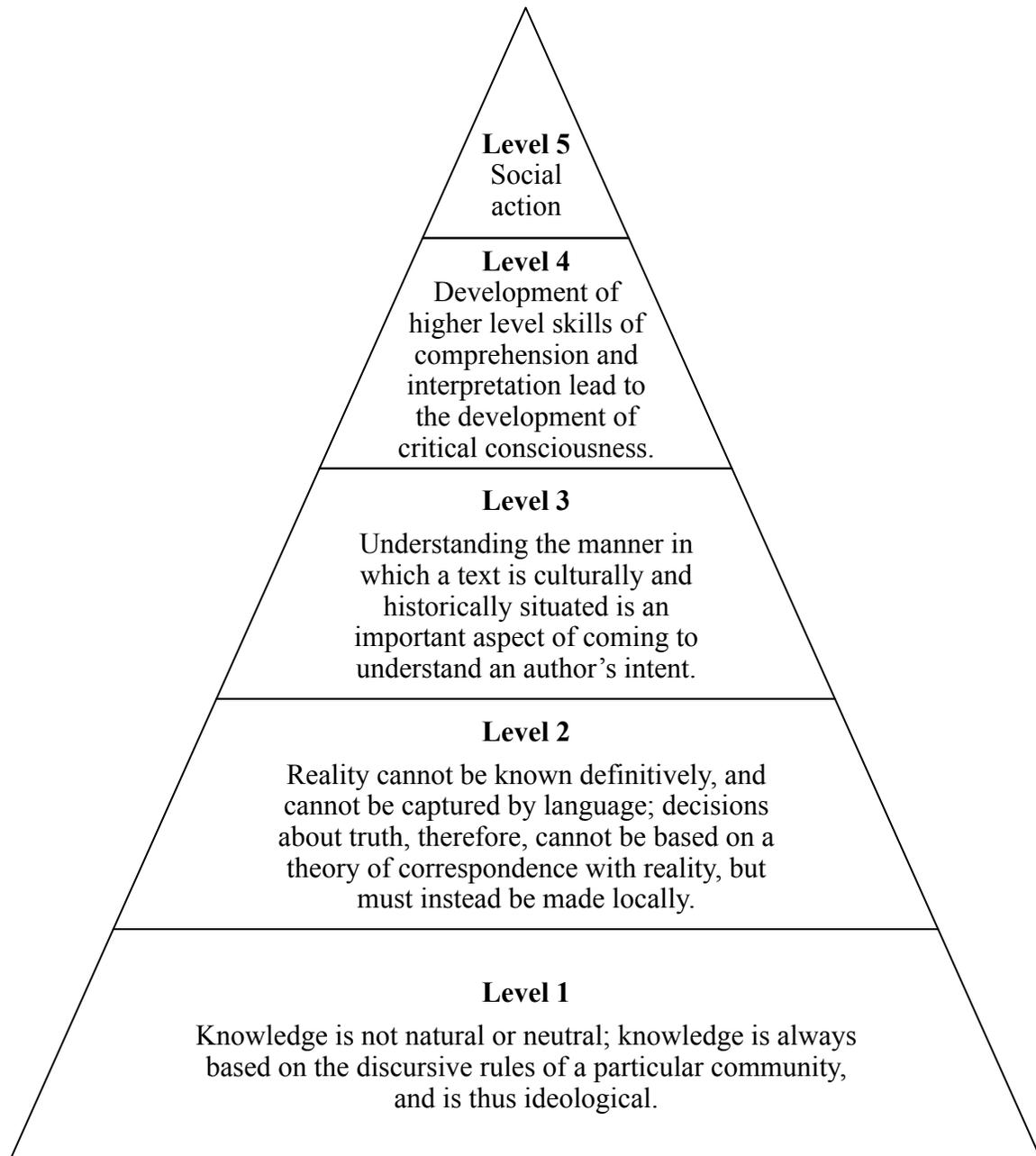
Area	Critical Reading	Critical Literacy
Knowledge (epistemology)	Knowledge is gained through sensory experience in the world or through rational thought; a separation between facts, inferences, and reader judgments is assumed.	What counts as knowledge is not natural or neutral; knowledge is always based on the discursive rules of a particular community, and is thus ideological.
Reality (ontology)	Reality is directly knowable and can, therefore, serve as a referent for interpretation.	Reality cannot be known definitively, and cannot be captured by language; decisions about truth, therefore, cannot be based on a theory of correspondence with reality, but must instead be made locally.
Authorship	Detecting the author's intentions is the basis for higher levels of textual interpretation.	Textual meaning is always multiple, contested, culturally and historically situated, and constructed within differential relations of power.
Instructional goals	Development of higher level skills of comprehension and interpretation.	Development of critical consciousness.
Adapted from "A Tale of Differences: Comparing the Traditions, Perspectives, and Educational Goals of Critical Reading and Critical Literacy," by G. Cervetti, M. Pardales, and J. Damico, 2001, <i>Reading Online</i> , 4(9).		

Table 3 illustrates the clear delineations scholars make between critical literacy and critical reading. Epistemologically, as well as ontologically, all four participants' definitions, as interviewed and observed, aligned with critical literacy as depicted in Table 3. However, when it came to considerations of authorship or instructional goals within that same Table, the understandings of critical reading and critical literacy were not distinct for these four teachers. Participants' definitions and actions reflected beliefs that attributes of critical reading relative to authorship and instructional goals also fit into the practice of critical literacy.

In relation to authorship, the data reflected these participants' beliefs that understanding authorial intent was a key tenet of literacy instruction. This is not considered to be an aspect of critical literacy, but of critical reading (Cervetti, Pardales, and Damico, 2001). More in keeping with critical literacy practices, each participant also expressed a belief that texts always contain a multitude of meanings and that language is culturally and socially situated (Gee, 2001, Morrell, 2008). Furthermore, participants shared a view that the act of deconstructing the power relations and multiple meanings in a text could ultimately lead to an understanding of the author's intent. In this way, critical literacy became a tool for critical reading.

These findings led to the creation of the Participant Critical Literacy Instructional Pyramid (P-CLIP) to illustrate the shared stages of the four participants in relation to the development of students' critical literacy skills. There is no outside evidence that all of these stages are absolutely necessary, or that they must occur within the order depicted. The P-CLIP merely represents the manner in which these participants approached critical literacy instruction and as such, their definition of critical literacy.

Participants Critical Literacy Instruction Pyramid (P-CLIP)



The Participant Critical Literacy Instruction Pyramid represents the stages of instruction used by these participants as they worked toward the apex of critical literacy: social action. As illustrated by the CLIP, the path to critical literacy involved several stages of academic growth on the part of the students. Each participant demonstrated

teaching practices represented in levels 1-4, with two of the teachers simulating types of social action that might occur in level 5.

Level 1. Instruction at level 1 of the P-CLIP involved building students' understandings that all literature is culturally biased (Gee, 2000) and that the author's personal history deeply influenced the biases included in a text. Once students had an understanding of the time and place in which an author was writing, they can then begin to contextualize the constructs of the author thus allowing the reader to better understand the rhetorical choices made by that author.

As noted in Chapter 4 relative to the interviews, all four participants felt that it was important for students to seek an understanding of the world during the time in which a work was created to gain a better understanding of the work. Valerie's use of the Sting song *Russian's* and Seuss' *The Butter Battle Book* in relation to the Cold War were both excellent examples of students working to understand the manner in which the time period a work is written in heavily influences that work.

Level 2. Instruction at level 2 of the pyramid is based upon the participants' beliefs that the world is conceived through a wide variety of "truths" and that no one truth is all encompassing. Consequently, any truth offered by an author is based only on his or her life experiences and should never be considered a truth representative of an entire group of people. Because of the power ascribed to the written word, it was important that students learned to explore the life of the author in so much as to allow him or her to partially grasp what was affecting the author's worldview.

Each of the participants engaged in activities aimed at understanding the manner in which where and when an author was writing in turn affected their writing. The

example described in Chapter 4 of Valerie's students engaging in background research of Flannery O'Connor before beginning their unit on O'Connor, was representative of the manner in which the participants as a whole approached explorations of authors life histories.

Level 3. In level 3 the students and instructors worked to understand why the author was doing what he or she was doing. They consider the author's intent in so much as whether the author was looking to inform, persuade, entertain, etc. And, how the intentionality of the author's purpose for writing affects the manner in which he or she writes.

As illustrated in the vignette of Michael's teaching in Chapter 3 and the participant interviews, these teachers each valued the effort of trying to understand an author's intent as a facet of better understanding a text. The participants believed that one must first understand why the author was writing before understanding what he or she was writing.

Level 4. It is within level 4 that literacy truly begins to occur. Within this level, the students moved beyond the words on the page and began to consider what the author was trying to tell the reader, asking how the author went about this telling, looking at the ways in which the author's work influenced the audience, and finally striving to ascertain how well the author represents the world from which he or she is writing. At this stage the students asked questions about the way minorities, and women, were portrayed. Or, if they were not portrayed, the students asked why such characters are absent and how that absence affected the text.

Heather's Fairy Tale unit, as described in Chapter 4, is an excellent example of the manner in which the participants taught their students to question a text, to explore the depictions within a text as well as consider what depictions are absent from a text. With the mock trial portion of the unit Heather demonstrates the depth to which critical literacy pedagogy looks to interrogate a text in order to gain a more thorough understanding of a work.

Level 5. While this stage was discussed by each participant and even "practiced" in two of their classrooms, none of the classes engaged in level 5 in any authentic way. The fifth level of the pyramid would be the point at which students were moved to social action. At this stage the critically literate student would engage in social action. As discussed in Chapter 2, this would include asking questions about textual representations of minorities, women, LGBT people, and the handicapped, and how those representations affect societies' view of those peoples. What makes this stage so powerful, is that the "asking" would occur in the public forum, not merely within the mind of the literate student. More importantly, at this level critically literate people would begin working for change; they would bring past transgressions to light and work to keep those transgressions from repeating. In this way, the critically literate students would actively work to establish equality in the classroom and beyond.

Not quite there. As academically valuable as all of these practices were, it is important to remember that only when students engage in true social action can we say that critical literacy has occurred. Teachers in this study worked to introduce or enhance skills that built upon each other along the path to critical literacy, but in the end none of the participants truly achieved critical literacy practices in their classrooms.

As demonstrated with the P-CLIP, none of the participants fully engaged in critical literacy practices. Each participant acknowledged the power of critical literacy as an agent for change, and Valerie and Heather even practiced scenarios in which students took social action. Ultimately however, as will be discussed further in relation to the implications of this study, none of the teachers were true critical literacy practitioners.

Question 2. What issues, public and private, must they negotiate to become critical literacy practitioners? Upon entering into this research there was an expectation of hearing war stories of teacher's ongoing fight to preserve critical literacy practices. This, however, was not the case. None of the participants recalled ever having been challenged about their use of critical literacy practices. Each participant could recall an occasion or two in which they had to discuss their pedagogical choices with parents or administrators, but none of those discussions related to critical literacy. In fact, when asked specifically: "Have you met any professional resistance to implementing a critical literacy pedagogy?" Each participant simply answered "no." In two cases, this was followed, after a long pause, with stories about parental complaints in their careers. These stories, however, did not reflect any issue with critical literacy, and so they were attributed to the participants desire to answer the question that was posed. One teacher recalled an instance in which a student disputed the grade the teacher had recorded, and in the other case, the teacher discussed a parental issue related to the use of Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*.

Context. It is possible that the contexts of the study had an impact on the lack of resistance to critical literacy (Jones & Enriquez, 2009). In the case of Heather and Valerie, the location and the general disposition of the surrounding community may have

positively affected the participants' abilities to practice critical literacy. Heather and Valerie's school was within a few miles of a large public university, which influenced the nature of the surrounding community significantly. As a consequence, the area tended toward being more "liberal" than most localities in the region (the only county in the region won by President Obama in 2008). Parents of students at this school not only didn't protest the use of critical literacy; they likely supported it.

In the other school, a probable reason for the acceptance of the use of critical literacy was twofold. These two teachers worked with IB classes, and IB classes are designed to prepare students to attend college and succeed at a high academic level. Consequently, the curriculum as well as the teachers was held in higher regard by parents, students, colleagues, and administrators. The IB teaching context may have offered the teachers increased pedagogical freedom.

Topics. Research that reported resistance to critical literacy practice did not identify any specific topics that tended to receive more resistance than others. While the majority of research about critical literacy research focused on practices aimed at race and class issues, there were also researchers who addressed gender (Jones & Enriquez, 2009; Lalik & Oliver, 2007) and sexual orientation (Goshert, 2008). The participants of this study made no mention of either of the latter topics. The inclusion of which, especially the study of LGBT issues, would most certainly have created resistance, especially in the more conservative Eastern High School.

Ultimately, no parents, colleagues, students, or administrators at these two schools protested critical literacy in the manner reflected in the literature. It may be that these teaching methods went unchallenged because there was no risk that such practices

would directly affect the status quo of the surrounding communities. Had this research taken place in an area with more diversity and/or a wider socioeconomic divide, perhaps there would have been a higher potential for protests as found in the literature. Because neither school was at risk of losing state or federal accreditation, there was little reason for parents, colleagues, or administrators, to question the methods of the participating teachers. Finally, because the researchers avoided topics that would offend the conservative religious communities in the area, they were able to practice critical literacy without objection.

Essentially, the data reflects that relevant stakeholders in education in these two communities did not feel threatened by students' exposure to critical literacy practices. This was significant because potential resistance to critical literacy practices was often cited in the literature as one of the reasons that new teachers were hesitant to continue using the critical literacy practices they experienced in their teacher preparation courses (Apple, 1995, 2000; Glazier, 2007; Jones and Enriquez, 2009; McNair, 2002; King, & Others, 1993; Schmidt, Armstrong, & Everett, 2007). Such a lack of resistance could help to empower teachers at all levels, to continue their critical literacy practices. However it must be understood that these teachers avoided, whether purposely or not, potentially volatile topics and as such they watered down the critical literacy curriculum to the point that, as will be discussed later, they may have rendered it a safe tool for improved academic literacy and not the tool for emancipation that Freire and others envisioned it as.

As discussed in Chapter 2, many instances of resistance to critical literacy practices were cited within the literature. At times the reported resistance came from

students or parents, while at other times there were reports of collegial or administrative resistance (Apple, 1995, 2000; Glazier, 2007; McNair, 2002; King, & Others, 1993; Schmidt, Armstrong, & Everett, 2007). No matter the source of resistance, researchers recalled incidences of teachers that at times had to defend their critical literacy practices in order to maintain their professional standing, while other teachers chose to abandon critical literacy practices rather than deal with that resistance on a daily basis (Apple, 1995, 2000; Glazier, 2007).

There were far too many documented cases of teachers facing resistance to critical literacy for me to now say that it no longer exists. In fact, I am certain that it still exists and that teachers at all levels need help in addressing that resistance. This research demonstrates a “safe” method of critical literacy that eludes confrontation by avoiding topics that are likely to inspire resistance. As demonstrated earlier, this neutered form of critical literacy instruction tends to more closely resemble the socially safe practice of critical reading than with the socially responsive critical literacy of Paulo Freire.

Teachers’ personality traits. In the interviews, three of the teachers indicated personality traits that at times impacted their critical literacy practices. Valerie, Heather, and Michael were all passionate about their philosophical beliefs. Unfortunately this passion was at times a detriment to these participants ability to model critical literacy practices. While Valerie, Michael, and Heather each mentioned, on several occasions, a desire for students to develop their own voices, to have opinions, and be willing to express those opinions, there was an underlying desire that students develop the same opinions held by the teachers. These three teachers were self-identified “liberals” who were at times politically active. Each stated a desire to live in a true democracy.

As happens on occasion, these three worked so hard to broaden their view of the world that they unintentionally became almost myopic. After interviewing and observing these participants, it was clear that Valerie, Michael, and Heather believed the most effective way to make the dream of a true democracy a reality was for students to adopt ideological beliefs similar to their own. It was not that these people were unyielding in their beliefs, but simply that they were teachers and believed it their duty to “properly” inform their students. Freire & Macedo (1985) warned against the predilection of teachers believing that they know what is best for a student, even when their intentions are sincere. Freire (1970) reminded his readers that one can never free another, that it was ultimately up to each individual to free him or herself. Teachers can help students acquire the tools of freedom, but it is the student who must use them.

This is not meant to portray these teachers as being overbearing, or people who might be inclined to punish students holding opposing views. Nothing in the data would lead to such a conclusion. Rather, the data portrayed people who worked so hard to be tolerant of all people, that they at times, without realizing it, became intolerant of those who didn’t share their same worldviews.

Such intolerance was observed in the classroom when the teachers didn’t quite accept a student’s opinion about a text, or when they worked a little harder to defend their own interpretations of a text or event. Participants never berated students, but because they were in the position of power, they were able to control a discussion to the point of influencing the outcome: an outcome they believed to be in the best interest of the students. Hall and Piazza (2008) noted similar situations and believed that “teachers may use texts to unintentionally promote their own comfortable and familiar cultural values”

(p. 32). From the perspective of a researcher, this was fascinating; as a teacher, it was somewhat troubling. In the end I was left reflecting on my own methods and efforts at student enlightenment, wondering if I too may have pushed an agenda of equality to the point of creating inequality.

Question 3. How do public school English language arts teachers implement critical literacy pedagogy into their classrooms? No matter their primary purpose for adopting critical literacy practices, all of the participants expressed a belief that critical literacy was not a method to be employed from time to time, but the underpinning of each of their pedagogies and part of their everyday classroom practices. As discussed previously, participants focused on two primary goals for critical literacy instruction: improving students' academic skills and developing students' critical conscience. While their individual goals may have differed, the participants all engaged in activities that promoted critical literacy. A few of the more prominent activities observed across the data included: (a) working with and through multiple perspectives, (b) engaging in discussions of a text in relation to the students' world, and (c) reading through a critical literacy lens.

The power of multiple perspectives. Lewison, et al., (2002) believed that “interrogating multiple viewpoints” was one of the central tenets of all critical literacy practices (p. 382). All of the participants in this study actively engaged their students in explorations of alternate texts. At times these texts were works of historical fiction, parodies, propaganda, movies, videos, songs, or first hand accounts. Additionally, several of the participants assigned projects in which students created or adopted alternative perspectives. By creating zines or taking on the role of a character in a mock trial,

students were able to explore and express alternative understandings and perspectives of a text.

Freire's dialogical. Freirian critical pedagogy relies on a dialogue between student and teacher, teacher and student, and students (Freire, 1970). This active dialogue based on equity of exchange and respect is often referred to, as Freire's dialogical. Other researchers have also noted the power and importance of classroom dialogue in critical literacy practices (Glazier, 2007; Lesley, 2008). Within each participant's class, I was able to observe students and teachers working together to comprehend a text. This comprehension, of course, was not merely an exercise of understanding the words on a page, but a much deeper, socially relevant understanding. The use of class dialogue, even if not always equitable, was the most consistent utilization of critical literacy pedagogy observed for this research.

The critical literacy lens. Building upon the power of multiple perspectives and the value of dialogue in critical literacy studies, each of the participants encouraged and even challenged their students to consider their worlds through a critical literacy lens. Hall & Piazza (2008) believed that authentic considerations of critical literacy, those that involve the self, were of the utmost importance in critical literacy practices. To do this, the students at times had to look inside themselves and take account of how their lives may or may not impede on the freedoms of others. For instance, these inward glances involved students considering where their shoes came from and the types of lives the people making those shoes. Students also considered the ways in which seemingly harmless personal insults could eventually lead to very real human atrocities.

Missing pieces. Two very important aspects of critical literacy absent in the data,

as mentioned earlier, were explorations of textual constructs in relation to gender or sexual orientations. At one point, Karen mentioned using a book by an Egyptian feminist. She only indicated using the text in relation to Egyptian culture and made no mention of examining the gender constructs in that or any other text. Considerations about people of color, varying religions, and ethnic groups were very important and at the heart of critical literacy practices in these four classrooms. That no teachers mentioned using critical literacy to explore the manner in which half of the world's population has been, and continues to be portrayed by the other half, was most interesting. This finding was even harder to comprehend when one considers the fact that three of the four participants were women. One would think that an issue that continues to affect, in one way or another, all people, would be at the forefront of critical literacy practices (Lalik & Oliver, 2007; Shor, 1996).

Gender. Young (2001) believed that gender was a learned behavior and that texts play a large part in that learning. She asserted, “boys learn to do gender” through their interactions with texts, and that this learning can be damaging “because it grows out of (and helps create) unequal power relations” (author’s parenthesis, p. 4). Additionally, the vast majority of literature cited and/or consulted for this research noted the importance of considering gender constructs within a text. And yet none of the participants related or demonstrated any examples of lessons or discussions aimed at questioning gender constructs within texts as essential to critical literacy practices. In fact, the word “gender” appeared nowhere within the data. Valerie (a heterosexual, white, female) recalled feeling disenfranchised in law school, but never specified in exactly what way. Because Valerie was white, middle-class, and heterosexual, there was an assumption on the researcher’s

part that Valerie's feeling of being disenfranchised was in relation to gender, which makes her lack of exploration of gender constructs all the more perplexing. Especially from a self described "liberal, feminist, political animal." Surely Valerie, as well as the other participants did not believe that we had reached a level of gender equity in the United States that would render the study of such divisions unnecessary.

According to the latest *Global Gender Gap Report* (Hausmann, Tyson, & Zahidi 2009), the United States ranks 31st in gender equity, out of the 134 countries profiled for the report, with women earning roughly 80% of what men earn for the same work. Clearly the United States has not achieved gender equity, and yet these teachers chose not to explore these inequities within their critical literacy practices. The lack of attention to gender equity found in this data belies the fact that there is much work yet to be done. Goshert (2008) asserts, "Critical literacy, students' normative perceptions must be brought into contact with longstanding, contentious conversations about gender and sexuality" (p. 18). Further suggesting, "since those conversations are not part of the dominant cultural monologue some countervailing knowledge is needed to develop a complex discourse that would otherwise be unavailable" (Goshert, 2008, p. 18). Marshall & Klein (2009) concluded that developing a space for such conversations was the duty of all teachers.

Sexual orientation. None of the participants led students to explore the manners in which characters that were gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered were portrayed in texts. This instructional practice further perpetuates the discrimination those members of society experience on a daily basis. Again, the contexts in which this study took place most certainly had a large impact on the content of what was taught. While there have

been genuine advances in race and gender relations in this country, issues of sexual orientation are still a near taboo topic in most public schools (Goshert, 2008; Jones & Enriquez, 2009). Add to that the understanding that this research took place in a section of the country traditional referred to as a part of “the Bible Belt” and it becomes easier to understand why participants may have chosen to avoid some topics.

However, if teachers are ever to play a role in changing those perceptions, they must, as the New London Group emphasizes, help students become alienated “from the familiar media and discourses in which they are immersed, helping learners to denaturalize and make strange again what they have learned and mastered” (Goshert, 2008, p. 23-24). Critical literacy plays an important role in this “relearning,” and it allows students to deconstruct oppressive texts in a way that empowers learners to create a more just and equal representations of their worlds.

Question 4. What inspires these teachers to adopt a critical literacy agenda into their curriculum? Considering the manner in which Question Three was answered, I expected the answer to Question Four to follow along the same pedagogical lines. After analyzing the data for Question Three, I even predicted in my researcher’s notebook that both Michael’s and Karen’s answers would ultimately boil down to using critical literacy to improve student learning, and that Heather and Valerie would each cite critical literacy as a tool for social justice (Bean & Moni, 2003; Duffy, 2008; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Goshert, 2008; Marshall & Klein, 2009; Johnson & Ciancio, 2003; Rogers, 2002).

Once again I was surprised as the data did not meet my expectations, but in fact merged across the data. Each of the participants cited the academic value of critical literacy, and each of the participants also expressed valuing, as a classroom practice, the

ability of critical literacy to reveal social inequalities that would ultimately lead to the development of students' social consciousness (Lesley, 2008; Marshall & Klein, 2009). The only difference, as mentioned earlier, was that Heather and Valerie created lessons in which students practiced social action, while Michael and Karen hoped that student's would be driven to social action as a byproduct of the critical literacy practices within the classroom. This brought in to question the degrees to which a teacher must practice critical literacy in order to be considered a critical literacy practitioner.

Critical literacy practitioners or not? When reviewing instructional goals in the data and relating them to Table 3, we view the same trend of combining theories in reverse, as critical reading is now serving the practice of critical literacy. In this instance the participants expressed a belief that developing a higher levels of skills and comprehension could lead to the growth of the students' critical consciousness. The only respect in which the participants differed on this belief was in whether or not they required their students to act specifically toward developing their critical conscious and if so, to what degree.

The fact that participants at times interchanged and combined the two theories, while uncommon, was not completely unheard of. Similar combinations of critical literacy and critical reading were reported by Janks (2000), who also noted a tendency in which "critical literacy that focused on domination, tended to emphasize critical 'reading' and deconstruction across a range of modalities" (p. 178). Janks' participants displayed the same penchant for combining critical literacy and critical reading in an effort to gain a deeper understanding of a text, in much the same way that the participants for this study did. The practice of combining critical literacy and critical reading, and the level of

success achieved through that combination, warrants further study by linguists and English educators alike.

Whether consciously or not, participants were combining aspects of critical literacy and critical reading in their daily lessons. It is important to note that there was consistency in this for all of the participants: both in their definitions of critical literacy and in their classroom practices. Each of the teachers was adopting and adapting aspects of multiple learning theories into their pedagogies.

When working to analyze the data, there came a time when a decision had to be made as to whether all of the participants could truly be seen as critical literacy practitioners or whether any of them would be more accurately viewed as Secondary ELA teachers that used some critical literacy practices in the classroom. As depicted in the literature and reflected in the data, none of the participants would qualify as what traditionally has been considered true critical literacy practitioners. Michael and Karen did not engage their students in social action, a key component of critical literacy practices (Giroux, 1985; Morrell, 2008). Valerie and Heather did “practice” critical literacy, but never truly engaged in it. Therefore, none of the participants are true critical literacy practitioners.

In the right direction. Because the development of critical literacy is an ongoing process (Lesley, 2008; Shor, 1996), one could posit that any teacher exerting an effort toward the development of students’ critical literacy should be considered a critical literacy practitioner. Both Karen and Michael expressed a sincere hope that their students would become more socially just members of society, in part due to the teachers’ adoption of critical literacy practices. Like, Heather and Valerie, both Michael and Karen

demonstrated pedagogical goals that were in line with critical literacy practitioners (Cooper & White, 2006; Morrell, 2008), even if they all stopped short of engaging their students in activities intended to move them to social action.

Critical literacy pedagogy adapted. The combining of critical literacy and critical reading practices implied that these teachers were not bound by theory, but in fact adapted theories to fit their needs in the classroom. Data analysis led to the creation of P-CLIP to better illustrate the participants' combining of aspects of critical literacy and critical reading into their pedagogical practices to develop students' critical consciousness and at times move those students to engage in social action. The P-CLIP represents an adaptation of the two theories depicted in Table 1 based upon the perceptions of the participants' definitions of critical literacy and their stated goals of moving students toward social action. In the case of two of the teachers, Valerie and Heather, the culminating level of critical literacy was to engage students in activities aimed at practicing social action.

Although Heather and Valerie took their critical literacy teaching closer to the level of social action than Michael and Karen, they too never truly engaged in critical literacy practices. For Michael and Karen social action was always a desirable side effect to their critical literacy practices, but it was never practiced in any way. Heather and Valerie did practice critical literacy, but within the safe realm of writing to mock antagonists and never engaging the world outside of the classroom. Consequently, Valerie and Heather's critical literacy instruction is more accurately viewed as a "boot camp" for critical literacy.

Critical literacy boot camp. Social action is the apex of critical literacy practices (Morrell, 2008). Critical literacy practices are valuable as academic tools for literacy development, but until a person moves to action, the stage Freire (1986) called praxis, one cannot be viewed as authentically engaging in critical literacy, but merely practicing. As noted in Chapter 2 critical literacy is an emancipatory practice and as such it must be working against something. It is the push for change that creates the tension so often cited by critical literacy practitioners. Only when teachers and students begin to push to change the status quo is it then necessary for those maintaining the status quo to push back. It is at that moment that students developing critical literacy skills need to be mentored as to how to address and respond to that resistance in an effort to overcome it (Janks, 2010; Morrell, 2008). Morrell (2008) felt so strongly about the need to educate students as to how to properly use critical literacy that he expressed his belief that it was “worth living and dying for” (p. 221). Consequently, if students are to gain the skills of critical literacy, they must perform authentic praxis to the point of disrupting the status quo. Lesley (2008) as well as King & Others (1993) noted the necessity of preparing students to confront and overcome the resistance critical literacy praxis so often encounters.

Within this study there was evidence of students at least reaching the point of what Morrell (2008) defines as citizen-philosopher. The citizen-philosopher is critically literate and critically aware but does not engage in social action for the greater good (Morrell, 2008). For the citizen-philosopher, critical literacy is a lens through which to view the surrounding world, but not a tool for social action. The delineations are small, but important. Scholars like Freire (1986), Janks (2010), Morrell (2008), and Shor (1992)

all profess the need for praxis as a component of true critical literacy instruction. Janks (2010) notes, “From its Freireian and Marxist roots, critical literacy has always been conceptualized as a form of social action—as political” (p. 186). Such action for Morrell (2008), involves empowering people to “encounter and subsequently produce and distribute texts on their own terms...allowing subjects to first acknowledge how they want to exist in the world and how they want to access texts and organizations” (208). Ira Shor (1992) even suggests developing a “democratic climate favoring protest with mass movements on the offensive” (195).

Social action through critical literacy does not, however, have to be on the scale suggested by Morrell (2008), or Shor (1992), but can be effective on a community level. Janks (2010) recounts an act of social action engaged in by Vivian Vasquez’s four-year-old students as they worked to have their school library include books about vegetarians because some of their schoolmates were vegetarians and the library had no books about vegetarianism (189). Vasquez’s students wrote a letter to the librarian asking her to purchase books about vegetarianism because “Vegetarians are people too” (p. 190). Vasquez’s students also wrote letters to neighboring schools in hopes that they too might adopt books about vegetarians.

Vasquez’s students didn’t change the world, but they did work to change their world and that is the value of critical literacy. The key to critical literacy pedagogy is those students have the opportunity to take action that is authentic (Janks, 2010), not just practice. Practice is of course important. Just as boot camp is important to a soldier, “practicing” the practice of critical literacy is important to the critical literacy classroom. However, if students are truly going to engage in critical literacy, they must experience a

little “live fire” (King & Others, 1993; Lesley, 2008). It is time for those wishing to be critical literacy practitioners to move beyond the safe zone of their classroom and engage in critical literacy in the real world. Only then will students be prepared to engage in authentic critical literacy practices of their own.

Research implications

Practicing teachers. One goal of this research was to gather information that could be used to support English educators as they worked to help preservice and practicing teachers implement critical literacy practices into their pedagogy. Consequently, the implications of this research for those groups are among the most important drawn from this study.

One implication for practicing teachers would be to take an active role in defining critical literacy practices within their shared spaces. Critical literacy theorists like Behrman (2006), Lewison et al. (2002), and Morrell (2008), have fashioned general definitions of critical literacy practices, but their definitions were bound by no constructs, be they curricular or social. As such, it is important that practicing teachers work to frame critical literacy within the constraints of standardized tests and prescribed curriculums (Jones & Enriquez, 2009; Paugh, Carey, King-Jackson, & Russell, 2007). Teachers need to answer the question as to whether one must engage students in social action, or is making students aware of social injustice enough to be considered critical literacy? Also, teachers’ voices need to be heard in relation to discussions of LGBT and gender topics. Should critical literacy pedagogy be flexible enough that it can be used to whatever degree possible? Or, if it is to maintain its transformative power (Apple, 2003; Shor, 1996), must those that adopt critical literacy practices do so only if they are committed to

full engagement?

Of course there are a wide variety of influences on a teacher's day-to-day practices, all of which impact the manner in which he or she is able to practice the teaching profession. However, teachers have always lived under the clouds of public and administrative scrutiny (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007; King, 1993). It is time for teachers to express themselves as highly trained, highly valuable, professionals and defend the use of practices that while not always popular, are academically sound and socially responsible (Christensen, 2000). If we are to experience true equality in our world, practices that lead to equality must be adopted whenever and wherever possible.

Administrators. School administrators spend considerable time and effort on working to insure that their schools are not only meeting the needs of its students, but also doing so in a way that reflects the goals and values of the community. Consequently, administrators tend to shy away from encouraging activities that may upset the status quo (Giroux, 1985, hooks, 1994). While understanding administrators' desires to maintain a peaceful, non-confrontational learning environment, educators should not support such practices unless they exist in a culture of school wide equity. If maintaining a peaceful school involves silencing the voices of various minority groups, which is not a true peace, but an artificial construct that perpetuates a culture of social intolerance (hooks, 1994). Administrators are accountable to parents and community members, but their primary goal should always be to serve each and every student to the best of his or her ability. To accomplish this, I encourage administrators to fully support teachers that engage in critical literacy practices, and to encourage an exploration of those practices by teachers that don't.

Teacher educators. The data reflected a need for education programs to more clearly delineate the theoretical and pedagogy differences between critical reading and critical literacy. As discussed in Chapter 2, there is a history of teachers erroneously using these terms interchangeably. The failure to correctly identify whether one is practicing critical literacy or critical reading can have far reaching affects for teacher educators. If it were the case that a teacher education program specifically sought cooperating teachers that practiced critical literacy in an effort to strengthen a program's commitment to critical literacy practices. It would be unfortunate to have cooperating teachers practicing critical reading misidentify themselves as critical literacy practitioners. Such misidentification would not only cause student teachers to miss out on the opportunity to further their critical literacy pedagogy, but those student teachers might also end up adopting critical reading practices with the belief that they too are practicing critical literacy. Consequently, if English Education programs are going to seek critical literacy practitioners to work as cooperating teachers, it is imperative that the teacher and the program share similar understandings of critical literacy pedagogy.

Although it was absent from this data, it is still important to make preservice teachers aware of the potential for resistance to their implementation of critical literacy; it is also important that they understand that such resistance is a natural aspect of change and that there are ways to try to overcome and counteract resistance. Of course it then behooves English Education programs to prepare preservice teachers to try to counteract and overcome that resistance. And, with improved critical literacy skills and strategies, practicing and preservice teachers will be better prepared to deal with any such resistance.

Fear of resistance should not guide the practitioner's curriculum design lest we risk losing the most valuable component of critical literacy; the ability to address and overcome social inequalities (Duffy, 2008; Lesley, 2008; Marshall & Klein, 2009). Therefore, it is imperative that teacher educators not only give preservice teachers methods to implement critical literacy, but also the confidence and sense of righteousness to do so (Glazier, 2007; Lesley, 2008). If equity is to be experienced in the public school, the tools to achieve that equity must be developed and expressed in the teacher preparation classroom.

Implications for the Researcher. I learned quite a bit about myself as a researcher and a teacher through this process. More than anything, was the joy of exploring the how's and why's of education. An appreciation for every step of the research process also developed. Not just for what it could teach me about others, but also for what it could teach me about myself.

During the interviewing and observing portion of the research, bonds with the participants came easily even to the point of viewing them as friends. The ability to relate quickly and easily to participants (reciprocity) was a valuable research asset. When people are at ease with a researcher they are more likely to offer forthright, honest, thick, rich descriptions (Patton, 2002). These participants were at ease and quickly opened up and shared their experiences. This bonding at times made critiquing my participants difficult, even to the point of doubting my own methods before questioning theirs. This was particularly apparent when trying to understand whether Michael and Karen were critical literacy practitioners. Considerable effort was expended pondering possible overlooked facts and doubting my own research process.

So much of qualitative research is based on a recollection of events as viewed through the lens of the researcher; it was essential to always remember to use multiple sources of data collection to offer the clearest, least biased, picture possible (Patton, 2002). The term “least biased” is most accurate here because try as we might, a researcher can never wholly abandon their biases in relation to a study (Erickson, 1986). This value of multiple sources was reinforced for me as I worked through moments of self-doubt. Finally the most valuable lesson learned was to just trust in the data and let it speak for itself to the greatest extent possible.

Because one cannot remove himself from his research, it is important that the researcher always remain aware of the way my opinions of people may affect my interpretations of events. A reflective researcher’s notebook will always be an integral part of my research to help uncover those biases as they arise, and I plan to remain reflective in reporting events (Patton, 2002). By using the researcher’s notebook and practicing reflexivity, an accurate depiction of each participant’s practice was developed, as Whitman said, warts and all.

While observing the participants, an admiration for their dedication and knowledge quickly developed. Their willingness to allow me into their worlds, and even more so their honesty in answering questions about the ways in which they understood and responded to their classroom experiences was valued throughout. These observations even reflected inward as at times I associated each one of the teachers, in some way, with my vision of myself as a teacher, or of the teacher I hoped to be. Such admiration and appreciation is sure to create a level of bias in a researcher.

Lastly, was the realization that there is still work to be done to gain the kind of

confidence in my research practices that I have in my teaching. Throughout this document and in countless entries in my researcher's notebook, it was noted and cited that critical literacy is not easily defined. Yet, time and again came the concern as to whether my participants were actually critical literacy practitioners. They didn't fit neatly into a box; thus, doubts about myself and my choice of participants often crept in. In the end, this self-doubt came to be viewed as a positive as well. Because of this self-doubt, many, many hours were spent in the data and the literature; as a consequence, the study was the better for it.

The qualitative research process allowed me to explore the world of four teachers in a manner that other forms of research could not have afforded. Qualitative inquiry offered an understanding of how the teachers did what they did, but even more importantly, why. Having gained an understanding of the critical literacy practices of these participants and the dispositions that inspired them to engage in critical literacy will allow me to better inform my own preservice teaching students about the methods and nature of critical literacy practices.

Recommendations for future research. It is still challenging to declare whether teachers are critical literacy practitioners or not. The combination of prescribed curriculums and school culture heavily influence the degree to which each teacher can practice critical literacy. Researchers and teachers alike need to work to understand whether acting for social justice has to be a component of critical literacy, or if making students aware of social injustices and the potential for critical literacy to address some of those issues is enough to count as critical literacy practices?

The most pressing need in relation to future research of critical literacy practitioners is an examination into why some teachers adopt critical literacy practices yet stop short of social action. Each member of this study identified him or herself as a critical literacy practitioner and yet they all stopped short of engaging students in social action. In crafting their definitions definition of critical literacy each member acknowledged the role of social action and each expressed a hope that their students would in turn engage in critical literacy. Yet, only two teachers modeled that engagement and none of them engaged their students in social action in any authentic manner.

Further research is needed to determine why those teachers choose not to engage their classes in social action and whether there are outside influences at work that prevent them from pursuing social action from the classroom. Researchers should seek to understand whether teachers believe it is their role to engage students in social action, or whether they believe it to be wholly upon the student to self-initiate efforts at social action. Research is also needed to understand the way in which teachers view their roles as critical literacy practitioners and whether they believe that social action is necessary, or even possible within the school context.

Research is also necessary that examines the interactions between teachers and students within critical literacy education. Of particular interest should be explorations of the manner in which feedback is given to students, both oral and written. Closer examination of how student work is read, and in what way learning is assessed in critical literacy projects and in relation to critical literacy pedagogy would also inform the field.

Conclusion

Since our ancestors first pulled charred sticks from the fire and scribbled images on a wall, the written word has become the most powerful form of expression for humanity (Freire & Macedo, 1987). The written word rules nations as a custodian of laws, validation of business contracts, and serves humankind as the guardian of the maxims of spirituality. When people want to know, they read; when they want to assure, they sign, and when they want to transcend, they listen. The written word is, for many, the harbinger of truth. The often-unquestioned authority of the written word can lead to misunderstandings, misrepresentations, and even manipulation (Foucault, 1980; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Morrison, 1993). Critical literacy as defined by Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys (2002) “involves four dimensions: 1) disrupting the commonplace, 2) interrogating multiple viewpoints, 3) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and 4) taking action and promoting social justice” (p. 382). As such, the need to adopt critical literacy pedagogy in our English Education and Secondary English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms is of paramount importance.

However, as we work to adopt those practices we must also keep in mind that 21st century educators work within a system driven by high stakes testing, prescribed curriculums, and increased pressures to standardize classroom practices across a nation that becomes less homogeneous by the day. There are teachers working to create engaging, socially responsive classrooms that fit into the prescripts above while also addressing the individual needs of their students. Those teachers are critical literacy practitioners, and their goal is to create a more equitable society by first creating a more equitable classroom. Critical literacy practices are not a prescribed curriculum meant to

address a national audience, but practices that are classroom and community specific so as to best serve all students.

In an ideal world, teachers of critical literacy would be able to move their students from the point of becoming aware of the inequalities in our society and the ways those inequalities are reflected or maintained by texts, all the way to becoming socially active in trying to end some of those inequalities. Such opportunities rely on far more than merely a teacher's desire to engage with the world in such a way, but are also deeply affected by the school, community, and curriculum from which a teacher is working. For some teachers, a requirement to focus on standardized tests or prescribed curriculums does not offer the opportunity to engage students beyond the text. This should not deter the potential critical literacy practitioner. As demonstrated in this research, critical literacy can be adapted to fit within any prescribed curriculum and still benefit the students. It is essential that teachers work to adopt and adapt critical literacy practices within their personal pedagogy to whatever extent they can and that English educators continue to work to support those efforts.

References

- Aldred, L. (2000). Plastic Shamans and Astro turf Sun Dances: New Age Commercialization of Native American Spirituality. *American Indian Quarterly*, 24 (3), 329-352.
- Allard, A.C., & Santoro, N. (2006). Troubling identities: teacher education students' constructions of class and ethnicity. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 36 (1), 115-129.
- Apple, M. (2003, April). Freire and the politics of race in education. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 6(2), 107.
- Apple, M. (2000, Spring2000). Can critical pedagogies interrupt rightist policies? *Educational Theory*, 50(2), 229.
- Apple, M. W. (1995). *Education and power*. New York: Routledge.
- Apple, M. W. (1990). *Ideology and curriculum*. New York: Routledge.
- Aronowitz, S., & Giroux, H. A. (1985). *Education under siege: The conservative, liberal, and radical debate over schooling*. [South Hadley] Mass: Bergin & Garvey.
- Au, K.H. (1998). Social constructivism and the school literacy learning of students of diverse backgrounds. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 30(2), 297-319.
- Au, K. H. (2003). Literacy research and students of diverse backgrounds: What does it take to improve achievement. In C. M. Fairbanks, J. Worthy, B. Maloch; J. V. Hoffman, & D. L. Shallert (Eds.), *52nd Yearbook of the National Reading Conference* (pp. 85-91). Oak Creek, WI: National Reading Conference.
- Banks, J.A. & Banks, C.A.M. (2003). *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives* (4th ed.). New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The Dialogic Imagination*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P.
- Ball, A. F. (2006). *Multicultural strategies for education and social change: Carriers of the torch in the United States and South Africa*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Bean, T., & Moni, K. (2003, May). Developing students' critical literacy: Exploring identity construction in young adult fiction. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 46(8), 638.
- Behrman, E. (2006, March). Teaching about language, power, and text: A review of classroom practices that support critical literacy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 49(6), 490-498.
- Berger, P.L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality*. New York: Anchor.
- Bishop, R.S. (1992). Multicultural literature for children: Making informed choices. In V.J. Harris (Ed.), *Teaching multicultural literature in grades K-8* (pp. 37-53). Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon.
- Bowen, G. (2006, September). Grounded Theory and Sensitizing Concepts. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5(3), 1-9.
- Boyd, Ariail, Williams, Jocson, Sachs, McNeal, et al. (2006). Real Teaching for Real Diversity: Preparing English Language Arts Teachers for 21st-Century Classrooms. *English Education*, 38(4), 329-350.

- Britzman, D. (1991, September). Decentering discourses in teacher education: Or, the unleashing of unpopular things. *Journal of Education*, 173(3), 60.
- Bruna, K. (2007, December). Manufacturing Dissent: The New Economy of Power Relations in Multicultural Teacher Education. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 9(1), 1-17.
- Bruner, J. (1996). *The culture of education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Cervetti, G., Pardales, M., & Damico, J. (2001). A Tale of Differences: Comparing the Traditions, Perspectives, and Educational Goals of Critical Reading and Critical Literacy. *Reading Online*, 4(9).
- Chou, H.M. (2007). Multicultural teacher education: Toward a culturally responsible pedagogy. *Essays in Education*, 21, 139-162.
- Christensen, L. (2000) Critical Literacy: Teaching, Reading, Writing, and Outrage, in: C. Edelsky (Ed) Making Justice Our Project (Urbana, National Council of Teachers of English), 209–225.
- Ciardiello, A.V. (2004). A democracy's young heroes: An instructional model of critical literacy practices. *The Reading Teacher*, 58(2), 138–147.
- Cohen, P. (2003). Tricks of the trade: On teaching arts and 'race' in the classroom. In D. Buckingham (Ed.), *Teaching popular culture: Beyond radical pedagogy* (pp. 153–176). London: Routledge.
- Comber, B. (1999) Critical Literacies: Negotiating Powerful and Pleasurable Curricula: How Do We Foster Critical Literacy through English Language Arts? Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the National Teachers of English, Denver, CO, 18–21 November.
- Conference on English Education (2005). CEE Conference on English Education and Policy Summit. *Eight Beliefs for Supporting Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Learners in English Education*. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from (<http://www.ncte.org/groups/cee/positions/122892.htm>).
- Cooper, K., & White, R. (2006, March). Action research in practice: critical literacy in an urban grade 3 classroom. *Educational Action Research*, 14(1), 83-99.
- Darling-Hammond, L., & Baratz-Snowden, J. (Eds.). (2005). *A Good Teacher in Every Classroom: Preparing the Highly Qualified Teachers our Children Deserve*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Darling-Hammond, L., & Baratz-Snowden, J. (2007, December 1). A Good Teacher in Every Classroom: Preparing the Highly Qualified Teachers Our Children Deserve. *Educational Horizons*, 85(2), 111-132.
- Delpit, L. (1991). The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in the education of other people's children. In M. Minami & B. P. Kennedy (Eds.), *Language issues in literacy and bilingual/multicultural education*. (pp. 483-502). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Educational Review.
- Delpit, L.D. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York: New Press.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Devine, J. (1994). Literacy and social power. In B. M. Ferdman, R. M. Weber, & A. G. Ramirez (Eds.), *Literacy across languages and cultures* (pp. 221-237). Albany, NY: SUNY.

- Dewey, J. (1985, c1916). *Democracy and education: an introduction to the philosophy of education*. New York: Macmillan.
- Doubek, M., & Cooper, E. (2007). Closing the Gap through Professional Development: Implications for Reading Research. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 42(3), 411-415.
- Duffy, J. (2008). Teaching for Critical Literacy and Racial Justice e. *Democracy & Education*, 17(3), 38-45.
- Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes. Chicago guides to writing, editing, and publishing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Erickson, F. (1986). Qualitative methods in research on teaching. In M. C. Wittrock (Ed.). *Handbook of research on teaching* (3rd ed.; pp. 119–161). New York: Macmillan.
- Fernandez, A. (2003). Autobiography in Multicultural, Anti-Racist Education: Three Case Studies. *Teaching & Learning*, 18(1), 5-15.
- Fitzgerald, F. S. (1925). *The great Gatsby*. New York: Scribner.
- Foss, A. (2002) Peeling the Onion: Teaching Critical Literacy with Students of Privilege, *Language Arts*, 79(5), 393–403.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. New York: Pantheon.
- Frankenberg, R. (1993, September). Growing up white: Feminism, racism and social geography of childhood. *Feminist Review*.
- Freire, P. (1998). *Teachers as cultural workers: letters to those who dare teach*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Freire, P., & Macedo, D. P. (1987). *Literacy: reading the word & the world*. Critical studies in education series. South Hadley, Mass: Bergin & Garvey.
- Freire, P. (1986, c1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Freire, P. (1973). *Education for critical consciousness*. New York: Seaburg.
- Gallagher, K., & Lortie, P. (2005). "How Does Knowin' My Business Make You Any Safer?": Critical Pedagogy in Dangerous Times. *Review of Education, Pedagogy & Cultural Studies*, 27(2), 141-158.
- Gallavan, N. (1998). Why aren't teachers using effective multicultural education practices?. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 31(2), 20.
- Garmon, M.A. (2005). Six key factors for changing preservice teachers' attitudes/beliefs about diversity. *Educational Studies*, 275-286.
- Gee, J. (2001). Reading as situated language: A sociocognitive perspective. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 44(8), 714.
- Gee, J.P. (1992). *The social mind: Language, ideology, and social practice*. New York: Bergin & Garvey.
- Giroux, H. (2009). Education and the Crisis of Youth: Schooling and the Promise of Democracy. *Educational Forum*, 73(1), 8-18.
- Giroux, H.A. (1992) Post-Colonial Ruptures and Democratic Possibilities: Multiculturalism as Anti-Racist Pedagogy. *Cultural Critique*, 21, 5-39.
- Giroux, H. A. (1983). Theory and resistance in education: a pedagogy for the opposition. *Critical perspectives in social theory*. South Hadley, Mass: Bergin & Garvey.

- Glazier, J. (2007, December). Tinkering Towards Socially Just Teaching: Moving from Critical Theory to Practice. *Changing English: Studies in Culture & Education*, 14(3), 375-382.
- Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: strategies for qualitative research*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Goshert, J. (2008). Reproductions of (II) Literacy: Gay Cultural Knowledge and First-Year Composition Pedagogy. *Composition Studies*, 36(1), 11-27.
- Greene, M (1988). *The dialectic of freedom*. New York: Teacher's College Press.
- Greene, S. and Abt-Perkins, D. (Eds.) (2003). *Making Race Visible: Literacy Research for Racial Understanding*. Teachers College Press, New York, New York.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105-117). London: Sage.
- Hall, L., & Piazza, S. (2008). Critically Reading Texts: What Students Do and How Teachers Can Help. *Reading Teacher*, 62(1), 32-41.
- Hanvey, R. (1975). *An attainable global perspective*. New York: Center for War/Peace study.
- Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Hausmann, R., Tyson, L. D. & S. Zahidi, World Economic Forum, Editors (2009). "The Global Gender Gap Report 2009". World Economic Forum, Geneva, Switzerland. p. 4. <http://www.weforum.org/pdf/gendergap/report2009.pdf>. Retrieved 2009-11-02.
- Hill-Jackson, V. (2007). Part III: Creating Multicultural Classrooms: Wrestling Whiteness: Three Stages of Shifting Multicultural Perspectives among White Pre-service Teachers. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 9 (2), 29-35.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: education as the practice of freedom*. New York, Routledge.
- Janks, H. (2000). Domination, Access, Diversity and Design: A Synthesis for Critical Literacy Education. *Educational Review*, 52(2), 175-86.
- Janks, H. (2010). *Literacy and power*. New York: Routledge.
- Jetton, T.L., & Savage-Davis, E.M. (2005). Preservice teachers develop an understanding of diversity issues through multicultural literature. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 7.1, 30-38.
- Johnson, A., & Ciancio, S. (2003). Young Adult Literature, Race, Arts, & Confidence: At-Risk Students Building Critical Literacy with Lester's Othello. *ALAN Review*, 30(3), 41-46.
- Jones, S., & Enriquez, G. (2009). Engaging the Intellectual and the Moral in Critical Literacy Education: The Four-Year Journeys of Two Teachers From Teacher Education to Classroom Practice. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 44(2), 145-168.
- Jorgenson, D. (1989). *Participant observation: A methodology for human studies*. London: Sage.
- Kalbach, L.M., & Aguilar, T.E. (2000). Strategies for instituting "racism" into a multicultural education foundations. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 2, 15-20.

- Kemp, L. (1993). *Encouraging preservice teachers to understand student diversity: Pedagogical and methodological conditions*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Number ED 365645).
- King, & Others, (1993). Is Resistance Empowerment? Using Critical Literacy with Teachers. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED371335).
- Knoblauch, C., Brannon, L., & Center for the Learning and Teaching of Literature, A. (1989). *Teaching Literature in High School: A Teacher-Research Project*. Report Series 2.2.
- Knowles, J., & Holt-Reynolds, D. (1991, Fall91). Shaping pedagogies through personal histories in preservice teacher education. *Teachers College Record*, 93(1), 87-113.
- Kutz, E., & Roskelly, H. (1991). *An unquiet pedagogy: Transforming practice in the English classroom*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Boynton/Cook.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1999). Preparing teachers for diversity: Historical perspectives, current trends, and future directions. In L. Darling-Hammond & G. Sykes (Eds.), *Teaching as a learning profession: Handbook of policy and practice*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2003). Foreword. In Greene, S. & Abt-Perkins, D. (Eds.) *Making race visible: Literacy research for cultural understanding*, vii-xi. New York: Teacher's College.
- Lalik, R., & Oliver, K. (2007). Differences and tensions in implementing a pedagogy of critical literacy with adolescent girls. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 42(1), 46-70.
- Lankshear, C., & McLaren, P. (1993). *Critical literacy: Politics, praxis, and the postmodern*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Lesley, M. (2008, September). Access and Resistance to Dominant Forms of Discourse: Critical Literacy and "At Risk" High School Students. *Literacy Research & Instruction*, 47(3), 174-194.
- Lewis, M., Flint, A. & Van Sluys, K. (2002) Taking on Critical literacy: The Journey of Newcomers and Novices, *Language Arts*, 79(5), 382-392.
- Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Lorde, A. (1984). *Sister Outsider*. Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press.
- Lortie, D. C. (1975). *Schoolteacher; a sociological study*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Marshall, J., & Klein, A. (2009). Lessons in Social Action: Equipping and Inspiring Students to Improve Their World. *Social Studies*, 100(5), 218-221.
- McNair, J. (2002). But That's One of My Favorite Books!: Conducting Sociopolitical Critiques of Children's Literature with Preservice Teachers. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED466704).
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Moll, L. C. (1990). *Vygotsky and education: instructional implications and applications of sociohistorical psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Moll, L., & And, O. (1992). Funds of Knowledge for Teaching: Using a Qualitative Approach to Connect Homes and Classrooms. *Theory into Practice*, 31(1), 132-41.
- Morrell, E., & Duncan-Andrade, J. (2006). Popular Culture and Critical Media Pedagogy in Secondary Literacy Classrooms. *International Journal of Learning*, 12(9), 273-280.
- Morrell, E. (2008). *Critical literacy and urban youth: pedagogies of access, dissent, and liberation. Language, culture, and teaching.* New York: Routledge.
- Morrison, T. (1993). *Playing in the dark: Whiteness and the literary imagination.* New York: Random House.
- NCTE/NCATE Program Standards for Initial Preparation of Teachers of Secondary English Language Arts, Grades 7-12 (October 2003). Retrieved May 17, 2008, from <http://www.ncte.org/prog/ncate/107902.htm>
- Paugh, P., Carey, J., King-Jackson, V., & Russell, S. (2007, September). Negotiating the Literacy Block: Constructing Spaces for Critical Literacy in a High-Stakes Setting. *Language Arts*, 85(1), 31-42.
- Patton, M. Q., & Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods.* Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications.
- Rogers, R. (2002). That's What You're Here for, You're Suppose To Tell Us: Teaching and Learning Critical Literacy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 45(8), 772-87.
- Sapon-Shevin, M. & Zollers, N. J. (1999). Multicultural and disability agendas in teacher education: Preparing teachers for diversity. *International Journal of Leadership in Education: Theory and Practice*, 2, 165-190.
- Schmidt, R., Armstrong, L., & Everett, T. (2007). Teacher Resistance to Critical Conversation: Exploring Why Teachers Avoid Difficult Topics in Their Classrooms. *New England Reading Association Journal*, 43(2), 49-55.
- Shanklin, N. (2009). Using Critical Literacy to Engage Learners: What New Teachers Can Do. *Voices from the Middle*, 17(2), 44-46.
- Shor, I. (1996). *When students have power: Negotiating authority in a critical pedagogy.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Shor, I. (1992). *Empowering education: Critical teaching for social change.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sleeter, C. (1996). Multicultural education as a social movement. *Theory Into Practice*, 35(4), 239.
- Sleeter, C. E. (1991). *Empowerment through multicultural education.* Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press.
- Smagorinsky, P., Fly, P.K. (1993). The Social Environment of the Classroom: A Vygotskian Perspective on Small Group Process. *Communication Education*, 42 (2), 159-171.
- Smagorinsky, P., Pettis, V., & Reed, P. (2004) High School Students' Compositions of Ranch Designs: Implications for Academic and Personal Achievement. *Written Communication*, 21 (4), 386-418.
- Sparapani, E., & Others, A. (1995). Pre-Service Teacher Education Majors' Understanding of Issues Related to Diversity and Exceptionality. (ERIC

- Document Reproduction Service No. ED379280) Retrieved May 20, 2008, from ERIC database.
- Spector, K., & Jones, S. (2007, September). Constructing Anne Frank: Critical literacy and the Holocaust in eighth-grade English. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 51(1), 36-48.
- Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. M. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, Calif: Sage Publications.
- Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. M. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Tabachnick, B., & Zeichner, K. (1984, November). The Impact of the Student Teaching Experience on the Development of Teacher Perspectives. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 35(6), 28-56.
- Vizenor, G. (1994). *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance*. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan UP/UP of New England.
- Vygotsky, L. S., & Kozulin, A. (1986). *Thought and language*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.
- Vygotsky, L. S., & Cole, M. (1978). *Mind in society: the development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Weddington, H. & Rhine, S. (2006). Comfort with chaos and complexity. *International Journal of Learning*, 13.2, 39-47.
- Wilhelm, J. (2009). The Power of Teacher Inquiry: Developing a Critical Literacy "for Teachers". *Voices from the Middle*, 17(2), 36-39.
- Yokota J., & Cai, M. (2002). Social Justice and Critical Literacy. *Language Arts*, 79(5): 432-37.
- Young, R.L., & Tran, M. T.(2001). What do you do when your students say "I don't believe in multicultural education"? *Multicultural Perspectives*. 3.3, 9-14.

Appendix A

Daniel Woods
PhD Candidate
English Education Program
202 War Memorial Hall (0313)
Virginia Polytechnic and State University
Blacksburg, VA 24061

Dear [],

I am writing with the hope that you will be willing to participate in a research study I am conducting on critical literacy practices in the middle and high school language arts classroom. Your name was given to me by [] who identified you as being a critical literacy practitioner likely to have valuable insight into the teaching of critical literacy.

My study will examine the ways in which teachers like yourself implement critical literacy pedagogy into their classrooms, the influences that led them to become critical literacy practitioners, and possible barriers they may have encountered and still encounter, professionally as well as personally, along their journey to becoming critical literacy practitioners. My hope is that we could discuss critical literacy issues in an interview and, if possible, that I could observe you implementing critical literacy pedagogy within your own classroom and maybe collect some artifacts of that observation; student work, lesson plans, assignment instructions etc. We can schedule the interview and observation at a time that is most convenient for you.

Please know that participation is wholly voluntary and that you are free to withdraw yourself from the study at any time. If you are interested in participating please contact me at daniel_woods@vt.edu or call me at []. We can discuss the details of the study in greater detail at that time.

I thank you for your consideration and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Daniel R. Woods

Appendix B
Pre-Observation Interview Questions

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. How long have you been at this school?
3. Have you always taught this grade? If not, what other grades have you taught?
4. Where did you go to college?
 - a. What was your major?
5. Did you student teach?
 - a. Where, what grades?
6. In general, what are your goals for your students?
7. On a global scale, what do you hope they will learn with you?
 - a. What are your goals in relation to writing instruction?
 - b. What are your goals in relation to literature instruction?
8. The term “critical literacy” has a range of definitions. What is your definition of critical literacy?
9. What does that term mean to you as a language arts teacher?
10. How long have you been a critical literacy practitioner?
11. Have you met any professional resistance to implementing a CLP?
 - a. If so, how did you negotiate that resistance?
 - b. When was the last time you encountered resistance? What did it look like?
12. In what ways do you practice critical literacy in your classroom?

Appendix C

Post Observation Interview Protocol

1. To what degree do social inequalities in our world inspire you to adopt critical literacy pedagogy?
2. How do social inequalities affect your teaching of literature?
3. What type of critical literacy projects or lessons do you use as an instructor?
4. What are your keystone critical literacy projects?
5. What is the single most important thing you want your students to know about literacy? The –so what—for literacy?

Appendix D
OBSERVATION MATRIX
CRITICAL LITERACY ATTRIBUTES

OBSERVABLE
ATTRIBUTE
INDICATORS

Questioning and posing of problems (some possible questions)

- a. What are the assumptions behind the statements?
- b. How does the author understand reality?
- c. What is shaping his/her understanding?
- d. Who decides (what is real, can be known or needs to be done)
in whose name and for whose benefit?
- e. What are the implications of his/her claims (past/present/future:
social, environmental, economic, etc...)?
- f. What are the sanctioned ignorances (blind spots) and contradictions?

Examples of other questions asked (on back as well)

Drawing on past knowledge and applying it to new situations

- a. How?

Group discussion

- a. Teacher guided
- b. Student guided

Other considerations

- a. Reading multiple texts
- b. Reading supplementary texts
- c. Encouraging social action
- d. Creating counter narratives

Appendix E

Table of codes (progression of codes)

	Code
Initial codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding social inequalities • Understanding the meaning beyond the page • Students' interpretation and creation • Making students aware • Value of literature • Value of literacy • Social inequalities • Drive critical literacy • Social justice projects (critical literacy specific) • Adapting critical literacy to students' skill sets • Critical literacy as an overarching goal-designed curriculum • Critical literacy implemented into existing curriculum.
Axial Coding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects • Personal philosophy • Pedagogy • Personal experiences • Students • Parents
Selective coding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining critical literacy • Projects (specific projects) • Assignments • Pedagogy • Personal philosophy • Experiences • Desired outcomes-goals • Curriculum • Activities dictated by outside influences (SOLs, etc.)

Appendix F

Table of collected documents

Karen	Michael	Valerie	Heather
Lesson plans for classes observed	Lesson plans for classes observed	Lesson plans for classes observed	Lesson plans for classes observed
Requirements and expectations for journal entries	Journal entry directions for <i>The Master and Margarita</i>	Lyrics to the song <i>Russians</i> by Sting	Final Project proposal sheet
IB 1 Summer Reading Assignment <i>The Great Gatsby</i> & <i>Chronicle of a Death Foretold</i>	IB English 2 Policy regarding the use of outside sources	<i>Butter Battle Book</i> story parallels propaganda sheet	Novel quiz (not for a specific novel, but exploring aspects of any novel)
IB 1 Syllabus & reading list. Required reading – <i>The Great Gatsby</i> , <i>Chronicle of a Death Foretold</i> , <i>The Stranger</i> , <i>Thousand Cranes</i> , <i>Woman at Point Zero</i> , <i>Song of Solomon</i> , <i>Othello</i> , <i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i> , <i>The Collected Works of Flannery O'Connor</i>	Journal Entry directions for <i>The Reivers</i>	World War II propaganda packet	Pyramid of Hate handout
Flannery O'Connor Biographical Research Assignment Sheet	IB 2 Summer preparation directions (reading list) <i>The Master and Margarita</i> & <i>The Reivers</i>	War Novels choice sheet (students must identify the war depicted as well as potential pros and cons of the book)	
Reading Questions for O'Connor's <i>A Good Man is Hard to Find</i>	Writing About Film assignment sheet	Journal Assignment directions for the War Novels	

Appendix G

Table of observations

	Date/Time	Date/Time	Date/Time
Karen	May 7 th /5 th Period	May 8 th /5 th Period	May 9 th /5 th Period
Michael	May 19 th /1 st Period	May 20 th /1 st Period	May 21 st /1 st Period
Valerie	May 19 th /7 th Period	May 20 th /7 th Period	May 21 st /7 th Period
Heather	May 19 th /6 th Period	May 20 th /6 th Period	May 21 st /6 th Period

Appendix H

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY Informed Consent for Participants in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

Title of Research Project: Daniel Woods Doctoral Dissertation, Critical Literacy: Practice to Pedagogy
Principal Investigator: Daniel Woods, Curriculum and Instruction, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

I. Purpose of this Research/Project

This research study investigates the current critical literacy practices of middle and secondary language arts teachers

II. Procedures

Participants will engage in a preliminary interview (approx. 45 minutes), three classroom observations (approx. 45-90 minutes), and a debriefing interview (approx. 45 minutes). Participation will also entail sharing any lesson plans used during the observation period. Interviews and observations will be conducted by the primary investigator and scheduled during a time convenient to the participant. Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed.

III. Risks

The risks associated with participating in this study are minimal.

IV. Benefits

No promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage me to participate. The data collected from me during this study will be used for purposes of a doctoral dissertation.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

My identity, and that of any individuals who I mention, will be kept confidential at all times and will be known only to the principal investigator. The above-mentioned interview will be audio recorded and later transcribed by the principal investigator. When the interview recording is transcribed, pseudonyms (i.e., false names) will be used for my name and for the names of any other individuals who I mention. If this transcribed interview is used to complete the above-mentioned group assignment, these pseudonyms will also be used in preparing a written report of the study. Any details in the interview recording that could identify me or any individuals who I mention will also be altered during the transcription process. After the transcribing is complete, the interview recording will be stored securely by the principal investigator. This interview recording will be destroyed after three years from the time the research has been completed. It is possible that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Virginia Tech will view this study's collected data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for overseeing the protection of human subjects who are involved in research.

VI. Compensation

I will not receive any form of compensation for participating in this study.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

My participation in this research is entirely voluntary and my refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. Similarly, I am free to withdraw from this research at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. If I choose to withdraw from the research, any information about me and any data that I have provided will be destroyed. I am also free to choose to not answer any question, or to not complete any activity, and this choice will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

VIII. Participant's Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the following responsibilities: to participate in two one-on-one interviews of (approx 45 minutes each/, as described in Section II above. Allow the investigator to observe my classroom practices for three periods (45-90min) and share any lesson plans from the observed classes.

IX. Participant's Permission

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and the conditions of this study. I have also had all of my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

_____ Date _____ Subject
signature

_____ Date _____ Witness

(Optional except for certain classes of subjects)

Should I have any pertinent questions about this research or its conduct, and research subjects' rights, and whom to contact in the event of a research-related injury to the subject, I may contact:

Investigator(s) Telephone/e-mail

Faculty Advisor Telephone/e-mail

Departmental Reviewer/Department Head Telephone/e-mail

David M. Moore 540-231-4991/moored@vt.edu

Telephone/e-mail Chair, Virginia Tech Institutional ReviewBoard for the Protection of Human SubjectsOffice of Research Compliance2000 Kraft Drive, Suite 2000 (0497)Blacksburg, VA 24060