

WADING IN THE WATER:
A WHITE EDUCATOR AND AFRICAN AMERICAN GIRLS
DEVELOP CRITICAL LITERACY

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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

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May 7, 1998

Blacksburg, Virginia

KEY WORDS: critical literacy, urban education, performance, race,
teacher education

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by

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(Abstract)

This qualitative study focused the experiences of a white educator who spent twelve months working with a group of 8-12 African American adolescent girls at a community center in an urban community. Data collection methods included fieldnotes, interviews, questionnaires, photographs, participant's journals, and other artifacts.

The study focused on the use of performance activities to stimulate critical reflection about issues that were generated from the daily experiences of the girls involved. Performance activities were based on the work of Augusto Boal in liberatory theatre and the notions of Maxine Greene about opening critical space through the arts. Activities engaged in during the twice weekly sessions included drama, poetry writing and reading, singing, and visual arts. The purpose of these activities was to stimulate the girls' development of critical literacy, a concept that may be defined as reading the written text and reading the sociocultural dimensions of society for the purpose of transforming society

toward greater justice and equity. The researcher examined her own developing critical literacy, as well, throughout the study, particularly as it relates to issues of race and white supremacy.

While the development of critical literacy is something that is a lifelong project, not something to be achieved in one year of work, analysis of data reveals many times when the girls were able to identify conditions in their experiences that worked against them. They were able to consider possible ways of changing negative situations in their lives. Working together as a group enabled the girls to pool their ideas and to learn from one another. They were also able to experience how powerful collective action can be. Comments by the girls in interviews, journals, and questionnaires showed that they believed that their understanding of issues important to their lives had changed as a result of participation in the group.

The things learned as a result of this study are useful for understanding how to work with adolescent African American girls in urban communities, as well as how to prepare teachers to work in such communities.

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CHAPTER ONE

FOCUS AND RATIONALE

Overview

This is a qualitative study of the evolution of critical literacy in myself and in a small group of urban adolescent African American girls with whom I had the privilege of working for more than a year. By critical literacy I mean having the skills, abilities, and disposition to act in the interests of justice and equity in one's own life and in the world. Critical literacy involves the ability to identify issues of personal significance, examine and critique these issues, then raise alternative ways of understanding and responding to them. It includes understanding the connections between our daily life experiences and the social world in which we live.

In biweekly sessions at a local community center, the girls and I explored issues that they had highlighted as being of significance in their lives. The girls noted early in our work together the following issues that they would like to explore: teenage pregnancy, losing someone special, sex, getting an education, money, drugs and alcohol, peer pressure, boys, and life goals. We engaged in a variety of performance and arts-oriented activities to examine these issues, as well as other issues that came up during our work together.

As an educator/researcher working with these girls, I understood my own need to carefully examine certain issues if I was to become critically literate in understanding how to work across race and culture. In doing this, I considered issues of whiteness and what being white in our society means. I also considered how my own lack of familiarity with the lives of these girls needed to be addressed if I was to become a viable facilitator of their critical literacy development.

The study is presented in the seven chapters that follow. Chapter One provides an overview of the study, the rationale, and the questions that were explored. Chapter Two examines three key constructs that are related to the central focus for the study: critical literacy, performance, and race. The methodology for this study is presented in Chapter Three where I outline how I came to be at the particular site, the nature of the research design,

and how I approached the various tasks of qualitative research. In Chapter Four I introduce the girls who participated in the study by sharing some of the thoughts they expressed about their lives. I also present several significant sessions with the girls, both as an example of our work together and to illustrate how particular activities seemed to help the girls examine issues they raised. In Chapter Five I explore four of the themes generated by the girls for examination: relationships, sexuality, racism, and self-presentation. Chapter Six presents my reflections on critical literacy development in the lives of the girls and in my own life. Finally, in Chapter Seven I connect the things that I was learning from my work with the girls to my work as an instructor in a university teacher education classroom.

Introduction

As a researcher I have found that the line between research and the rest of my life is not always clear. I am often thinking about my relationships within research communities as I spend time with friends. My time in the field evokes earlier times in my life. I bring into my research everything that is a part of my life, conscious and unconscious. Because of this seepage or intertextuality I have come to see my research as an autobiographical ethnography. I use this term to describe the way in which this current work in a community center with African American girls has become an entry point into my own critical interrogation of race, class, gender, and culture in my own life. The conversation that occurs among my historically grounded life, this specific research project, other research, my teaching, and daily conversations and experiences has led to the writing of this dissertation as an inter-text. Inter-text describes for me the text that is formed in the intersection of various points of dialogue. It is seated wholly in none of them, but exists as a result of them all.

In her book, Love's Knowledge, Martha Nussbaum (1990), discusses Aristotle's understanding of practical wisdom. In doing so, she uses the phrase, "a person on whom nothing is lost" (p. 84). When reading this phrase, I was captivated by the desire to be such a person, both as researcher and teacher. Nussbaum goes on to say:

being responsibly committed to the world of value before her, the perceiving agent can be counted on to investigate and scrutinize the nature of each item and each situation, to respond to what is

there before her with full sensitivity and imaginative vigor, not to fall short of what is there to be seen and felt because of evasiveness, scientific abstractness, or a love of simplification (p. 84).

I have quoted at length here because as a researcher I feel bound to adopt such a stance toward my study. Nussbaum is advocating being fully present in the context of our research.

Nussbaum's concern for sensitivity in the researcher is echoed by Lincoln's (1996) discussion of "caring" as one criteria for inquiry. This sense of caring is born of a view that considers each person's struggle a part of her own. As Lorde (1984) has noted unless everyone is free, no one is free. Nussbaum is also concerned with living a life of "imaginative vigor" (Nussbaum, 1991). I understand this notion as the ability to bring imagination into the process of inquiry.

Jagger (1989) tells us that the "reconstruction of knowledge is inseparable from the reconstruction of ourselves" (p. 148). As an engaged researcher on whom the experience of relationships with the research community is not lost, I have experienced not only new understandings, but also new feelings about the importance of critical literacy. I have found this study to be a passionate journey populated with new relationships and experiences that have heightened my awareness of the world.

Rationale

A Rationale from Life

This research arises from the things that I, as the researcher, have experienced within my own life. I am drawn to particular concerns and ways of being because of my earlier experiences with the world.

I am the product of an upbringing in a white, patriarchal, middle-class family. My mother never worked outside of the home. My father had a twenty-year career in the military which spanned my years until I left for college. My mother stayed at home, sewing my clothes, cooking and baking, and participating in school activities with me and my brother. In my family, gender roles were patriarchal. The family was led by my father and it was his schedule at work that shaped our lives as a family during the days and the weeks.

My mother's life did not resonate with me. I liked to read, write, and draw. I was energized by reflection and creativity, preferring to be out of doors, not in the house. I spent hours, sometimes it seems like my whole childhood, wandering around, sitting in trees, on hillsides and seashores thinking about life. And I liked to discuss my thoughts with others: my parents, teachers, and religious leaders. I felt so different from the example of womanhood revealed in what I saw of my mother's life. It was not until later that I saw a variety of examples of how women were living out their lives.

As a result of my father's occupation, we traveled to various military bases around the world, moving every two to three years. Several months after my birth, we moved to Morocco. Between that time and the time when I graduated from high school, I lived in Germany, Cuba, and The Philippines, as well as in the United States. Throughout these years my life was full of friends and acquaintances from a variety of cultures. Many of my friends grew up in inter-cultural homes with one parent speaking a language other than English. In school my teachers represented a variety of cultures.

As a teenager I became impressed with the teachings of Jesus through reading the Bible in the context of the social issues of the seventies: the Vietnam War, Watergate, race and gender issues. As I sought out answers to some of the issues I was wrestling with, I gained hope from the liberatory message I heard in the way Jesus resisted the power structures of his time. Freire (1997) says that he has "never been able to understand how it could be possible to reconcile faith in Christ with discrimination on the basis of race, sex, social class, or national origin" (p. 105). I was beginning to feel this way during my late teens and early twenties. I have since read the writing of Myles Horton and Jane Addams, whose commitments to struggle for social justice have also grown from their deeply held beliefs.

As a college student, I embraced teaching as a place where I could impact lives. I became interested in literacy development as a senior. It seemed that teaching a child to read was the biggest challenge an elementary teacher could attempt. I was eager to find a job teaching first grade students using the inquiry-based, process approaches to teaching that I was learning.

My years in the classroom were spent working with children in low-income communities. Some of these communities were predominantly white, others were African American communities. I worked with first grade children whose home literacies were different from those valued in the school system at large. In my classroom I struggled to develop a practice that made literacy meaningful for these students. I began with students' own experiences and language as I helped them learn to read. They both read and wrote independently, as individuals and groups. Working collaboratively with other teachers, my students and I learned Spanish and sign language. My students wrote books with sign language captions developed with a third grade hearing-impaired child as consultant. These books were then shared with other hearing impaired peers. When a student from Laos joined our learning community we studied her country.

After six years of struggling to understand the lives of my non-mainstream children, I left the classroom in 1989 to work in communities with what the county human services division termed, 'at-risk' children. I soon learned that it was not the child that was the problem. There were systemic issues that had to be dealt with. I began to develop my understanding of community development and organizing by reading the writing organizers like Saul Alinsky (1971) and Myles Horton (Adams, 1975).

This reading helped me to understand that human service workers needed to work collaboratively with the community to develop the resources that the community wanted. I began working within a rural, low-income community to encourage the development of resources by inviting people to talk about their ideas for their community. I did not realize then that I would spend eight years working within human services, eventually developing educational programs with these communities.

Returning to graduate school was a deeply hidden desire for me. I had always wanted to do doctoral work, but as the years went on, I did not know how I could leave a job and take on the financial burden of school. I also knew that the things I had learned from both my time in teaching and my years in human service work about working with non-mainstream communities were very important to me. I wanted these ideas to be central to any graduate work that I pursued. In the summer of 1994, I decided to quit my job and return to graduate

school in the fall. I would complete my master's degree in literacy and then begin a doctoral program in curriculum and instruction.

Graduate school became a place for me to feel free to express my values and knowledge. I have continued to develop my understanding of the connections between teaching and minority communities through my work the last two years as a university instructor. I have been able to place my students in field experiences in rural and urban schools, while encouraging them to explore similar issues to those I faced as a teacher.

Why We Must Address the Critical Literacy Needs of Urban Children

Research concerned with critical literacy and non-mainstream communities was clearly influenced by my own life experiences and commitments as a citizen and an educator. As an educator I was aware that many non-dominant groups have had little success in American public schools. My own teaching experiences with low-income white and African American students helped me to know that it was not the level of intelligence in these students that was keeping them from academic success.

As I gained more understanding about how our educational institutions are situated within our white supremacist, patriarchal society, I became concerned that non-dominant children would never receive the education that they needed to flourish in our society. They needed to develop functional literacy, "reading the word" as Freire (1985) says; to acquire the capital valued by the "culture of power" as Delpit (1995) asserts. But more than that they needed to develop critical literacy, the ability to negotiate the forces of society that daily impacted their lives. They needed the tools, vision, and the courage to challenge the narrow views of their own potential as human beings. Kanpol and Yeo (1995) advocate the focusing of schools around "the pursuit of the undoing of oppressive, alienating, and subordinating conditions centered on race, class, and gender assumptions" (p. 83).

Nowhere were these inequities more visible than in the inner city (Kozol, 1991, 1995). I was convinced that if there was any project I should commit myself to it was to the reinvigorating of the inner city through participation in activities that would contribute to the lives of the residents. Living, at the time, about an hour from an urban area, I decided to find a

site there. Because of the concentrated communities of low-income and non-dominant groups found in the city, I knew I could explore my concerns. I had taught in the city's school system ten years prior, as well as in another city with all low-income African American children. In both places I watched as families were faced with the withdrawal of industry, deflating both the tax base and the job pool.

Schooling in America

Historically schools have focused on the maintenance of dominant culture (Giroux, 1992, Goodman, 1992, Shannon, 1992). That is, they have worked to enculturate those who are from diverse backgrounds -- be they ethnic, linguistic, or economic differences. Enculturation has often meant extinguishing cultural distinctions in favor of dominant norms. Because schools act as mechanisms to ensure the continuation of the existing power relationships and resource control of dominant culture, students are categorized to receive particular kinds of knowledge. Hale (1994) notes that "the educational system, through its unequal skill giving, grading, routing, and credentialing procedures, plays a critical role in fostering structured inequality in the American social system" (p. 190). Giroux (1989) calls this process the hidden curriculum, whereby students are schooled to remain at the social levels of their parents. This "inegalitarian stratification" is enforced through the reproduction of "structural constraints" within schools (McLaren, 1998, p. 9). It is this "structural organization" of our entire society that, according to Massey and Denton (1996), "plays a profound role in shaping the life chances of individuals" (p. 138).

Under such unfair educational frameworks, "schools functioned to reproduce the ethnic division of labor" (Clark, 1983, p. 4). A retired teacher interviewed by Foster in her book, Black Teachers on Teaching (1997), shares her belief that African American students, "instead of being taught to lead, . . . are being taught to follow" (p. XXIV). She makes this comment as she discusses the number of scholarships and leadership awards won by African American students when schools were segregated, comparing this to the dearth of such recognition in integrated schools.

It is clear that “fundamental disparities” exist between life at school and the world outside of school for many non-majority students (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988, p. 91). This cultural mismatch often keeps students from learning to their potentials in school (Delpit, 1995). Hale (1994) believes that it is the cultural mismatch between schools and the home life of African American students that explains some of the difficulties these children have in school. Thus, “the education of white children proceeds relatively more smoothly than that of African American children because their [white children] learning complements their culture” (Hale, 1994, p. 4). That is to say, the forms and content of education more easily match the cultural styles of white children.

Another aspect of this mismatch between American schooling and the lives of non-majority children is the minimal exposure students receive to the histories and achievements of people from their culture. Giroux (1989) asserts that “marginalized students must locate themselves in their own histories as part of the task of learning the knowledge and skills they will need to shape the world in which they live” (p. 228). Even when schools are unwilling to acknowledge student diversity as a significant impact on the curriculum, students and parents must begin to see their culture as valuable and as a source of power.

Welch and Hodges (1997) assert that “an overwhelming number of African American students have underachieved and continue to be underserved” (p. 20). Within our schools African American students are twice as likely as white students to be suspended and they are three times as likely to be labeled as educably mentally handicapped (McLaren, 1998). This is a characteristic of schooling for minority students that must be changed if we are to suggest that our system of education in the United States is adequate, let alone excellent.

As Kozol (1991) points out in his book, Savage Inequalities, there is a great disparity between funding for inner city schools and suburban schools. This inequity is revealed in the crumbling buildings, scarcity of textbooks, non-existent science and technology equipment, and lack of plumbing facilities. It is no great mystery why many teachers are reluctant to work in these schools.

Attracting quality teachers has plagued the inner cities for some years. In many urban areas the salaries are much too low to attract new, invigorated teachers to the system.

Because of this, in Chicago, low-paid substitutes represent “more than a quarter” of the teaching staff (Kozol, 1991, p. 56). Teachers may also be intimidated by crime in urban neighborhoods or daunted by the complexities of educating urban children.

Educators of all cultures and ethnicities have typically had limited experience in the worlds of their students (Olmedo, 1997). This is particularly true for the many white, middle class teachers we educate in our university teacher education programs. Shor (1992) suggests that “it helps if teachers study the local communities before formal instruction begins and before a curriculum is designed. This will ground the teachers in student reality as the basis for a curriculum:” (p. 172). There have been several significant studies of this approach to developing culturally-relevant pedagogy, including Heath (1990), Diaz, Moll, and Mehan (1986), Ladsen-Billings (1995), and Au (1979). As well, I have engaged with colleagues in a study of an Appalachian school where teachers developed and implemented a cross-discipline, cross-grade level curriculum based on the discourse, history, and conditions of their community culture (Lalik, Dellinger, Druggish, 1995). What these studies reveal is that there are strengths in all cultures that, when brought into the classroom, will help children of non-dominant groups become more successful as learners. As it stands many of our curriculum and teaching practices mirror life in a white, middle class, patriarchal family. McCaleb (1994) concludes that, “including the social contexts of the students and their lives at home and in the community would provide a potentially rich resource for learning and literacy development” (p. 10).

Students of color are seldom taught by teachers of color. The 1990 Census reported that African American teachers represented only eight percent of all teachers (In Foster, 1997, p. XLIX). One out of every four Americans is a person of color and by the turn of the century, this statistic will change to one out of every three. By 2020 nearly half of the students in our public schools will be people of color (In Banks, 1994, p. 4). This means two things to the universities preparing teachers: we need to recruit more teachers of color, and we need to help our teachers from the majority culture understand how to work beyond their own racial, ethnic, class experiences (Shor, 1987).

A further concern is how young African Americans are constructing their identities in relation to schooling. To be Black is to not speak the language of dominant culture, to not engage in conventional employment, to not raise children in formal marriage arrangements, and to not do well in school (Massey and Denton, 1996). For many minority children there is a conflict between working hard in school and fitting in with one's peer group. African American students who do well in school run the risk of being considered "Uncle Toms" or "school girls" by their peers (Fordham, 1996).

Welch and Hodges (1997) raise a concern about whether schools can ". . . be redesigned to eliminate ideological biases and include the conceptual tools that poor African American students need to succeed in society" (p. 24). From studies on culturally relevant teaching, we know that redesigning schooling is more than just changing curriculum; it is also examining the ways we teach and the overall culture of the school to assess its compatibility with student cultures (Au, 1979).

Life in Urban Communities

In the United States, 99% of the census tracts identified as being at or below poverty level are located in the inner city (Schorr, 1989). Within these census tracts, 58% of the population is Black, 11% is Hispanic, and 28% is white (Schorr, 1989). Over the past thirty years businesses have left their homes in once-thriving downtown areas, causing consumers' dollars to flow into businesses outside of the community. Middle-class white families have left the inner cities for upscale suburban neighborhoods. Old homes have become affordable rentals for poor and minority families. Abandoned houses and other buildings within the inner cities have become havens to the homeless.

Homicide is now the leading cause of death among inner-city youth (1992, Children's Defense Fund). According to the Center for Disease Control, it is more likely that a fifteen year old black male will die before his twenty-fifth birthday, than it was for a US soldier to be killed in Vietnam (Fliegel, 1993, p. 19). Seventy-two percent of young people living in urban America know someone who has been shot, 24% have witnessed murder, 25% have been shot at or threatened (McLaughlin, Irby, Langman, 1994).

Among the urban adolescents I know, one girl is in a foster family where an adopted son was jailed as an accomplice to a murder that took place across from the community center. A boy from an inner city alternative school, who came to speak to my university students about urban life, is currently being held on charges of the premeditated murder of another young man who had just recently graduated from high school. The boy charged with murder had described to my students how he tried to be a peacekeeper on his street, keeping predators out of the neighborhood.

Mike Rose (1995) summarizes these evidences of crisis in the inner city by saying that "schools are nested in complex, often volatile social and political environments" (p. 5). This comment is not even limited to the actual conditions of the streets. It also implicates the political institutions that neglect inner city communities and schools. Because of this neglect, many inner city youth receive an insufficient education. More than half do not graduate from high school (1992, Children's Defense Fund). Fifty to eighty percent of urban students drop out of high school (Bastian In Peterson, 1996, p 153).

For urban families, inadequate housing, the lack of essential services, poor schools, limited access to higher education, and restricted job opportunities combine to create a burden that is difficult to discard. Kanpol and Yeo (1995) suggest that conditions of life in our inner cities today are a result of "the lethal linkage of economic decline, cultural decay, and political lethargy in American life" (p. 78). These multiple conditions combine to make urban life complex and stressful.

Many of these families, however, retain an optimism that seems impossible (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). They foresee a brighter future for their children. This optimism must carry over into institutions charged with creating policies for inner city families. "To free ourselves from the urban crisis we must first free ourselves from the idea that an unhappy ending is inevitable" (Smith, 1996, p. 98). We must learn to see the youth of the inner-city not as those to be fixed, remediated or healed, but "as young people of promise, largely ignored, wrongly perceived, and badly served by society at large" (McLaughlin, Irby & Langman, 1994, p. 96).

Being Black and Female

I am looking for the women of my house.

`Lineage', Daisy Zamora

To be a young African American girl in our society brings with it particular concerns and struggles that are both individual and collective. There are the issues that are brought on by adolescence, but take a particular form in the lives of black girls. Gender issues hold different meanings within a culture where the brutalization of women has become a legacy. I do not, however, want to paint a picture of gender as monolithic for African American girls. Their gendered identities are multi-layered and complex, shaped by culture and class, as well as by race. As hooks (1992) has commented, it is impossible to separate being black and being female.

As a white woman I do not have insider knowledge about these issues. I am informed by the African American women I have known, those whose writings I have studied, and by the young girls with whom I spent time. In the introduction to a book of conversations with black adolescent girls, Rebecca Carroll (1997) says, "young black girls in America are often not heard" (p. 19). How can we develop as competent educators in urban communities if we have not first listened carefully to these young black girls?

Stevens (1997) notes that African American girls deal not only with "the societal devaluation of [their] gender, but more importantly, societal devaluation of [them] as member[s] of a racial minority" (p. 148-9). For African American girls, there are three sources of influence that they must integrate in order to form a coherent sense of self: 1) mainstream society; 2) devalued societal status; and 3) cultural reference group. In addition to accomplishing this task of integration, African American girls must also develop bicultural competence and strategies for resisting racial and gender devaluation (Stevens, 1997, p. 152).

For African American girls, the family and the community are places where they often care for siblings, for substance-involved family members, for the elderly, and often for their own children. Historically, black females have gotten by, taken care, and held things together (Guy-Sheftall, 1995; Omalade, 1994). The academic arena, however, is where African American girls suffer the deepest valleys in their self-confidence. There is often tension

between giving one's time and energies to school or to the family and community. Knowing this, Ladson-Billings (1994) notes that classrooms in which African American children are successful are those that, among other things, develop connections between the classroom community and the student's larger community beyond the school.

West (1993) has asserted that, "it is virtually impossible to talk candidly about race without talking about sex" (p. 83). He notes, however, that, "black sexuality is a taboo subject" (p. 84). And yet, media images of African American sexuality loom large in the minds of adolescents. Movies often reinforce the stereotypes of black men as predatory and black women as seductive. This results in a kind of exotification of black sexuality (hooks, 1994).

For adolescent girls sexuality is powerful and exciting. As Pipher (1994) notes, "girls are aware of their own sexual urges and are eager to explore them" (p. 208). As they negotiate these new feelings, adolescent girls experience conflicting advice from many voices, such as family, peers, media, church, and school. These various voices may lead to confusion as girls begin to make sexual decisions, trying to "integrate these messages and arrive at some value system that makes sense" (Orenstein, 1994, p. 205). Thus, it is not unusual for a girl to one day espouse a particular stance and on another day to report a completely different perspective. This may be a way of 'trying on' different perspectives to see how they 'fit.'

It is clear to anyone who spends time among adolescent girls that "they are interested in the opposite sex and eager to be liked by boys" (Pipher, 1994, p. 208). This typical development of adolescence is shaped by media and peers who place sexuality in the forefront of life's priorities, encouraging adolescents to create heterosexual pairings. So strong is this pressure to be a part of a heterosexual couple, that girls will accept far less in a relationship with a guy than they might in a relationship with a girl friend or any relationship that does not have a sexual dimension.

Within the black community, violence against women and children is increasing. Lorde (1984) attributes this increase to "racism and the pressures of powerlessness" felt by African American males (p. 120). She suggests that these males become aggressive as a means of asserting their maleness in the only way open for them to do so. This situation creates a

psychological dilemma for black women. They want to support their men who they see as being emasculated by white society; at the same time, they need to protect themselves and their children from brutality. It is difficult to know how to support the men, yet to speak out against the violence. bell hooks (1995) is concerned about this interplay between denouncing racist domination of black men, while also denouncing male domination of women. She writes that, "within black life, as well as in mainstream society, males prove they are 'men' by the exhibition of antisocial behavior, lack of consideration for the needs of others, refusal to communicate, unwillingness to show nurturance and care" (p. 74). Adolescent girls growing up in this environment experience the same dilemma faced by adult African American women.

Rap, and more broadly, hip-hop, as the vernacular of the inner city, is influencing the behavior of adolescent men and women. Rose (1994) asserts that "rappers also tend to reinforce the male sexual domination of black women and confirm and sustain the construction of black women as objects and status symbols" (pp. 103-104). The activist and rap artist Sister Souljah (1994) agrees that the status of women in the African American community will not be addressed adequately as long as "our young men continue to refer to young women as 'bitches,' or our young women refer to young men as 'motherfuckers,' or all of us refer to each other as 'niggas'" (p. 350).

Heath & McLaughlin (1993) suggest that inner-city kids know the facts about the risks involved with sexual behaviors. For example, a young girl who has sex as a means of keeping her boyfriend, maintaining financial support, or gaining access to material favors, can end up with AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases. In interviews with girls from an urban high school, Orenstein (1994) talks with a girl who says, "I think boys distract you from school and everything. . . So I don't want a boyfriend. . ." (p. 237). Heath and McLaughlin (1993) discovered in their conversations with urban adolescents that, "every inner-city youngster knows these facts, but making wise decisions about how to be a man or a woman is much tougher than facts can suggest" (p. 25).

Questions Addressed by this Study

Having reviewed both the general focus and the need for this study, I will introduce the specific questions that this study has addressed. There are two major questions that were identified at the beginning of the study and addressed throughout: 1) In what ways and to what extent can educators assist urban adolescent African American girls to develop critical literacy?; 2) In what ways must I as a white educator develop my own critical literacy if I am to work with non-mainstream communities? There are several supporting questions that I will discuss.

In considering the ways and extent to which we might encourage critical literacy development in urban African American adolescent girls, I chose to emphasize the uses of performance activities. By performance activities I mean any activity that is expressive and sensory. Thus, I have raised the question, are there ways in which performance activities are uniquely fitted to critical literacy development?

A second supporting question related to the girls' development of critical literacy that emerged during the study was, to what degree can adolescents step back from their culturally embedded lives and do the critique that is inherent in the development of critical literacy? At times I wondered if the girls were too connected to their peer culture to see alternative ways of living their lives.

In relation to my own critical literacy development, I realized that I needed to examine the issue of whiteness. I, like the girls, am embedded in my culture. In my case it is the subtle, but no less benign, culture of whiteness. How have I been influenced by the white culture in which I have grown up and continue to experience, both consciously and unconsciously? I realized that asking this question must be where I begin if I am to divest myself from white supremacy. What *changes* must I make as a white, middle class educator if I am to work in ways that are equitable and anti-racist? In my university classroom I explored ways to examine racism with my predominantly white, middle class, female students.

Thus, this study examines the following questions:

- 1) In what ways and to what extent can educators assist urban adolescent African American girls to develop critical literacy?

A. Are there ways in which performance activities are uniquely fitted to critical literacy development?

B. To what degree can adolescents step back from their culturally embedded lives and do the critique necessary for the development of critical literacy?

2) In what ways must I as a white educator develop my own critical literacy if I am to work with non-mainstream communities?

A. How have I been impacted by my life as a white person within a white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal society?

B. What changes must I make as a white, middle class educator if I am to work in ways that are equitable and anti-racist?

CHAPTER TWO

KEY CONCEPTS FOR UNDERSTANDING CRITICAL LITERACY AMONG URBAN ADOLESCENT AFRICAN AMERICAN GIRLS

Introduction

This study is shaped by my consideration of three key concepts: critical literacy, performance, and race. Critical literacy is the frame for this study. It focused the work that I did with the girls. Performance is important because I chose to explore how performance activities and processes could support critique and lead to critical literacy. Finally, I explore the significance of race because of my situatedness as a white woman trying to understand how to better work with African American girls.

The Role of Theory

Wolcott (1988) suggests that “the major role for theory to play [is] not to tell us what we should see, but to help us make sense of what we have seen in terms of some broader context or issue” (p. 348). What I had initially seen was the complex lives of my own urban elementary students and the constraints in the lives of low-income people I later worked with. Reading critical theory had given me the conceptual language to make sense of those experiences. I now wanted to consider how the use of performance activities could assist marginalized groups of students in becoming critical about their own positioning within the larger society.

As a qualitative researcher I tried to hold theory loosely. That is, I wanted my theoretical frames to interact with experiences, interpretations, intuitions, and judgments throughout the study. A qualitative researcher must struggle to keep theory from becoming too heavy-handed and thus deterministic.

Reductionist uses of theory by the researcher reproduce hierarchies of power that are antithetical to qualitative approaches. A reductionist application of theory becomes a top-down approach where the researcher fits participants and events into a

predetermined frame, rather than carefully attending to the ways in which participants' daily life experiences might inform theory. By reading and writing while working in the field, I struggled to converse across the layers of theory and practice, and to move toward a sense of knowledge production that was "open-ended, non-dogmatic, speaking to and grounded in the circumstances of everyday life" (Lather, 1991, p. 55).

Keeping research open-ended and grounded in the circumstances of everyday life is neither easy or automatic. I found many times that the issues I struggled with were not addressed by my theory. For example, my theory did not tell me how I could keep the attention of adolescent girls or explain why the girls were so optimistic about their life chances in a white supremacist, capitalist society.

I raise this conversation about the purposes and uses of theory because it is dangerous to quality research and to the well-being of participants to raise theories to a level of sacredness. My discussion of three particular theoretical constructs that informed my thinking are meant to declare the ways in which my own sight was biased as I developed, engaged, and interpreted my work with the girls.

Critical Literacy

Critical Theory as Underpinning for Critical Literacy

Critical theory grew out of the work of the Frankfurt School, actually named the Institute for Social Research, beginning in the 1920s.¹ The distinctive idea that the Frankfurt School brought to theory was that theory should address the inequalities of society. This scholarship brought theory and action closer together, suggesting that "critical theory openly takes sides in the interest of struggling for a better world" (Giroux, 1997, p. 44). Critical theory provided a language and a method to examine why non-mainstream communities existed and were so clearly marginalized. Theorists analyzed

¹ The Frankfurt School or the Institute for Social Research was created in Frankfurt, Germany in 1923. Their embrace of Marxism, as well as its critique led to the notion that ideas did not stand alone, but were interrelated with the sociohistorical milieu. Some of the more well-know participants in the Frankfurt School were Max Horkheimer, Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, and Theodor Adorno.

“fundamental relations of domination and exploitation, and the ways that hierarchy, inequality, and oppression are built into social relations and practices” (Best and Kellner, 1991, p. 264). Critical theory focused on the interplay between individuals and society.

The language of critical theory resonated well with the American pragmatism forged at the University of Chicago which became known as the Chicago School of Pragmatism.² The scholars connected to this understanding of pragmatism, including John Dewey and Jane Addams, struggled to articulate a theory that would describe their work with non-mainstream communities in Chicago. Through their struggle there emerged not a new theory, but a praxis that sought to wed the sociological thought produced in the university with the lived experiences of immigrants and poor people. Dewey’s (1900 & 1902/1990) concern with the primacy of experience and the “organic relation of theory and practice” helped to create a focus on connecting people’s lives with the workings of the larger world (p. 85).

The work of Addams at Hull House, and the theorizing she did in company with others within the Chicago School, led to the founding of social work as a practice that lent itself to the application of critical theory. The articulation of social work as a field concerned with providing practice assistance to people in need, led to a gendered bifurcation of sociology. During the height of Chicago School activity, female scholars were often denied the title of sociologist, being relegated to the sphere of practice as a lesser field. Recent scholarship on Addams has disputed that she was any less a sociologist than her male university counterparts; however, she remains the ‘patron saint’ of modern social workers (Deegan, 1988). Addams was described as a critical pragmatist because when she studied the everyday lives of the community, including laborers, the poor, the elderly, youth, women, and immigrants, Addams “connected this analysis to the political and

² The Chicago School included John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, James Tufts and Ella Flagg Young. The School’s understanding of the pragmatism developed by Charles Peirce and William James led to a distinct approach called the Chicago School of Pragmatism. Pragmatism was concerned with the idea that human beings operated based on a capacity for intelligent, purposeful behavior, connecting thought and action. Some of the Chicago School and particularly, Addams and Dewey, embraced a critical pragmatism that sought to radically understand and empower the poor, the elderly, youth, women, and immigrants.

economic conditions that generated that mundane and oppressive reality” (Deegan, 1988, p. 255).

Antonio Gramsci (1971) described the concept of hegemony. Hegemony is the worldview that is disseminated by institutions of the dominant culture. Individuals are so embedded within this worldview or ideology that it is difficult to see beyond it. Gramsci, however, believed that it was possible for the dominated groups to resist this hegemonic control and create alternatives to dominant structures.

Situated within the critical theory camp is radical structuralism (Sleeter, 1996). Radical structuralists view human behavior within the context of larger society. They look for answers to inequalities in the structural organization of society, not in individual lives. Radical structuralists are concerned with explicating relationships of power. They believe that government institutions can not be trusted to serve all people fairly and equally because of these institutions’ complicity in the perpetuation of dominant purposes. Radical structuralists critique the behavior of those few who hold the majority of the resources for the purpose of seeing resources redistributed.

To be critical is also to remain hopeful. Critical theory includes the Gramscian project of exposing hegemony. Critical theorists, critical pragmatists (like Dewey and Addams) and radical structuralists view education as significant to personal and societal transformation. As Sleeter (1996) explains, it is through education that young people can learn to examine social relations and act collectively to create a more just social system” (p. 45). Consequently, a large body of work on schooling as a process for maintaining the status quo has been developed. The term, critical educational theory, best describes this work.

Critical Pedagogy: Educating for Critical Literacy

Education has become a site for focusing critical theory because as a form of cultural reproduction, education is implicated in the construction of values, beliefs, knowledge, and social practices (Giroux, 1992). As Weiler (1988) points out, “school

organizations and practices tend to reproduce and justify classism, racism, and sexism” (p. 150-1).

The goal of critical pedagogy, a term which includes critical literacy and critical teaching in various disciplines, is to provide a framework for teachers and students to examine ideas and events as they are related to larger societal issues such as culture, capitalism, race, economics and politics. Lather (1988) says that critical pedagogy is “intended to interrupt particular historical, situated systems of oppression” (p. 121). Examining these ideas and events leads to critical awareness or critical literacy, that is, being able to read the world (Freire and Macedo, 1987).

My own understanding of a critical pedagogy which supports the development of critical literacy involves four processes: 1) identification of oppressions; 2) conscientization or a personal awareness of the implications of oppression; 3) imagining possible alternatives to current conditions; and 4) transformation toward a more just society. This process emerges from my consideration of Freire’s (1973) three phases of critical teaching: 1) identifying and naming the problem; 2) analyzing the causes of the problem; and 3) finding solutions to the problem. I have elaborated Freire’s method because I believe that there are times when general oppressions are identified, but people do not have a sense that the oppressions are affecting their lives. An example of this is the way in which many white people do not believe that they are impacted by living in a racist society. I also view both conscientization, one of Freire’s terms, and imagining possibilities as processes of analysis.

Thus, the first step in a critical pedagogy is the identification of oppressive conditions, both in the lives of individuals and in the structural world that surrounds us. Knowing how the oppression becomes created and legitimized is the initial step in changing it (Davies, 1993). According to Gramsci (1971), the starting point of critical pedagogy is “what one really is and in ‘knowing thyself’ as a product of the historical process to date” (p. 326).

Understanding these conditions of domination will allow us to circumvent them and eventually to destroy them. Domination exists when some children are kept from attaining

the education afforded to others, when economic success for the few is built of the work of the many men and women struggling to support their families, and when liberty and justice for all means liberty and justice for the few. Knowledge of the “hidden” goals of dominant society will allow those who are dominated to work together to regain their communities, and even their histories, from those who have become powerful and oppressive.

A second feature of critical literacy is conscientization. This is a term used by Freire (1991) to signify a critical perception of reality. Such perception allows us to name what could not be addressed before. It is like exposing the naked emperor.

Conscientization is the process of moving through the murkiness to see what is

behind the veiled myths of our sociopolitical culture. Freire (1970) says, “conscientization is first of all the effort to enlighten men about the obstacles preventing them from a clear perception” (p. 89). Collins (1990) suggests that resistance comes from connecting identified experiences of oppression with “a self-defined standpoint concerning these experiences” (p. 28). Thus the process of conscientization is a personal response to the identified inequities.

Part of the process of conscientization involves critiquing our own lives for instances of oppression behavior. Being marginalized by mainstream society does not eliminate the possibility that one would act oppressively to someone in a different class, race, gender, or ethnicity. Lemke (1995) talks about the “hermeneutic of suspicion” that drives critical practice, which assumes that each individual plays a part in the creation of oppressions (p. 131). Therefore, as a first step in becoming critically literate, I must look to my own life and practice. If we as teachers are not committed to critical stances in our lives and work we will be unable to encourage our students in this direction.

The third piece of the process of critical pedagogy is imagination. Imagination is really the consideration of alternative possibilities. It is a consideration of what could be

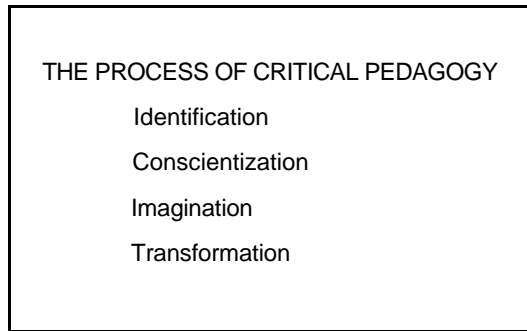


Figure 1. Stages in the Process of Critical Pedagogy

that is not yet seen. As Gramsci (1997) says, “imagination allows us to create possibilities and explore their consequences” (p. 134).

Greene (1995) advocates the use of the arts as new ways of seeing. Dewey (1934/1980) advises that “possibilities are embodied in works of art that are not elsewhere actualized,” noting also that “this embodiment is the best evidence that can be found of the true nature of imagination” (p. 268). Writing in her book, Releasing the Imagination, Greene (1995) says that it is imagination “that permits us to give credence to alternative realities. It allows us to break with the taken-for-granted” (p. 3).

Fourth, critical pedagogy has as its goal the “transformation of the self and society” (Martusewicz & Reynolds, 1994, p. 9). The goal is to move from current realities to a changed society. Without such transformation, critical practice remains only a theory. Or perhaps, something even worse, a hope that is never realized. While transformation may occur in individuals, the greater goal of critical pedagogy is the transformation of society.

In a critical pedagogy, learning activities must be meaningful to students. They must arise from the “concrete practices” of everyday lives where people “live out their problems, hopes and everyday experiences” (Giroux, 1985, p. xxii). Such learning activities become a dialogue mutually created by students and teacher (Shor, 1992). The use of student generated themes was a hallmark in the practice of such liberatory educational experiments as the Bryn Mawr Summer School for Women Workers (1921-1940) and the Highlander Folk School (begun in 1940s). Both of these schools used critical pedagogies to assist their students in critiquing labor and civil rights. The schools’ uses of critical pedagogy led to the critical literacy of their participants.

A concern of critical pedagogy is a respect for diverse voices. Traditionally, we have valorized the voices of the white, upper-class males. The educational process must be open to ideas that are “multiaccentual and dispersed” (Giroux, 1992, p. 29). Heath & Mangiola (1991) are hopeful that education, even within the public school, can provide this richness of “ways of seeing, knowing, thinking, and being” (p. 17). To do this, we must enlarge our commitment to providing students with experiences using tools other than print as means of reading and writing the world.

Critical Literacy

From the work of Shannon (1990, 1992), Freire (1985, 1993), and Edelsky (1971, 1994), I define literacy as the acquisition of the abilities, skills, and disposition to create and accomplish goals that lead toward justice and equity in society. Freire has said that becoming literate is being able to "look critically at the culture which has shaped [us], and to move toward reflection and positive action upon [our] world" (Freire In Bartoli, 1995, p. 115). Literacy is "a critical engagement" with our own lived experiences, as well as those of others (McLaren, 1994). It is connected to the daily experiences of living in the world. It is not simply reading a printed text.

Critical literacy is a concept that is inclusive of other forms of literacy that I call standard literacy and multiliteracies. Standard literacy is the kind of literacy typically experienced in schools. It includes reading and writing, as well as forms of discussion such as debates, presentations, and teacher-led discussions. The notion of multiliteracies recognizes that there are a variety of expressive forms through which we mediate the world, that is, inquire, organize, and communicate. A final layer in this model of critical literacy is the inquiry process. The inquiry process is an elaborated form of critical pedagogy which moves through the activities of identification of issues, inquiry, critique, raising possibilities, acting on possibilities, and culminating in transformation. Greene (1995) makes the assertion that "literacy in more than one medium will be required if people are to deal critically" with a variety of modern sources of information (p. 13). Shannon (1995) shares a similar view about "the ability to use multiple texts, including all symbol systems. . . to make sense of one's life and world" (p. 103).

Someone who is critically literate believes that change is possible, both on a personal and societal level, and acts on this belief. Garrison (1997) suggests that action is connected to the process of inquiry which "mediates being in an undesired present actual situation and looking toward a desirable future" (p. 92). Thus, it is not enough to just become informed about areas in which our lives and the lives of others

are lacking. Critical literacy involves interjecting ourselves into the world around us (Shannon, 1995).

McLaren (1998) asserts that mainstream pedagogies fail to explore the connections between what we do in classrooms and efforts to build a better society. I agree with Shor's view that as teachers "if we do not teach in opposition to the existing inequality of races, classes, and sexes, then we are teaching to support it" (1990, p. 347). There can be no neutral ground. What seems to be neutral is actually the taken-for-granted ideology of mainstream society, working in such a way that most people do not even experience it as separate from their own consciousness.

Performance as a Critical Space

Using the Arts to Create Critical Space

Greene's belief is that the arts provide a language that works to release the imagination. She describes how for those concerned "about breaking through the surfaces, about teaching others to 'read' their own worlds, art forms must be conceived of as ever-present possibility. . . . They ought to be, if transformational teaching is our concern, a central part of the curriculum" (p. 131). Stuart (1993) suggests that "the imagination, nurtured in the arts, can envision change" (p. 207). Imagination can also be brought to bear on social issues. Such social imagination encourages us to consider the kind of world we would like to live in. hooks (1995) suggests that "art should be. . . a place where boundaries can be transgressed, where visionary insights can be revealed" (p. 138). It is a place of freedom where there is the "opening of spaces as well as perspectives" (Greene, 1988, p. 5).

In this way, the arts become knowledge forms that allow those on the margins to assert their own identities, having found "it impossible to define their identities" in the terms of the dominant culture (Giroux, 1992, p. 32). As Heath & McLaughlin (1993) suggest, there are some young people who need alternative literacy processes to express dimensions of their lives and to celebrate who they are and are becoming. This belief comes from their work with community organizations working among inner city youth to "re-

create, assess and interpret their daily lives” (p. 78). These organizations involve youth in experiences with dance, music, visual arts, and drama. In fact, many young people are already using a variety of performance forms to gain knowledge and express themselves, such as music, film, dance, and verbal forms.

Green (1995) notes that only as we engage in the creation of possibilities can we move beyond imitation into actual thought. This idea of enlivening possibilities is seen in Boal’s commitment to maintaining theatre as a place of action, not merely rhetoric (Heritage, 1994). Boal’s techniques result in what he terms, “micro-revolutions” within individuals and communities (Patterson, 1994, p. 38). The revolution is that which disrupts the taken-for-granted, life as it currently exists. It is the transformation of critical pedagogy. In each community (or learning community) that engages in these theatre techniques as a means of critical examination, there is potential for disruption and consideration of new ways of being that are more just.

Performance as an Art Form to Create Critical Space

For my purpose within this study, I have defined performance as expressive forms that include some level of physicality. I include writing and performing poetry, interactive drama, singing, dancing, and call and response forms. I have relied heavily on Augusto Boal’s strategies for critical performance, which I will describe in more detail later.

Performance can be useful in assisting people to reflect on their own experiences. By playing the role of the protagonist or the subject of the story, the individual can give concrete form to issues and consider her actual responses within this scenario (Stuart, 1993). This reflexive nature is significant in beginning to build a pattern of personal empowerment. The ability to remember and imagine our own lives allows us to consider past and future events (Greene, 1995).

Performance can also allow the protagonist to interact as the antagonist or the oppressor. This provides the possibility of understanding the role of the oppressor. It has the potential for developing a dialogue across differences that may lead to further clarity over the issues and possibilities for action.

Performance activities are most helpful when they focus on themes that come out of the everyday worlds of the participants (Heath & McLaughlin, 1995). These generative themes, as Freire (1973) calls them in his literacy work, become the focus of critical analysis during the processes of conscientization and imagination. Because these themes come from the daily lives of the participants, they create connections between personal and collective experiences. During conscientization and imagination, these experiences become connected to the workings of society.

Embodiment

Embodiment is, perhaps, a word we do not often use in our everyday lives. But for a discussion of performance it becomes essential. Quite simply, to embody means to make something corporeal -- to give it flesh -- to incarnate. It means we use our bodies to make explicit the ideologies that not only shape our lives, but have been imprinted on our bodies themselves. Grosz (1994) has suggested that our bodies are “inscribed, marked, engraved, by social pressures external to them” (p. x). Boal (1979), 1992) calls this mechanization. Mechanization is the notion that in the process of performing our daily roles we use our bodies in particular ways. Such ways become “masks of behavior” (Boal, 1979). Demechanization is the process whereby each participant first “understands, sees, and feels to what point [her] body is governed by [her] work” and becomes newly aware of her own body in order to physically interpret characters in performances (Boal, 1979, p. 128).

When we engage in performance, we are able to physicalize our memories and emotions. We can stop action and rearrange it. We can imagine actions for the future. In this way we are able to see how the ideologies and scripts surrounding us have come to reside in our bodies. Most of us are unaware of the physicality of our experiences.

I will highlight four aspects to this idea of embodiment. One is that our bodies have become inscripted by routinized patterns of movement as a result of work, society, and relationships. Thus, a necessary component of performance is to examine these patterns and search for ways of reinventing our trajectories through our lived experiences.

This can be done through games, as Boal suggests, that articulate specific aspects of our lives. For example, one game involves the participants in shaking hands with people they meet as all the participants walk slowly around the room. This is a ritual we often perform. By engaging in this ritual with a variety of people, we see how it is both ritualized and has the potential to be experienced in a more fluid, situated way. That is to say, we can vary our ways of shaking hands according to each person we greet. We can demechanize our routine physical rituals.

A second aspect of embodiment is the need to resist the mind/body dualism that has historically shaped our thinking (Grosz, 1994). This kind of thinking has led to various notions of the body in subjection to the higher mind. Knowledge has been considered as being resident only in the mind. Grosz (1994) says, “as soon as knowledge is seen as purely conceptual, its relation to bodies, the corporeality of both knowers and texts, and the ways these materialities interact, must become obscure” (p. 4). Thinking in this way, we do not consider how knowledge is also resident in our bodies. We mask the actuality that we can not identify the dividing line between mind and body.

A third aspect is that performance occurs in the moment. It is historical. It is not timeless. What occurs among the participants at a given time will never occur again. Phelan (1993) suggests that, “performance honors the idea that a limited number of people in a specific time/space frame can have an experience of value which leaves no visible trace afterward” (p. 149). Salverson (1996) suggests that the narratives enacted through performance should not be seen as a “fixed, knowable, finite thing, but as an open one that changes and carries with it the possibility of reformings and retellings” (p. 184). It is this sense of being temporal that performance as an in the moment experience highlights.

Related to this characteristic of temporality is seeing performance is action. It is not discussion of the future; it is happening now. The participants are not merely rehearsing for a production that will be played out at a later time. They are participating in the event as they are performing it.

A fourth consideration related to embodiment is that we live in a world where certain specified forms of writing and verbal speech are privileged. Performance inverts this value system, placing the discourse of the body in the foreground. Instead of relying only on discussions to develop possible solutions to problems, performance in its very sense of being a different form of inquiry creates a different point of view. Greene (1978) suggests that shifting the mode of seeing can create “experiences of shock,” a term she borrows from Alfred Schutz. She further contends that such experiences of shock are necessary if the existing “horizons are to be breached” (1978, p. 101). Performing themes of oppression shifts the common mode of seeing.

The Performance Practices of Augusto Boal

As I considered performance as a process for the development of critical literacy, I relied heavily on the work of Augusto Boal. Like Paulo Freire, Boal is a Brazilian social activist who has worked in literacy and political awareness with those outside dominant structures. Boal (1995) asserts that performance is “an effective tool for the comprehension of social and personal problems and the search for their solutions” (p. 15). He further suggests that “engaged participants rehearsing strategies for personal and social change” could begin this search for solutions (Schutzman & Cohen-Cruz, 1994, p. 1).

Over the last forty years, Boal has developed what he calls The Theatre of the Oppressed. This work includes techniques that are gathered under the terms Image Theatre, Forum Theatre, Invisible Theatre, Rainbow of Desire, and Legislative Theatre. My work incorporated primarily Image and Forum Theatre, as well as other performance activities.

Image Theatre (Boal, 1992) is an attempt to reveal the hidden truths of society through non-speaking images. The work begins with a static image that is sculpted from the bodies of participants by positioning, proximity, and expression. Images are built around issues raised by the group as oppressions that need changing, such as racism, classism, gender discrimination, and violence. Often they are personal stories of

subordination. The image is not necessarily narrative, but is an evocation of the feelings, experiences, lives, and beliefs of the group.

The images do not remain frozen, they become dynamised by various stage directions. One technique involves the facilitator asking each of the individuals in the image to speak one phrase that vocalizes the immediate feeling of that aspect of the image. For example, in an image of violence a person may cry out in fear. Another dynamisation is to ask each person in the image to take one step in the direction that would be most natural within the image at the sound of a clap. A person in the image seeming to flee from another person may take steps away.

Boal works with images as a means of short-circuiting our over-reliance on words, crossing language and cultural barriers and reversing the environment of privilege for more articulate people. It is probable, as well, that images may be closer to how we envision our relations in society (Boal, 1992).

Forum Theater (Boal, 1992) focuses on exploring an immediate and embodied obstacle faced by the protagonist. It is a narrative episode shown to the audience in an incomplete form. For example, a scene in which a young girl is telling her mother that she is pregnant would not end with everything resolved. It would stop at a moment of crisis when the mother is responding with anger. It leaves a space for their proposals for alternative solutions to the enacted oppression.

A model of the situation is enacted for the audience. At the point where the problem begins, the action is stopped. The scenario is then played through more quickly with the audience prepared to shout, "stop!" when they would like to intervene by proposing a change in the action leading to a more empowered response for the protagonist. So, in a scene with the pregnant girl trying to communicate to her mother her decision to keep her baby and not marry the father, an observer could stop the action, going into the scene in the pregnant girl's role to suggest a way to talk with the mother.

This process of proposing alternatives is repeated over and over, until the protagonist, whose story is being acted out, is ready to recreate the scene using some of the ideas suggested. The purpose of this process is actually a pooling of ideas and

possible solutions given by members of the community. As Horton suggested in his own work in Southern Appalachia, the solutions to community problems exist within the experiences of the community's residents (Adams, 1975).

Each individual's experience and knowledge becomes a potential source of understanding for the group as a whole. Forum theatre is intended to "stimulate debate (in the form of action, not just words), to show alternatives, to enable people to become the protagonists of their own lives" (Jackson, 1993, p. xxii). Performance is an art form engaging oppressions as a critique, and encouraging people to develop as ethical agents.

Boal (1995) suggests that the purpose of his work is to help the person transform herself into the agent in a dramatic action and rehearse possible alternatives to then use in real life to address injustices. He is committed to beginning with personal stories of oppression that resonate with the larger community, thereby providing the opportunity for collective action. For example, in a workshop I participated in with Boal, a group of people suggested approximately twenty different stories of oppression that we might explore through enactment. I chose to participate with a group working on a story related to the censorship of a play about AIDS. The woman who told the story described a scene and suggested a cast. Although this was not my own story, I connected powerfully to the issues of the scene and the role in which I was cast. There were times when we were enacting the scene that I felt significant tension between my own values about the issue and the values that I was asked to portray in my role. The scene allowed everyone in our group to explore our connections to the issue of AIDS.

It is Boal's contention that for theatre to have a transformational impact, it must become a "laboratory for social experimentation" (Auslander, 1997, p. 104). Boal acknowledges performance as a means of looking analytically at the instances of one's life. This kind of self-consciousness can occur when we are able to step back from our own lives to reflect on who we are in society and how our lives have been historically shaped. That is to say, that we must be able to conceive of a space between ourselves as subject and as object. As Boal describes it, we both act and observe ourselves in action. This reflexivity is what makes performance powerful. It is through an analysis of

ourselves as social and historical actors that we can remake ourselves in new relationships with each other and with society.

Developing as a Performance Practitioner

I first considered the possibilities of performance when I was working in a low-income community trying to design activities for adolescents. I thought maybe performance would allow adolescents to explore the important concerns of their lives because it would allow them to vicariously address these concerns. Performance would allow them to embody adolescent or adult characters, without naming the experience as their own. It was at this time when wandering through the university's bookstore, I came upon Augusto Boal's (1992) book, Games for Actors and Non-Actors. I was captured as I read on the back of the book that Boal's methods "transform theatre into a democratic arena" where the participants engage issues by "contributing ideas, taking over roles, and using theatre to confront problems such as sexual harassment, racism, poor pay, homophobia, and all forms of exploitation or oppression." I bought the book and went back to my office to develop my program. I created a program called *Life Acts* which involved low-income children in performance games. While it did not become all that I hoped, it was my first attempt to utilize performance to stimulate critical literacy.

A year and a half ago I began participating in the Performing Community³, a group of faculty, students, and community members who have been exploring the interactive theatre processes of Augusto Boal. These workshop sessions allowed me to experience the emotions/fears of acting out my ideas and concerns within a community. I experienced in a real way the power of being "in the moment" as I participated in a scene. I learned games and warm-up activities that help participants become comfortable with using their bodies and their senses to express themselves.

³ This group was formed by Theatre faculty at Virginia Tech, Dr. Ann Kilkelly and Dr. Bob Leonard. They have led the Performing Community in the study of interactive theatre processes from a variety of sources including Augusto Boal, Celeste Miller, Viola Spolin, as well as their own theatre techniques. As a group we have worked to develop our own understandings of performance as a process for social change. A number of the Performing Community participants are working with performance in issues of racism, violence against women, and adolescent issues.

I participated in the various kinds of theatre that Boal has created to explore oppressions in individual lives and in society. Participating with the Performing Community helped to deepen my understanding of how particular games and activities might help adolescents explore issues in their lives, experiencing power and control over otherwise slippery tensions. For example, during one session the Performing Community group worked on issues of violence against women. The scene involved a woman who had been abused by a husband/boyfriend. As I watched the scene, I found myself particularly drawn in. It resonated with my work on child abuse prevention issues. At one point I went into the scene to take the place of a friend who was reaching out to the woman. I said to the woman, "I love you," in a gentle voice. Then I asked someone to take my place. I went to stand on the other side of the woman and said, "I love you," in a gruff voice. Someone went in for the woman and started arguing with me. At that particular moment I felt really uncomfortable. I felt like I had abused this woman on the floor. I asked someone to replace me in the scene. As I watched the rest of the scene play out, I was very overwhelmed by the power of my experience. I knew at that moment that experiencing an issue through participation in a performance activity could be a way for students to stop events in their lives in order to analyze them and consider options.

Dr. Mady Schutzman from The California School for the Arts came to the university in the Fall of 1996. She conducted a series of workshops for the Performing Community and the campus. Dr. Schutzman has studied with Boal and uses his theatre methods with adolescents and single mothers in Los Angeles. Watching her facilitate provided another example of how one might work with a group using Boal's techniques.

I was able to consult with Dr. Schutzman about my own emerging thinking about performance and literacy. She helped me decide that it would be advantageous to work with a group of girls, rather than a mixed group of adolescents. We discussed the distraction that boys and girls can be to one another during adolescence. I agreed that working with a mixed group would complicate the work I hoped to do.

Exploring Performance as a Process for Developing Critical Literacy

Over the last two years I have been an instructor for a literacy development course at the university. The course drew students from a variety of majors and academic levels who were considering teaching as a career choice. The students participated in a fifty hour field component where they worked with elementary and middle school students to develop literacy related projects. In class and through the reading, I tried to raise issues about how schooling is shaped by the purposes of dominant society. I encouraged my students to consider their own situated lives in terms of race, class, gender, and ethnicity.

I carried into this teaching environment the same commitments that I held when I was teaching elementary students and when I was working in communities. I want to help my predominantly white, middle class, female students consider how they benefit from the inequalities of society and how those from non-dominant groups suffer as a result. I hoped that I might stimulate my students' commitments to the collective project of redistributing the resources that are guarded so carefully by the dominant culture.

I used the performance activities developed by Boal to engage my students in critical reflection. I tried a variety of performance activities with my students. For example, we read Bartoli's (1995) book, Unequal Opportunity and discussed the interplay of race, gender, and class in relation to students' educational experiences. To prepare my students for the performance activities I began by sharing a wordless, picture book called, Across Town (Sara, 1990) which shows how a man and a cat find each other in a desolate section of a city. We discussed what this says about building relationships with students. We also talked about how the images were evocative for each of them in unique ways. I then proposed that we play a game called "making a machine" to get them warmed up and used to moving their bodies. The first group I tried making a machine with resisted and proposed their own game, which we played. The goal was to get used to moving our bodies in front of one another, not to necessarily make a machine. Then I asked them to write notes in their journals about a time when they felt they were treated unfairly. They shared these stories with a partner. The partners then found another pair.

These groups shared their stories and then worked together to create a static image that represented unfair treatment.

Each of the three groups presented their images to the others. After this “preview” we went back and used the images to begin a ‘dialogue’. I asked audience to move or remold the image in any way they wanted to. They could intensify an expression, change the position of a figure, or add to the image. I used dialogue to dynamise the images. For one image, I asked each person in the image to speak the words that they thought their part of the image would say. Another technique I used was to ask each image figure to move at the sound of a clap until they created an image of fairness. This process is a simulation of moving from oppression to liberation, from the actual to the possible.

The second group responded more eagerly to the warm-up game. They seemed to engage more positively with the dramatic process. Several in the second group said they enjoyed working through the creation of a physical representation of unfairness. The second group ended up also using the techniques to act out a problem that involved a middle school student and one of the course participants. Acting out the actual events allowed the rest of the class to become critically engaged in what happened, and then to propose alternative ways of reacting. I was pleased with the response of the students, but also saw that in order to use these techniques well, the community had to be safe: a place where participants could feel trust and take risks.

Last spring I received an invitation to work with a group of six grade girls at a local Middle School.⁴ The girls were described by their teacher as needing some extra time to deal with issues in their lives and with aspects of being adolescent girls. As it turned out, the administration did not want to have a group just for girls, so I worked with a group of sixth grade students every other week for about three months. We used performance to analyze issues in their lives and in the larger world. The students were white and middle

⁴ I worked with a group of approximately eight six grade girls and boys at a local middle school at the invitation of a teacher who was a friend of my advisor, although the invitation didn’t come through that relationship. We engaged in a variety of performance activities that examined their lives as adolescents.

class. Working with this group of middle school students was an additional opportunity for me to think about how to involve adolescents in performance activities for critical analysis.

Attending a workshop with Augusto Boal⁵ around that same time helped me deepen my understanding of the potential of performance for critical analysis of issues. During the workshop I participated in the development of a performance piece on censorship. Experiencing this issue as a participant in an enacted story helped me to think about censorship in new ways.

The Implications of Race

Whiteness

Hill (1997) asserts that “whiteness is a *faux* neutrality, a liberal ruse that has worked since the Enlightenment to keep race matters distinct and at a comfortable distance from the dominant and, heretofore anyway, silent majority” (p. 140). Frankenberg (1993) sees whiteness in three distinct ways:

First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege.

Second, it is a ‘standpoint,’ a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, ‘whiteness’ refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed. (p. 1)

To name whiteness as privilege is to get at the heart of the matter of inequality. As Sleeter (1996) has noted, to be white is to be privileged. It is difficult to give up this privilege. Perhaps it can not be done. A principle operating in our society is that by virtue of having white skin, no matter what class or gender, although these factors do mediate the rewards, one is entitled to a certain level of access and credibility that is not afforded to people of color.

Another issue that Frankenberg raises is that whiteness is unmarked. Omi and Winant (1991) note that “most whites do not experience their ethnicity as a definitive aspect of their social identity” (p. 17). Carter (1995) agrees that “whites, while socialized

⁵ Pedagogy of the Oppressed Conference, 1997, Omaha, Nebraska.

in a racially constructed world, are taught not to be aware of themselves in racial terms” (p. 199). This is a sense that white is normal and non-white is other, abnormal.

Christine Sleeter (1996) has said that by virtue of being white and benefiting from white supremacist society she is a racist. I admire Sleeter’s writing and her radical structuralist analysis of race issues, but I resist calling myself a racist. In the fall of 1997, I attended a workshop where the topic was “transforming curriculum to reflect diversity.” I found out later that a colleague who had also attended the workshop thought I sounded arrogant when I talked about not feeling any prejudice in relation to race/ethnicity. When I heard that she interpreted my remarks that way, I felt defensive. I was glad to have her feedback. I certainly didn’t want to sound arrogant. But, as with Sleeter’s assertion, I knew I was working really hard to be anti-racist. Thinking about it, I began to feel like my language betrayed me -- I became wary of speaking, especially in the presence of people of color.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) agree with the definition of racism given by Wellman, “culturally sanctioned beliefs which, regardless of the intentions involved, defend the advantages Whites have because of the subordinated positions of racial minorities.” Carter (1995) describes three types of racism he calls individual, institutional, and cultural. These types reveal the pervasive ways in which racism has entered the thinking of both white and black people.

The first type Carter terms individual racism, describing it as those people who consciously or unconsciously accept the notion that people of color are inferior because of physical attributes. The second type is institutional racism, suggesting the many established laws, customs, and practices that insure the continuation of racial inequalities. The third type of racism that Carter defines is cultural racism. This perspective conveys the conviction that white Euro-American culture is superior to the cultures of people of color. Carter uses these three types of racism to discuss Helm’s five-stage model of white racial development (Figure 3) .

Level	Identifying Perspectives
Contact	Not aware of self as a racial being

	Adopted an essentially “color-blind” stance Lacks awareness or experiences with people of color
Disintegration	Knows that racism does exist, that race does matter, and that they are white Empathetic to black issues, but realizes the costs of identifying outside of white structures
Reintegration	Believe that whites are better than people of color People of color should adopt white ways in order to be successful
Pseudo-Independence	Beginning to consider race in cognitive ways Sees personal experiences as the lens for understanding the experiences of others
Immersion-Emersion	Understands and accepts the perpetuation of racism by whites Actively reject oppression of all people
Autonomy	Free from racism and white racial denial Values and seeks out cross-racial/cultural experiences

Figure 2. Carter’s Explanation of Helm’s Five-Stage Model of White Racial Identity Development

Carter’s uses these stages to suggest how white people might begin to engage in self-exploration about racial issues. He understands racial identity as a complex construct shaped by individuals, institutions, and cultures. Thus, Carter advocates the creating of spaces where white people can talk about racial issues.

There are few spaces for white people to explore the issue of race. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) tell us that the inequalities in our society are “a logical and predictable result of a racialized society in which discussions of race and racism continue to be muted and marginalized.” West (1993) agrees that “our truncated public discussions of race suppress the best of who and what we are as a people because they fail to confront the complexity of the issue in a candid and critical manner” (p. 2). hooks asserts that “everyone in this society. . . who want to see an end to racism, an end to white supremacy, must begin to engage in a counter hegemonic ‘race talk’ that is fiercely and passionately calling for change” (p. 5).

The system of racial inequality shapes all of us. It is not just something that people of color must address. It can be argued that white people must engage in the struggle because it is a white held territory. “Racism is a White problem in that its development and perpetuation rests with White people” (Katz In Carter, 1995). This

makes me accountable for what I am doing to dismantle racism in our society. I can no longer feel that I am not racist, if I am not doing something to transform inequalities. Thompson (1995) says that we must consider “what it means to live as white people who are attempting to unravel racial hierarchies” (p. 354).

I attended a meeting of the Black Women’s Coalition on campus. I was interested in hearing what these young women would have to say. One of the members of the group was enrolled in a course I was teaching. I had mentioned to her that I was coming to the meeting. As I walked to the Black Cultural Center where the meeting was being held, I wondered if I should be there. Would there be other white women? If Black women were trying to create their own space, would they resent a white woman’s presence? Would I be seen as an interloper? I walked in to an area where several women were still moving furniture to create a circle. I observed that there was one young Black woman sitting on a couch. Normally, I would have taken the chair next to the couch, not wanting to intrude myself into another’s space. As I considered what to do, I thought that if I sat in the chair it might look as if I didn’t want to sit next to this woman. So I asked if the seat on the couch was taken and when she said no, I sat down.

As the meeting went on, I listened as the women and men discussed relationships among African American students on the campus. I took notes. I wondered if people were questioning why I was there and why I was writing notes. I wondered if I inhibited the conversation in any way. It didn’t seem like I did. Toward the end of the meeting, I raised my hand to make a comment. It was a little while before the conversation got to me. I talked about the girls from the Center and how I would love for the girls to have conversations like the one they were having now. One of the women who knew of the Center asked about mentoring. I shared a little bit about my attempts to set up some connections between African American university women and the Center girls. A few of them asked me questions.

The group leader suggested we move on and those who were interested talk with me after the meeting. I was glad she moved the attention away. I was feeling intrusive. At the end of the meeting I talked with two of the women at the meeting. I had thought the

student in my class might come over and greet me. Then I wondered if I was raising the expectation that because I was white I should receive some special recognition for coming. I wondered how the group perceived me, both as I listened and when I talked.

I am keenly aware that for me as a white woman to work with black people will raise a host of issues. I am personally raising some of these. Other issues will be articulated by both African Americans and white people. A part of me sees the raising of issues as a way to make my work have greater integrity and resonance with the communities I want to interact with. Another part of me is fearful of doing the wrong thing -- being judged as an interloper -- one of the white people jumping on the African American bandwagon because it is a way to attain some degree of status within a largely white university struggling to respond to diversity issues.

Black Feminist Theory

Andersen asserts (1993) that “feminist theory is, itself, incomplete without an analysis of the intersections of race, class, and gender in society” (p. 348). This analysis is meager because the feminist movement has emerged primarily from and developed within the experiences of white, middle class women. Many women of color have found it difficult to find a home within the women’s movement (hooks, 1990). In difficult times, this sense of exclusion has resulted in name-calling and alienation. And yet, at other times, the challenges made by women of color have raised significant issues that must be dealt with if a powerful feminist agenda is to ever be realized. For example, there was a time when black women were the domestics working in the houses of white, middle class feminists. They were the ones caring for white families when the women were out talking about gender equality (Dill, 1994).

Fundamental differences in how black and white feminists view the world have undermined attempts to create a consensus against patriarchy. For white women the early feminist movement was often about personal consciousness-raising and individual freedoms (Dill, 1994). Because of their experiences with racism, Black women are strongly aware of their group identity and the necessity of collective struggle. For black

women, the issues of race are highly, if not preeminently, salient. For white women, race takes a back seat to gender concerns.

Patricia Hill Collins (1994) has advanced a definition of Black feminism. She suggests that “Black feminist thought consists of specialized knowledge created by African-American women which clarifies a standpoint of and for black women. In other words, Black feminist thought encompasses theoretical interpretations of black women’s reality by those who lived it” (p. 581). She rejects the biological categorization of blackness and argues that her definition does not mean that by virtue of being black, all African American women possess a feminist consciousness or “that other groups do not play a critical role in its production” (p. 581). Collins does believe, however, that “Black women’s experiences with both racial and gender oppression . . . result in needs and problems distinct from white women and Black men” (pp. 19-20).

The notion of standpoint is not simply another way of saying that we all exist in an intersection of race, class, gender, and ethnicity. Feminist standpoint theory is based on the idea that a woman’s particular location shapes her experiences and what she knows. Hartsock (1997) explains that a standpoint is developed by raising our various positionalities to a level of consciousness that allows them to become a place from which to connect with others in order to critique society. She suggests further that a standpoint is not “simply an interested position (interpreted as bias) but is interested in the sense of being engaged” (p. 218). Collins (1991) echoes this sense of engagement by saying that “a Black woman’s standpoint. . . provide[s] a unique angle of vision on self, community and society” (p. 22).

Speaking more broadly, hooks (1981) defines feminism as “a commitment to eradicating the ideology of domination that permeates Western civilization. . . and a commitment to reorganizing US society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires” (p. 194). This definition fits well with Black feminism as a move against racial and gender domination. In suggesting this, hooks takes a stance of a radical structuralist (Sleeter, 1996). Radical

structuralism speaks to the reorganization of American society that will be necessary to break the systems of domination that our patriarchal capitalist nation is committed to.

Valerie Smith (1994) sees Black feminist theory as referring “not only to theory written (or practiced) by black feminists, but also to ways of reading inscriptions of race. . . , gender. . . , and class in modes of cultural expression (p. 672). Smith suggests here the kind of critical analysis that Freire advocates. Race, class, and gender have become embedded in the ideologies of dominant culture. It is critical that all people who would be anti-racist be able to read against these inscriptions. Only then will African American feminists develop powerful responses to embedded injustices.

If subordinated groups can identify and act on a self-defined purpose then there is the possibility that they can move beyond their “appointed place” in society. Collins says, “Black women’s ability to forge these individual, unarticulated, yet potentially powerful expressions of everyday consciousness into an articulated, self-defined, collective standpoint is key to Black women’s survival” (1994, p. 585).

bell hooks describes the difficulties that Black women have had in developing a unified resistance to issues of sexism when she talks about the fighting among Black women. She attributes these difficulties to the “star” status attributed by mainstream society when a Black woman is successful. hooks suggests that this racial myth of meritocracy actually becomes a way in which only some can rise to the standard. Notoriety for a few is a way that mainstream society keeps Black feminists from developing any kind of solidarity. Her response is that, “black women dealing with one another with respect, or women of color in general is an act of resistance” (1990, p. 94). Refusing to engage in destructive criticism holds the promise of unity. This does not, however, mean that all critique within a group is destructive. hooks encourages Black feminists to develop “skills that enable us to look at ourselves critically and observe how we behave towards others” (1990, p. 98).

Another strategy that divides Black women is to believe that they must chose between engaging in the struggle for racial liberation or joining the feminist project (Dill, 1994). This is a false choice laid out by those who support neither. “Yet the historical

success of this strategy and the continued importance of class, patriarchal, and racial divisions perpetuate such choices both within our consciousness and within the concrete realities of our daily lives” (Dill, 1994, p. 46). African American women continue to believe that they must only join a single group, that they cannot be ‘both, and.’ hooks (1996, Lecture) says that the question she is most frequently asked is whether she is first a woman or first African American.

A major issue for Black feminists is audience. hooks asserts that “much of the small amount of feminist writing done by women of color is directed toward a white audience” (1990, p. 100). This focus keeps feminist ideas out of the minds and hearts of younger Black women and men. Collins has also noted that in order to gain legitimacy, Black feminists must negotiate three key groups. The first group is the ordinary African American woman who is struggling to get through her life. She wants to hear a voice that is authentic based on her own experience. Secondly, there is the community of Black women scholars. Finally, there is the plumbline of the white male for those who want mainstream acceptance. It is likely that it is not possible to please all of these potential audiences at the same time. African American feminists must choose those to whom most need to speak.

Omolade (1994) challenges “the Black feminist and nationalist intelligentsias to do more than engage in intellectual sparring and ethnic validation” (p. xxi). She is referring to the development of a praxis -- the intermixing of theory and practice. Omolade is also making the connection that the Black feminist project must be passed along the generations. She laments the lack of attention to getting “radical books” and “radical discourse” into the hands of youth. Collins (1994) suggests that an intergenerational legacy of Black feminism will come about through collaboration “with Black women at the center of a community based on coalitions among autonomous groups” (p. 594).

Black feminist theory as a lens for viewing this study is based on its commitment to stimulating a Black woman’s standpoint. The seven adolescent girls written about in this study include six Black and one white female from low-income families. In order to understand their constructions of themselves in relation to their families, communities, and

societal influences I must have a way of considering their unique standpoints. I believe Black feminist theory provides this. Another contribution of African American feminism is the ability to see that constraints and lack of success may not be the result of individual deficits, but of larger systems of racism (Smith, 1983).

CHAPTER THREE

A METHODOLOGY FOR EXAMINING CRITICAL LITERACY IN NON-MAINSTREAM COMMUNITIES

The Research Design

Research Questions

This study was designed to explore the concept of critical literacy and the possibilities for its development within the lives of a white educator/researcher and African American adolescent girls.

The primary research questions for this study were:

In what ways and to what extent can educators assist urban adolescent African American girls to develop critical literacy?

In what ways must I as a white educator develop my own critical literacy if I am to work in non-mainstream communities?

As the development and implementation of the study progressed, I formulated two additional questions related to my first primary question:

Are there ways in which performance activities are uniquely fitted to critical literacy development?

To what degree can adolescents step back from their culturally embedded lives and do the critique that is inherent in the development of critical literacy?

I developed two supporting questions related to my second primary question:

How have I been impacted by my life as a white person within a white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal society?

What changes must I make as a white, middle class educator if I am to work in ways that are equitable and anti-racist?

I addressed these questions in chapters four and five as I discuss the activities that the girls and I engaged in, along with conversations that occurred as we were working together. Through interviews I connected their lives with the insights that they developed through critical activities. By reviewing my own struggles and concerns, I consider my own critical literacy development. In my final chapter I discuss how this experience has shaped the ways in which I work with pre-service teachers.

Ethnographic Action Research

This study is situated in the qualitative realm as it “is conducted not to confirm or disconfirm earlier findings, but rather to contribute to a process of continuous revision and enrichment of understanding” (Elliot, Fischer, and Rennie. In Lincoln, 1996, p. 17).

Qualitative research is not intended to prove a prestated hypothesis, but to provide descriptive data about a local situation. I have not tried to generalize from my work with the girls, but I have considered how my learning from this study has impacted my teaching and my thinking about teacher education.

As a qualitative study, this work is ethnographic. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) state:

the ethnographer participates. . . in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions; in fact collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues with which he or she is concerned. (p. 2)

In my case, I participated in the life of an urban community center for a year, involving myself in a variety of activities beyond my work with the girls participating in the study. Rose (1995) notes that “what we come to know, we know by setting in, staying a while, watching and listening” (p. 9). The power of ethnography comes from this immersion in the lives and spaces of those we are learning among.

Part of being immersed in the site is learning to carefully watch and listen. As a researcher, this is difficult for me. One reason is because of the nature of this particular study. When I worked with the girls I was generally leading the activities in our sessions. The other reason is that I tend to enjoy being more active when I am in a research site, a classroom or a community site. I prefer to interact with people. I have to structure times to watch and listen or I don’t tend to do it. I was able, however, to listen to the girls at the beginning of sessions and when they were working on activities around the table where we worked. At times I came to the Center early to watch the girls as they interacted on the playground.

In this ethnographic study, I have taken a critical activist stance, meaning that I took part in the work of the community center as it sought to impact the lives of the children it serves. I was an advocate for the Center and I contributed resources that I was able to broker because of my position as an instructor at a local university. Haraway (1988) suggests that knowledge is best gathered through/within a social change project. My work emerged from my own explicit desire to help the girls in the study move toward greater freedom in their lives by identifying and transforming the constraints of racist, classist, and patriarchal dominant institutions. I also wanted to deepen my own understanding of how race had impacted my life. McLaughlin and Tierney (1993) suggest that the researcher should be involved in “changing those conditions that seek to silence and marginalize” (p. 5). I sought to change conditions by contributing to the work at the Center and to the lives of the girls.

Action oriented research can raise the complexity of research for the researcher. Delgado-Gaitan (1993) says about her work with a Hispanic parents group, “I continued to experience a great deal of consternation about moving away from my role as a researcher” (p. 402). She says this because the parents asked her to become a facilitator for their parent group in its developmental stages. When we take an activist stance in relation to the community in which our research is sited we open ourselves to experiencing the same kind of turmoil as our participants. We embrace their struggles as our own. An activist researcher risks engaging her emotions, as well as her intellect.

An example of such a sense of emotional engagement comes from my interaction with one of the girls’ foster mothers. On several occasions I interacted with Jackie’s foster mother. She seemed to always say negative things about Jackie. One time I went to pick Jackie up to go on a field trip with several other girls. She was not home. Her foster mother asked me how Jackie acted at the Center. I told her that I enjoyed working with Jackie. Jackie’s foster mother began to list all of the reasons that Jackie was a bad person. As the girls and I left the neighborhood, we saw Jackie and called out to her. She came over to get in the car with us. I took Jackie home and went into the house with her to ask if she could go with us on the trip. Jackie’s foster mother ridiculed Jackie. When

Jackie began to cry, she moved away from the door to go sit on the stairs. Her foster mother yelled at her to not walk off when she was talking to her. She wasn't talking to her, she was talking about her. For days I wondered if I should let social services know about my concerns about this home situation. I never did because I knew they had no where else to put Jackie.

The Research Process

Description of the Site

The group of girls I worked with was made up of volunteer participants from the Central City Center for Youth. This community center was located in Valley City¹, a city of approximately 100,000 people in Southwest Virginia . The Central City Center for Youth is located in the area considered the “inner city” or the “core” by the city government. This area, which includes the city's oldest neighborhoods suffers from many of the conditions characteristic of larger urban communities, such as low-income, racial isolation, and high crime. It is also approximately 53% African American, compared to 24.3% African American city-wide (US Census).

According to a series of Valley City Times special reports (6/1-6/6/97), forty percent of its residents are below poverty level. For adults twenty-five years or older, 27% have less than a ninth-grade education. In Valley City in 1995, the out-of-wedlock birthrate was 42.3% as compared to a rate of 29.3% for the state (Valley City Times, 6/6/97). More than 60% of the residents are renters in homes that have typically been assessed at a value one-third that of the typical house in the rest of the city. Nearly one in four of these houses has been cited for building code violations at least once, and many more than once. In 1996, eleven of the fourteen murders in the city took place in this section, as did about one-third of the drug offenses, 42% of the muggings, and more than two-thirds of the prostitution offenses.

The median income for families in this `core' area is \$14,803, while the median income figured for the city as a whole is \$30,590 (US Census, 1990). Twenty-two percent of the households receive public assistance. While these numbers are not the staggering percentages seen in cities like Detroit, New York, Los Angeles, they do tell us that families living in these Valley City neighborhoods face significant challenges as they try to survive and raise their children.

The Central City Center for Youth was created in 1979 by a grassroots coalition consisting of two churches and a neighborhood group who expressed concern that vandalism was increasing and many youth had little to do but wander the streets. The Center was originally located in a house in the West Side neighborhood, but was moved

¹ The name of the city, the community center, and the other neighborhoods are pseudonyms to

to its current facility in 1993, adding a teen building in the spring of 1997. The Center's programs address the needs of nutrition, recreation, socialization, and education through an after-school program, a tutorial program, a parent program, and an extended summer program, serving kids 5 -18 year olds.

The Center has a planned schedule for the children's time. Students are bussed to the Center from their schools between 2:30 and 3:00. There is free time and a snack until 3:30 when students get into age-related activity groups. These groups are led by a leader who plans recreational and educational activities. From 5:15 to 6:15 three times a week the tutoring program takes place.

Each year over 200 children from kindergarten through twelfth grade participate in the Center's activities. Many of these children participate for several years and are joined by brothers and sisters at the Center. Each child must be enrolled by a parent/guardian who commits to volunteering at the Center.

The Center has established income guidelines for the families whose children attend. Eighty-five percent of the parents of children attending the Center work. Their mean income is \$12,951. Ninety-six percent of the children are from families receiving some type of government assistance. Fifty-four percent are Medicaid recipients. Twelve percent of the children live in foster families. Six percent of the children are being raised by retired relatives; 2% have parents who are disabled; and 3% of the children have parents who are currently enrolled in school (Numbers compiled by Central City Center for Youth).

The Central City Center for Youth is a non-profit agency governed by a Board of Directors. The Center receives funding for its \$256,000 budget from the Valley City human services budget, from private donations, and from designations to the Center through the United Way campaign. The two buildings that now comprise the Center were bought and partially renovated through funds from the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG). The CDBG is intended primarily for localities to spend on infrastructure, although a small percentage of the allocation may go to human services. Currently, the

protect the agreement of confidentiality I made with the participants.

Center is run by an Executive Director, an Associate Director, a Tutorial Director, eight other full-time staff and four part-time, two of whom work 35 hours.

Description of the Participants

Over the course of the twelve months I worked with the girls at the Center, I worked with thirteen girls. All of these girls were African American except for two. Of the thirteen six were in foster homes. Four more of the girls lived with their mothers only. The girls ages ranged from twelve to sixteen. During the year several of the girls dropped out and a few more joined the group. At the end of the year I had eight girls coming to the group, many of whom had been with me since it started.

Entering the Site

I explored two sites: a middle school alternative education program and an evening high school completion program. After several tutoring at the evening high school, I realized that the students were too busy trying to get in the credit hours they needed to graduate to engage in any additional work. Even though the school system was willing to approve my work with them for elective credit, most did not need any more electives.

I found the alternative school site to be very interesting. However, the enrollment was overwhelmingly male and African American. I tried to build relationships with the five female students by helping them with school work and talking with them. Right before I was to begin work with them, two of the girls quit coming to school. Then a few new students arrived. I decided to open up the group to some of the younger high school girls. I found one additional girl to work with. After about four months of working in the school twice a week, I tried some activities with this small group of girls. Some of the girls expressed positive feedback about the activities, others were unenthusiastic. I was not able to meet with them again during the remaining several weeks of school.

While at the alternative school, I wondered if I should try to work with a group of the boys. I had begun to read about schooling for African American males and found it to

be a issue that had important consequences for society at large. I decided that expanding the study to include boys, as well as girls, would make the study overwhelming.

One day I went to Valley City to visit with some of my students who were in field placements in the city schools. When I arrived, I learned that it was a teacher work day. Since I was there already, I decided to try and locate the Central City Center for Youth. I had an address so I stopped twice to ask for directions. When I arrived, I realized that the Center was located nearby a school where I used to teach.

The building was a single-story, brick structure. The words “Central City Center for Youth” were painted brightly across the side of the building. An asphalt basketball court/parking lot filled the space from the building to the street. A small play area with a wooden fort sat in one corner of the lot. Surrounding the whole area was a high chain link fence. As I entered the door, I was met by a young woman, Leslie. I later learned that Leslie was the director of the tutoring program. She gave me a tour of the Center. As we walked, I talked with her about what I wanted to do and learn. Leslie was positive and encouraging. She had graduated from a local private college the year before with a degree in political science.

I left a description of my research with Leslie to share with the director, Kathy. Later I found out that all of the staff had read it. Leslie called me a few days later to tell me that it would be fine for me to work at the Center. Six days after I had first visited the Center, I met with Tina, the leader of the Purple Group, the group for the 14 - 16 year olds. I talked with Tina about how my work with the girls would fit in with the rest of their program. I explained to her that I wanted to involve the girls in performance activities, such as poetry writing and performance, drama, singing, dance, and call and response. We would use these activities to reflect on issues relevant to their lives as adolescent African American girls.

Introductory Meeting with the Girls at the Community Center

My plan was to talk with the girls about the group, provide an invitation for them to participate, and then send permission slips home to their parents. I was unsure if I could

explain the kinds of things we might do in the group in a way that would make them sound interesting to the girls. I told them that we would use a variety of performance activities, like singing, dancing, and drama to examine issues that were important to them as young African American girls. This was the first time the girls had met me, so I neither anticipated nor received an enthusiastic response.

This first day when I met with the girls, a speaker for the group had canceled, so there was additional time I could choose to spend with the girls. I decided to do an activity with the girls. For this session, the group leaders asked all of the girls to stay. I tried a rhythm activity with the group, where one person starts with a beat and then each person in the circle adds some kind of rhythm forming a kind of chorus of sounds. We did this game once and then tried a similar process by adding together sounds made with voices. Most of the eleven girls participated.

I was concerned about whether the girls would enjoy what we were doing. I remembered times when I had done activities with the kids at the alternative school that were less than well-received. I wrote in my fieldnotes later that day:

One of the girls said, "do we have to be in this group or is it only if we want to?" I said, "only if you want to." She said, "so I can leave now." I told her I'd like her to stay [this first time]. Her group leader told her to stay today. At one point she was participating. I turned toward her as I was talking. She said, "I'm not participating."

I next tried to do an activity with call and response where one group would make up a rhythm and the other would answer it with their own rhythm. The group that began did a kind of dance step. The other group did exactly what they were doing, instead of moving in a way that was a response, but they did enjoy the dancing.

At the end of the session, I handed out permission slips to each of the girls. I explained the forms, telling them that I wanted to work with them over the next year to do activities similar to the ones we did that day. I explained that I would be asking them to talk with me about their lives in interviews, to write in a journal during our sessions, and to allow me to photograph our work together. I told the girls that they could choose to stop

participating at any time, but I encouraged them to continue throughout the year. I ended up with approximately eight girls who came to the second session.

Duration of Girls Involvement

I began to meet with the girls in April 1997. I didn't really consider the girls an actual group until our fourth session in May. During the third session, three girls left the group while I went out to get some supplies from my car. Attendance was very stable through mid-June, when four new girls joined the group. By the August 7 session, three girls had dropped out of the group, but from that point on through March 1998, our group of eight girls remained stable, with a ninth girl coming irregularly.

Schedule of Sessions

I met with the girls from April, 1997 through March, 1998. Most of the time we met twice a week for ninety minutes. Because of school breaks, when the Center was closed, and times when the group leaders had made other plans for the girls' age groups, this schedule was occasionally altered. The days of the week that we met changed at regular intervals based on changes in my teaching schedule at the university and the scheduled activities at the Center. For example, my schedule changed at the end of the spring semester (May, 1997), at the end of the summer (mid-August, 1997), and at the end of fall semester (December, 1997). In the spring (January - March) of 1998, the schedule was adjusted to accommodate the needs of the girls attending Interact meetings, a teenage leadership group sponsored by the local Kiwanis community club, on Mondays.

Overview of Sessions

I worked with approximately five to ten girls ages 12-17 at Central City twice a week beginning in April, 1997. We engaged in performance-based activities designed to help the girls explore their lives, their families/community, and the larger culture. We talked

about issues that they identified as important. For example, they identified teen pregnancy and created sculpted images that represented their feelings about the issue. As a group, we engaged in a variety of activities designed to help them identify and critique their current situations in life, and consider how they might shape their future lives.

I felt it was important for the girls to develop a sense of ownership for the group. For this reason I encouraged them to name the group. We set aside an entire session to come up with the right name. Eventually I had T-shirts printed with a graphic and the name.

Performance techniques formed the centerpiece of my work with the girls. I used performance as a means of embodying the experiences of the girls as individuals within society (Boal, 1993). I relied heavily on the performance processes of Augusto Boal (1985, 1992, 1995) as a way of exploring societal and personal oppressions. According to Schutzman (1994), "Boal's techniques point the way to awareness of society's politicization of gender, class, race, family, and/or psyche" (p 152). Such critical awareness is essential to the development of critical literacy. I used performance to provide opportunities for the girls to consider and rehearse strategies for personal and social change (Schutzman & Cohen-Cruz, 1994). For example, we read together several poems about hope. We then talked about the goals and future plans that the girls had. We wrote poetry about these goals. Then groups of girls created static sculptures with their bodies to reflect hopelessness and hopefulness. We discussed what they saw in each group's sculpture. In other sessions, we prepared performance pieces on teen pregnancy and peer pressure. We created rap pieces on society's definition of beauty.

As a group, the girls examined the forms of popular culture familiar to them. We examined music, poetry, magazines, books, and videos that influenced them in some way. We talked about the ways in which girls and women are portrayed in these media. The purpose of this activity was to help the girls make connections between their personal lives and the lives portrayed in popular culture. In this way, the girls had an opportunity to consider the world in terms of their lives and the larger culture (Freire, 1973, Shor, 1988).

Taped Reflections

I realized early on that I was forgetting a lot of things from the sessions by the time I drove the hour to my home. I also saw the drive as a significant time to debrief. I began to use a small hand-held tape recorder to note what went on in the sessions. I also recorded my observations and general thoughts, including any questions or concerns about particular girls. Later I listened to these tapes to help me expand my fieldnotes. I found that the relaxed time in the car allowed me to review the session with the girls.

Interviews

I conducted interviews with each of the girls who agreed to do so. They had all signed the confidentiality agreement which included an agreement to participate in an interview, nevertheless only eight girls actually agreed to sit down and talk on tape. I interviewed eight of the girls once at the beginning of our work together, meaning that some interviews were conducted in later phases when the girls joined the group. One of the girls dropped out in the beginning of the summer phase of the group. The interviews with the seven other girls were used to develop profiles of their lives and in understanding their thoughts on the themes that we discussed.

The interviews were conversational and dealt with autobiographical information, school history and perspectives, self-descriptions, current and future goals, and concerns about community issues (Appendix E). They lasted approximately 30 minutes. I developed a list of topics that guided the conversation, rather than using directive questioning (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1990). Eisner (1998) advises that interviews must not be “formal, questionnaire-oriented encounters” nor “rigid or mechanical in method” (p. 183). Wolcott (1986) suggests that these kinds of informal interviews “usually prove more important than structured interviews in an extended study” (p. 339).

The interviews were conducted in one of the rooms in the teen building where we held our sessions. I let the girls know in the beginning of the interviews that if they were uncomfortable talking about any topic I raised they could say so. For example, when I

I sought to be responsive to the topics of concern generated by conversations with the girls. Thus, I did not plan a sequence of sessions in advance of actually working with the girls. I did plan for each session, although even then I allowed myself to modify and even abandon, these plans as I interacted with the girls during a given session.

When I arrived at the Center, I would walk around the building and the playground rounding up the girls to go across to the teen building. Usually we would talk together for ten to fifteen minutes about whatever conversations they initiated. After that I asked them to write in their journals for about ten minutes. Usually after this time, we began an activity I had planned for the session based on their generated themes. Sometimes, if there were only two or three girls, and I had the financial resources, I would take them out for pizza or donuts. There were also times when the needs of the girls preempted my plans. For example, when they were too energetic to do a quiet, focused activity, I would try to do some active games or just have a discussion. Sometimes, like when two of the girls were arguing and refused to work together, we had to focus on immediate issues.

Data Collection

Fieldnotes of Sessions

I took brief notes in a spiral notebook as we worked and talked. I recorded fieldnotes after each session with the girls. Fieldnotes are "accounts describing experiences and observations the researcher has made while participating in an intense and involved manner (Emerson, Frets, Shaws, 1995, pp. 4-5). I tried to capture snatches of conversations, descriptions of the activities, and how the girls responded to our topics. Because I was often leading the activities, I usually had few jottings from the session. I would make notes at the end of the session most of the time.

After the session, sometimes at the Center, sometimes later at home, I would elaborate my notes. Sometimes I typed these and at other times I wrote by hand. Ultimately, these outlines and fieldnotes were organized chronologically in a three-ring binder for rereading and open coding.

asked Deborah what struggles she had overcome in her life she said she'd prefer not to talk about it. I also reminded them that I was trying to understand how to better work with African American girls and I wanted insight into the things that were important in their lives. The interviews were transcribed to provide a written text of the interview.

When I read over my transcripts after doing the interviews I could see how for many of the interviews, as I began to talk the girls finished my sentence. The interviews showed lots of overlapped speaking. For example, in one interview this happened a lot.

LaNette: So what are your future plans in terms of education?

Jackie: College?

LaNette: Yeah, so how. . .you. . .what do you see yourself. . .

Jackie: Doing in life?

LaNette: Yeah, or studying in college?

Journals

Throughout the year the girls kept journals. I let them know that I would be the only one reading their journals as the confidentiality agreement specified. During sessions, I frequently asked the girls to write in their journals for different activities such as making a list of their goals or of phrases that described relationships. I would also ask them to write responses to the themes we had explored. Sometimes the girls would say they didn't have anything to write. At other times, they would continue to talk in hushed conversations instead of writing.

I invited the girls to write in their journals whenever they wanted to. I showed them where they were kept and suggested they write in them on days when we did not meet. As far as I could tell, this never happened. During the summer, I began to ask the girls to write in their journals at the beginning of each session. I encouraged them to write about anything they chose. These entries were also typically brief, sometimes one sentence like, "school is the bomb!" Over the course of the year each girl made approximately 35 journal entries.

At one point, one of the girls' journals disappeared from the closet in the office where it was kept. It turned up in the same place two weeks later. There was a place where the girl had written that she did not like a particular girl in her age group and was not going to invite her to her birthday party. At the bottom of the page someone else had written, "fuck you." The very upset the girl showed it to me and then tore it out of her journal. I began to put her journal in the bottom drawer of the secretary's desk for safer keeping.

I found out about mid-way through the year that several of the girls actually kept journals in their private lives. Two of the girls told me that they wrote about their days and at least one of these girls said that she reread their journals to think about the things that they had written. This girl seemed to be the most forthcoming in her journal at the Center.

Questionnaires

Toward the end of my study, in March, I prepared a questionnaire (Appendix G) that reviewed some of the questions the girls and I had discussed together. One session I asked the girls to respond in writing to these questions. I told them that their responses would help me to understand how our work together was of use to them. They were very willing to provide this information. The questionnaire consisted of ten questions:

How would your life change if you were to wake up as another race (black or white)?

How would your life change if you were to wake up male instead of female?

What activities have we done together that were most helpful for you in understanding the issues felt by teenage girls?

What issue have you begun to think differently about?

What advice would you give a younger girl?

What difference does it make if you are black or white?

What would you change in your life if you had a chance?

What do you think are the most important things in your life that are helping you become the person you want to be?

What is success for you?

What are your biggest worries?

The girls worked individually on these while eating the chips and drinking the soda I had brought. From time to time they would talk quietly among themselves. It took most of them about thirty minutes to write out short answers.

Artifacts

As a researcher, it is my nature to collect everything that I find that is connected to my work to any degree. Artifacts (See list in Appendix D) included the girls' work that was not in their journals, lists and poems written on chart paper, artwork and copies of poems and other written material we used in our work together. I also collected the Center's newsletters, participant handbook, applications for participation, monthly calendars for the two age groups from which my girls came, and the Center's annual report. I collected newspaper articles and copies of advertisements about the Center.

Photographs

Throughout my time at the Center I took photographs, partly because, as Prosser (1992) notes in his own case, I had the "desire to use a personal skill" and interest (p. 399). Eisner (1998) considers photography, as well as videotapes and film, to be useful in "displaying what a situation is like" (p. 187) and to "help us see a scene" (p. 188). I used a Nikon N-90 35mm camera and either a 70-210mm or a 35-80mm lens. In order to minimize intrusion, I did not use a flash attachment, opting instead to use high speed Kodak TMAX P3200 film, sometimes pushing it to 6400 in extreme low light. Over the year I took hundreds of photographs, only a few of which are included in this document.

My motive in including photographs in the written narrative was to help the reader understand the work the girls and I did. I also wanted the reader to get a picture -- an

image -- of the Center and the physical spaces that this study occupied. I wanted the photographs to be accessible to the girls, so we often sat around and viewed them together, commenting and laughing. I gave extra photographs to the girls. At times I let the girls take photographs, for no reason other than they enjoyed being on that end of the camera. As a researcher I understand how selective my photographs are as a representation. For this reason, they reveal to the reader the things I wish to visually portray from this study.

Analyzing the Data

Analytic Interviews

So that I might engage in a critical dialogue with my own ideas about race, gender, and class with regard to the girls, I talked with several African American women who were close to the lives of these girls. As cultural insiders, these “informants” helped me to consider additional ways to look at my work with the girls. I talked with two foster mothers and with a woman who worked at the Center. One of the foster mothers and the woman from the Center were in their fifties. The other foster mother was twenty-six. I talked with these women several times over the twelve months that I worked with the girls. We discussed issues of race, class, and gender as it related to their lives as adolescents and their lives now. We talked about what they thought African American girls today had to contend with. We talked about the influence of popular culture and peers. One of the foster mothers lost her battle with cancer several months before this study ended.

Rereading

I reread each genre of data several times (interviews, journals, fieldnotes, and surveys) to detect themes. I noted each theme in the margins of the text. Strauss (1987) discusses this notion of “open coding” as a way of generating initial themes from data. I also noted particular stories that I thought I could highlight in my writing. I copied those sections of marked data onto small pieces of paper so I could group each piece.

Categorization

After rereading several times within each data genre, I listed the themes that emerged most often. After writing these highlighted sections of data on small pieces of paper, I grouped these in categories across the genres. For example, I looked at every mention that was made by any of the girls about relationships. I used these data sets to write.

Semantic Mapping

In order to make sense of what I was seeing throughout the year I used visual outlining or semantic mapping to consider how my observations were connected. Vacca and Vacca (1989) describe semantic mapping as “as organizational tool to visually illustrate categories and relationships associated with a core question or concept under study” (p. 206). The actual writing and visual nature of the process helped me to articulate not only themes, but new directions and questions. This reveals the emerging nature of qualitative research. Ultimately, I used this to lay out the writing of my text.

Outlining and Organizing

Over an approximately three month span of time I produced eight different outlines for how I would write about my experiences with the girls. Wolcott (1988) talks about “beginning to ‘think’ in chapters, sections or expanded notes” (p. 344). This was an important process, not unlike the semantic mapping, that helped me to think about how to show the unfolding of my time with the girls in a way that made, what was for me a very complex and intuitive experience, clear for readers. The outlining process helped me to think about ways to encapsulate my thinking into language that would say what I needed it to say. I found this to be difficult because of the many connotative dimensions of language.

Writing as a Tool for Analysis

I began writing about the theories, both constructs and methodology, that were important to my study even before I entered the site. This writing helped me to think deeply about these constructs and to dialogue with my reading. Wolcott (1988) suggests “coupling the writing task to ongoing fieldwork” (p. 344).

As I moved through the year I began trying to make connections in my writing between theory and what the girls and I were doing. I also rewrote several times a section on my own life and how it was connected to this study. I actually wrote much more than is included in this text. The writing helped me to do analysis by slowing down my thinking, actually stopping moments for me. It also allowed me to become “acutely aware of what [I did] not understand” (Wolcott, 1988, p. 344).

Methodological Concerns

The Nature of Inquiry: Intertextual and Dialogical

I made the decision to work at being as vulnerable as I am able in this study and in my presenting of it. Toward this end, I tried to make explicit not only the development of my beliefs and commitments, but also the kinds of thinking I did as I worked with the girls. For this reason I describe this study as an *‘autobiographical ethnography.’* Nuemann and Peterson (1997) suggest that “viewing research in the contexts of lives yields a richer understanding” (p. 3). They note that part of the “research realities” are conversations with authors, colleagues, and study participants and the contemplation that occurs inside the researcher’s head. This fits well with the idea in ethnographic research that the researcher is a tool for data collection, as Wolcott (1997) says, “the research instrument” (p. 332).

I attempted to preserve this dialogical sense in my writing to clearly show the reader how both the study participants and the researcher have grown through their work together. The writing of this study takes a form that I call an *‘inter-text’*. What I mean by this is that the story is not resident in the research site nor is it in my head. It is not a review of what other’s have said about related subjects. But it is all of these in dialogue with one another. This constructed text tells a story that is “inherently partial, committed

and incomplete” (Clifford, 1993, p. 136), but it will tell how I have tried to understand the lives of these girls and my own life in relationship to them. As writer Alice Walker (1997) has said, “one’s experience, in fact, is all one ever truly owns” (p. 67). This text tells how we all have learned about understanding our lives and the ways in which culture shapes us.

Issues of Relationship

Salverson (1996) speaks of the "highly complex negotiations that are involved in the politics of knowing and being known" (p. 182). I was aware that my relationships with these girls were embedded within the complexities of social politics. I was a white woman working with African-American girls. I came from the university to work with girls who had not been successful according to the mainstream academic standards. I reflected a middle-class economic status, whereas many of the girls came from lower socioeconomic levels. I was an adult; they were adolescents. I was a teacher; they were students. I was not always aware of the dynamics that each of these positionalities created, but I do know that the potential problems of power differentials must be raised. The girls also existed in a variety of positionalities. They were multiple selves often constructed along relational lines. To assume that the disclosure that occurs through interviews, group reflections, and during group activities, represents the core, true self of any of these girls would be naive. Instead, acknowledging the complexity of individuals and relationships, I see each of these points of interaction as a representation of that girl at that time and place

Immersion

The concept of immersion in ethnographic work refers not only to the type of physical presence engaged in by the researcher, but also to a psychological stance of connection to the commitments of the site. The full potential of fieldwork is realized in participation that is defined as “firsthand experience and observation” (Wolcott, 1988, p. 333). Game and Metcalf (1996) discuss what they term a “passionate sociology” (p. 5). They characterize this type of engagement as “an immersion in life, a compassionate

involvement with the world and with others, . . . concerned with the sharp and specific experiences of life; . . . a sensual and full-bodied approach to knowing” (p 5). Viewing research in this way, leads to an embodied research stance that removes valor from the notion of distance and objectivity.

Immersion means that the researcher defines a role for herself through progressive identification of how she might contribute to the organization/community. Fieldwork may also include `service' to the site such as volunteering to help with projects or to contribute materially. In addition to my particular study, I tutored one of the girls in this study because she was on the waiting list to be matched with a tutor in the center's tutoring program. I responded to several invitations to work with particular groups of children. As an instructor at the university I placed my students in field experiences at the center. I took the position that because the work of the center is commensurate with my political commitments I should contribute any resources I have that would assist their work. It was also a way for me to give back to the girls I am working with.

Immersion in the research community can also be seen in ethnographic writing . We cannot separate ourselves from the dialogical descriptions; we are “in the dialogue” (Lather, 1991, p. 108). I have struggled to create a text that reveals my own presence at the site and amplifies my voice within the work. Lincoln (1997) suggests that detachments and objectivity are actually barriers to doing quality research. In ethnographic writing we have the opportunity to `come clean' about our stances as researchers and participants.

Passion and Yearning

Throughout this study passion was the unnamed shaper of all that I was doing. With the encouragement of other researchers in discussion and in reading I was able to bring this notion to a level of articulation. One dictionary definition of passion is “intense emotional drive or excitement” (Webster's New World Dictionary, 1988). My connection to my work at the community center was the result of deeply held beliefs. I felt strongly about the worth of the girls I was working with and about the importance of the work of the

Center. As Strauss (1987) notes, the researcher "will be 'in the work' - emotionally, as well as intellectually" (p. 10). The reciprocal is also true, 'the work is in the researcher.'

Another definition of passion is "an eager, outreaching of the mind towards something" (Game and Metcalfe, 1996, p. 3). It is similar to what Lincoln (1997) calls, "yearning," defining it as "a powerful, heartfelt driving impulse toward some world which is only dimly glimpsed, but profoundly desired" (p. 21). I find myself yearning to say something with my study that points a path to a new freedom for the girls that I worked with. The desire to see minority, inner city children increase their life options creates an energy, both emotionally and intellectually, for me in this study, as well as in my teaching.

Catalytic Validity

Lather (1986a) calls this idea that research can have an emancipatory outcome, catalytic validity. It may be defined as the degree to which the research process reorients, focuses, and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it (Reason & Rowan In Lather, 1986b). Using this idea research has as its explicit aim helping the research participants to develop self-understanding that leads to agency within their particular lives (Lather, 1991). This kind of empowerment may be understood as an ongoing, intentional process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and collective participation (Delgado-Gaitan, 1993). This is a stance taken by critical researchers. As I have thought about how the girls in this study might have been changed I have hoped for them to become agents. I desire to help them become free to shape their lives, however, I am coming to believe that we must all make ourselves free.

By resonating with peoples' lived concerns, fears, and aspirations, emancipatory theory serves an energizing, catalytic role (Lather, 1986a). Two aspects of emancipatory research are most salient to this notion of catalytic validity. Reciprocity is the idea that there must be a give and take between researcher and participant. It touches every aspect of the research process, from conception, collection, and analysis. It is related to the view that the researcher and participants are actually co-

researchers. The other aspect is what Lather calls 'praxis', that is, the link between theory and action. Research that is to be emancipatory must make explicit the connections between the theories of the researcher and the action that she espouses. It is this dialogue between the researcher as theoretician and the researcher as activist that propels emancipatory research.

CHAPTER FOUR

GYRLZ 4 REAL: BECOMING A CRITICAL COMMUNITY

Understanding the Lives of the Girls

The girls profiled below are the girls whose work in the group I reviewed for this study. Over the year, as I will explain, there were several other girls who participated in the group for short periods of time, but I choose to focus on the girls below. I have tried to characterize these girls from my interactions with them over the last year, as well as their self-reported characterizations in interviews and journals.

Nikiki¹

Nikiki was twelve years old. She was very outgoing, expressing her opinions quickly and confidently. She had a sister who was a year younger. They both lived with their mother in subsidized housing not far from the Center. Nikiki was categorized by the school system as having a learning disability. During the second spring of my work with the girls, Nikiki spent six weeks in a juvenile facility because she was not coming home at night, but staying out with a boyfriend. Her sister had had a number of out of the home placements, both court-related and in mental health facilities. Nikki described herself with a list of adjectives: “freaky, nice, lovable, hugable, beautiful, joyful, sweet, and tall.”

Deborah

Deborah was fifteen. She was a leader at the Center and a very capable student. As a participant in a scholarship program in her school division, she was guaranteed tuition at a local private college as long as she kept her grades at a certain level and graduated. She wanted to be a teacher. Deborah’s sister was fourteen and wanted to be a lawyer. The two of them had been removed from the foster family where

¹ The names of all the girls have been changed to protect their anonymity.

Jackie, another of the participants, currently lived because the situation was not positive for them. Deborah was a member of the Interact leadership club sponsored by the Kiwanis community group and attended by several of the teenagers at the Center.

Deborah described herself as being “so short and I always get picked on because of my height. I’m brown-skinned and very intelligent. I’m very peculiar and love every bit of it.” In a poem she talked about herself:

I am young and beautiful
My name is Deborah Smith
My smile lights up a room
The rays given off from it are
golden like the sunshine
Sometimes I feel there’s no
fuel for my flame that burns
within my soul. Each day it gets brighter
But I know there’s hope for me
in the years to come.

Rochelle

Rochelle was a small and trim thirteen year old. She was very energetic, often talking aggressively, but seemed to have a very positive nature. Rochelle had a younger sister who also came to the Center. They had been in eight different foster homes before the one in which they had lived the past five years. In a poem Rochelle wrote about herself:

I am tan.
I like to play football.
I dance.
I have black hair,
Pretty brown eyes.

Jackie

Jackie was twelve years old and lived with an older foster family who had anywhere from three to five foster children at a time. Her biological mother died of AIDS, as had a half-sister, contracting it from the man who was the father of the half-sister. Jackie lived down the street from the Center. She liked school, but did not seem to feel successful at it; a situation her grades attested to. Her real interest was in singing. Jackie visited with her biological father from time to time, mostly when he brought things to her.

She also saw her biological sister who had dropped out of school, had a young child, and was living on her own. Jackie described herself as being, “Black and African. Nice.”

Marqwan

Marqwan was fourteen years old and lived with her mother. As a large young woman she had received the name, Big Ethel, a name which she herself used at times. My first experiences with Marqwan made me think that she was a cut-up who would not focus on any of the activities we were doing. After the summer, when she rarely attended the Center, she seemed much more focused and ready to talk about concerns in the group. She became a consistent and committed member. In the winter she joined a boxing club, talking about it often.

Marqwan talked about herself in a poem:

Big Ethel AKA Marqwan
Tall and a church child
Cool, smart, funny
I love my mother and my father
I wish I was much smarter
I'm afraid of bungy jumping
I hope I could go to Florida and
see my mother, brother, and father.

Missy

Missy was tall and thin, with an often quiet, brooding nature. She could laugh and joke, often using her considerable acting talent to imitate people, and then she could be pensive, as if troubled. Missy was fifteen and lived with her mother, in what she characterized as a bad neighborhood. She also spoke of a younger, half-brother who she saw occasionally. Missy was enrolled in honors courses at school. One of her goals was to be an actress. It was Missy who asked nearly every time the group met if we were going to do some acting.

Missy described herself as “tall, light-skinned, hazel-eyed, big shoe-wearing, book reading, freaking (in a good way).” She also commented that:

I think I am pretty easy to get along with at times. I try to be nice,
but some people just don't appreciate what you do for them. I try

to make people laugh and I try to keep them happy, but sometimes people say I play too much. It kind of hurts my feelings, but, oh well. I just won't try to be nice to them anymore. I hang around certain people. I try to be cool and stomp with the big dogs, but sometimes it doesn't work.

Cassandra

Cassandra turned fifteen in the summer. She lived with a single foster mother, who she alternately spoke of as a hero, and a tyrant. Cassandra was aggressive, often mean. She was labeled as emotionally disturbed by the foster care system and as a special needs foster child. In school she received services for a learning disability. Cassandra's attitudes positioned her on the margins of her age group at the Center. She was not well-liked, but over time our group of girls began to treat her with acceptance, although they still got frustrated with her.

Debbie

Debbie was one of two white girls in the group, with the other, Constance, attending sporadically. She seemed to feel like she was not a part of things, often sitting alone and wanting to work alone. Within the group Debbie would seek out my attention. I knew that Debbie's age group leader was concerned about her, taking her to get her hair cut and out to dinner before Christmas. Debbie described her feelings of ostracism: "When people make fun of me for no reason or because of the way I look that is no reason to be picking on someone. I bet they would not like to be treated that way."

Debbie was thirteen. She lived with her mother and a sister. Another sister was in foster care with her baby. Debbie's mother raised birds: cockatiels, love birds, parakeets. Debbie also had several birds, as well as other animals. Her love for animals led to her desire to be a veterinarian.

The Girls Talk About Their Lives

School

An often related tale is that urban adolescents are not interested in schooling. For most of the girls in this study school was a place that they enjoyed, as suggested by Missy's comment in a personal history essay, "I love George Washington [middle school]. Most of my friends go there. I get good grades and I like my teachers." Also writing in a personal history essay, Deborah said, "I love TD [high school]. It is a wonderful school. TD is so bomb. There are a lot of wonderful classes. There are also a lot of my friends there." Marqwan wrote in her journal one afternoon, "School the bomb."

Many of the girls easily named favorite subjects. For example, Cassandra described why her typing class was fun:

I mean, you sitting there doing work on a computer and then once you finish your work you know you get free time. But really all we do is, like, copy a sheet of paper like something out of a book or like, you know, practice our A, F, D, K, J, something, something, something, semicolon.

Jackie said that her "favorite classes are science, social studies, and reading. But I'm not good at math or spelling. But I got some good grades in my spelling book." Neither of these girls suggested that they enjoyed these classes because of what they were learning, however they did have a positive feeling about being there.

Nikiki indicated some interest in the content of her favorite classes: math and science. She explained that:

when I was smaller I used to have science projects that me and my friends had to do. When I was in the fifth grade we had to put ice on color papers and see which one melts the fastest. And I like math because. . . it seems like I started math early. I mean, I did multiplication when I was in second grade. Third grade I did division and fractions and this other stuff.

Missy's favorite subjects were language arts, civics, and gym. She shared that she particularly liked "reading in history about people and finding out what their life was like for them, how it was hard for them and stuff."

For some of the girls the thing that made school enjoyable was the opportunity to socialize with friends. This seemed to be important whether or not they excelled academically. Deborah, for example, was a participant in a scholarship program and enrolled in honors classes. She talked about her high school schedule of classes, explaining how the presence of her friends enhances the class:

B days I got English and like, I love my English class. And I got Spanish and I don't like the class. I mean, its all right, but I like my friends and them with me. Then I got Algebra 2/Trig.. Me and my friends be tripping in there. And then A days I got health which is all right cause I got Jennifer, but Tiffany get on my nerves. Then I got biology and that's alright cause Bernard and Chelise be tripping. Chelise be cracking me up.

For Nikiki being without her friends made her desire to transfer to another school, though the likelihood of this happening was small. She suggested that both the absence of her friends and the presence of others she did not get along with shaped her feelings about school:

And, like I just be glad when I get out of that school cause I don't like that school that much. Because it has, like, teachers that get on my nerves and plus those people in there. I mean, I'm cool with mostly everybody up in that school. But its like I think I'd rather go to Autumn Ridge because I have all my friends there.

Many of the girls also had a positive view of themselves as students. One day Missy wrote in her journal, "Today I took my SOL (Standards of Learning Test) for English, multiple choice. I aced it and tomorrow I will be taking my writing part and I'm going to ace it also." Missy also shared that "the last year's teachers and this year's, they picked me for the merit award thing." One day when I arrived at the Center Missy ran up to tell me that one of her teachers had written across the top of her story that she had written, "You are a writer!" Cassandra, though designated learning disabled by the school system, described her self as a good student. She said, "I'm the best student in there, pretty much."

For other students school was more difficult. Debbie and Cassandra were in learning disabled resources classes at their middle schools. Jackie enjoyed school, but did poorly. She identified herself as a student who was “academically low.” When I asked Jackie why she thought that way, she responded:

Because I don’t, like, do my homework, kind of like, and stuff. And, like the other kids, they get better grades than me. So, like, I want to cry, but I ain’t going to cry because I can do better than that. I just need to study more.

She also confided that she was “going to bring [her] grades up. I already am. I brought an F up to an A.” Jackie said she did this by doing her homework and studying. Later, in the spring, though, Jackie wrote in her journal, “I got three Fs today on my report card and I am pissed.” The Center ran a tutoring program three days a week and although Jackie lived just down the street her foster parents would not let her attend.

The girls did not see their schools as places of inequality. None of them believed that schooling was any different for students because of their race or class. Deborah did observe that there were more white students than black students in honors classes, but she attributed this to “Black people don’t push themselves enough to be in honors. There’s this boy in my class and I know he can do it if he tried, but he just skips and everything.” Deborah shared that some of her friends felt that their teachers discouraged them from signing up for academic track classes. She talked about being teased by her Black friends about hanging around with whites, but Deborah said this was all in fun, not malicious. When I asked Missy, who said that she did not have any African American teachers this year, who was supportive of her, she answered, “my teachers, some of my friends, and my mom, mostly my teachers.” The girls all seemed to feel that as long as their teachers were caring and fair, race was not an issue.

Goals

Early in my work with the girls we read Langston Hughes’ poem, ‘Harlem,’ about dreams being deferred. We talked about how the girls viewed their futures. Rochelle said

that her dream was to be an obstetrician. Jackie told us she wanted to be a police officer in the future and to sing. Deborah wanted to be a teacher, to be a “positive role model for children.” Cassandra said she wanted to be a lifeguard. Marqwan’s dream was to be an RN (registered nurse). Nikiki wanted to work in a nursing home and be a cosmetologist.

I also asked the girls to talk about their goals when I interviewed them. Missy said that she would probably go to college to study acting and writing. Jackie, who alternated between talking about being a police officer and singing, said, “I want to sing or do hair or dance. Not exotic dance. I’m talking about like rock dance, right?” In addition to being an RN, Rochelle said she wanted to “be with my real family.” Marqwan decided that she might also like to be a lawyer and perhaps play basketball in the NBA. Cassandra articulated two goals: “get me a job and get me a car.” Deborah considered that she might like to become a counselor in addition to her work as a teacher. Debbie, whose love of animals led to her many pets, wanted to be a veterinarian.

One of the girls, Cassandra, often talked about her foster mother as an example of a successful woman. Her description provided insight into the things that Cassandra saw as important in her world. She described her foster mother in an interview:

She’s good to go. She is 28 years old. She went to high school, graduated, went to college, got graduated. She’s got her own driver’s license. She’s on her feet. She got a car. She got an apartment, nice apartment, got some good furniture, got a nice bed. She’s even got me now and she’s still doing good.

About her own life, Cassandra said, “I would be successful if I had a good job or education. Marqwan also felt that “to keep on trying to do good in school” was a part of her success. Missy and Deborah defined success in less concrete ways, looking toward personal satisfaction and significance. Deborah described success for her as, “having good times in life and having wonderful people to share them with.” For Missy, it was important to “be something in life.” She articulated her concern that she be able to “be something, do something that I want to do not something that I end up doing.”

For all of these girls the future was something that they looked out toward. Each of them articulated goals that, to some extent, shaped their present. They also gave some consideration to how they would measure their success in life. In Chapter Six I say more about their optimism for their futures, a feature which I found surprising in light of the conditions of their lives and the overall life chances of poor African American urban girls, particularly those in foster care.

Life with Friends

As I observed the girls at the Center, I could see how important their friends were to them. I knew there were times when the girls were reluctant to come to our group because a friend they hadn't seen in a while had returned to the Center. When I asked Deborah in an interview about her friends she talked about having different levels of friends.

LaNette: Do you have lots of close friends or a few close friends?

Deborah: I mean, I got a lot, but I got a few, you know?

LaNette: Lots of friends, but. . .

Deborah: You know, I got a lot, I got a lot of friends and a lot of close friends, but I only got a few. Its difficult. You know what I'm saying?

LaNette: They are like really close?

Deborah: Yeh. I mean, I only got like a couple that's really close. Then you got close.

Although Deborah seemed to have a difficult time explaining what she meant about these different kinds of friendships, it was clear that she saw them as having significance for her own relationships.

The girls indicated a wide variety of activities that they engaged in with their friends. Marqwan noted that she and her friends "go to the mall, go to hockey games, go to football games." Rochelle went with her friends to the movies and sometimes to their houses. Jackie said that she went with friends "to Super Wal-Mart and to the mall and like, swimming, skating, to the movies and lots of stuff." Deborah summarized by saying,

“friends, in general, we just be chilling, you know. Talking about people, talking about school, talking about boys.”

Several of the girls mentioned the Center as a place for socializing with friends. Missy said, “me and my friends we all, we hang out all the time. We hang out here at the Center.” Deborah agreed that she and her friends, including Missy, “mostly hang out here at the Center.” Heath and McLaughlin (1993) in their study of urban community organizations for youth found that those organizations that were successful in attracting teens were those whose atmosphere was like a family.

Advice to younger girls

At various times I tried to encourage the girls to consider how they might now be supportive of the many younger girls at the Center who followed them around on the playground, imitating and longing to be included in their dancing, singing, and talking. Most of the girls understood that they could and perhaps, should, be concerned with the lives of these younger girls, but they were not eager about actually spending time with younger people.

Deborah understood how difficult the teenage years were. She described the uncertainty of adolescence in an interview:

Yeah, I mean, it's weird, you know. One minute you're hating yourself. One minute you're loving yourself. One minute you're hating your parents. One minute, loving them. Just knowing, just know it's a phase or whatever. You be through it and that just don't worry. Keep your head up.

At sixteen Deborah had already been in and out of foster care because of her own family's inability to care for her properly. She had recently experienced the death of her foster mother due to cancer. As with all of the other girls Deborah remained courageous in regard to her own life chances. Deborah gave this piece of advice, “Don't let nobody shoot your goals. Like don't let somebody tell you, you can't do something.”

In my interviews with the girls and in a written survey I asked the girls what advice they would give to a younger girl. Most of what they advised centered around education and sexuality. Debbie advised that younger girls ought to “go to college when they grow up. Be successful and do good in school.” Missy exhorted further that the girls “learn while they can before something happens to them. . . because they might live in a bad environment. . . just try to focus on their work. . . it could lead into other things.”

Rochelle was concerned about pregnancy and STDs. She said that she would tell a younger girl, “not to go out here and have sex with anybody because it can get you pregnant and I will teach her about protection and about all the STDs.” Cassandra further advised not even “to have a boyfriend because it is a lot of trouble.” She continued, “ell him no. Because if you still in school and you ain’t married yet, they’ll leave you in a heart beat, won’t care about no baby. They’ll leave you.” Jackie warned not to “go out and let a boy pull your life down.”

Jackie advised younger girls to not get involved with some of the things that she confided she had tried. She encouraged them not to “smoke, drink, drive reckless.” Debbie was concerned with the ways that adult life could place burdens on lives. She advised that younger girls, “have fun while you can; it will not last long.” Perhaps she was thinking about her mother or her older sister’s responsibilities with her baby.

Worries

The girls often worried about their families. Jackie said that her biggest concern was “that my sister and niece and dad and mom won’t get hurt.” Rochelle shared this concern about her “sisters, brothers, nieces, and nephew.” Debbie said that she worried that “my mom might die or something might happen to someone close.” Many of these girls had already seen loved ones ravaged by drug use or die painful deaths.

Some of the girls were concerned about achieving something in life. Missy said that she worried about “not achieving my goals and going through life as a failure.” Cassandra’s greatest concern was “getting a good job” and living “in the big world outside

on my own.” I knew that Cassandra had asked her foster mother if she could remain with her after she was eighteen if she paid rent.

There were also girls who worried about being personally harmed physically or emotionally. Deborah worried about “dying young or dying without someone knowing who I am.” I read this comment over her shoulder, immobilized because of its force. Missy, who talked about being hurt by gossip and who suggested themes of abuse, said, “my biggest worry is getting hurt by a loved one.” Jackie said that one of her concerns was to insure “that I won’t get raped.”

Working with the Group

In this section I review the life that the girls and I shared in the group over the year. I discuss particular sessions as representative of the many we engaged in. The sessions lasted anywhere from one hour to one and a half hours, depending on the Center’s schedule for that time of the year. I also discuss concerns important to the group and to my own development in working with the girls.

Across the year girls both entered and left the group at various times. While I have profiled those eight girls who were involved during the latter months of the group, in this description of our work during the entire year I include girls who are not part of that eight. The chart (Figure) below provides a guide to the length of time that each girl was involved. Five girls who came the first session left by the third session. Three of them sneaked out of the third session while I was preparing materials. These five do not appear on the chart.

Girls	Duration of Participation	Number of Months
Deborah	April 28, 1997 - March, 1998	12
Marqwan	April 28, 1997 - March, 1998	12
Linda	May 5, 1997 - August 5, 1998	3
Jackie	April 28, 1997 - March, 1998	12
Nikiki	June 17, 1997 - March, 1998	10
Debbie	June 17, 1997 - March, 1998	10

Rochelle	June 17, 1997 - March, 1998	10
Cassandra	June 17, 1997 - March, 1998	10
Tami	April 28, 1997 - August 5, 1998	3
Missy	July 14, 1997 - March, 1998	9
Keekee	June 17, 1997 - August 5, 1998	3

Figure 3. Length of Participation for Girls Involved in Gyrلز 4 Real

Spring (April - June, 1997)

I began in the spring with nine girls. Three sessions after beginning, three of the girls left the group. The rest of the spring the group consisted of anywhere from three to five girls: Marqwan, Deborah, Jackie, Tami, and Linda. I began working with the girls by engaging in several sessions which focused on who they were as individuals. In our first session together, after the introductory session, we played the 'name game.' In this game everyone got into a circle and created a movement to accompany their name. We went around the circle saying our names and enacting the movements. The girls were not as self-conscious with this activity as other groups I had worked with had been. We played around with the movements by using them to signal one another and moving the order of people in the circle.

In my own initial experience with this activity I had been keenly aware of my body as everyone watched me perform and then reenacted the movement I had done. These girls seemed to be much less inhibited about using their bodies expressively. I was encouraged to see them eagerly perform a complex dance-like movement as they called out their name.

From this activity we went inside and wrote 'bio-poems' on large chart paper with a variety of markers. We used the outline that is shown as a frame for writing the poems. I wanted the writing to be informal and comfortable. The girls talked as they crafted their poems and then decorated the margins with symbols that represented things of importance to them. My goal in this session was for the girls to get to know one another. I also wanted to begin to understand who they were as individuals, not as a monolithic group of 'African American adolescent girls.'

First name
Two words for physical description
Three words for personality
I love. . .
I wish. . .
I'm afraid. . .
I hope. . .
Last name

Figure 4. Frame for Bio-Poem

At the end of the session I asked the girls to give me feedback about the session. I suggested that they might use phrases like 'I feel. . . , I learned. . . , I would change. . . .' They told me they "liked coloring; it was fun; liked the circle game." Marqwan tells me it was boring.

The next session I continued with the theme. I asked the girls to find a spot on the floor where they could lay with room to move their bodies. Most of the girls began to ask if they were supposed to just lay on the floor because there was no way they were going to lay on the concrete and get their clothes dirty. I had brought large pieces of newspaper for them to draw on later. I gave each a piece to lay on.

Once each girl found a space, I told them that I was going to ask them to lay on their backs and close their eyes. Then they would imagine each part of their body as it was connected to the other parts. They could move that body part as they tried to isolate it from the rest. They would start at their head and slowly go down to their toes. The girls were nervous about this. Some said it was "bo-bo." I asked them to try it. I told them that each person's body was unique. I suggested that we all have bodies that help create the person that others know us as. They settled down. I turned off the lights, knowing that the room would still be well-lit from window light. Many of the girls did not close their eyes. I tried to guide the experience by talking about moving throughout their

bodies. I suggested things to think about such as, how you use these parts, how they are related to your senses, and how they are connected to other body parts. There would be silence for a few minutes and then someone would laugh.

After finishing, I asked each girl to take a marker and draw an outline of their bodies on the newspaper with their eyes closed. I suggested that they rely on the sense of their bodies that they developed from the previous exercise. Deborah noted that this was like an art activity they had done at school where they drew an object by looking at the object and not the paper. The girls said this was impossible. Many of them opened their eyes from time to time. When we finished, we laid each picture out in a row on the floor. The body drawings were rough outlines. One of the girls ran up to draw breasts on her picture. We tried to talk about what they saw and how it felt trying to draw your own body without looking. Mostly they giggled.

We then drew self-portraits, with their eyes open, using a variety of drawing materials. They worked eagerly on these drawings, seeming to enjoy the task. After about fifteen minutes each girl shared her drawing. The others commented approvingly, sometimes joking about an aspect of the picture, such as the way the girl had drawn her hair or represented the color of her skin.

In this session we ended by working with an adaptation of an activity called “mask variation.” In this activity one person takes a pose that is natural to them. The rest of the group looks carefully and tries to copy the pose as closely as possible, noticing how weight is distributed, what body parts are touching, and the attitude of the position. Tami volunteered to go first. After each of the other girls had copied her pose, Tami walked around to comment on their attempts. She discussed who she felt had different features of her body posture accurately portrayed. Two other girls volunteered. Several were not willing to join the activity at all, remaining on the side in chairs. After the activity we discussed how it felt to be scrutinized and to have people try to copy your poses. We discussed how different people have characteristic ways of using their bodies, such as the way they stand, the way they use their hands, or nod their heads.

The girls gave me feedback indicating that they didn't like getting down on the floor. All of them liked drawing the self-portraits, several had enjoyed the mask variation. I was already feeling a lot of pressure to keep them interested. I was concerned about them

I Am A Black Woman
(3rd Stanza)
by Marie Evans

I
am a black woman
tall as a cypress
strong
beyond all definition still
defying place
and time
and circumstances
 assailed
 impervious
 indestructible
Look
 on me and be
renewed

Figure 5. I am a Black Woman,
Poem by Mari Evans

being uncomfortable with the first exercise. I also was anxious about the fact that three of the girls had not participated in the mask variation.

Later, when I reviewed this session, I identified several concerns. I had a strong visual image of adolescent girls laying on their backs in a dark room. I immediately felt a sense of vulnerability as I reflected on this image. Although at this point, I did not know the stories of the girls' lives, I considered that some of them may have been sexually victimized. I realized that in my first session with the girls I had already reenacted oppression.

Six girls joined me for the third session in this series. This was a short session because the science club was meeting in our room for the first thirty minutes. When we began two of the girls went over by the window and layed on the floor instead of sitting around the table. I asked them to join us at the table; they said they were fine where they were.

I passed out the poem, 'I am a Black Woman' by Marie Evans, telling them that we would read it together. Several of the girls volunteered to read. One of them read it through. I suggested to them that we read the poem as a performance piece with one person leading and the others following like a "call and response." I gave examples, like reading a line twice, reading slowly or quickly, speaking loudly or softly. Linda volunteered to lead first, then others led. The girls seemed to enjoy this activity a lot. They were eager to lead and enjoyed responding to the caller.

Then I told the girls we would write our own poems using the first two lines of Marie Evans' poem as a beginning. I needed to go to my car, parked about ten feet in

front of the building, to get the paper and the markers. As I was returning to the room, I could see three girls slip around the corner of the building. Less than a minute later, the Assistant Director, Jane, came in to say that she had seen three girls run past her. I said, "let them go." Jane said, "we can't do that." She said she would take the girls back across the street to their group if they weren't going to participate. I said that would be very fine. The three girls that left were the two who were on the floor and another girl. They did not return to the group. I was discouraged, but I knew I didn't want to make the group a place where the girls were forced to come.

The rest of the girls continued writing poems. After they had written for a while, we practiced doing the poems in a call and response style. I suggested that we go across the street to do them on the playground where the other kids were playing. The group really like Linda's poem so we did that one. On the playground we did the poem once or twice, then the girls

started added dance-like movements. Several of the younger girls came over, watching and trying to join in. The girls gave very positive feedback about this session, noting that they enjoyed writing the poems and doing the call and response.

I Am A Black Woman
by Marqwan

I am a black woman
that is respectful
I am a black woman
who is strong and beautiful
I am a black woman
big and strong
I am a black sister.

Figure 6. Marqwan's poem patterned after I am a Black Woman by Mari Evans.

Because I wanted to continue to use movement and to prepare the girls for more

I Am A Black Woman
By Linda

I
Am a black woman
as strong as black can be
with dedication and
determination
I
Am a black woman
You can see there are no
mysteries

complex performance activities, in the next session I did two games with them. The first was called the 'mirror activity.' In the mirror activity the girls got in pairs facing one another. One girl acted as the leader by moving in ways that her partner would copy. The purpose of the activity was to focus closely on the movements of the other person and create a partnership as opposed to a competition.

Figure 7. Linda's poem patterned after I am a Black Woman by Mari Evans.

Then the other girl had a turn as leader. From this game, we moved to one called the 'glass cobra.'

In this game the leading partner placed her hand approximately six inches from her partner's face with the heel of the hand at the chin of her partner. The partner followed the movements of the hand as if mesmerized. The point of this exercise, as well, was not to challenge the partner to contort her body, but to work together to move in particular ways.

Boal (1992) suggests that before performance can be used to explore new ways of being in our bodies, it is important to de-mechanize the body from routines imposed upon it from cultural rituals such as jobs, schooling, and social conventions. While I didn't explain this aspect of the activity to the girls, I wanted them to enjoy using these warm-up games to engage and relax their bodies.

The bulk of the session focused on the development of a 'life line.' The life line "was to be a chronology of the girls' lives. We began by brainstorming about the kinds of things that they could put on their life lines, such as birthdays, starting school, holidays, awards, births, and deaths. I tried to stimulate their thinking by describing kinds of information. One of the girls made a list of our ideas on chart paper. Using large newspaper the girls drew a line and segmented it into the number of years of their age. Most of them put corresponding dates for birthdays or for each school year. During this time the girls talked comfortably with one another. These conversations gave them ideas about what to put on their life lines. Linda put her grandmother's death on her life line.

She talked about how she and her family would go over to her grandmother's house every Sunday for breakfast. Linda expressed her difficulties with her grandmother's increasing senility, saying that her grandmother couldn't remember who family members were and got mean, even cussing people out. I told Linda about my grandmother's death and how hard it had been for me. I was glad that this activity was allowing the girls and I to share real events in our lives.

Deborah talked about an incident that happened when she was eleven and some men had followed her in their car while she was walking on the street. Although she ran to get away from them, they turned the corner in their car and were following her again. They slowed down to ask how old she was. When Deborah told them she was eleven, the men drove away cussing. Deborah said the reason they did that was that boys and men only have one thing on their minds, "getting some booty."

At an early age many African American girls become aware of sexuality because of the sexual behaviors they observe in older women and men. Deborah's encounter with the men in the car created a fear of sexual attack. Deborah's telling of this story elicited similar stories from other girls about being followed by men in vehicles.

On Jackie's life line she had written that her mother and her sister had died of AIDS. I couldn't tell if her sister had died also, so I asked her about it. She took the stencils and wrote her mother's name in large letters over the date. Later Jackie was sitting with her shirt up over her head. I touched her and said, "are you okay." Deborah said, "she'll be okay." Tina wrote me a note that said, "Its because her mother and sister passed away."

I was completely overwhelmed to know I was forming relationships with young girls who had already lived such complex lives. I wondered if I would have anything to contribute to them. After all, I had not experienced the deep pain and struggle that characterized the history of many of these girls' lives. Jackie had close experience with the possible consequences of sexuality. Later, I found out that a man her mother had been with passed the AIDS virus to Jackie's mother and their baby.

In a later session the girls chose events from their life lines and created three movements to express something about the events. We also talked about birthday memories.

Summer (June - August, 1997)

At the beginning of the summer phase, I gathered all of the girls in the 12 - 16 age groups to reintroduce the group and invite them to participate. In the summer there were children who came to the Center who did not come during the school year. Six new girls joined, including one white girl, Debbie.

In my first session with this new group of approximately 8 - 10 girls we began a series of activities related to dreams and goals. We played the name game again to create some initial common experiences that were fun and low-risk. When we were playing the name game a friend from the university who lives in Valley City came by to drop something off with me. We were

enthusiastically playing the name game outside, with much laughing. I was greatly encouraged that my friend could see such a positive session, I had certainly not felt that all of the sessions were as upbeat.

When we went inside I gave each of the girls a copy of the poem, 'Harlem,' by Langston Hughes. I read the poem and asked if it was familiar to anyone. Several said they had read it in school. We talked about what it meant to have dreams. I asked the girls to write their dreams on the back of the poem.

Then we read the Langston Hughes' poem, 'Deferred,' together, with different girls reading each stanza. The poem is written as a variety of people sharing the things they have dreamed about.

Harlem
By Langston Hughes

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore--
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over--
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or *does it explode?*

Figure 8. Harlem by Langston Hughes

In the following session, we used the poem 'Deferred' as a template for writing our own poems about dreams for the future. Each girl wrote a stanza and we read them as one long poem. Rochelle's stanza read:

My dream is to be an obstetrician,
To help people in need
To be a doctor who helps babies.
My dreams, I hope come true.

Jackie wrote, "my dream was to be a police officer in the future. My dream is to sing."

Deborah said that her dream was:

Someday I want to be a teacher. I want to be a positive role model
on children. I want to help make a difference in changing their lives.
I want to give back to the community by hopefully changing their futures.

At the end of this session I told the girls that we would start having a time at the beginning of our sessions, which I called "Expressions," where they could share anything they wanted. I suggested things like poems, songs, and dances. Linda volunteered and at the beginning of the next session she shared a dance. I didn't think she had prepared because she went another person in her age group to borrow a CD. Nevertheless, I wanted to encourage her so I gave her the time to teach us a dance. My intention was to provide a space for the girls to shape our work together.

In the next session we used the thinking we had done about dreams/goals to create images of hopefulness and hopelessness. These images were still sculptures formed by each of the girls taking a position within a 'scene.' We formed two groups with three girls in each group. The group with Deborah, Rochelle, and Cassandra created an image of hopelessness with Rochelle in the middle with her head down, looking forlorn. Deborah and Cassandra were looking down at her with sad faces. Their image of hopefulness showed each of the girls reaching upward with one hand. Their extended arms came together.

With each of the groups we went through a process of dynamization, that is, giving the sculptures the opportunity to speak and to move. First, I asked that each member of the sculpture simultaneously speak what they were feeling in the sculpture. In the sculpture of hopelessness the group above vocalized things like, "I'll never be

anything, I'm angry," and crying. For the image of hopefulness, all three girls said, "We made it."

A large part of the power of image-making comes from the use of the body to portray concepts. Physicalizing subverts the dominant verbal strategies typically used to discuss issues. Learning to conduct such a dialogue with one's body moves beyond simply engaging the mind in the thinking process to including the body as a tool for mediating and communicating.

Early in the summer phase we named the group. I had wanted to wait for awhile so the girls could gain a sense of themselves as a group before talking about names. We listed the ideas that each girl contributed: Cool Crew, The Bomb Diggities, Gyrlyz 4 Real, Da Bomb, Girls Group, The Hoochie Mamas. I suggested that the girls think about what name they would want to wear on a t-shirt. I also encouraged them to consider what the name might suggest to other people. We voted for the top two names which became The Bomb Diggities and Gyrlyz 4 Real. After voting a second time the girls chose Gyrlyz 4 Real.

The Expressions time that I began in order to allow the girls opportunities to lead our time together fizzled out after three sessions. The girls never remembered whose turn it was to share something with the group. When I asked who was leading the Expressions, they would look at each other, unable to answer the question. It did not seem to serve an identified need for them. I continued to ask them about the things they wanted to talk about and listen carefully to the kinds of activities they preferred. I had also stopped asking the girls for feedback at the end of each session because it seemed like they were saying the same thing each time: "It was fun. I liked it." Deborah observed one day that I had stopped asking for their feedback each week. She suggested that I knew what they thought anyway by whether or not they returned.

Toward the middle of the summer phase, Tina, Linda, and Keekee started attending irregularly. By the end of the summer, all three had quit. I was very discouraged by this because they were some of the original girls. I lamented in my notes that I didn't know how I could compete with the girls' free time where they could listen to

the latest songs, dance, talk with their friends, put on nail polish and do their hair. I became concerned about the possibility of all the girls dropping out, small groups at a time.

Fall, Winter (September - December, 1997)

By the fall a core group of girls was beginning to form, despite the absence of the three girls who quit. Marqwan, Deborah, Jackie, Nikiki, Rochelle, Missy, and Cassandra were attending consistently. I began to feel a little less pressure to be the best entertainment on the block. I felt like I was developing genuine relationships with these girls, several of whom had been with the group since the previous April.

In a couple of sessions we explored the idea of beauty. I asked the girls to write a self-description in their journals. From this they drew self-portraits on poster board. They were not really excited about drawing, but I explained that the self-portrait would become a mask for a dialogue about beauty. After they drew their self-portraits I distributed a variety of teen and women's magazines, asking them to make a collage that represented what they felt society said about women's beauty. They enjoyed cutting out the pictures. Some had pictures of clothing, others cut out body parts such as lips, hair, legs. As we worked on this activity the girls talked together about fashion, about music, and several videos they have recently seen. They would break out in song from time to time. At one point someone sang a line that had the word 'damn' in it. Nikiki looked at me and said not to say that language.

When they finished preparing their collages, I explained to them that they should find a partner and work out a dialogue between themselves, using the self-portrait as a mask, and the voice of beauty in society, using the collage as a mask. We did this until the end of the session, sharing the dialogues with the whole group at the end. When the girls wrote in their journals about this issue of beauty standards, Jackie wrote, "I think that you don't have to look like other people, but you have to be satisfied with how God made you." Deborah wrote, "Its bad how stereotypes have girls, even sometimes boys, thinking they have to be exactly what magazines and the media project."

In a following session we worked on rap songs that expressed their thinking about beauty. I was surprised at the difficulty of this task. The girls spent a lot of time singing different rap songs they knew. I suggested that they write their own words to a beat used by another song. This helped only slightly. Marqwan began working with Rochelle. They wrote:

Its All About the Style, Baby

What I want to do
I want to take showers everyday
every hour
You want to rumble in my clothes
I be throwing clothes on my whole family
Its all about your body, baby
Its all about your clothes, baby
Its all about the fashion, baby.

Jackie and Missy wrote:

I don't have to look good for someone like you
At least I wear clean underwear
At least I don't go to sleep with a night light
I think my skin is pretty, nice, and neat
I don't have to wear all them phat clothes
All I go to do is go to bed.

The next session we worked on the raps again. We created new groups with Deborah, Missy, Cassandra, and Jackie in one and Marqwan, Nikiki, and Rochelle in the other. The groups pooled the ideas they had developed in the earlier session. The first group (Deborah, Missy, Cassandra, Jackie) worked eagerly and intensely on their rap song. When they read it, the whole group liked it. All of the girls worked together to create a performance of the song. It had shifted from a rap to more of a Rhythm and Blues style. Jackie sang the words with

Beauty Song
By Deborah, Jackie, Missy, Cassandra

Your nose is so ugly go get a nose job
If you wanna be like us
you have to be a major snob
Thin lips are last year
now they must be luscious and fat
Your hair can't be looking like no welcome
mat
Your face has to be smooth
And you must know the latest dance
grooves
Yo' body had to be phat, slim and tiny
Get out of my face if you're whiney
Yo' shape must be like an hour glass
Or else you'll step to me and I'll pass
You gotta be a cover girl
If you wanna rule the world
You gotta look like Tyra Banks
Or else get's da stepping and walk da
plank.

Figure 9. Beauty Rap written to convey their thinking about society's standards of beauty.

Deborah and others in their group doing some back up vocals. The rest of the girls contributed rhythms and kept the beat by clapping.

The rap the group performed was written to express how society tries to pressure women to follow a certain standard in the way they look. Later, I was talking to some African American women in my university class and they expressed their opinion that the model, Tyra Banks, was not really Black. She is tall and thin, with long straight hair. Her lips and nose are thin. These women noted that fashion seldom paid any attention to the body styles of typical African American women.

While my observations of the girls as they interacted with peers at the Center were that they paid a lot of attention to fashion, from our activities related to beauty, it seemed also that the girls felt comfortable with their physical images. There were times when particular girls said they would change physical attributes, such as their height or their hair. These same girls, at other times, reported being satisfied with how they looked. I felt that the girls exhibited tolerance for a wide dispersion of physical attributes. This interest in physical attributes has typically been associated with women more than with men (Pipher, 1994).

Spring (January - March, 1998)

The girls' winter vacation from school was the longest break that we had from one another during our year of work together. When they returned to school, the weather caused them to miss a number of additional days. Because the Center follows the school schedule, it affected our meetings.

The first session after the winter holiday was tense and scattered. We began by talking about relationships with friends. The girls got into groups to create performance pieces. Missy, Jackie, Rochelle, and a girl who occasionally joined us, Shontelle, began to work on their piece over by the basketball goal. There was one basketball laying around that I asked them to put away. Then Marqwan started bouncing the basketball. The room we often worked in was large with concrete floors. The echo of the bouncing ball made it difficult for others to hear. I told the girls that if they wanted to play basketball, they could go ahead and leave. They put the ball down.

I went to work with the other group. Cassandra shared with the girls in her group that she had recently been in a situation where she was trying to tell her foster mother something, but she refused to listen. She asked the others if they had ever been in a similar situation with an adult. Cassandra described how every time she tried to explain, her mother would interrupt to finish what Cassandra was trying to say. I was pleased with Cassandra's clarity about her situation and her willingness to put it out for the group to explore. The group began to work on roles to recreate Cassandra's situation.

As I was encouraging Cassandra's group, I heard the sound of a bouncing ball. I turned around to see Missy bouncing the basketball toward the goal with the other girls guarding her. I had told them at the beginning of the session that they could not use the ball in their scene, they could present playing basketball with their actions, not by the actual use of a prop. I told the group that they needed to leave if they were not interested in working on their performance piece. Missy said, "This is our scene." I reminded her that I had told them not to use the ball. Missy threw the ball down and ran into the other room. After hesitating, the other girls went after her. Just as they went through the door, the kids in the age group in the adjacent room came flooding through the door. Their leader came through behind them to ask if we were finished. Although we would have worked fifteen minutes longer, I was quite exasperated. I told them that we were done. I tried to talk to Missy afterwards, but she was sullen and quiet. Jackie told me that Missy had said that "I had gotten on her case." I replied to Jackie that I had gotten on everyone's case. Why is basketball so important?

As I looked back across the previous months, I could see how the group had become cohesive and connected, not only with me, but with each other. One afternoon when I arrived, Rochelle told me about a conflict between two girls at the Center, identifying her particular position on the conflict. She gave no names, so I thought no more about it. We began our group by creating machines, where each person would add to a motion done by another to create a rhythm of movement. We shaped our machines around the topics of money and beauty. The girls were familiar with the exercise, so it was a fun way to begin. We decided to take up the issue of teen pregnancy. Marqwan

had been telling us about her friend at school who had just found out that she was pregnant. As we usually did, we split into two groups.

Cassandra, Rochelle, Debbie, and Constance formed one of the groups. I sat with them after speaking briefly with the other group. They had begun to argue. Cassandra told a story about asking a boy in one of her classes to help her with some work. Another student, unnamed as she gestured toward Constance, told the boy not to help her. Debbie shifted around nervously, saying she would leave if things were going to get violent. A woman from a local university studying counseling and interning at the Center, interjected into any brief pause, "it sounds like what you're saying . . ." Suddenly Constance stood up in front of Cassandra with her hands on her hips, her head swaying from side-to-side, saying, "go ahead if you want a piece of me." Cassandra mused angrily about what she could do to Constance. I suggested to Constance that she sit down because Cassandra most certainly did *not* want a piece of her. Cassandra then blurted out quickly, "the reason I am the way I am is because I never knew my dad and my mom is in jail and I am in foster care now." Debbie asked, "who else is in foster care?" Constance talked about the foster family she lives with, saying that her foster mother listens to her own children and not to Constance. Debbie confided that she had been in foster care once for two weeks when her mother had a "breakdown." Debbie said that all she did was stay to herself and read. As the conversation unfolded, Rochelle sat silent, almost angry. I asked her if she wanted to add anything to the conversation. She said, "no." I was never able to draw Rochelle into the conversation. As the conversation wound down, Constance told Cassandra that she was sorry about what she did at school and she wanted to be Cassandra's friend again. Cassandra spoke gruffly telling her that she wouldn't accept her apology. The other group, who had been working on their teen pregnancy piece was ready to perform. We got the group together. The performance group did their scenario. It involved a girl who had just found out she was pregnant. She told two of her friends at school, but not her best friend. Later, her best friend confronted her when she found out about the pregnancy from the other two friends. The best friend told the pregnant girl that she had warned her about this boy. They

discussed the girl's naivete' regarding the boy's intentions, revealing that the boy was not going to take any responsibility. They discussed what the pregnant girl might do. The scene dealt with anger from the friend and decision-making about the pregnancy. After watching the scenario several of the girls took turns acting the role of the pregnant girl. We replayed the scene several times. This led to a discussion about teen pregnancy.

Replacing the main character, the person having the struggle, allowed the girls replacing the main character to try their suggestions for alternative actions. The goal is not to solve the difficulty, but to raise a variety of plausible options. Actually trying these possible actions with the scene gives some idea of how they might work in that situation.

Teen pregnancy was a topic we explored a number of times. In interviews the girls were all sure that they would not become pregnant before finishing high school. They felt that it would greatly diminish their possibilities for building successful lives. Their performances, however, allowed them to explore the issue in a more complex way. It was then, in the performance, that the girls could begin to consider why a girl might become pregnant or why it might be difficult to talk about a pregnancy, especially if you had determined it wouldn't happen to you. The issue of pregnancy is particularly genderized because the boy rarely accrues any stigma or accountability for his part in the pregnancy, leaving the girl to deal with a variety of significant consequences.

During the spring several of the girls from our group began meeting with mentors from a local university. These mentors were African American college women who came to the Center to spend time with the girls each Friday afternoon. They talked with the girls, played games, went to eat together, and hung out at the mall. In February Marqwan assisted with a presentation at a conference about the mentoring program. During the presentation Marqwan was playful, joking with the two mentors on the panel, and entertaining the audience with her light hearted responses to questions. This conference included a visit to the mentor's university and lunch at one of the university's formal dining areas.

As I worked with the girls I was aware that they often engaged in performative activities as part of their daily lives. One day as I was preparing to make a presentation

at a conference, I reviewed the photographs I had taken at the Center. Looking at the photographs of the girls interacting informally I saw them dancing, singing, playing hand games, jumping rope, and making the signs of rap families. The visual power of the pictures underscored the connections between my work with the girls and the ways they used performance in their own lives.

Shortly after this experience I arrived at the Center to find the girls trying to work out the words to the song, "Oh, Happy Day" as it was sung by the inner-city students in the movie, Sister Act 2. We went across the street to our meeting area. Immediately the girls huddled together to work on the song. Debbie sat by herself on a bench. I encouraged her to join us. I went over to where the girls were. Jackie was teaching the girls the different parts for the song. I decided that it I would let this activity focus the session. Missy was working hard to understand the lines. Jackie would sing; then Missy would repeat the line. I sang with Missy trying to learn the part also. Sometimes Jackie would turn away in exasperation. Then she would turn back to try again, saying, "listen . . ." Later I bought the Sister Act soundtrack to play for the girls.

One of the ways Boal (1992) gets the warm-up games that he uses is by observing the games and performance activities engaged in by different cultures. I realized as I looked at these photographs that I could do the same thing. We could explore jump rope or hand game chants.

During one of our last sessions together I decided to open up the generation of topics to issues that they felt were important to their lives. This was where we had begun, but I wanted to see how our previous work may have helped them think about additional concerns. Prior to brainstorming a list, we did a warm-up activity. I asked the girls to walk leisurely around the room. When I called out a time of day they were to take a pose that was typical of their activities at that time of day. This exercise helps to physicalize everyday routine activities and see them reflectively. I thought it might also assist the girls in focusing on their daily life experiences as situated people.

We made a list of several possible topics: friends, prejudice, parental abuse, abandonment, racist teachers, and foster care. Several of these were new ideas.

Because the group was small on this day, everyone worked together to create a performance piece. They chose to work on the issue of parental abuse. This had been Missy's idea. Their scene involved a girl asking her mother if she could go to the mall with some friends. Her mom suggested that she didn't trust the girl's friends, but allowed her to go, giving her a strict time to return. The daughter returned late. The mother got angry, hitting the daughter repeatedly. The next day the girl was questioned by her teacher about the marks on her face. The girl denied any abuse, telling the teacher to leave her alone. Then she ran out of the room. The teacher followed the girl, asking what the girl wanted her to do. The preparation of this scene took quite a bit of time. After it was presented we discussed how the girl should answer the teacher. The girls all agreed that the mother shouldn't hit the girl. Missy said that if the teacher told someone the girl could get taken away from her mother and put into foster care. The girls debated which is better: foster care or an abusive situation. I am aware that in her journal, when suggesting topics for us to explore, Missy has written, "Another topic I think is important is abuse. Abuse is important because of stuff. . . ."

In a previous conversation Missy has said, "People in foster care may get things they wouldn't get if they were at home." I began to wonder what Missy was really working through in the scene the group performed.

Finally, in the spring we got the T-shirts designed with the Gyriz 4 Real logo on the front. The delay was related to my availability of financial resources to purchase the T-shirts. I ordered large and extra-large T-shirts for the girls. Even the smallest complained that the shirts were too small, despite the fact that they hung mid-thigh and the sleeve seam was way off of their shoulders. Missy and Jackie said the grey shirts would look good with their black jeans. Rochelle later told me that she had worn hers to school the next day. Cassandra still wanted to paint in the logo, saying the black print needed some color.

CHAPTER FIVE

GENERATIVE THEMES IN THE LIVES OF THE GYRLZ 4 REAL

The Role of Generative Themes in Critical Literacy Development

The goal of critical literacy is to read the world that shapes lived experiences and be able to write against those messages that are oppressive. This process begins with individuals identifying their own situationalities. Greene (1978) has written about the importance of people being “enabled to pose questions relevant to their life plans and their living in the world,” suggesting that such authentic questions motivate action to create a society that is less oppressive (p. 165).

Generative themes rise out of identification with one’s daily lived experiences and the experiences of others in similar conditions, leading Shor (1992) to define generative themes as coming from the “problems of [individual’s] own experiences” (p. 3). Freire (1970) says that themes are generative because “they contain the possibility of unfolding” into numerous sub-themes (p. 83, footnote). Thus, these themes are both themselves generated, and in turn, generate additional themes.

In his own work among adults with low levels of literacy, Freire (1970) has used generative themes to engage his students in an understanding of how the experiences of their own lives connect to those of others in similar positions and how their collective experience is related to the larger workings of society. Thematic explorations assist the participants in defining their conditions in society, as well as revealing possibilities for action to change those conditions. Freire (1970) has stated that “To investigate the generative theme is to investigate people’s thinking about reality and people’s action upon reality. . . .” (p. 87). Freire uses the idea of reality to mean a person’s daily lived experiences.

The power of generative themes is that they “emerge directly from student cultures and conversations” (Giroux, Lankshear, McLaren, Peters, 1996, p. 152). Generative themes allow students or participants’ voices to be heard on issues that are of concern to

them. Creating activities or developing curriculum from these themes can also change the dynamic among teacher and students, leader and participants, creating a culture of collective inquiry where both teachers and students explore questions of concern. Exploring student identified themes allows the possibility of connecting experiences of daily living with structures that exist in our society, as well as creating an interplay between individuals and the institutions and ideologies that work on them.

How These Themes Were Generated

Herbert Kohl writes in his recent book, The Discipline of Hope (1998), "To teach well you have to be able to listen carefully and learn from your students" (p. 45). I knew, as well, that critical literacy begins with not only an acknowledgment of the subjectivity of the learner, but also focuses its attention there. In exploring critical literacy I needed to focus on the issues that were significant to the girls, not those concerns that I, as an outsider, projected on to the community.

In order to understand the themes that were most significant to the girls I first asked them to brainstorm a list of topics that they felt were important to teenage African American girls (there were no white teenage girls at the Center at this time). This occurred after we had spent several sessions working together around the theme of self. The girls contributed the following as themes for exploration: teen pregnancy, losing someone special in your life, sex, getting an education, money, drugs, alcohol, and peer pressure. Based on this list of concerns I developed performance activities that would open up the connections between the girls' daily life experiences and larger societal perspectives.

When we began our sessions together I was not quick to stop the conversations that the girls brought into the room as they came, wanting to listen to the things that were on their minds. These informal conversations also lead me toward topics that we should focus on.

During the fall I asked the girls to write in their journals topics that they felt we should explore. Missy wrote, "One issue I think is important is teen pregnancy. I think if you don't and can't take care of what comes out, don't let it go in." She also suggested that we discuss abuse, not defining exactly what she meant by the word. Rochelle

wrote, “I get worked up about Black folks killing their own color.” Deborah added that we should talk about street violence and birth control. Cassandra suggested that guilt was an important topic to explore, not saying anything about what she meant. Many of the suggestions were the same as our earlier list.

Highlighted Themes

The themes that are highlighted below represent some of the themes that the girls and I explored in our sessions together. They provide examples of how the examination of issues of importance to the girls became a process for developing critical literacy.

Peer Relationships

I was surprised to find as I worked with the girls and listened to their conversations the level of energy they devoted to their relationships with friends. I was not surprised that their peer group was important, but the ways in which they characterized relationships with their female friends was different than I had imagined. I projected toward my work with the girls a view of African American women working together as the history of African American women’s organizations have demonstrated. I hoped that we would be able to develop the same kind of cohesiveness.

One session I gave the girls an article about the African American international women’s group, the Links. I was hoping to stimulate their thinking about the power of working together, of having allies. We began by listing words that described a group. They suggested words like gang, crew, posse, club, and friends. One of the girls said she didn’t like the word gang because it was violent. We talked about whether the word had to be connected to violence. We then drew a relationship map where each person wrote their name in the center of the paper and then created a web that showed the different levels of relationships in their lives. As they were working on this we continued to talk about relationships. Someone made the comment that she had more friendships with boys than girls because girls were competition. Most of the other’s agreed. When I asked why they felt that way, the girls began to tell stories of how other girls had “stolen

their boyfriends.” I wondered why these girls already felt this at twelve and thirteen years old.

In a later session we discussed unity using the idea of `umojā' from the Kwanzaa celebration. I reminded the girls that we were all part of some community, for example, Gyriz 4 Real represented one community they were a part of. We began by doing two warm-up activities. First we experienced a trust circle. We formed a group and had one person stand in the middle. With her eyes closed and body relaxed, we passed that girl around the inside of the circle. Some of the girls said they had done this at Camp Eagle, a summer camp that several of the girls had attended. They told us it was scary because at camp they had dropped a lot of people. I tried to be reassuring. Volunteers took turns begin the person in the middle. Linda said she was afraid, so she didn't go into the middle. Then we did a blind trust walk where each person was led around by a partner using a particular sound. The girls agreed that it was scary to have to trust someone else.

After these physical activities, I gave each girl a graphic with arrows reaching out in four directions. In the center was chalice which is the symbol for umojā. In our discussion I pointed out to the girls that the arrows that were horizontal suggested those people in their lives who were their peers. The arrow pointing up suggested that there were people in their lives who helped them. They also had people that they helped in some way. The arrow pointing down represented these people. In the arrows the girls wrote the names of people they were related to in each of these ways. Nikiki drew lines around the outside connecting each of the arrows. I asked her to show what she had done to her graphic. She said she did it because it looked good that way. I commented that it made me think that all the people she had listed formed a community. Her line bound the arrows together. As we worked on this activity, Deborah teased Rochelle, saying that she didn't have any friends. Rochelle then spoke out loud each name she wrote on her graphic.

Relationships with friends, particularly close friends were very important to each of the girls. They expressed this in a number of ways. Missy often wrote about relationships in her journal. For example, one day she reflected, “I had a best friend who

said we would be best friends forever, then she said she didn't want to be my best friend and it broke my heart." Missy lived with her mother, who was often gone. Her friendships with close friends at school and at the Center were opportunities for her to share her life with someone else. On another occasion Missy writes, "My day was okay until lunch. My best friend got mad at me. I hate when she is mad at me. It hurts to know that she is." Missy was one of the girls who was most articulate about relationships. Nikiki also talks about what it feels like to lose a friend, "Today I was sad because my new friend moved to Tennessee."

Several of the girls talked about fighting with both girls and boys, although I never saw any of the girls actually become physically aggressive with anyone at the Center. Rochelle wrote in her journal, "today in school me and this girl LaTonya Matthews, almost got in a fight because she called me a bald-headed bitch." This demonstrates the power of words to instigate aggression. One of Jackie's entries in her journal reported, "Today I was going to fight some boy." Jackie also confided in me that she had been suspended from school before for fighting. I had no indication from observation or interaction that Jackie was an aggressive person.

Confrontation by others seemed to cause an unsettling of relationships. Cassandra described a day at school, "I had a bad day. It was not good. I'm sick of people getting in my face and this so called 'he say, she say' stuff." Rochelle warned that "Cheryl Atkins is going to get dropped if she says anything smart about me." It also seems important to keep others from saying things that were defamatory.

There were times when relationships among girls at the Center were strained. Sometimes when I arrived one of the girls would run up to tell me that she was angry with someone for something that had happened at school or earlier at the Center. Cassandra wrote in her journal:

People I don't like in my [age] group:

I don't like certain people in my group like: Shontelle and her friends because they are so hateful, stingy, rude towards me. That's why I can't stand them. I'm having a party today and I don't want them ruining

my party.

Cassandra's foster mother was going to bring in cake and ice cream to celebrate Cassandra's birthday. This was an opportunity for Cassandra to seek revenge on the girls who had been mean to her, although she knew that everyone in the group would get cake and ice cream. A couple days after Cassandra wrote this, her journal was taken out of the closet in the office where the girls' journals were kept. Several weeks later when it reappeared, someone had written, "fuck you!" below her entry. Cassandra tore the page out of her journal, saying, "I don't want this in here!"

One day Rochelle wrote a particularly vehement tirade against another girl at the Center. It was stimulated by a conversation that she had been having before Rochelle came to our group. Rochelle wrote, "I do not like stinky _____ cause she is a freak and she likes to kiss boys and sleep with them and suck their _____. She is a nasty whore. She is a freak." As she wrote this entry, Rochelle would comment verbally about the girl she was describing. In other contexts, such as music and the girls' own romantic imaginings, the same language would be used positively. It was interesting that Rochelle despised this girl for the things that she teased her friends about.

Cassandra presented herself as confrontational. Once when she had asked me if I had any chewing gum, I came up behind her as she was standing in a doorway. I handed the gum across her back, beginning to say, "here, I found. . ." As she felt my presence, Cassandra, said, "hey, get away from me." I told her I was just handing her a piece of gum. Cassandra lightened up and said, "Oh, thanks." I tutored Cassandra in the Center's tutoring program for about three months. I found it difficult to enlist her cooperation when we worked on her homework. After we quit working together due to time constraints in my schedule, Cassandra came to me to ask if we could work together again. I told her that I wasn't sure that she enjoyed the tutoring sessions. Cassandra said that it was helpful to her. As I got to know Cassandra, I realized that she reacted aggressively, but really did not want to be excluded from relationships. It was this way with her peers also.

The argument that occurred in one of our sessions between Cassandra and Constance stemmed from an incident that happened at school. They had not resolved the situation when we began to work together in a small group on a performance piece. Cassandra and Constance both told their sides of the story. Finally, Cassandra attributed her anger to her life situation: losing contact with her parents and living in foster care. After the group of girls discussed how foster care was a part of their own lives, Constance apologized to Cassandra. Cassandra told Constance she would not accept her apology. The next time we met, however, they were no longer angry at one another.

On two occasions when we talked about relationships with peers the girls did performance pieces about gossip. The first time two groups created performance pieces. One was focused around copying someone's fashion style. The other portrayed "two-faced friends." Both of these pieces ended in arguments among the girls. We ran out of time before being able to make proposals for other outcomes.

The second time we ended up with a larger group than would typically be working on a performance piece because two girls who did not usually join us asked to participate in the group. Using the two-faced friends idea as a seed, the new piece portrayed a group of girls standing together talking and laughing. They complimented one of the girls in the group, for example, saying that they liked her outfit. Then this girl excused herself from the group to go to class. As soon as she left the others looked at each other and one said, "where did she shop, K-Mart?" They all laughed. This happened with each of the girls in turn. In our discussion the girls saw that everyone of the girls was talked about. We considered what one of the girls could have done to change the pattern of gossip. Some of the girls had ideas. Some were willing to take part in the group to try to change the conversation. One strategy was to defend the girl that was being talked about. Another was to confront the issue of gossip.

The girls commented about gossip in their journals. Jackie wrote about how she feels when people talk about her or her mother.

The thing that makes me mad is when people are talking behind my back and also to my face. And another thing is when a person

also talks about my mother. That makes me really mad because my mother is deceased. And I will fight when someone talks about my mother.

Deborah suggested that although people did engage in gossip in the way they portrayed they don't typically resolve it or decide to end its destruction in their relationships.

It happens in real life like that, but I don't think it ever comes out like ours did. Friendships and so-called 'friendships' are ruined because of 'he say, she say.' I once heard, 'he say, she say, don't say.'

Marqwan gave this advice, "good friends need to stop talking about each other behind their backs."

The girls in our particular group did not fight among themselves, with the exception of the issue between Cassandra and Constance. One reason seemed to be that despite not all of them being best friends, they had shared histories together through our work in the group. It took a while for the girls to get used to Cassandra's personality, but they learned to handle her outbursts and not react. Many of them were very supportive of each other, particularly Jackie, Missy, and Deborah.

Sexuality

I was sure that sexuality would be a theme that the girls articulated and that I readily observed. This was true. It was also a part of the music, movies, and magazines they enjoyed. When we talked about themes that the girls wished to explore they mentioned both teen pregnancy and sex.

The girls seldom asked or discussed facts about sexuality in our sessions. The Center had speakers from Planned Parenthood who came in to talk with the two older age groups about sexuality, diseases, and pregnancy prevention. In an early summer session, however, the girls began to discuss menstruation. We were working on timelines about their lives. I was sitting at the table watching, sometimes participating in their conversations. Linda brought up that it was "that time of the month for her." Nikiki said

that it felt to her “like something squished my stomach together.” Each of the girls said when they had begun to menstruate. Cassandra interjected into the conversation that she thought, “it was disgusting and why did people talk about it?” Then Nikiki said that she was nine when she began to menstruate. Linda said, “for real?” Tami told the group that her mom started to menstruate at 8 years old. I asked the girls if they had a name for “it.” Some one said, “puberty.” Several other girls said they called it their “period.” Tami asked why women stop menstruating when they got older. We talked about how hormones change in a woman’s body.

Most of the girls talked about guys they were interested in or about boyfriends. Rochelle wrote in her journal, “My new boyfriend is Terry. He is so cute. That is why I like him.” It was not unusual for their comments to focus on physical attributes. Nikiki often talked about her boyfriends. In an interview Nikiki talks about the connection between fashion and getting a boyfriend, “I just like dressing nice because you can get a boyfriend dressing nice.” Then she explains that it is important to have a boyfriend because, “I know if I have a boyfriend and another man come up to me then my boyfriend can handle that, but sometimes I can handle it myself.” Cassandra confided in her journal that “there are three guys that I really like, two in my class and one on my bus in the afternoon.” One day Deborah writes, “I found out something valuable. DUDE got `A` lunch with me. I’ll probably be talking to him soon. That’s good.”

Sometimes they talked about older men they came in contact with such as teachers, police officers or Planned Parenthood workers who gave presentations at the Center. Deborah wrote about one of her teacher in her journal one afternoon,

Today has been a good day for me! Mr. C. looks so good. You could see his underwear line. His smile is sooo beautiful. He is so fun. Oh, yeah, my exam also went well. Jennifer’s boyfriend threatened to tell Mr. C. we thought he had a nice butt. And that Jennifer thought he was sexy -- super-model-wanna-see-him-naked and wet cute.

In several sessions we discussed teen pregnancy. This was an issue that the girls raised often. In an interview Missy discussed why she believed that teen pregnancy was such an important issue.

LaNette: So what issues do you think are important for teenage girls as you look at your life and the lives of your friends. What issues seem to be big issues for you?

Missy: When they talk about sex and stuff like that, how to be safe.

LaNette: Why do you think that's such an issue? Do you think it's more now than it was, say for your mom?

Missy: Yes. Yes. It's more of an issue now because all these teenagers getting pregnant and getting diseases and stuff.

LaNette: Why do you think it's increased?

Missy: Some of them, I guess, I guess, they just don't know how to say no when they're trying to make somebody happy, trying to please them or think they're in love or something.

LaNette: Do you feel pressure to have a boyfriend, or to have sex, or for people to think that you're doing all kind of stuff?

Missy: No.

LaNette: Do you think some of your friends feel that pressure?

Missy: Maybe, I guess. Yeh.

Marqwan wrote in her journal that her reason for thinking teen pregnancy is important is related to her friend's pregnancy.

The issue that is most important to me is teen pregnancy. The reason why I get worked up about teen pregnancy is because my friend is pregnant and she is telling school. And some people these days don't know how to keep their legs closed.

Marqwan seemed to feel some anger toward this friend for not making better decisions about her sexual life.

In an early session on success and failure, one of the images the girls created showed a girl who was pregnant and being consoled by her friends as an image of failure. Their personal experiences with teen pregnancy were varied. Both Jackie and Debbie had older sisters who had children in their teens and were now parenting alone. In the second spring, Marqwan shared that one of her friends had just found out that she was

pregnant. There were doubtlessly, many other experiences with teen pregnancy that I was unaware of.

When thinking about their futures several of the girls mentioned that becoming pregnant as teenagers could block their goals. For example, Marqwan noted this and quickly dismissed the idea, “teen pregnancy, but it ain’t going to happen.” Cassandra used much stronger language to deny the possibility of early pregnancy.

No. Cause I’m not going to open my legs. My legs going to be closed until I get married. My legs ain’t going to be open for nobody. I’m going to keep myself a virgin until I get married or if I find Mr. Right.

This theme of not having sex and not getting pregnant was also strong in their advice to younger girls.

One of the first image-making activities we engaged in was focused around teen pregnancy. There were four girls at this session. Each girl had the opportunity to sculpt the other three into an image, opting to place herself in there as well. Deborah sculpted the first image. It showed a pregnant girl talking with two people. When I asked that each part of the image speak what they thought their part would say it was clear that one of the people the pregnant girl was speaking to was her mother. The other figure was her older sister saying, “I hoped it wouldn’t happen to you.” Marqwan sculpted an image with a person standing in the doorway, as if leaving, two people sitting down and a person standing in front of these two. When the parts of the image spoke it was evident that one of the girls sitting down was the pregnant girl. The person in the doorway was the father of the baby, saying it wasn’t his problem. The other person sitting was telling the father that he should stay. Both of these images revealed the girls’ sense that early pregnancy was not a positive thing. They demonstrate their understanding that it can become a pattern within families, as well as the potential for bearing the responsibility of a baby alone. After this sculpting activity the girls wrote in their journals.

In another session one of the groups developed a performance piece about a girl who found out she was pregnant. She told two of her friends and it got back to her best friend who was angry that she wasn’t the first person who knew. The best friend was

also angry because she had warned the pregnant girl to stay away from the boy. The scene focused on the conversation between these two friends. We tried the rehearsal technique where the spectators asked questions of any of the actors in the scene. So for example, someone asked the pregnant girl, “why did you believe that the guy would stick around?” This develops the character by revealing her thinking in more depth. Girls from the other group watching the scene took turns replacing the pregnant girl trying to discuss with the friend why she had been with the boy and what she was going to do now. This turned out to be one of our most focused sessions.

We spent a couple sessions looking at rap videos trying to get a sense of what they portrayed about women, men, and relationships. I had taped the videos from rap shows on Black Entertainment Television (BET) and Music Television (MTV). As we watched the videos the girls took notes on what they were seeing. We stopped after each one to discuss their observations. We did this with a series of videos: Usher’s Make You, Brat/Jagged Edge’s The Way You Talk, Missy/Brat/Lil’ Kim’s Crush on You, and New Edition’s Hit It Off. The girl’s observations focused particularly on how the women dressed and how they were treated by the men both in the video and in the lines of the songs. We tried to reenact some of the video scenes to see if we could then consider ways in which the women could change their roles. Jackie and Nikiki tried to show how the girl was treated in a particular video. Missy replaced Nikiki in the girl’s role to show how she might be able to tell the guy to talk differently to her.

Another comment the girl’s made was that the videos really promoted sex. I asked them where in the videos they actually said, “let’s have sex.” The girls identified phrases that meant the same thing like, “grab it, stab it; hit it off; nasty; drawers smoked; and bang it.” We talked about what a euphemism is and why people might use different language to describe something.

In her journal Missy wrote, “I think they are trying to tell us about sex and how much they like it and it is unnecessary [for them to do this].” Rochelle agreed that it was not necessary for the video artists to promote sex. “These videos is sending a message out to kids and grown-ups and teens about sex. Like Lil’ Kim, she always talks about

something she doesn't need to talk about." Jackie reacted to the videos by commenting, "I think that women is low-rating themselves and men need to stop talking about how they are going to get some of our stuff." Jackie did indicate in an interview that she listened to this music although she did say that the comments about women, "calling us B's and H's" were distasteful to her. Deborah disagreed that music influenced teens toward sexual activity. She said, "it influence the way you talk, but if you got a song about sex, it don't mean you going to have sex. It, just cause you singing don't mean you going to have sex, you know."

One session we talked about what made relationships between men and women good or bad. We began with each person making a list of things that you do in relationships. The girls listed things like: kissing, hugging, sex, fighting, living together, hooking up, talking, having fun together, going places, holding hands, and verbal arguing. We then worked in pairs to create images of relationships. The first set showed two people embracing, two arguing, and a person hitting another person. The second image by the pair was to show an image that was very different from the first one. So for example, the two who were arguing showed a couple embracing. We discussed which of the images were positive and which were negative. The first positive image they identified was the embrace. All of the girls agreed that this was positive. The said the hitting was definitely negative for a relationship. Marqwan suggested that the image of arguing was not too bad. We talked about how arguing might be both good and bad for relationships.

The girls were aware that there were things that were out of bounds in relationships. In a journal entry Rochelle noted that she knew a boy who was cute, but he had a reputation for treating girls poorly. "I know this boy named Michael. He is cute, but he kind of like abusing girls if he goes with a person." Niki's journal contained a written dialogue with Rochelle in which Niki is giving Rochelle advice about how to deal with a boy.

Niki: Tell him that he is taking it over board.

Rochelle: What you mean? Explain it to me.

Nikiki: He said that he think you are playing him. Tell him he is taking it over board.

Rochelle: He is kind of taking it over board when he be saying that I'm scared to kiss him or when he be playing with my body.

It seemed that the boy Rochelle was relating with was pushing her to do things that she was uncomfortable with. Nikiki gave Rochelle advice about how to change the way things were moving in this relationship.

Racism

I was sure that racism would be an important topic for the girls. I anticipated that they had stories to tell about how things at school or in their communities were unfair. They did have some stories, that came out over the year. As I expected they felt that racism was a horrendous, unbearable problem in society. What I was not ready for was their strong belief that at school everyone was treated equally. They personally concluded that people were no different inside their skin. My first instinct was to tell them that the larger society certainly saw a difference between dark and light skin, but I resisted this urge, wanting instead to listen over time to the unfolding complexities of the girls' understandings of racism. I was just beginning to think about the issues of white supremacy in racism. My own thinking helped me to see how hard it is to step back from the dominant culture that is shaping us all.

Missy wrote in her journal that she did think racism was bad, but her information came, not from her own experience, but from movies she had seen. She wrote, "I think racism is uncalled for. I have never seen a situation involving racism, but if I were I would be pretty upset. I've seen all of these movies and it doesn't make sense." Later, in an interview, Missy noted that she was aware of instances of racism in society. For example, "in some high schools and stuff, they have racism. . . they have the KKK. . . . They've been on TV, been on talk shows." On a questionnaire the girls responded to toward the end of our work together, Rochelle wrote that, "it really don't matter what color you are because you are equal to everyone." On the same questionnaire Jackie wrote, "I don't look at color." Debbie, the one white girl who answered the questionnaire, said, color

doesn't make a difference "to me, but it might to others." I began to wonder if society was so racist, which I believed, why did these girls not experience it.

Spending much of their lives in their schools, I thought perhaps this was the place where they observed racism. In an interview with Cassandra I asked her about racism at her school. She communicated in one word answers that she did not believe there was racism at her school, which was predominantly black.

LaNette: Do you think there is racism there?

Cassandra: No.

LaNette: Do you think that blacks and whites are treated differently?

Cassandra: No.

LaNette: You don't think so. Everybody is treated the same?

Cassandra: Yes.

LaNette: Does it make a difference to you [if your teachers are black or white]?

Cassandra: No.

I wondered if it made any difference to these girls if they had black teachers or white teachers. I knew that several of them had white teachers that they really liked and who supported them academically. Missy attended a predominantly white school where she was well liked by her teachers. She said that, "a teacher is a teacher as long as they do their job right."

Some girls were ambivalent about racism, even when they presented examples. Rochelle said, "I think my school is like, ain't no racism in it." Then she gives an example of her cousin being the victim of racial comments. "But. . . my cousin, Kino, got into a fight with this white girl because she [white girl] said that she hate blacks in front of me and her face."

Deborah identified segregated groups of students when we talked about racism at school. She described the scene in the cafeteria at her high school:

, you know. You look in there man. I'm telling you. You got your white tables.

You got your black tables. You got your white and black tables. You

got your preppy tables. You got your freak tables. You got your tree huggers

When I asked if people could break the mold, crash this system of tables in her cafeteria, Deborah explained, “at lunch, only time you see blacks and whites together it’s like football players, cheerleaders. Like, you got to belong to some club or organization to sit with them.” Although Deborah didn’t think anything violent would happen if a person tried to sit at a table that they didn’t really fit with, it was clear that they would not be welcomed, and anyway, no one ever did it, unless there was absolutely no where else to sit. Marqwan said there was still racism because of “the way people talk to you. . . these days.” Then she told a story about a Puerto Rican and a black guy getting into a fight. She whispered to me that the Puerto Rican lost.

Deborah described her classes as being filled mostly with white students. She explained that this was because she was in honors classes. Deborah felt that more African American students weren’t in honors classes because “black people don’t push themselves enough to be honors.” She also noted that her friends think that the teachers encourage black students to stay away from honors classes. Deborah friends have told her that teachers have said, “you don’t want to get stuck in one of them honor’s classes. Oh man, them kids are bad. You couldn’t even concentrate in one of them classes.” Deborah also described the responses of her friends to her own participation in honors classes, “Like when I’m walking with some of my friends right after class, I see my black friends in the hall. They be like, this one girl like, every month, she ask me, ‘Do you hang with any black people?’” For boys who make academic work a priority, Deborah said, they receive pressure from the other guys, “Man, what’s up? I thought you was down at the corner like [the rest of us]” Missy also notes that there are mostly white kids in the honors classes, but in her case her school is more predominantly white than Deborah’s.

One day when we were working together an older boy came through the doorway . Cassandra turned, saying to the boy, “you ugly black Buddha.” Deborah immediately challenged Cassandra, saying “why you be dogging him, girl? God didn’t make anyone to be ugly?” The boy Cassandra made the comment to had a very dark round face with a

high forehead. It was clear why she made the comment, but I also wondered what she understood about the connection of her comment to race.

During a session in the fall we produced performance pieces on racism, beginning by listing events they were aware of that were related to racism. The girls then worked in two groups to create their pieces. One group, Rochelle, Marqwan, and Nikiki, created a scene where an African American teacher was verbally attacked by a white student, while a black student tried to defend the teacher. The girls were able to identify the teacher as the person who needed assistance. We replayed the scene with Jackie going in as the teacher. Jackie explained to the white student that although she thought she was superior that she, the teacher, was really in charge. When the student did not respond to this pronouncement, Jackie went over and pushed the student out of her seat. The girls identified this action as unrealistic. There were several other attempts to replace the teacher.

In the other performance piece there was a white girl who was a new student at a predominantly African American high school. Two black girls pushed her down as she was walking through the hallway. The white girl talked with the principal who disciplined the two bullies. The bullies victimized the girl even more. Nikiki played the role with the white girl talking back to the bullies. Jackie walked a different way to class so that she could avoid the bullies. The girls thought that either of these ideas might work. It was interesting to me that the girls created a performance where the African American students victimized the white student. Jackie explained in her journal, "Black people didn't want white people to go to their school because one day the Black kids was picking on the white kids because of what they wear and how they act." Deborah also noted that "my `friends' or associates have also picked with people because of their race." Nikiki wrote in her journal that "one day my sister made fun of a white person because of their color." I wondered if this was a way of turning the tables on racist society by making white people the victim of racial oppression. These few threats, however, were nowhere near the systemic proportions of white supremacy in our society.

In one session with the girls' personal stories about racism. Throughout my work with the girls it was rare that they told stories where they were the main subject. There stories tended to be composites of events they had heard about either with friends or in the media. Rochelle talked about how two young boys who were refugees from Bosnia called her friends "niggers." She said that she wondered how they knew the words because they knew very little English. Rochelle suggested that kids learn to be prejudiced from adults. This reminded Deborah of a time when she was volunteering as a tutor to immigrant children. One day she was coloring with one of the boys. He held up the black crayon and said, "this is you." Then he got the white crayon and said, "this is me." Deborah talked about how her skin was not the color of the that black crayon nor was his the color of the white crayon. We discussed how people begin to understand skin color. During this session Nikiki tells us that she wants to have babies with white men because their skin will be prettier.

When we began the mentoring program with the girls I told them that I had talked with the Black Female Coalition at a local university and these African American college women were interested in spending time with them. Deborah and Missy asked why they had to be black. I didn't understand what they were trying to ask. I felt like I was doing something racist. I thought they would want to know some older African American women with whom they could talk about life, school, music, the future, and anything they felt comfortable sharing. I told them that the Black Female Coalition, at this point, was made up of all black women. I was puzzled over this conversation.

There was also a sense in which the girls continued to valorize light skin. Cassandra described her school as being predominantly black. Right after she said this, Cassandra said, "but the white boys are cute, cute as hell." During a session where we were discussing personal stories of racism, described above, Nikiki stated that she "wanted a mixed baby with pretty hair." She said that a mixed baby would be beautiful. Nikiki asserted that she did not want to date a black man. All of a sudden Deborah rose up out of her chair across the table from Nikiki and said in a powerful voice, "you dogging your race saying a black baby is ugly." Nikiki continued to protest. Finally, all of the girls

started saying that Nikiki was putting down being black. Rochelle suggested, "if you go with a light skinned [black] man your baby may not be so dark." I did not enter this conversation. I wanted to listen to the girls debate the issue.

Self-presentation

I decided to begin my work with the girls by exploring who they were as individuals. The goal of critical theory is to explore the connections between individuals and society. I wanted to help the girls see themselves as subjects and to develop a standpoint as African American girls.

The girls concern for their personal presentation was evident in their leisure activities. When I watched the girls on the playground before we met or in their age group activities I often noticed them painting their fingernails or fixing their hair. Over the year their hairstyles changed many times. For example, Linda had green weave in her hair for several months. Deborah had hers cut close to her head. Jackie got braided weave put in her hair. I even saw Nikiki braiding Debbie's hair one day.

This interest in the latest style was evident in their clothing as well. Nikiki talked in her interview about the importance of dressing right, "like if I wear black and white, I wear black and white shoes." At Christmas time the Center worked hard to get gifts for the children. For the older kids it was important to get clothing that was fashionable. Baggy jeans, shirts with sporting emblems, and ball caps were items that were sought for the teenagers. For example, Jackie reacts to receiving a pair of jeans, "I got a pair of black wide leg jeans. And they fit very well. And I am thankful that I got them."

One of the activities that we did centered around creating a dialogue between a person's self-portrait and a collage of beauty as society defined it. Deborah wrote in her journal after this activity that stereotypes of what is physically acceptable were detrimental to both men and women. She wrote, "Its bad how stereotypes have girls, even sometimes boys, thinking they have to be exactly what magazines and the media project. God created nobody ugly, everybody is beautiful. . . "

Although, it was my observation that the girls had a positive feeling about how they presented themselves, some of them wished to change physical things about

themselves. Jackie said that she would like to change her looks. She confided during an interview that, “everybody say that I’m ugly” and “I want my hair long.” But Jackie said that she personally thought otherwise, “I know that I am cute.” During the second spring Jackie wrote on a questionnaire that “boys say that I look ugly and I have bumps on my face.” Rochelle said that she would change “my appearance and my style and my hairstyle.” Despite these disparaging remarks about themselves, I never heard any of the girls attack another using derogatory remarks about their bodies.

Cassandra said that her foster mother was concerned with how she dressed. Throughout the year Cassandra often came to the Center in new clothes, often matching outfits. She said that her foster mother told her, “you ain’t gong out of her looking all wrinkled with me.” Cassandra thought that having wrinkled clothes was “not a good way to carry yourself.” One of the foster mothers I interviewed told me that she worked with the girls who lived in her home on issues of hygiene and dressing well. She felt that it was important for the girls to present themselves well.

Compared to other groups of adolescents that I had worked with using performance activities, these girls seemed to be much less self-conscious about their bodies. They were quick to dance while others watched. The performance activities did not seem to create significant anxiety for them. When we did activities such as the name game, their movements were elaborate, quite beyond my own physical abilities. They were also quick to get in front of my camera whenever I was taking pictures. There seemed to be no hesitancy to be photographed. The girls would pose together requesting that I take a picture. I often did this, giving the pictures back to the girls.

Generative Strategies for Critical Explorations

In addition to addressing themes that are important to the participants, a process for developing critical literacy must also pay attention to the strategies by which the themes are explored. In some discussions this has been called culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

I was aware that the arts were often more utilized in expression by non-mainstream groups than by those in the mainstream. I knew that adolescents engaged in a variety of performative activities from the ways in which they dressed, styled their hair, adorned their bodies, to how they moved through space. Across the year I would observe the girls incorporating a variety of rhymes in their rope jumping. I would see them dancing to music on the playground and teaching one another the latest steps.

One afternoon when I got to the Center a group of kids were creating performances, or skits as they called them. I observed a skit that was a segment on the Ricki Lake show. The girl who played Ricki was interviewing a gang member and his mother. They then projected the scene into the future, showing that the boy got killed. The grieving mother was down over the body wailing. This performance took place in front of a group of kids and adult group leaders. Behind the performing group were kids playing basketball, boys tossing footballs, and little kids playing jump rope. It had the feel of a medieval carnival.

Many times when I arrived at the Center I would hang out on the playground, often turning a jump rope. Jumping rope was an activity that boys and girls of all ages participated in, the most sophisticated of whom jumped double dutch. The rhymes were the same ones I remembered from the days when I was a rope turner for my first grade students during recess, although some of the lines had become racier. The same was true of the hand clapping games that I remembered playing during my own elementary school days.

When Missy joined the group in the summer she brought her own interest in acting. Many days she would come to our sessions asking, “are we going to act today?” Missy did not have a great deal of patience with some of my performance activities, but she had great imagination and the ability to easily slip into a character. Missy always wanted to create a new performance, instead of working with an old one. Her enthusiasm for performance helped motivate the other girls, and sometimes, me.

I clearly saw this connection between the girls’ leisure time performance activities and the sessions with the Gyrلز 4 Real while I was reviewing photographs for a

presentation. I realized that the elements of the sessions with the girls were already in the choices they made for their own activities.

CHAPTER SIX

CONSIDERING CRITICAL LITERACY

Introduction

In this chapter I try to think about how the girls and I developed critical literacy. This is, of course, just a small beginning. For any of us to become critically literate we must continually engage in the identification of our positioning and the effect of the larger society on our lives. All of us have begun to think more carefully about the issues that we generated as areas in which we needed to become more critically literate.

I do not take the position that the girls had never thought or acted critically in regard to some of the issues they raised. I saw evidence that they were aware of a variety of positions that people took on issues of race, sexuality, and pregnancy, for example. I knew that some of their influences, such as, parents, teachers, community workers, and even peers, had encouraged them to think critically about their lives. I was amazed at their beliefs that they could overcome barriers to achieve their goals.

The Girls' Critical Literacy Development

When I began working with the girls I told them that we would talk about issues that were important to them, themes that they wanted to think about. I explained that we would not only discuss them, we would use a variety of performance activities including drama, poetry writing and reading, singing and dancing. I explained that I wanted to learn about how to help African American adolescent girls think about who they were and how they could accomplish their goals by working together with other girls in their community.

I knew that I would not see these girls undergo a complete transformation in a year's time. I hoped to see them begin to raise questions and to consider other ways of living out their daily experiences. I wanted the girls to experience the ways in which working together to examine issues could contribute to changing situations both personally and collectively. I also expected there would be a wide range of

understandings and abilities to articulate their thoughts about issues and about new insights.

Toward the end of my work with the girls in March I asked them to fill out a questionnaire (Appendix G) that asked them to respond to several questions. Two of these questions were: what activities have we done together that were most helpful to you in understanding the issues felt by teenage girls and what issues have you begun to think differently about? I wanted to know what each of the seven girls who were present on that day would say to these questions when answering individually.

Debbie said that “talking together” . . . helped me to understand some things.” For Rochelle, the time we did images and Linda “was pretending to be pregnant” was helpful to her, “because I thought about it and how many kids were doing it.” Marqwan also said that she gained a better understanding of teen pregnancy “when we did the skits.” Jackie said that she learned about sex and how to be a woman and “not be up all in boy’s faces” from “plays and acting and other kinds of fun stuff.”

Missy and Deborah seemed to make the deepest connections between our activities and their lives. Missy connected deeply with an issue that she raised several times during the year, “The issue of gossip helped me tremendously with my relationships with my friends. It taught me not to listen to what everyone says and only believe it when I hear it myself from that person’s mouth.” Missy’s comment suggested that rehearsing roles in performance activities in our group helped her to think about the issue of gossip in relationships with her friends. She indicates that she incorporated her new understandings about gossip into the ways in which she lived.

Deborah clearly articulated her understanding of the purpose of the activities we engaged in. She expressed the significance of embodiment in experiencing various roles connected to the issues the girls raised.

With Gyrlyz 4 Real we’ve done activities that help us view life differently. Then afterwards, like with our role playing, we say how we felt when we were the characters, like being the: pregnant girl, nerd nobody likes, white/black girl/boy.

Jackie said that she had begun to think differently about sex, “because I don’t want to ruin my life, because I don’t want to have sex when I am young, because boys influence girls.” Debbie noted that she had begun to think differently about her life, about sex, and about “working with friends together to work things out.” I was encouraged to hear her suggest this sense of collective action.

While it is true that awareness and consideration of new possibilities is not complete transformation or actually being critically literate, it is certainly the place where critical literacy must begin. With these self-reported comments as a backdrop I would like to discuss the ways in which the girls that I worked were able to identify issues in the lives, critique the impact of these issues on their lives, and consider other ways of living.

Optimism

Part of my thinking when I began working with the girls was that they needed to become critically literate so that they could see the ways in which they could avoid some of the structural constraints associated with being African American, poor, and female in our society. I had not thought that they would feel so positive about their abilities to achieve their goals. I found the girls to have a persistent belief in their own possibilities.

My first thought after interviewing several of the girls was that they needed to develop a more ‘realistic’ view of their lives and how the larger society would view them. I thought that perhaps I needed to do some activities with the girls that would reveal to them the significance of racism, classism, and sexism. I considered this for several weeks. I concluded that I should not focus activities around specifically informing the girls about the negative responses they might receive from society. I decided to see what kinds of things happened as we examined their generated issues together. I came to believe that the girls’ optimism was a hopefulness that needed to remain in order for them to do the kind of critical examination necessary to become critically literate.

Deborah talked about how she was able to overcome her difficulties, particularly the circumstances that led to her being in foster care, which she would say very little

about. She explained that she dealt with difficulties, “just by sticking by, like, just keeping my head up, keeping with my sister.” Deborah told me that she used to have a poor sense of herself, “I’d be feeling bad about myself. . .if a boy chose somebody else over me, “ but that now, “I’m usually thinking about how live I am.” When I asked Deborah what could keep her from achieving her goal to become a teacher, she replied, “teenage pregnancy, but it ain’t going to happen. . . .not anymore. . . . at the first beginning, but you know, just not anymore, though.” When I asked Deborah how these changes in attitude had come about she said that she had just decided to change things. The staff at the Center told me that Deborah had been in a poor foster care placement. Moving to a new home had helped her tremendously because she had a foster mother who was attentive to Deborah’s needs.

Missy said that “I try not to let anything get in my way. If I keep trying. . . I should graduate [from high school].” Living with her mother, who was often away from home, part of the time at work, I wondered who Missy felt supported by. Missy said she was supported by teachers, friends, and her mom, but “mostly my teacher.” She said that she thought they were supportive of her because, “they know I can do it. And they know when I want, when I put my head to it, I can work with anything.”

Marqwan wouldn’t even name an obstacle to her goals, denying even being pressured by her peers to do things that might be self-destructive.

LaNette: Do you think you are going to reach your goals?

Marqwan: Yep, yep, yep, yep.

LaNette: Why do you think that?

Marqwan: Why? Why? Because I’m trying to stay in school. I’m trying to keep a ‘C’ average.

LaNette: What would keep you from staying in school? What would be an obstacle?

Marqwan: Nothing.

LaNette: How about peer pressure? Do you feel like you’re pressured to do different things?

Marqwan: Sometimes, but I don’t do it.

Cassandra acknowledged that money could be a barrier to going to college, although she did not identify that it was her goal to go to college. When I asked her if she'd ever thought of going to college, Cassandra said, "No. . . . I won't have the money to pay for it." She further explained that "if I go to college and ain't got the money to pay for it, that's going to dig me deep in the hole." However, Cassandra was sure that she would graduate from high school, "nothing can stand in my way, unless it's death." She was also adamant about not becoming pregnant as a teenager, "my legs ain't going to be open for nobody."

Jackie also talked about staying in school. Reflecting on how her older sister had dropped out of high school in the eleventh grade, Jackie stated, "I'm staying in school. I know I am because I'm never going to drop out of school because she dropped out."

Each of the girls I worked with, as is true of those whose optimism I have described above, felt strongly that they could control the outcomes of their lives. I began to think that one part of developing critical literacy with these girls would be to provide ongoing support for their positive beliefs about their lives. The Center did this in many ways. I also believed that the mentors would contribute to the continuation of the girls' strong sense of themselves. I knew that my own employment needs would probably take me out of the girls' lives at the end of the year. I considered ways in which I could keep in touch with them over the next years, for example, exchanging letter, perhaps making visits.

Learning to Be Critical

A Safe Place

Over time the group of girls that I worked with became more willing to share their lives with one another. We built a community of trust, despite the fact that several girls left the group over the year and several new girls joined. I believe that the sense of trust was built on shared experiences. While it was not evident that the incidents we

examined were personal, I think that they were often very close to concerns that the girls had for their own lives and the lives of family and friends.

This safe place must exist if critical literacy is to develop. I knew it was important for the girls to be able to share deeply. Early in the summer I responded to a comment made by Cassandra, by saying that her foster mother, Malynn, was an great example of someone who had given back to her community by becoming a foster mother. Cassandra became angry, saying, “why are you telling everybody my stuff?” In the fall, Cassandra initiated sharing with the group that she was in foster care because her dad was gone and her mother was in jail. This opened the door for several other girls to talk about their own lives. With Debbie, who was typically very protective of her life, saying that she had been in foster care when her mother had a “breakdown.”

Another day, in the fall, I arrived at the Center to find Jackie and Missy huddled together on a bench crying. I rounded up the girls to go across the street to our session. When we all got together, Jackie was still crying. Jackie asked Missy if they should tell everyone what was going on. Missy said yes. Jackie said that Deborah’s sister had been removed, abruptly, from her foster home. Deborah was upset. Deborah and her sister had lived with Jackie’s foster parents a couple years ago. The girls were very close. The other girls in the group tried to ask questions and comfort Jackie. It was pretty amazing to see how the girls were able to take care of one another.

When I began working with the girls I was concerned about the degree of trust they would be willing to develop with a white woman. I told them that I would not share their work or their journals with anyone, nor would I talk or write about them using their real names. Still I knew telling them about my provisions for anonymity would not be the thing that would make them feel that they could trust me with their views on issues. There were times when they would use language that they though I shouldn’t hear. They would apologize or tell the other girl to not talk that way. One time the girls were singing a song that had the word, ‘damn,’ Nikiki told the girls that it was not appropriate. Another time they were sharing a piece of paper where a jump rope rhyme had been rewritten with sexually explicit words. They didn’t want me to see it. When I asked about it they just

said it was nothing. When I asked again they showed it to me. I asked if I could make a copy on the copier. The girls were unsure if they should let me do this, but they did.

I tried to understand the dynamics between these African American girls and the white teachers they had at school, many of whom they named as their favorite teachers. The girls told me that it did not make a difference to them whether their teachers were black or white. They wanted teachers who did their job and who cared about them. I tried to ask about my own work with them -- if race mattered. The girls told me that they came to the group because they had fun, they got to talk about important issues, and they liked the acting. I was presenting this work with the girls at a university where I shared my concern about how the girls would view a white woman. I said that I felt a lot of pressure early in my work to be exciting and interesting to keep the girls coming back. At the end of the presentation an African American woman came up to tell me that I needn't worry about being an exciting white woman, she said that black women bore children as well.

While I'm sure there were a lot of things that the girls never shared with the group, they grew to trust each other and identify together. Cassandra became less argumentative with the group. The girls developed in their abilities to help each with issues and ideas. They also grew in tolerance for each other's idiosyncrasies. The girls became more connected with me as an adult friend in their lives.

Collective Work: Transforming Peer Culture

At the end of our work together as a group, Debbie noted, that she liked "working with friends together to work things out." The eight girls that were in the group by Spring, 1998 had learned to work together. They had learned that solving problems could be done collectively. Instead of finding peers to be those who only advocated unhealthy activities, they had experienced peers as helpful, trusted partners. One day in the fall when I went into the room where Nikiki and Debbie's age group met, Nikiki was braiding Debbie's hair. I was even more surprised because Nikiki was braiding Debbie's hair. If Nikiki had been braiding another black girl's hair this would have seemed typical.

During the summer I did an activity with the girls where we talked about unity. I was trying to develop the idea that collective work was useful and necessary. I wanted the girls to think about all of the people who helped them and those people that they helped. We also discussed African American women's organizations early in the first Spring, 1997. The girls had talked then about how they saw other girls as competition for their boyfriends. This had concerned me.

When we planned the mentoring program I suggested to the girls that in addition to the time they spent with their university mentors, it would be neat for them to include a younger girl from the Center that the teens would begin to mentor. The first time we talked about this the girls did not want to include a younger girl. Many said that they didn't like little kids. I suggested that they had the opportunity to influence a young girl. Although we were never able to get the younger girls integrated into the mentoring project, the teens agreed that they would be willing to do so.

Stopping to Examine Issues

An important step in developing critical literacy is examining generative themes to make connections to larger society. During each session we explored an issue that had been raised by the girls. Many issues were explored across several sessions; some we returned to again and again. The activities that we engaged in were designed to highlight the particular theme in such a way as to look at it from a variety of angles. It was like freezing an event so that we could examine it in greater detail.

Many of the issues that impact all of our lives are so embedded in our thinking and living in our culture that it is difficult to see them. To focus on teen pregnancy in a place where the girl is not being pressured by her boyfriend, or lectured by her mother, provides the opportunity to consider what she really thinks is best for her life. When we discussed teen pregnancy we told stories, wrote in journals, created images and performance pieces. We considered how an older sister might feel to see her sister make the same mistake she had, how a boyfriend might react hearing about a pregnancy, what

it would be like to be the friend of someone who is pregnant, and how it might be to tell your mother that you were pregnant.

Whether these activities actually caused the girls to change something about their lives or their community, the activities did give them time and tools to examine salient issues. Jackie concluded after one of our sessions related to pregnancy, “you don’t have to have sex to love someone.” I can not know at this point if Jackie’s conclusion will shape her life as she gets older.

Personal Concerns

Becoming critically literate is connected to developing awareness and responses to issues that are personally salient. The issues that we explored were generated by the girls. They were not the issues that I wanted them to learn about, but the concerns that they suggested we explore.

I tried to encourage the girls to share personal stories related to the issues. Sometimes they would tell stories about friends getting pregnant. Usually their stories, which became images or performance pieces, were more general. They did not talk about themselves as the person to whom the event happened. Based on their comments in journals, I believe these more general stories were very connected to events that they had experienced. For example, twice Missy suggested stories about gossip for performance pieces. In her journal Missy talked about how she felt when friends hurt her. On the questionnaire at the end of our work together she described what she had learned about dealing with gossip in relationships with her friends.

The girls also told stories when we were talking together, but did not use them when creating performance pieces. Deborah told a story about a white boy from Bosnia who she was tutoring who held up a black crayon, saying it was her, and then a white crayon, saying that was him. Rochelle talked about her friends being taunted about being black by some immigrant children on the school bus. Their groups created totally different performance pieces right after they had told these stories. Missy also worked with her group one session to develop a detailed performance about a girl who was abused. She

wrote about the issue of abuse and abandonment in her journal. I had no evidence, but I wondered if this was more personal than Missy revealed and if she wanted someone to know this story.

I concluded that the girls, for some reason, did not want to put themselves into the issues they examined by using personal stories. They seemed to want a bit of space. Sometimes this space can be useful when the participants are not ready to name themselves as the ones being mistreated. I still think the embodiment of the issue through participation in the performances provided a powerful means of examining issues that were touching the lives of each of these girls.

Strategies for Critique

The activities that the girls and I engaged in provided both a language and strategies for critiquing issues. In many ways, this is an important goal of critical literacy, the acquisition of the tools to engage with issues that shape one's life. Something as simple as keeping a journal can provide a space for reflection. Learning to work together can provide opportunities for support and for pooling ideas about an issue.

I believe that the girls I worked with were all bright and proactive on their own behalves. Knowing some ways to consider issues will allow them to do this in other areas or at other times in their lives. Just knowing that they do not have to follow society's thinking irresistibly is important.

A Final Thought

A critique I have of my work is that the time with the girls was too short. It is impossible to really evaluate the develop of critical literacy after twelve months. It is important for me to look for places where I can continue my thinking about the development of critical literacy with groups of adolescent with whom I can have long-term relationships. I hope to keep in touch with these girls to see if they do graduate from high school, attend college, achieve their future goals, and postpone childbearing. It is also important that their beginning critical literacy development be supported. I do not

know if these girls will find teachers or other adults who will encourage them to be critical about their lives and the factors shaping them. I am convinced that critical literacy is a stance to be developed within a community of other people who are also committed to living critically. This is true for my own critical literacy development as well. Critical literacy, itself, is a collective project.

My Own Critical Literacy

Clearly there were issues of race for me to consider in this study. I did not initially set out to make this a focus of my study. I was comfortable being a white woman working with predominantly African American girls. I had done it before. I identified myself as a person who saw beyond race. I did not consider myself to be a person who chose friends based on race or culture. I was not afraid of working in the inner city or intimidated by adolescents of color. I thought racism was appalling, a shame that would never be wiped away from our society. When I had read about Freedom Summer and the registering of Black voters in the South in the sixties, I thought about what it would have been like to have stood side to side with African American men and women in this struggle. I actually held an inner feeling that I was one of the 'good white folks.' Sleeter (1996) talks about "'good' whites, who are not contributing to racism, but who are also not changing our own lives to try to dismantle it" (p26).

Two things prompted me to think more deeply about race. The first was my doctoral advisor telling me that there were surely issues of race involved in my study. The second was reading Christine Sleeter (1996). I read Sleeter's book, Multicultural Education as Social Activism because I was interested both in multicultural issues and in social justice. I was not prepared to hear Sleeter say, "I am a racist and I am also a capitalist because I benefit from racism and from capitalism" (p 30). I had begun to articulate my anti-capitalist stance, but I didn't really know how to live as an anti-racist. In fact, I didn't know that I needed to say it.

Sleeter also notes that multicultural education can actually sidestep race and not attend to the structural framing of racism. Because of my exposure to other cultures when

I had lived outside of the United States, I was very interested in diverse customs, beliefs, and behaviors. I had an attraction to the exotic, to things that were different. What I had never focused on was myself as a white American. I had learned to see myself as cultureless.

I did not realize how much I as a white woman had been affected by racial inequality. I was not aware of how people `read' my skin differently than they did with darker skinned people. Because of my own unconscious immersion in white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchy society I did not see all of the rewards that I accrued because of the color of my skin. I was aware that as a woman I could be excluded because of my gender, but I didn't understand the ways in which I was privileged.

As my awareness of the significance of race in my life grew, I began to think about what I should be doing. To be critically literate is not just to be aware, but to combine tools and abilities with the disposition to act to change society for the better. I realized that I needed to talk about my thinking and my study with women of color. Sleeter (1996) asserts that "white educators should be engaging in regular dialogue and collaborative work with people of color" (p. 152). I asked two foster mothers of girls in the study if they would talk with me about my work with the girls. I told them I wanted to discuss their lives as African American women, their goals for their foster daughters, how they experienced racism in society, and what concerns they had for white educators working with African American girls.

I also wanted to ask an African American scholar to read and critique my work. I wanted to make sure that I was not reproducing oppressive relationships through my writing. I asked the Director of our campus Black Studies program to serve on my doctoral committee and to help me think carefully about issues of race. During one of our conversations she recommended that I read Frankenberg's (1993) study, White Women, Race Matters. Frankenberg (1993) interviewed white women about their experiences with race throughout their lives. She explores how they constructed themselves as white women.

Throughout my reading on race and whiteness, my discussions about race with both white and African American women, and my work with the girls at the community center, I wondered how a white woman would actually live out anti-racism. Sleeter's framework of radical structuralism highlighted the ways in which society maintained and extended racism. One of the greatest effects of this structure is the distribution of resources. I began to believe that the thing I needed to do to connect action to my increasing awareness was to share those things that I received because of my own whiteness, such as power, access, authority.

As I looked at the staff at the community center where I conducted my study I realized that the administrative staff was all white: the Executive Director, Assistant Director, Tutoring Director, Secretary, Reading Program Coordinator, and the Educational Programming Coordinator. There were four group leaders who were African American and two who were white. This caused me to consider how the girls were learning to see African American women, and thus, themselves. I was concerned that I was another white woman repeating this pattern.

While many did have women in their families who were excellent role models, I thought perhaps connecting the girls with African American women studying at the university would broaden their examples of life options. I contacted an African American campus organization, the Black Female Coalition about the possibility of mentoring the girls. I also received a small grant to implement this mentoring program. When I talked with the girls in the study they were very excited about spending time with university students. To the girls the students' lives were glamorous and successful. This seemed like a way in which I could bring resources to the girls.

I felt like I needed to find ways to support the work of the Center because of its long term commitment to working with African American children in the inner city. I had access to two pools of students: those in my field study course who participated in a four hour a week placement where they did literacy tutoring and work study students in a campus-wide literacy tutoring program. I approached the Center about placing some of these students to work with their children. I tried to assist wherever I could, by providing

educational programs for the 11-12 age group, baking brownies for parties, and packaging donated Christmas gifts. One semester I volunteered in the tutoring program so one of the girls I worked with could be tutored.

As a teacher educator, my work with my students at the university was affected. I was eager to act upon my new thinking about issues of race. In my second year of teaching a course on literacy development I began to talk much more clearly about our society as white supremacist. I discussed ideas such as radical structuralism, seeing inequalities such as racism as embedded within the structures and institutions of American society.

I was also concerned that my mostly white, middle-class students learn to see themselves as complicitous in the structures of white supremacy. As I think about my strategies for teaching this idea I observe that I did a lot of talking to convince them about the reality of white racism and the need to change society toward more egalitarian ideals. None of my students ever challenged what I said, perhaps because of the teacher/student power differential. I often wondered if they had any understanding of what I was trying to say. I did use some questionnaires to get them talking about racial/cultural differences. I thought these questionnaires might raise some issues that they hadn't thought about before.

During the spring semester as I was finishing my study and writing, I taught a section of a course with five students. Two of the students were African American women. Throughout the course I found them to be only moderately engaged. One missed a lot of classes for doctor's appointments. The other young woman came to class late, sometimes as much as an hour. When she got there she would set with her head down on the table or write something. I didn't know what to do and I couldn't figure out why I was so unsure. I knew that I wanted to be a white instructor who was supportive of Black students on our majority white campus.

Earlier in the semester one of these girls had been talking about having two Black Studies courses and my course being almost like a Black Studies course. I was really proud that she would make such a comment. I perceived that as meaning she was

comfortable in the class. Both of the girls had stated at the beginning of the semester that they were going to get an A in the class. After agonizing over what to do I talked to one of the girls about her being late. She said she took naps in the afternoon and she woke up late. Then she told me that she did get up to come to class no matter how much of the class she had missed. The next week she did not come to class, but emailed me to say she was sick. After about mid-semester I stopped feeling good about how I was relating to these girls, but I couldn't articulate what I was feeling. I wondered if I would feel differently if the situation was with white students.

As I began writing about my study I became concerned with my language. I wanted the tone of my writing to express clearly a sense of collaboration and learning, not any hint of superiority or heroism. I didn't feel as if my work with the girls constituted anything valorous. There were actually many times when I was working with them that I hoped they didn't think I was wasting their time or boring them. I often was discouraged by attendance patterns and changes in schedules at the Center.

Toward the end of my work with the girls I began to feel guilty about stopping my work with them. I was interviewing for jobs, planning to move away from the area. I felt complicitous in every bad thing that had ever happened to them by getting to know them and then leaving after my research was over -- my needs met. I felt like I was just like all the other people in the girls' lives who had left. I felt like a colonizer who restructures the society, takes what he needs, and then leaves. I talked with my advisor about this. It didn't help. I knew I couldn't stay. I needed a job. But I just felt bad. I never resolved this, but I need to consider it for the future when I begin a research project.

How should I answer the question, 'have I become critically literate?' I have taken on the project of learning to live as an anti-racist. For me that means actively seeking to dismantle white supremacy by joining with others committed to the same project. It also means, as Sleeter (1996) said, that this is a never-ending struggle. A white woman can never pronounce herself no longer a racist until the system of white patriarchy is fully dismantled.

I plan to continue to engage in research that looks at critical educational theories across race and ethnicity. I will also continue to interrogate my teaching to make sure it is anti-racist, critical, and contributes to social justice. As a teacher educator I desire to influence my students to consider issues of white racism. In my personal life I want to continue thinking about how I can be part of redistributing the resources of material goods, access, and power.

Critical Literacy and Transformation

Critical literacy is not an event that occurs at a given time nor is it the end product of curriculum. Critical literacy is a process that must be an ever progressing way of being in the world. It is the adoption of a stance of vigilance over the social interactions that shape one's life. It is seizing the tools to write one's own history.

I cannot really assess the degree to which the girls I have worked with across the year have become critically literate. What I have tried to reflect in this chapter is the points at which the girls became critically engaged with themes and issues that connected their lives to the larger society. These are often the points where they stopped events long enough to begin to unpack their layers of influence. What I have hoped for here is a beginning. I have hoped to open a space, provide a glimpse of another way that the girls might view the world in which they are situated.

This same beginning is true of my own developing critical literacy. While I have begun to reassess some of my taken-for-granted notions about being anti-racist, I realize that I must continue to engage in such interrogation. To stop is to not be critically literate.

CHAPTER SEVEN

LESSONS FOR MY WORK AS AN EDUCATOR OF TEACHERS FOR URBAN COMMUNITIES

Developing as a Teacher Educator

My interest in working with adolescents in an urban setting was due, in part, to my desire to understand how to educate preservice teachers to work in these settings. Olmedos (1997) has documented the “scarcity of well trained educational personnel to provide effective instruction to our increasingly diverse urban populations:” (p. 246). I wanted to think about how the kinds of activities I would engage in with the girls I worked with at the community center would inform my own thinking as a teacher educator. I also believed that I needed to continue my own work in urban settings so that I could bring my experiences into the university classroom.

As an instructor for a literacy development field study course I placed my students in schools and community sites to work with elementary and middle school aged children on literacy projects. The students who enrolled in my course were from various degree programs across the university and at different academic levels. I had students who were in pre-education majors such as interdisciplinary studies or sociology, those who were in secondary education programs, others who were enrolled in graduate teacher certification programs, and then a number of other students who planned to teach in the future. Thus, the majority of the course enrollment was students who had selected the course to gain additional experiences working with children.

Throughout the two years that I taught the course, the first semester being prior to my study, I placed students in the city where I conducted my research. Some of my students did their fieldwork at the community center where I worked with the girls. I often discussed my experiences at the Center and at the alternative school that I initially explored as a research site, as well as my own earlier teaching experience in the city’s schools.

One of the urban sites where I placed students was a school where we had placed students from the course for the previous two years. It was a predominantly African American elementary school located across from a large subsidized housing complex. In my first year of teaching the course I added a second elementary school which was predominantly white and low-income. I also added the middle school grades at an alternative school. The students at the alternative school were predominantly African American males. I added the Central City Center for Youth as a site for field placements at the beginning of my second year teaching the literacy development course. By then, I had been working with the girls at the Center for approximately five months.

During the spring semester of each year I taught a section of the course that focused on literacy development in urban settings. Students could choose this section if they wanted an experience working with children in an urban field placement. I was also able to focus class activities, as well as book selections on urban issues.

At their field placements my students engaged in a variety of activities related to literacy development. Many of them worked one-on-one with students, reading together, writing stories, studying content texts, and conducting inquiry projects on topics like volcanoes, mammals, and space travel. Some students worked with small groups in literature circles or writer's workshop. Occasionally students taught whole class lessons or units. One student taught a six week unit on plants, designing reading and writing activities that supported content learning. Students at the Central City Center for Youth developed a variety of creative, active lessons such as collecting things they found outside the center and then writing descriptive statements about them on a large poster. A student who was at the alternative school involved the middle school language arts students in studies of time periods such as the Harlem Renaissance and the Depression era where he brought in videos, music, and poetry. He then involved the students in poetry writing and performing. The students kept reflective journals where they thought about their experiences working with urban students.

In addition to their fieldwork students in the literacy development course read books about urban life and schooling. They wrote autobiographical essays that helped

them begin to consider their own life experiences. In class we discussed their work with students in light of their reading and own life experiences. Several times during the semester I gave mini-lectures on topics such as poverty, race, economics, and critical literacy. We also engaged in interactive performance activities, designed urban schools, and wrote poetry. The goal of these class sessions was to create a space for critical reflection on the social issues impacting urban education, similar to the ways in which I was working with the girls at the Center on topics of significance to them.

Throughout the two years of teaching the literacy development field study course I reflected on my teaching, collecting extensive evaluations from my students, even hiring, with a colleague, an outside researcher to interview selected students. I wrote about my work with my students in this course, presenting papers at the National Reading Conference, the Pedagogy of the Oppressed Conference, and the American Educational Research Association Conference. As I learned more about race and urban life from working with the girls at the Center, I tried to incorporate my learning into my teaching. I describe these attempts below as I consider some of the things I am learning about preparing teachers for urban settings.

Urban Teachers As Critical Educators

I have come to believe that all teachers, especially urban teachers, must become critical educators. This means that I must continue to interrogate the social structures that shape my own life as a citizen and as a teacher educator. I must do this in order to help my students do the same, as I hope they will do in their own teaching with their students.

Christine Sleeter (1996) talks about teachers who understand teaching as a social movement. These are teachers who understand the power that teaching in critical ways holds for transforming their own and their students' lives and communities. She suggests that teachers who subscribe to the social movement metaphor for teaching act in certain ways (p. 239-240).

- 1) First, it suggests that a teacher recognize the ethical dimensions of teaching other people's children, and work to provide them with the

highest quality of education one would wish one's own children to have.

- 2) Second, a teacher who takes the social movement metaphor seriously learns to work as an ally with the community.
- 3) Third, taking the social movement metaphor seriously by becoming an ally to marginalized communities means acting as an advocate for children from these communities in the broader civic life.
- 4) Fourth, a teacher who takes the social movement metaphor seriously teaches children and youth to act politically, to advocate both individually and collectively for themselves and for other marginalized people [italics added].

These are qualities that I have sought to encourage in the students in my classes. I have tried to illustrate these attributes in the stories I tell about my work with the girls at the Center.

I will further discuss the characteristics of a critical teacher that I am trying to build into my own life and encourage in my students. Much of my thinking about developing teachers, in addition to my own experiences in urban settings, comes from my reading of Maxine Greene (1978, 1988, 1995), Christine Sleeter (1996), Henry Giroux (1992, 1996, 1997), Ira Shor (1980/1987, 1992), bell hooks (1990, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997), and Gloria Ladsen-Billings (1994), and Paulo Freire (1970/1993, 1985, 1987, 1997).

Aware of Their Own Situationality

Each of us comes to teaching as people who are historically, culturally and socially situated. We have been shaped by the families and communities we have grown up in. Our race, gender, class, and ethnicity present on-going patterns for how we should think and act.

Across the nation the greatest number of teacher preparation students are white, middle - upper class women (Olmedo, 1997). I have been fortunate that in each of my class sections I have had some degree of diversity including males, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Native Americans. But the overwhelming number of students at the university where I teach and in our education program are still white and female.

For many of us, particularly those who are white and middle to upper-class this situationality goes often unnoticed. We assume that our lives are merely 'normal.' Within this understanding of white, middle class culture as typical exists a whole host of other taken-for-granted assumptions of social relations such as the competition for resources and the myth that education allows one to escape social class. Greene (1978) advocates "that attentiveness to one's own history, one's own self-formation, may open one up to critical awareness of much that is taken for granted (p. 103).

In trying to help my students identify their own situationality, their own histories, I have asked them to write autobiographical essays about their lives. I suggest that they include their recollections about schooling, the community they grew up in, their family structure and activities, their experiences with people from other cultures, and anything else that was important to them. Sometimes I have students share these with one another in pairs or in small groups, thinking about ways in which their experiences were similar and different. Later in the semester I have had the students go back to their essays and make connections with the current lives of the students they are working with.

I have also had my students work with physical images of oppression and justice, hope and despair, and images of strength and weakness. For example, one semester I asked my students to recall times in their lives when they felt weak, incompetent, dumb. In small groups they told stories to one another. The group then created a physical image that represented incompetence. I then asked them to share times when they felt strong, intelligent, and competent. The groups created another image. One of my students said about this experience, "It took me back to the whole body experience of being a kid in school -- how my body reacted to a particular situation. This reminds me how the kids I teach react, how deep and invasive the experiences are -- for all of us."

Recently, I have begun to use several questionnaires taken from Paul Kivel's Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice (1996). These questionnaires focus on questions and statements related to racial differences such as the following which comes from the checklist on the costs of racism for white people:

I grew up, lived, or live in a neighborhood, or went to school or a camp, which, as far as I knew, was exclusively white.

I grew up in a household where I heard derogatory racial terms or racial jokes.

I have sometimes felt that `white' culture was `wonderbread' culture -- empty and boring, or that another racial group had more rhythm, more athletic ability, was better at math and technology, or had more musical or artistic creativity than mine.

I have felt racial tension or noticed racism in a situation and was afraid to say or do anything about it.

I ask students to respond to the items individually. Then we have small group or whole class discussions about each of the statements. Students may share their thoughts voluntarily. I believe these questionnaires raise issues that the students may not otherwise consider. I think they also ask the students to remember parts of their lives that they pass over as being part of normal life. I connect the issues of race with the racialization of urban issues.

Wide-awake

Greene (1978) discusses the term `wide-awakeness' as it is suggested by Alfred Schutz, as a "plane of consciousness of highest tension originating in an attitude of full attention to life and its requirements" (p. 163). I understand this to mean a high level of engagement with one's own life and, for a teacher, the lives of her students and the community in which they live. Ayers and Ford (1996) agree that "to be a successful city teacher you need to commit to a lifetime of learning, growing, developing, moving. You need to commit to staying wide awake and aware" (p. 329).

Teachers who are wide-awake are willing to take on the oppressive structures of our society and not sleep through their white, patriarchal, middle class lives. Alice Walker (1997) has titled a recent book, Anything We Love Can Be Saved. Love is a wide-awake response, an intimate connection with another. Walker's book contains stories of her own engagement with social justice concerns, including her visit to Cuba. It is this depth of awareness, of connectedness that critical educators seek.

Most of the time I wonder how I can really help my students understand what it means to be wide-awake. Sometimes I see it already in their lives. I sense this understanding of wide-awakeness when Steve, who taught his students about the

Harlem Renaissance, talks about his trip to Europe. I think I am beginning to hear it when Christina talks about her work with Mexican campesinos. I talk to my students about the things that I see when I open my eyes -- when I give my full attention to life. I talk with them about how I am beginning to understand how I as a white person automatically benefit from racism.

Being wide-awake is seeing beyond the myths that have made us believe that white capitalist society will save us all and that competition for dwindling resources is the American dream. Without such wide-awakeness teachers develop a stunted vision that focuses only on the teaching of skills to students who reveal their intelligence on standardized tests. It is Kanpol and Yeo's (1995) assertion that "it has become necessary to help education students be the kind of teacher who acts as a cultural worker struggling for democracy" (p. 89). One cannot become a culture worker or struggle for democracy without understand the wider context of education.

I structure several activities to help the students move beyond their currently held world view. Reading helps my students to see the bigger picture about urban communities. They are able to see both tensions and strengths of urban life. The texts I choose are both critical essays from a variety of viewpoints and narrative accounts of life in urban communities. I encourage my students to critique the books they read in the reflections they write. I have also given them assignments that take them outside of their typical world view, such as interviewing parents of the children they are working with. I have asked them to interview people who work with community agencies. We have also had guest speakers. For example, one semester a young man from the alternative school came to speak with the class.

Engaged in Self-Critique

I have found that my work with the girls at the Center has challenged my own commitment to anti-racist actions. I have been provoked to try to develop a new understanding of my own life as a white educator. Part of this new understanding is

learning to be vigilant to the places in my own life where I am racist and oppressive. Or even those situations where I am well-meaning, but misguided.

Olmedo (1997) asks the question, “what approaches can teacher educators employ to help students bring their beliefs and assumptions to a surface level of awareness to challenge them” (p. 247)? I have found for myself and for my students that being in contact with students in urban settings has unsettled our taken-for-granted assumptions about our lives and theirs. For me the challenge has been to my self-perception as a “good white person.” My students are often immersed in a diverse culture for the first time in their lives. In many cases their thinking about the way society functions is unsettled.

It seems to be important to raise students’ assumptions about urban life to a conscious awareness. In fact, Fry and McKinney (1997) suggest that “teachers must first confront personal beliefs and attitudes” before they can develop appropriate teaching practices for urban settings (p. 187). One of the first activities I do with my students is to have them list everything they think they know or feel about cities. We use these lists to have a discussion about the assumptions we make about cities. I then assign an introductory reading about urban life about which they reflect in writing. One semester I asked students to make a visual representation of city life using photographs, drawings, clippings, and other artifacts. My thought was that using visual representations might engage the students in a more affective way with the urban experience.

Refuse to View the Complexities of Urban Life in Reductionist Ways

The media has constructed an image of urban life as violent, alienated, and predatory. This has made it easy for legislators and other policy makers, as well as citizens, to construct urban ills as self-inflicted. Parker, Kelly, and Sanford (1998) describe urban communities as “urban reservations,” isolated and cordoned off from the outside world (p. 126).

Because of the increasing isolation of urban communities from mainstream America most preservice educators have grown up with little knowledge of their conditions.

Therefore, it is easy to see urban communities as, 'those black men,' 'those teen mothers,' 'those unemployed poor people,' or 'those drug addicts.' This defining of urban communities as something that is 'other,' further isolates urban dwellers.

It seems like it has always been the approach in urban renewal efforts to focus on one solution that will turn the tide in urban communities. Hiring more teachers for elementary grades will reduce class size allowing the teacher to become more personal with each student. Providing job training will prepare unemployed workers to go on interviews and work in new technology jobs. Funding for prenatal programs will decrease the number of low birth weight babies. The reality is that all of these programs and many more need to be concentrated within one community. Lasting changes will only come from multi-faceted programs that are committed to long-term efforts (Schorr, 1997). Beyond the provision of multi-faceted, long-term programs, there remains structural constraints in the larger society that work to sustain urban ghettos.

I have become convinced that it is only as we get preservice teachers out into urban communities that we can help them see the complexities of life in these communities. However, just being there is not enough. Teacher educators must create discussions that focus preservice teachers' thinking about what they have experienced. I have found that I need to strike a balance between my desire to set up activities that I think are important for class time and leaving time open for students to raise issues from their field experiences. One class session, I had set aside time for each student to share something about their fieldwork. After most of the class had participated, a student burst out crying and told a story about one of the students she worked with who had run away from home. We spent the rest of the class time discussing the situation, even role-playing possible alternatives for solving her problem.

Teacher educators can help students see that people living in urban communities are often applying rational solutions to their lives. Their ways of living may be different from mainstream white, middle class suburbia, but that makes their ways no less viable for their particular setting. Failing to see how cultural responses are necessarily different is another result of the myth of white neutrality, that all culture is mainstream culture and

people put themselves outside of that culture when they deviate from the list of acceptable responses.

Be Hopeful

Educators in urban settings must be hopeful. Hopefulness is that quality that says, 'we can survive, thrive even.' We can create a community where students can learn, where children can be safe, where adults can find jobs. Hopefulness is linked to the idea of transformation -- transformation of society for greater social justice.

First of all, urban educators must be hopeful about themselves as teachers. As I work with my university students I try to encourage them to get to know themselves so that they can bring their excitements and passions into the classroom. I talk with them about the importance of building a support network of other teachers who are pursuing similar goals in their teaching. This semester in particular I have talked a lot with one of my classes about the constraints placed on teachers. We need to let preservice teachers know that schools have a tremendous amount of bureaucracy, but teachers can still do a lot of helpful things for and with their students.

This hopefulness needs to carry over as a perspective on student learning. Urban educators need to value each of their students and believe that they can learn. This is like believing the best about each student. My students often tell me about teachers they work with who do not treat the children with dignity. One day when I was visiting a school I listened to a teacher tell me and my student that she had told a little boy that there was no way she would give *him* a permission slip for the afterschool science club. I thought about her comment for many days afterward. As a first year teacher she had already given up some of her hopefulness for herself and for her student. If we don't believe that all our students can learn, then what have we left to do in our classrooms.

Finally, urban teachers must have hope that they, together with their students and many other people can transform society. Because if society is not transformed things will not change for children in urban communities. To this end, I have introduced my students to critical educational theory and radical structuralism. We have created designs for urban schools that would promote justice and equity.

Committed to a Project Beyond Their Own Classrooms: Social Justice

This is somewhat redundant, but urban educators must be committed beyond their classroom doors to the larger community. In the classroom teachers can influence and assist their children. In the larger community they can be a part of the collective work to transform society.

Transforming society is not a utopian imagining. It is the explicit objective to collectively refashion our white supremacist, capitalist society into something that provides democracy and justice for all people regardless of their race, gender, class, or ethnicity. There are those who feel that this is an task of great urgency (Feagin and Vera, 1995). Unless our society can restructure itself beyond race and class there is no hope for the days when 80% of our population is non-white.

Helping My Students Become Critical Urban Educators

To summarize my discussion above I highlight four things that I have come believe are important if we are to help preservice teachers begin to understand urban teaching.

Exposure to Urban Schools

For most education programs fieldwork is an integral part. It is important to get students out in the field as early as is possible. Particularly in urban settings, early field experiences allow students to begin to interrogate their own understandings of the complex issues shaping urban life. Fry and McKinney (1997) note that Pasch advocates the “provision of early, ample, and carefully supported fieldwork in urban schools” (p. 187).

Thus, fieldwork is not the only or the most important component to a good urban teacher preparation program, there must be other components that work with the experiential component. Carefully crafted activities and discussions help students reflect

upon their experiences. Texts extend the experience by making comparisons to other teaching experiences possible.

For many of my students the course is the first time they have worked with children as college students. They are testing their ability to work with children. They are looking to see if they want to pursue teaching. As a result many of my students shift their career goals during or after the course, to an education major or choose a new certification option.

Exposure to Other Urban Community Organizations

Imer, Snyder, Erbaugh, and Kurz (1997) recommend that “early teacher preparation experiences should incorporate opportunities for preservice teachers to recognize the importance of learning about the communities in which they will work and the cultures of the students they will teach” (p. 383). This sounds similar to Heath’s project with teachers studying the language development of several communities where their students come from. It also creates the possibilities for developing culturally relevant teaching strategies and content.

I have tried to encourage my students to develop a broader understanding of urban communities by requiring them to interview someone who works at a community agency such as Big Brother/Big Sisters, the YMCA, and community action programs. I also asked them to interview a parent of one of the children they worked with. In this way they were seeing beyond the school or the community center where they were doing their work.

It is also possible that agencies other than the schools are providing quality critical education for children. They are often afterschool programs in urban communities that conduct tutoring programs, arts programs, and other interesting activities for young people. In critiquing Stephen Haymes’, Race, Culture, and the City: A Pedagogy for Black Urban Struggle, Parker, Kelly, and Sanford state that “given that public schools tend to be

conservative institutions employing workers who have been trained in teacher education programs conceptualized, created, and dominated by Whites, Hayme's call for a critical pedagogy of place and representation may best be carried out in contexts other than the classroom" (1998, p. 126).

My agreement with Parker, Kelly, and Stanford (1998) my own desire to work in a non-school setting to explore critical literacy development. It is also why I have provided a field site for my students that is not in a public school. It may very well be that we need to go outside of schools to reach urban youth who have tuned out the irrelevant activities that constitute traditional teaching.

Opportunities to Interact with Students and Families Living in Urban Communities

Preservice teachers benefit from having the opportunity to understand the lives of students in inner cities. Having access to their parents provides the preservice teacher with an insider perspective on what its like to try to survive and raise children in the urban community. Talking with parents also helps to reconstruct a view of parents, not as the enemy, but as part of the team to help urban students become successful both academically and socially.

In my work with the girls at the Center, I conducted interviews with them to understand their lives. I also observed them at the Center when they were interacting with their friends. About midway through my study, I decided to interview two of the foster mothers of two girls. I wanted to understand their views on the topics I had asked the girls about: goals, education, family, relationships, and friends. I asked my students to interview a parent also.

Opportunities to Challenge Their Taken-for-Granted Assumptions about Society

While I said a great deal about this in the initial discussion about teacher education, I will reiterate because of its importance. Early field experiences provide opportunities for students to engage with urban children and settings. The experiences give students the opportunity to consider how their own taken-for-granted beliefs are or are not accurate.

Another thing about field experiences is that students interact with real people. I am a firm believer in reading and writing as reflexive activities, but field experiences add a different dimension. At the field site the student does not know what will happen. Life at the field site is as unpredictable for the students as it is on any other given day.

The Significance of the Arts in Developing Critical Literacy

Because of my reading of Maxine Greene and my own use of performance-based activities in this study I am convinced that teacher preparation for urban communities must include a strong connection to the arts. Teachers need to develop an understanding of how to integrate arts-based learning broadly into their curriculum. Students need to interact with a variety of art forms. They need to learn to `read' these forms, as well as to use artforms expressively. This is different from a separate course in fine arts appreciation or studying the piano. The premise is that engaging with art forms can become a normal part of curriculum for all students, not just those who might be considered talented as painters, dancers, musician, etc.

As Greene (1988, 1995) suggests the arts can be a place for opening up critical space, that is, places where students can look at issues in fresh ways. Using visual arts, for example, as a way to examine portrayals of African Americans can provide a different way of seeing things. Borrowing from Alfred Schutz, Greene calls these different ways of seeing, "experiences of shock" (p. 101). She explains that "experiences of shock are necessary if the limits or the horizons are to be breached" (p. 101). The jolt of seeing things in new ways engages a kind of imagination that provides alternative ways of considering daily experiences.

For preservice teachers this can be a powerful tool for their education, as well as a process they can use in their own teaching. I have found a variety of arts activities to be useful in helping my university students think and experience things differently. I have used interactive performance as I explained earlier. I have involved my students in poetry writing and in drawing as ways to transform their field experiences and reading.

It is true that university students are not used to learning through the arts. They sometimes balk at these experiences. I have also felt at times that maybe I was not being academic enough. Yet, I am thoroughly convinced that students are able to experience the integration of ideas and experiences more deeply through the arts. I continue to develop new activities that will provide this integration.

Further Explorations

As I reviewed my work with the girls across the last twelve months I consider the new questions my work had raised. Knowing that I can not pursue every question that arises, I have found a few of these questions to be particularly salient for the understandings I seek.

During this year I focused more on race than on gender, though they can not really be separated. I would like to develop more understanding of how gender is important to these girls. I have thought that much of the behavior connected to the female gender is developed in reaction to male behaviors. Through critical examination of what it means to live out a female gender it might be possible for the girls to become less reactionary and more able to shape their own behavior. I have also wondered if the girls feel that gender is a handicap for them. I think about Marqwan's current involvement in a local boxing program as an example of challenging traditional notions of gender behaviors.

I felt that I missed a lot of what was happening with the girls sexually. They clearly have an interest in exploring sexual issues. Pregnancy and relationships with guys were topics that often came up both in our work as a group and informally in their conversations. I felt more unprepared to talk about sexuality with the girls than in discussing other issues. I was comfortable with them talking, writing, and performing about sexuality, however, I do not think that I helped them move forward in their thinking on this topic.

I would also like to explore more carefully the phenomena of embodiment. I focused so much on developing a way to work with the girls in terms of preparing activities, developing a sense of community in the group, and building relationships with

the girls, that I was able to consider embodiment only superficially. Personally, I struggle to clearly articulate what the experience of embodiment or “being in the moment” really is. Embodiment has seemed to be a kind of unnamed experience. I would like to understand how the girls experience embodiment in the performances. At this point, I am not sure how to get at this notion.

I intend to explore each of these areas in my continued work with the girls. This initial year has really just laid the groundwork for thinking about how performance activities might be a process for developing critical literacy. Having engaged in the performance activities and exploration of issues that we have, I feel like I can begin to talk with the girls about the processes we have used. I would like for them to think about how the activities themselves were useful in considering various issues. I have talked with the girls about how they might help other girls at the Center to explore issues important to their lives using these performance activities. The girls have expressed an eagerness to do this.

Summary

Knowing the girls that I worked with at the Center as I have come to know them has stimulated and strengthened my commitment to help transform urban communities. As a teacher educator I bring what I have to this task. One of the contributions I can make is to help preservice teachers prepare to teach in urban settings.

As I consider the students that I have worked with over the past two years, I wonder how many of them will actually choose to teach in urban settings. Of the fifty students enrolled in the literacy development field study course approximately nine have done student teaching in the city where they did their field experience. In all likelihood there were other reasons that influenced their choice of this student teaching model, such as having families living in that city or nearby.

I do know that they all reported having positive experiences during their fieldwork, though some observed teachers that they would not emulate. The students at the urban sites seemed to be more challenged by difficult issues, than those in the suburban, rural

sites. I think that they struggled more, which makes me think that a reason they might not teach in an urban setting would be the intensity of the issues in student's lives.

When I write or read about urban schools I always think about my six year old student, Freddie, who stayed up at night caring for his baby sister, then slept the next day in school. Freddie was the one who first challenged my thinking about the purpose of education for urban African American children. I often wonder how I would relate to Freddie now. What would I do differently?

I wanted to be a creative teacher, and it was the students' responses that moved me to understand that I couldn't be one without also being militant and passionate in defense of their right to a decent childhood and to the hope of a welcoming place for them in the adult world.

(Kohl, 1998, p. 30)

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APPENDIX A

Consent Form

The West End Center for Youth and LaNette Dellinger from Virginia Tech would like to invite you to participate in a program for adolescent girls to look at how your lives are shaped by forces around you such as movies, magazines, music, and your peers. We will do this through writing about our lives, reading and writing poetry, and drama. We will also consider how you can develop your own plan for your life by considering the possibilities for its direction. This program will run through the summer and next school year. Through the end of this school year the program will meet on Mondays and Tuesdays from 3:30-5:00.

I would like to learn from you how to help other adolescent girls understand their lives. Your feedback will be important for my learning as well as for each other. In order to listen and understand what you will tell me I would like to ask you to help me in the following ways:

- 1) keeping a journal that you may volunteer to share with me
- 2) allowing me to audiotape conversations with you over the course of the program.
- 3) giving me a tour of your neighborhood and places that are important to you
- 4) allowing me to videotape some of our program sessions
- 5) introducing me to your family and allowing me to talk with those who volunteer.

The audiotapes will be transcribed and you will be given a written copy of the conversation. I will not be using your name in any of the written documents. The only people I will be sharing this information with will be my faculty advisor and research committee at Virginia Tech. Whenever I write about this program I will not use your names and I will give you a copy of whatever I write about you.

You may choose to stop participating in the program at any time simply by talking to me. It will not affect anything related to your involvement at the West End Center. If for any reason you would like to reach me you can call me at the number below. A research liaison from Virginia Tech may also answer questions about the study.

Please sign below and ask your parent/guardian to sign as well. Your signature indicates that you have read this consent form and that you desire to participate in the program and to help me learn about our work together in the ways listed above.

LaNette Dellinger
(540) 639-5056

Dr. Rosary Lalik, Virginia Tech
Faculty Advisor, (540) 231-5558

Dr. Ernest Stout, Virginia Tech
Research Division, (540) 231-9359

Kaye Hale, Executive Director
Laura Boutwell, Tutorial Director
Tami Anderson, Purple Group Leader
Marry Ferrell, Orange Group Leader
West End Center (540) 345-0902

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

Parent willing to participate in an interview

_____yes _____no

APPENDIX B

PHOTOGRAPHIC RELEASE FORM

I give permission for photographs of _____ to be used for research purposes as outlined in the Informed Consent Document. I give permission for these photographs to be published in journal articles, books, and other reporting of this research with the condition that no names, localities, or other remarks that would reveal identification be included.

I realize that I will have the option of reviewing each photograph before it is published in order to withdraw the right to publish based on individual photographs.

Name _____ Signature _____

Guardian _____ Signature _____

Date _____ Phone _____

Description of Photographs

APPENDIX C
LIST OF ARTIFACTS

Girls

Life Lines
Raps
Kwanzaa Drawings
Self-Portraits
Relationship Maps
Free Time Drawings
Jump Rope Rhyme
History Essays
Journals

Center

Monthly Calendars (Orange and Purple Groups)
Monthly Newsletters
Annual Report
Tutoring Manual
List of Girls Twelve and Older
Parent Handbook
Center Fliers (2)
Newspaper Advertisement for Center

Trips

Brochure for Henry Street Festival
Ticket Stub from Juneteenth Festival
Juneteenth Festival Program

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW TOPICS FOR GIRLS

Each interview took place in the board room in the teen building. Interviews were tape recorded and lasted approximately thirty minutes.

Talk about your family

- who you live with
- others you spend time with
- typical things you do together
- special times

Things you do with your friends

- places you go
- special times
- where you hang

School/education

- favorite classes
- teachers you like
- describe your school, what the atmosphere is like, relationships
- future educational plans

Future plans in general

- how real do you think your desires are
- who has influenced you
- who do you rely on for support in achieving your goals

Difficulties in your life

- how have you overcome them
- are you currently aware of any struggles in your life

Self-perceptions/image

- how do you feel about yourself
- what would you change about your life
- what advice do others give you

Advice to a younger girl

APPENDIX E

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYTIC INTERVIEWS Adult Informants

These interviews took place in them women's homes. They lasted approximately one hour. Although I had this list of specific questions, this was an informal interview.

Life as a Child

Describe you family life growing up.

Did you grow up in Valley City? Where?

What kinds of pressures did you face as an adolescent?

Were you influenced by the media - films, magazines, music?

Was racism ever an issue for you growing up?

What messages did adults give you, especially about being women?

How did you think about your future and the options for your life?

Issues for Girls Today

Do you think adolescent girls today have similar struggles or concerns compared to your experiences?

What do you believe to be the important issues facing black adolescent girls today?

Why have you chosen to be a foster parent to adolescent girls?

What do you hope to pass on to these girls you are raising?

Do you believe we still battle issues of racism in our society? How does this affect you?
The girls?

How significant are relationships with older black women for these girls?

Popular Culture

What thoughts do you have about the music that the kids listen to?

Do you have any comments about how women seem to be portrayed?

What do you think about the ways black women are portrayed in the movies?

Advice

Does it matter to you whether black children have black or white teachers?

What advice would you give to a white woman working with black children?

APPENDIX F

END OF THE YEAR QUESTIONNAIRE

How would your life change if you were to wake up as another race (black or white)?

How would your life change if you were to wake up male instead of female?

What activities have we done together were most helpful for you in understanding the issues felt by teenage girls?

What issues have you begun to think differently about?

What advice would you give to a younger girl?

What difference does it make if you are black or white?

What would you change about yourself if you had a chance?

What do you think are the most important things in your life helping you to become the person you want to be?

What is success for you?

What are your biggest worries?

VITA

K. LaNette Dellinger
621 Tenth Street
Radford, Virginia 24141
540-639-5056
kdelling@vt.edu

Professional Education

Ph.D.	1998	Curriculum and Instruction: Literacy Education Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University
M.Ed	1995	Curriculum and Instruction: Reading Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University
B.A.	1983	Elementary Education Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University

Professional Experience

Assistant Professor	1998-Present	James Madison University School of Education Reading Education Program Harrisonburg, Virginia 22807
Coordinator	1997-98	Virginia Tech Community Literacy Corps (America Reads) College of Human Resources and Education Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
Instructor	1996-98	<i>Literacy Mentoring in the Public Schools</i> <i>Literacy Development in Urban Schools</i> <i>Exploration of Literacy Development in Schools</i> <i>Literacy Development Field Study</i> Department of Teaching & Learning Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
Family Service Worker	1995-96	Virginia Preschool Initiative Montgomery County Human Services Division Christiansburg, Virginia 24073
Field Coordinator	1994-95	Reading to Learn Project Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University Blacksburg, Virginia 24061

Director	1994-95	Child Abuse Prevention Coalition Christiansburg, Virginia 24073
Program Planner	1989-1994	Montgomery County Office on Youth Christiansburg, Virginia 24073
Teacher, <i>K-8, Developmental Reading</i>	1987-1989	Montgomery County Public Schools Christiansburg, Virginia 24073
Teacher, <i>English as a Second Language</i>	1987	The Navigators Shizuoka, Japan
Teacher, <i>Fourth Grade</i>	1986-1987	Petersburg Public Schools Petersburg, Virginia
Mental Health Worker	1986-1987	Westbrook Hospital Richmond, Virginia
Teacher, <i>First Grade</i>	1983-1986	Roanoke City Public Schools Roanoke, Virginia

Refereed Journal Publications

Dellinger, L. (1996). Empowering teachers to empower students. Reading in Virginia. XXI. Virginia State Reading Association.

Refereed Proceedings

Lalik, R., Dellinger, L., Druggish, R. (1996). Appalachian literacies at school. In D. Leu, C. Kinzer, and K. Hinchman (Eds.), Literacies for the 21st Century, (pp 345-58). The Forty-fifth Yearbook of the National Reading Conference.

Research Presentations

Murriel, L., Beck, L., Dellinger, L., Gavazzi, C., Scott, R., and Lalik, R. (1998). Fostering conditions for social change through multilayered collaborations. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA (April 13-17, 1998).

Dellinger, L. (1998). Learning to read the world of whiteness: Developing critical literacy as a white educator/researcher. Dialogue convened for the Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed Conference, Omaha, NE (March 5-7, 1998).

Dellinger, L. (1998). Exploring critical literacy among African American adolescent girls using performance activities. Paper presented at the Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed Conference, Omaha, NE (March 5-7, 1998).

- Dellinger, L. (1988). Peforming critical analysis in the university classroom. Performance workshop conducted for the Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed Conference, Omaha, NE (March 5-7, 1998).
- Dellinger, L. (1997). The drama of critical pedagogy: Rehearsing the revolution in the literacy classroom. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference, Scottsdale, AR (December 3-6, 1997).
- Lalik, R. and Dellinger, L. (1997). What just happened here?: Students' conceptualizations of their learning experiences within an emancipatory literacy frame. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference, Scottsdale, AR (December 3-6, 1997).
- Dellinger, L. (1997). Creating spaces for critical practice among 'privileged' communities of young people. Paper presented at the Pedagogy of the Oppressed Conference, Omaha, NE (April 17- 19, 1997).
- Druggish, R., Lalik, R., & Dellinger, L. (1997). Local cultures in the curriculum: Stories of a teacher drawing upon the strengths of the mountain culture and her mountain traits. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL (March 24-28, 1997).
- Dellinger, L., Lalik, R., & Druggish, R. (1997). Examining the landscapes of curriculum development: The view from the plateau. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL (March 24-28, 1997).
- Lalik, R., Dellinger, L., & Druggish, R. (1997). Home-school associations as spaces for transforming curriculum and community: Examining configurations of power. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL (March 24-28, 1997).
- Lalik, R., Dellinger, L., & Druggish, R. (1996). Home-school collaborations as spaces for transformation. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference, Charleston, SC (December 3-6, 1996).
- Dellinger, L., Lalik, R. (1996). Educating for freedom in a graduate teacher preparation class: The struggle to live out an emancipatory pedagogy. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference, Charleston, SC (December 3-6, 1996).
- Lalik, R., Dellinger, L., Beck, L. & Peterson, C. (1996). Disrupting traditional power relationships in a teacher education classroom. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on Curriculum Theory and Classroom Practice, Monteagle, TN (October 2-5, 1996).
- Dellinger, L. (1996). One child's uses of literacy as a tool to shape the world and create self. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York, NY (April 8-12, 1996).
- Lalik, R., Dellinger, L. & Druggish, R. (1996). Literacies as cultural connections: Case studies of four Appalachian children. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York, NY (April 8-12, 1996).
- Dellinger, L. (1996). Researching literate lives: The researcher as colonizer or catalyst -- a consideration of catalytic validity. Paper presented at the 17th Annual Ethnography in Education Research Forum, Philadelphia, PA (March 8-10, 1996).

Lalik, R., Dellinger, L. & Druggish, R. (1995). Using Appalachian literacies as a basis for literacy learning at school: A study of a teacher authored project. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference, New Orleans, LA (November 29 - December 2, 1995).

Reports

Rice, R. and Dellinger, L. (1992). Delinquency Prevention and Youth Needs Assessment and Six-Year Plan (1992-1998). Montgomery County Office on Youth, Virginia Department of Youth and Family Services.

Grants

1997-98 mentoring Empowering \$3000.00	Dellinger, L.	Generations Mentoring Project: Mentoring project matching African American university students with urban African American adolescent girls and younger girls to form triads. [Virginia Tech Service Learning Center Girls Grant - Jessie Ball Dupont] Amount:
1997-98	Lalik, R., Dellinger, L.	Program Development Grant: Purchase of children's books and materials for the publishing of books written by children in Virginia Tech Community Literacy Corps literacy mentoring program. [Virginia Tech Service Learning Center] Amount: \$1000.00
1997-98 of	Lalik, R., Dellinger, L.	Cyber-Serve Grant: Development of an internet web network statewide America Reads projects, including listservs, web pages, and chatrooms. [Virginia Tech Service Learning Center] Amount: \$620.00
1997-98	Dellinger, L.	Cultural Awareness Video: Production of videotape with African American adolescent girls to educate university faculty and teaching interns about living as a Black adolescent girl in urban communities. [Equality Opportunity Affirmative Action Office, Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University] Amount: \$2400.00
1997-98 literacy	Lalik, R., Dellinger, L., Fu, V., Schoenhoff, H.	Community Literacy Corps: Development of a corps of mentors to work in schools and community sites [College of Human Resources & Education, Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University] Amount: \$5340.00.
1994-96	Dellinger, L., Porterfield, G.	INVEST: High school service learning course [Learn & Serve Virginia] Amount: \$20,000.
1995 Systematic	Consortium	Virginia Service Learning Implementation Plan: plan for integrating service-learning statewide

		Community Service Trust Act]	Amount
[National and \$100,000.00.			
1994-95	Rice, R., Dellinger, L.	Barriers to Youth Involved in Juvenile Justice System: Explored barriers statewide [Department of Criminal Services] Amount: \$76,000.00	
Justice 1992-93	Dellinger, L.	Parenting Potentials Project: Teach parenting skills to teen parents [Virginia Department of Social Services Family Violence Prevention] Amount: \$17,000.00.	
1990-1993	Munson, S., Rice, R., Dellinger, L.	Project Families At Risk: Intervention for families needing in- home assistance [Department of Criminal Justice Services] Amount: \$270,000.	
1984-85 development Amount \$1200.00.	Dellinger, L.	Cognitive Language Project: Holistic language for first grade students [Exxon Corporation]	
1983-84	Dellinger, L., LeFevre, D.	World Cultures Curriculum: Teaching elementary students about world cultures [Roanoke City Public Schools] Amount: \$300.00	
1983-84	Dellinger, L., Strayer, M.	Spanish Instruction: Developmentally appropriate second- language instruction [Roanoke City Public Schools] Amount: \$300.00	
1983-84 development Schools] Amount:	Dellinger, L.	Cognitive Language Project: Holistic language for first grade students [Roanoke City Public Schools] Amount: \$500.00	

Seminars, Workshops, Presentations

March, 1997	Presentation, <i>Integrating Experience, Texts and Class Activities</i> . Radford University Center for Teaching Excellence and Service Learning Center
May, 1996	Workshop, <i>Community Collaboration</i> . Virginia Campus Outreach Opportunity League Annual Conference.
1995	Presentation, <i>Child Abuse</i> . League of Women Voters Forum.
1994	Presentation, <i>Developing Resources for Human Services</i> . New River Valley Community Services Board.
October, 1993	Workshop, <i>Community Development</i> . Virginia Social Work Education Consortium.
March, 1993	Presentation, <i>Whole Communities Process</i> . Virginia Department of Education.
1992-94	Training, <i>Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention</i> . Teen Parent Support Program, New River Community Action.

- January, 1987 Presentation, *Peer Observation Program*. Petersburg Public Schools.
- April, 1986 Interview, *Project Pass It On*. *PM Magazine* Television Program, WSL, Roanoke, Virginia.
- March, 1984 Workshop, *Cognitive Language Activities: Integrating Thinking, Writing, and Reading*. Roanoke Valley Reading Council Seventh Annual Spring Conference.

Consultancies

Consultant to Buchanan County Public Schools (1998). Provided a series of five workshops on connecting literacy and social studies for curriculum development for K - 8 teachers.

Consultant to Montgomery County Public Schools (1996). Developed high school service learning program and conducted literacy training for students.

Service

Service to Community

Radford University Service Learning Center Advisory Board, *Member & Chair*, 1994-97
 Radford Youth-Adult Partnership, 1995-96
 Community Action Radford Local Board, *Vice-Chair*, 1993
 Focus 2006 Task Force, Montgomery County Public Schools, 1993
 Child Abuse Prevention Coalition, *Member & Chair*, 1992-1994
 Community Action Montgomery Local Board, *Consultant*, 1992-93
 Commonwealth Alliance for Drug Rehabilitation Education, 1992-93
 Habitat for Humanity Fundraising Committee, 1992
 Community Service Coalition, *Founding Member*, 1992-96
 Prevention Coalition, 1991
 United Way, *Volunteer*, 1991
 Teen Parent Support Program Advisory Board, *Member & Chair*, 1990-93
 Early Intervention Council, *Member*, 1989-92
 Montgomery County Human Services Commission, 1989-94

Memberships & Service to Professional Organizations

Pedagogy of the Oppressed Conference, *Reviewer*, 1998
 American Educational Research Association, *Member*, 1995-present
 National Reading Conference, *Member*, 1995-present
 State Working Group on Service-Learning in Higher Education, *Appointee*, 1994
 Southwest Virginia Association of Volunteer Administrators, *Steering Committee Member*, 1994
 Virginia Association of Partners in Education Nominating Committee, *Elected Member*, 1993
 Delinquency Prevention and Youth Development Association, *Member*, 1989-94
 Petersburg Public Schools Public Relations Task Force, *Appointed Member*, 1986-7
 Roanoke Valley Reading Association, *Board Member*, 1984

Editorial Work

Reviewer, *Tell It On the Mountain* -- Interviews with fifteen Appalachian women writers.
WMMT/Appalshop. Whitesburg, Kentucky. 1997.
Editorial Advisory Board, Reading in Virginia, 1994-95, 1995-96

Service to University

Service Learning Center Grants, *Reviewer*, 1997-98
Excellence in Education Conference, *Session Chair*, November, 1997
Excellence in Education Conference, *Review Panel*, 1997
Graduate Honor System, *Panel Member*, 1996-97
Virginia Tech Service Learning Center Advisory Board, 1993-95
Student Literacy Corp Advisory Council, 1992-93