

Triggering transformation: College freshmen use children's
literature to consider social justice perceptions

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ABSTRACT

This 3-month long, participatory-action research study with 19 college freshmen exposed students to children's literature selections hoping to initiate dialogue on social justice. The following questions guided the study: 1) How do students in a freshman writing course at a small, private liberal arts college initially perceive social justice? 2) How will critical reading of children's literature texts impact students' perceptions of social justice? 3) How do students self-identified as preservice teachers differ from the remainder of class members in relation to the first 2 questions? Data included 152 short narratives, 19 long narratives, field notes of the primary researcher and the student research assistant, and a group interview transcript.

Findings included the following themes: a) Students and teachers should interact dialogically on their own cultural backgrounds as they consider their social justice perceptions; b) It is possible to go beyond the "tunnel" vision of prejudice and see "difference" as a positive attribute; c) All students, but particularly preservice teachers, need to wrestle with how they "fit" into a larger world context and teacher education should provide this critical opportunity; d) Personal, critical reflection on texts and discussion within a caring, secure environment can foster change; and e) Students embrace change as they hope to avoid becoming "stagnant."

The findings serve to explicate the research theories on building caring classroom communities (Noddings, 2003), transformational learning opportunities (hooks, 1994; Villegas & Lucas, 2002), the use of text to drive change (Rosenblatt, 1995; Trites, 1997; Vandergrift, 1993; Zipes, 2001), and the value of dialogue on social justice topics to preservice teachers and others (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lowery, 2002; Marshall & Oliva, 2006).

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CHAPTER 1 OWNING THE TOPIC

The world is dark, and light is precious.
Come closer, dear reader.
You must trust me. I am telling you a story.
~ Kate DiCamillo (2001), *The Tale of Despereaux*

The beginning which was actually not

Working class, middle class, upper class, educated class – all those terms swirled around in my head as I sat in the front row of *Sociology 101* listening to the professor regale us on the rarities of escaping the class to which we were born. It had been a long fall already. Early September had found me at the large university where I had gone on a hard-won architecture scholarship; late September saw me in the university's bursar's office signing away my access to that free education. The air was already cold and crisp and I was wearing the heavy cabled sweater I got for my 18th birthday 3 weeks before, the one I thought made me look very casually collegiate. I walked through the large wooden doors, up the curving stairs to the window and asked how to resign from college. The woman behind the glass handed me a form; I entered all the pertinent information and signed it. She took it from me without a word and I was out. I called my mother to come and get me. She cried. I cried. Now here I was at the local community college, trying to rectify my hasty decision by immediately signing up for freshmen classes.

It is only in retrospect that I can understand what happened. Fear. Gut-wrenching, sweaty-palmed fear. Fear of failing; fear of being found masquerading as a competent college student. A bit dramatic? Maybe, but it didn't seem so at the time. My mother worked as a secretary by day and at a convenience store by night to give my sister and me some appearance of higher means. My neighborhood sported graffiti and violent outbursts that I tried to ignore.

My friends aspired to leave home immediately upon high school graduation and many of my acquaintances from elementary school had already disappeared from the high school radar screen. College was a dream only a few of us “teacher’s pets” had, and mine were big dreams. Architecture school was for me; it offered the appeal of financial success as well as the added affirmation of “making it” as a female in a male-based field, and I was after all, already an award winner in the technical drawing I took for four years in high school.

But all I could think of those first few weeks of college was that I did not belong. I would never make it and I would be humiliated when others found out what an imposter I was. I could never do the math and science necessary for the field; never handle the pressure of the work schedule imposed by the school to weed out the weak links. So before I could fail, I quit. I didn’t know that my thoughts might be normal to any student in a new environment and lack of knowledge in how to navigate through the unknown doomed me. Later I would come to know that I had been bred to question my abilities in a way other students did not, but it was only after I entered the teaching field myself, years later, that this epiphany came to me.

The actual beginning

I was a product of an environment that did not offer me the cultural lessons it had offered more affluent students, ones from the right side of the tracks. My family approved of my college plans, but the reality was so foreign to them, that they could offer little practical help. Few from my junior high school made it to college, so no time was wasted by counselors at that stage discussing my plans or aspirations. My large high school had just imported the students from my side of town a couple of years before and the prior inhabitants were not thrilled. The school personnel – counselors and many teachers - concentrated their college efforts on those whose parents pushed the system for the information. My family did not know to do that. I applied for

my college admission and scholarships on my own with the advice of one friend who was also doing the same thing by herself. We did the best we could, but many pieces of information fell through the cracks.

There were application deadlines, not only for the colleges themselves, but for the financial aid and/or scholarships that would make it possible for those of little means to make college a reality. Even more foundational to college preparation was the selection of the “right” courses in high school, the advanced courses to which there was limited admission and in which were few of my friends. Add to this list the information about the (Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT) and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), when to take the tests and the costs involved, how many times to test; this information must have been considered common knowledge among teachers and counselors, but it was not to me (College Board, 2008). For instance, I didn’t know that National Merit Scholars were chosen from the high scorers on the PSAT until my own daughter took that test 25 years later; and who knew you should take the SAT more than once (National Merit Scholarship Corporation, 2007)?

With the help of a few teachers along the way, I learned enough to gain admission as well as the money necessary to a well-known school in a prestigious field, but it wasn’t enough. Without the support system of others who had gone before me or the true belief that people like me were capable of achieving great things, I fell right back into the phenomenon my sociology professor described to me in frustratingly accurate words - future generations fail to rise above the economic station of their parents because they lack the knowledge and cultural awareness necessary to function in the next level. My own situation was just a small example of what was occurring for others around me: tracking into non-college preparatory courses, vocational programs, work-release programs, all were repositories for my former junior high classmates. I

had at least stayed in the college-bound academic track of courses, possibly due to high standardized test scores and a self-fulfilling prophesy that I would go to college, which did happen, just not as planned.

The first career

Later on, as a high school English teacher in a rural / suburban school of 1000 students, I taught 9th and 12th graders who were not considered college-bound. At that time there were only two levels of choice in English courses, the advanced track and the general track. My general students had the same basic curriculum as the students in the advanced classes, with the same state Standards of Learning to meet, but they did not expect to like English or to do well in it. They often asked me, “What good will this Shakespeare stuff ever do me?” My students were not pulled out for college representative visits; they were not called into the guidance office and given scholarship information; I did not receive class sets of SAT information. They were, however, called into that office should a military recruiter stop in for interviews. In 8 years of teaching at that high school, a handful of my students entered college upon graduation, but most did not. As their teacher I could have done more to provide this kind of information and having been denied it myself, I should have known to do so. I did provide it to individuals that I became close to and I did promote further education as something to be valued, but I did not do anything systemic within my school to change the way these students were treated.

Had I been taught by my teacher preparation program that it was my responsibility as a teacher to ensure my students’ fair treatment, I might have felt more empowered to fight a bit more universally for change at the school level. I might at least have pushed a little harder within my own classroom to disseminate information in a more uniform way; making sure all students at all levels knew and understood the opportunities available to them. I think I ignored

the needs of these students because I felt it was too late by their senior year. The courses they needed were untaken; the grades already too low.

I sent some of my younger students to the guidance office for help with questions about college only to have most of them return with vocational and technical school information. I do not disparage a technical education in anyway, but these students were not often given the choices that other students in the school received. One example of this kind of thinking springs quickly to mind. A student from my colleagues' advanced English class who wanted to attend our vocational program as well as the college prep courses was told by our guidance counselors that he was not vocational school material as his aptitude and grades would allow him to attend college. They continued to refuse to allow him the opportunity to do both kinds of work until his parents came to school and demanded that he be registered in vocational as well as advanced courses.

Even by ninth grade, my general education level students were considered non-college material, even in their own eyes. Many related that they were unwilling to take the advanced courses because they were not smart enough or they were too much work, or none of their friends were in those classes – many of the same reasons my own friends did not enter them in my high school years. I did not expand my role as their teacher and offer my students the information they needed about the college experience as I could have done.

The next career

As I have moved into the higher education classroom to teach preservice teachers, these memories of inequity have reemerged and I find myself trying to incorporate discussions of social justice advocacy in as many places as possible with my students. These talks have initiated even further self-reflection as a consistent theme began to emerge over several years and across

different courses: my students felt the need to rescue their future students from themselves. The preservice teachers I was teaching had a strong sense that the students they would one day teach – probably in settings of racial and economic diversity unlike their own school settings – were in need of being saved from their environments.

If only these boys and girls could be taught that there was a better way to live, the way the preservice teachers did, then their lives would be changed for the better. If only the students could understand the path to success that their teacher had followed, they, too, would succeed. This kind of thinking on the preservice teachers' part revealed a lack of understanding of the people with whom they would one day work. Assumptions about whose lives were lived better were being made – assumptions that connoted judgments about the love of parents for children and the path to happiness. These assumptions were often based solely on the cultural values differences between the preservice teachers and the students they were considering (Zeichner, 1996).

Gaining focus

By this time I had finally found the courage to set new educational goals for myself and was in the midst of a doctoral program for which this study is the culminating piece. Within that role as a beginning researcher and my role as a preservice teacher field supervisor, I was watching a familiar pattern play out at my old high school. Twenty five years after my departure, very little had changed within a social and educational climate which still allowed easy access to the collegiate path for the privileged while denying it, or at least obfuscating it, for others. I knew that this kind of educational inequity was of interest to me; the question was only how to address it. The affinity for reading that had fed my academic life as well as my personal one, my current position within a teacher preparation program, a love for children's literature, and a best friend

from the old neighborhood who still struggled in middle age to overcome her educational deficits, led me to combine these interests and delve more deeply into making future teachers more aware of the importance of widening the perspectives of the preservice teaching pool.

I found that it was social justice I wanted to put before the preservice teachers as a talking point. But the idea of social justice was so large and cumbersome that refinement of the topic was necessary and began with defining the term, not for the study participants as will be shown later, but for the purpose of designing this study. I settled on a social justice definition derived from the mission statement of Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University's Social Justice Resources Center (2006): Social justice is the elimination of discrimination on the basis of race, ethnic group, sexual orientation, social class, physical ability, or religious preference.

Once the social justice focus of the research was in place, I began to ponder how I could best address social justice issues with the preservice teachers and the pilot study (analysis included in a subsequent chapter) which used a children's and adolescent literature course was born. That pilot used literature selections as a catalyst for both narrative and oral interaction on social justice topics that were brought up by the participants who also formed their own definitions for social justice. As the participant definitions were reflective of my original social justice definition, I chose to keep it for this more in-depth study.

The idea. Though I enjoyed those class discussions about my preservice teachers' ideas of working with their future students as an intellectual exercise, I felt the need to make preservice teachers aware that their own experiences, beliefs, backgrounds, were no more valid than those of others (Paul, 1997; Zeichner, 1996). These children they would be responsible for teaching did not need someone to save them, but to teach them; they needed someone who would work to connect to them with understanding (Haraway, 1991).

I turned our classroom talks to the way preservice teachers saw themselves – to their own personal backgrounds. In large number they reported that they had no culture – they were not “ethnic;” they were the “majority.” The notion that my students believed their own cultural backgrounds and experiences were *the* common background and experience of all people concerned me. I became interested in the exploration of how preservice teachers’ perceptions might influence their abilities to work democratically with diverse populations. I needed a way to make these kinds of critical cultural discussions more strategic and ingrained in my teacher education curriculum.

Prevailing opinion

Review of existing literature on preservice teachers and teaching in diverse populations gave me that strategic focus. Preservice-teachers must become aware of the values they hold, the way they see the world and those in it (Narayan, 1997; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). They must also be exposed to those with values other than their own prior to teaching (Haraway, 1991). Literature can provide that exposure prior to clinical placements or as a way to supplement clinical environments that are not as culturally diverse as we might wish them to be (Lowery, 2002; Nodelman & Reimer, 2003; Valdez, 1999; Zipes, 2001). Such exposures may help preservice teachers see the relevance of the values others hold (Haraway, 1991; Christensen, 2000). In the end, we, have a responsibility to communicate to our teacher education students that all people have a right to seek equal opportunities and their own versions of success within the environments we inhabit (hooks, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Marx & Pennington, 2003; McCarty, 2005). Teacher educators can begin this process by facilitating dialogues that challenge ways of thinking and believing (Darling-Hammond, Lopez, & Garcia-Lopez, 2002).

Those who teach others to teach have the power to reach exponentially large groups of people through their work with even small numbers of college students who may one day teach. The college instructor who teaches 20 preservice teachers may reach at least 400 pupils of those new teachers in a given year, and the number becomes very large as the years of teaching pass. The opportunity to reach so many cannot be ignored by a teaching profession responsible for an increasingly diverse population of students.

The world around us

Today's classrooms. The world we live in has become a more multicultural place; the United States is experiencing the largest influx of legal immigrants ever recorded, over 11 million from 1991 to 2006 (United States Department of Homeland Security, 2007). Minority populations are also migrating within the country, causing demographic shifts that are reshaping the cultural landscape and citizens are becoming increasingly more aware of the diversity that surrounds them (Frey, 2006). Economic disadvantage is also a consideration as approximately 36.6 million people in the U. S., including 1 in 5 students, live in poverty (Banks & Banks, 2001).

Though there are many facets to these dynamic cultural changes, one side has a particular immediacy: education of the children who are filling U. S. schools. Approximately 250,000 of the legal immigrants entering the U. S. each year are school age children (United States Department of Homeland Security, p. 30, 2007) and approximately 20,000 school age children enter as refugees (United States Department of Homeland Security, p. 48, 2007). These numbers do not account for the immigrant children who are in the U.S. illegally and are attending schools. The challenges to educating such a diverse population are many (Marshall & Oliva, 2006). Only one of those challenges is relevant to this study: the attitudes and beliefs of those preparing to

teach toward their future students and how those attitudes may be informed and potentially influenced.

Today's teachers. Practicing teachers are overwhelmingly female members of the white, U. S. middle class and from that frame of reference they reflect the values that were instilled in them by their culture (Leming, 1991; Freire, 2000). The composition of teacher education programs in the U. S., also white, middle class, and female (Banks & Banks, 2001; Young, Grant, Montbriand & Therriault, 2001), is unfortunately perpetuating this lack of diversity in the teacher ranks, making it difficult for teachers, surrounded by those like themselves, to grow outside their own cultural parameters. With no one to talk to who provides a different cultural perspective, is it any wonder that many teachers and their preservice counterparts are unable to see difference as a positive attribute and instead try to make their students into likenesses of themselves (Chizhik & Chizhik, 2002; McCall, 1995)?

After all, these people have successfully traversed the educational system into which they will be initiating students; shouldn't they inculcate the values and methods that they believe allowed them to succeed? This idea of standardizing all students to achieve success is even incorporated into the high-stakes assessments mandated for every child in the United States at this time (United States Department of Education, 2005a).

Today's schools. A number of researchers in the education field believe most schools are a reflection of the broader society which establishes them and that, as such, they are full of the biases that exist in that larger society (Chizhik & Chizhik, 2002; Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Darling-Hammond, French, & Garcia-Lopez, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). The values of the society in power are perpetuated because social systems are hierarchical and allow those with the most power to generate the rules for everyone else (Freire, 2000). Unfortunately, this power is

often split along lines of race/ethnicity, social class, and gender, leaving those in less powerful positions to either follow along or become adversarial to the system in place (Friere, 2000).

Many pre-service teachers are faced with this phenomenon in the form of student antagonism toward learning as soon as they walk into their field placements and they will continue to face those challenges as they become employed (Leistyna, Lavandez, & Nelson, 2004).

The schools, as cultural institutions, are actually playing a role in continuing the current power structure, possibly maintaining inequities because the dominant culture (including teachers) accepts them. After all, teachers have been proven successful in the current educational system and have a vested interest in maintaining it because of that prior success (Friere, 2000). Questioning the system can lead to uncomfortable feelings that the way you did things may not be the best way to do them. Add in the fact that many teachers do not have close contact with those different from themselves and the stage is set for continued maintenance of the status quo (Banks & Banks, 2001; Gay, 2000; Valdez, 1999).

Changing the system for tomorrow. How can preservice teachers get to the point where they are able to consider cultural difference from a positive frame? The critical thinking practice and self-reflection necessary to such a pursuit and the time to engage in it must be made available in their teacher education programs so that they may begin their careers ready to meet with challenging populations of students (Escamilla & Nathenson-Mejia, 2003; Gay, 2000). With this practice and time, it may be possible for these preservice teachers to work toward making schools transformative environments where children and teachers grow and learn from each other in respectful arenas that recognize diversity as a positive attribute (Darling-Hammond, French, & Garcia-Lopez, 2003; Jung, 2005). It is up to teacher education programs to initiate this critical instruction.

The research questions

From the perspective that preservice teachers must be prepared to teach in a changing world environment, I constructed the following research questions which were used to study the narrative and oral responses of 19 college freshmen in a writing course designed to address social justice issues through the use of children's literature texts.

1. How do students in a freshman writing course at a small, private liberal arts college initially perceive social justice?
2. How will critical reading of children's literature texts influence students' perceptions of social justice?
3. How do students self-identified as preservice teachers differ from the remainder of class members in relation to the first 2 questions?

Due to my own situation as a teacher educator, I am still most interested in the preservice teacher population, however, in completing a pilot study with a homogenous group of preservice teachers in the year prior to this study, I became aware that better data might be gathered by placing my research among a more diverse group of participants that would also include preservice teachers. I hoped a more heterogeneous population would add depth to the data as more ideologies were likely to be represented while still allowing me to look at the preservice teacher sub-set of participants for any differences that might be revealed between them and the rest of the group.

The audience for this research became much broader with this inclusion of a wider population of participants and may be relevant to the following groups: 1) teacher educators who want to initiate social justice dialogues with preservice teachers; 2) other educators who want to include social justice dialogue as it relates to their own areas; 3) preservice teachers; 4) beginning teachers.

CHAPTER 2 THEORY AND RATIONALE

Those of us who submitted or surrendered our ideas and dreams and identities to the "leaders" must take back our rights, our identities, our responsibilities. Then we will have to confront. I don't only mean external confrontations. We have to confront ourselves. Do we like what we see in the mirror? And, according to our light, according to our understanding, according to our courage, we will have to say yea or nay--and rise!

~Maya Angelou (1995), *Mother Jones.com*

Is the narrator omniscient or are we all ventriloquist dummies?

“White trash; you are all just white trash,” the tall well-dressed African-American woman with close-cropped hair had shouted. I knew I lived and went to school in a working class / poor neighborhood, but it took my 7th grade science teacher to really spell out what many people apparently thought about us at Jackson Junior High School. I was hurt; I was angry; I was ashamed. How could my teacher say that to me? I got straight As; I was quiet and respectful; I was never in trouble. But the condemnation, let alone after a group of rowdy kids had plucked her last nerve, included me.

The racial epithet may seem minor in comparison to what others have endured, but the injustice of it was monumental to me. Though other injustices have followed, I remember this one as the beginning of “other” awareness – that knowledge that there are people in the world who do not like, or respect you because you are different from them. An educated woman saw a group of working class white children and assumed we were less than she; that is the greatest injustice a teacher can impose on her students. My passion for instigating social justice dialogues is a way of ensuring that preservice teachers become aware of their own biases and work at mitigating them before they reach their classrooms.

As I reviewed the literature supporting my participatory action research study, I used a feminist perspective, a framework that allowed for the establishment of an intentionally confrontational environment, but one that was also imbued with a deep sense of caring and

respect for the individual within the environment – a mixing up of the waters (Anzaldua, 1999; Fraser, 1996; hooks, 1994; Jung, 2005; Paul, 1987; Trites, 1997; Vandergrift, 1993).

Also important to the perspective of this study were Reader Response Theory (RRT) and Critical Race Theory (CRT). Louise Rosenblatt's (1995) reader response literature supported the use of response journals as a means of interacting with texts, especially in connection to children's literature. CRT, developed over the last 20 years by a number of researchers/authors, provided the background information necessary for deep discussions and writings regarding cultural identity, particularly among the predominately white, middle class participant population of this study (Bernal, 2002; Gilborn, 2006; Gutierrez, 2000; Jewett, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Along with a more in-depth look at my theoretical perspective, I include in this chapter

- 1) an expansion of my theoretical perspective,
- 2) the relevance of using literature to engage students in critical thinking and writing,
- 3) the intentional use of children's literature to frame social justice dialogues, and
- 4) the importance of self reflection to the social justice discussion.

I conclude with a charge to teacher education programs to address the need for social justice discourse among preservice teachers.

Focusing the lens

When I first heard the word "theory" associated with "research," I was confused. What was theory; why did it matter; and how was I to go about finding myself one? I imagined that a research study was all about the data collected. How those findings might be framed, or from what perspective the researcher was looking at the data, were not issues that came to my mind. It was only after a classmate made a presentation on theory in a qualitative research class, calling it

the “eye through which we see” that I began to understand how theory might undergird the research (Kuhn, 1970; Putnam, 1981; Patton, 2002; Smith & Deemer, 2003), but I was still confused about how I would come to use this information in my own work. What kind of “eye” would I use? The implications of that question about vision and perspective became crucial to this study and that ability to “see” eventually became one of the study’s main findings.

My classmate jump-started my thinking and through subsequent reading I became aware that theory was, indeed, an integral part of any study as it immediately allowed the reader of the research to see from the unique perspective of the researcher (Patton, 2002). I had been thinking of it as an add-on, something that could be decided somewhere along the way while the research was being done. I began to understand how completely unworkable that idea was.

Research on theoretical perspectives led me to consider several different ones for my work, namely: critical race theory, feminist theory, poststructuralism, reader response theory, social constructivism, and pragmatism. Unfortunately, as I read deeper into each theory, thinking that I might have found something that worked; I began to sink back into confusion. Each theory was relevant until I delved more deeply into it, at which point it seemed to become a “reductive” frame for my purpose, touching on important aspects of my research, but not fully addressing all of the avenues I needed addressed (Nespor, 2006, p. 115). I began to despair that I did not really understand how theory was going to guide my work. Only after more reading, discussion with others in the field, and deeper contemplation did I come to realize that one perspective had already revealed itself as a part of my thought processes as I had considered my initial interest in the topic, my methodology and the overall structure of my study.

Making a choice – taking a stand

Feminist theory guided my research because the diversity of perspectives within the feminist frame allowed me to locate my own voice, as well as the voices of others, within the study, but those were not the only considerations (Jung, 2005). Feminist theory provided a model of caring engagement that was foundational to both the purpose behind my work as well as to the process of it (Anzaldúa, 1997; Noddings, 2003).

I first noticed this theory “fit” when I pondered how I became involved in my topic in the first place. I realized in thinking back to my own school experiences as well as my work within school environments, that I had always been aware of my gendered identity within all of these places (Paul, 1987). In elementary school, gender kept me from being a safety patrol, even though I exhibited the other criteria: good grades and citizenship. Instead, the reward for those of my gender was cafeteria clean-up helper. I knew this process was unfair, but wasn’t even aware it could be challenged. When junior high school classes were chosen, I was excluded from the technical drawing class because it was considered a “shop” class and girls were not allowed to take those. My mother (and I later realized, my model in many ways), a single mom working two jobs and serving as PTA president at the school, had that decision overturned after a talk with my principal. I knew at the time that her action was unusual, but it was only in retrospect that I considered the difficulties my mother must have faced in assuring me that opportunity to pursue my true interests.

Interestingly enough, after that initial barring from the course, the continuation of my interest in technical drawing was easily sustained, also based partially on my gender. As only one of two females in those courses over the next 4 years, in the late 1970s, I garnered the positive attention of the instructors and was able to excel and win considerable accolades for

myself. Unfortunately, as I related in the first chapter, I did not go on to build on my accomplishments as I had expected.

Multiple plot lines converge

These early experiences forged a deep belief that the kind of person I became, my likes and dislikes, my choices, was heavily influenced by my gender. Adult life experiences have only reinforced that belief. As I considered my perspective for this study, I asked myself a number of questions: From what place do I speak and with what authority? How did I get here? Who was I before now? Who will I become? Why? Am I an authentic voice? Do I, can I, represent anyone other than myself, or in presuming to represent others, do I marginalize them in ways I don't understand or intend?

I considered all of these points and decided that feminist theory allowed me the latitude to ask these questions that are not situated solely on gender, but never veer completely away from it either. I embraced this choice as one that allowed me to use children's literature to initiate critical thought and writing on race, social/economic class, gender, and social justice.

Who am I to say?

I am a middle-aged, middle class white woman. My background is working-class; I am the first in my family to go to college. My culture is a tightly woven fabric of nuclear family members with strong threads of hard physical work, adherence to rigid rules of behavior, mistrust of outsiders, and fear of change. My ethnic heritage locates itself somewhere in the British Isles and Western Europe; though my ancestors settled near where I live now, in southwest Virginia, at least 150 years ago. Though I earned a scholarship to study architecture at a major university when I graduated from high school, I was too backward to successfully navigate that course and squandered the opportunity, returning to home, family and a local

community college to start over. My educational path after that was less than distinguished as I wandered through my undergraduate degree in English with little of the focus and goal-orientation I had shown in my prior pursuits. It was only as an adult, having had a career in education myself, that I had enough courage to obtain what I had always valued – the highest degree in my field.

I have focused on the way we see the “other,” which is tied up with our personal perceptions as well as with actual race, gender, or class and the power relationships that are engendered by those attributes (Paul, 1997; Zeichner, 1996). This feminist lens at times seemed like a kaleidoscope, revealing many views simultaneously and shifting quickly, but that was not a negative thing. It is positive use of this multiplicity and variability that others have found helpful and that I wished to use as I focused my work even more acutely on individual perceptions, specifically those of preservice teachers (Andersen, 2005; Bullough & Stokes, 1994; Harris, 2006; Parsons, 2005).

Research in action

The very nature of participatory action research (PAR) allows for transformation and integration of theory and practice (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). I situated my study in this paradigm because I aimed to look deeply into my own classroom and teaching practices as well as into the writing products and interactions of my student participants. My investigations into such a multidimensional topic as social justice were well suited by a methodology that allowed a plurality of voices to be heard (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005).

Action research has been around in some form since the early part of the 20th century, but has experienced resurgence in the last thirty years. The intent of the method that allows researcher and participants to act as co-researchers is to promote “shared ownership,” (Kemmis

& McTaggart, p. 560, 2005) social change, and political action. Schwandt (2001) locates the beginning of action research with both John Dewey (1933), who brought in a pragmatist aim of specific goal-oriented problem solving, and Kurt Lewin (1946), who developed a model for the paradigm that includes stages of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting in recursive cycles as the research proceeds.

The ownership of knowledge within a classroom setting combined with the potential to effect change espoused by this ideology worked well for my study. To become even more methodologically refined, I situated this project as critical participatory action research, defined by Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) as research that is committed to social analyses and the revelation of injustices associated with power distribution and ethnicity, gender, and social class, and seeks a remedy to those problems.

Participatory action research (PAR) is understood by Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) to be a social process, “constituted in social interaction between people” (p. 563). It is concerned with what is temporal, what can be described and potentially changed. Though theory may be discussed, it is practical action that drives the method. It eschews the abstract nature of positivist research as unsituated or decontextualized and therefore unreal. Using a PAR model, production and reproduction of educational practices can become transparent, allowing the participants to adapt to the new knowledge this re-vision allows.

There are, of course, areas to which the researcher must pay particular attention: social practices and structures already in existence, as well as those that develop over time (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). Interaction among people is never a smooth process and conflicts are bound to arise as existing cultural processes and emerging group dynamic shifts take place, but it is this action and reaction that makes the research real. Thomas Kuhn (1970) addresses just such

situations of dealing with ambiguities of circumstance. He relates in a discussion of assimilation of anomalies within a paradigm, that important ideas may be overlooked when one keeps to a model too closely, as in traditional, positivist research. Kuhn (1970) goes on to theorize that the anomalies are what will actually drive the needed changes to the paradigm if the governing authority will only choose to see what is actually being revealed. By decentralizing the power for change out to the individual level, as PAR allows, the individual is empowered to seek knowledge that is relevant to him/her in a given time (Paul, 1987). Education becomes an action: real learning.

This kind of research engenders questions that can hit at the deepest levels of participants' consciousness. Knowledge that has already been built is opened to scrutiny and judgment. Such practices are intentionally intrusive and can lead to confusion and even combativeness on the part of the participants (Boler, 2005; Sugrue, 1997). It must be added that change that goes beyond that of the individual person is at the mercy of collective groups within society itself, therefore, democratization cannot be undervalued as a necessary driving force when it comes to lasting social change. Part of the action research agenda is also the "growth and development in participants' *capacity* [emphasis added] for action" (Kemmis & McTaggart, p. 571).

As further reinforcement of the researcher's location in PAR, Harry Wolcott (2005) calls for total immersion of the researcher in fieldwork. Action research allows for this kind of immersion, allowing the researcher and the participants to interact on as close a level as possible. Wolcott (2005) goes on to recommend that the researcher know herself before beginning such study. It is this point of self-realization that I tried to reach in this section on theory as I searched for a perspective from which to examine phenomenon as clearly as possible. In fact, I sought to

accomplish Wolcott's (2005) ideal of finding my path and working my way into the research. Having identified myself as a feminist researcher, an explanation of how the purpose of my study is best served by feminist theory is also in order.

A feminist point of view

Feminist theory may be defined as “any of multiple theories or perspectives either based on the premise that women have been and continue to be oppressed...or based on the premise that gender is a fundamental category of analysis” (Seigfried, 1996, p. 4). In its most general sense, it espouses the fundamental view that women experience life differently than men do.

A brief history

Feminism is such a broad term, spanning such a wide time period that some general background information is necessary to situate exactly how the theory is being used in this study. The discussion of the primary means of women's oppression did not vary a great deal between the 1950s and the 1970s, a time period considered the second wave of feminism, the first wave having been the suffragist movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. From De Beauvoir's *Second Sex* in 1954, through the 1980s with the writings of Gayle Rubin (1974), Shulamith Firestone (1970), Nancy Chodorow (1978), and Luce Irigaray (1985), a consistent theme emerged: women are oppressed because they buy into the system that oppresses them and because they have not gathered the forces necessary to fight their oppressors. The authors found a number of causes associated with this failure to fight oppression, but there is general consensus that historicizing women's oppression is fundamental to the fight against it.

To that end, De Beauvoir asks what makes a woman a woman, and in asking, she implies that the definition should include more than, a woman is not a man. The beginning of oppression then was the defining of woman as the “other,” someone lacking the attributes of a man and

therefore not worthy of the same considerations (De Beauvoir, 1954). It appears that women have been colonized so well in their roles and so many of them believe deeply that they are what they have been labeled, that they cannot fathom the desire to overthrow their male oppressors since they see them as protectors/providers, the avenue through which women's esteem comes (Rubin, 1974; Chodorow, 1978; Firestone, 1970).

Rubin (1974), Chodorow (1978), Firestone (1970), and Hartsock (1983), make arguments for sexual reproduction as a means of oppression, given societal tendency to place women in the role responsible not only for childbearing but for childrearing as well. Rubin coins the term "sex / gender system" (p. 28) to identify the phenomenon through which women are oppressed by their own biological sexuality. Hartsock (1983) asks that the oppressed take a stand for change from a realistic, action-oriented position from which would come "the restructuring of society as a whole on the basis of women's activity" (p. 234). The cultural roles revealed in these writings are reinforced long before boys and girls turn into men and women. The jobs and life duties that are culturally appropriate vary widely but are set without regard to whether individual men and women want to assume them (Rubin, 1974).

Economic oppression of women exists on many levels and has a great impact on how willing they are to fight for their own rights if that fighting might lead to economic suicide. The disadvantages are along all points of the economic continuum: women who stay out of the work force to raise children are financially penalized, as are those who are in the work force, but are unable to advance in well-paying jobs. Those who marry expecting economic stability are at the mercy of their husbands' financial decisions, illnesses, or infidelities. The cultural roles attributed to each sex make it nearly impossible for women to achieve economic equity since

women in these times were (and I would argue still are) expected to continue their household responsibilities in addition to working outside the home (Rubin, 1974).

Rubin (1974) brings in the discussion of Marxism as a remedy for women's inequality woes, but goes on to illuminate its shortcomings when it comes to explaining oppression of women: capitalism has only served as a conduit for oppression, it did not invent it, even though it promotes the environment in which that oppression thrives. Marxism as a counter-point to capitalism helps to illumine women's struggle within a system of oppression similar to that of the worker within the capitalist system. The difference, though, is that women are not collectively bargaining for their greater good. Heidi Hartmann (1981) sees Marxism as a theory that would swallow up feminism under its "larger struggle" (p. 97) and yet taking things from a solely feminist angle may obscure the bigger picture of what is really happening to women.

A prescription

Second-wave feminist, Luce Irigaray (1985), relates that women have been made subject to male representation so completely that they will often deny their own pleasure in order to facilitate men's pleasure. To change their subject status, women must first free themselves of men's central economy and then allow themselves to "expand" (p. 32) into and out of themselves, reconnecting to all of their own and other's multiplicities. It may be that seeing these multiplicities in ourselves first may allow us to appreciate them in others.

Donna Haraway (1991) calls for "partial, real connection" (p. 159) to others to be made if we are to continue to exist as human beings. Trying to theorize a totality is a mistake that misses what is really there: how all the parts are connected. Comparison of others to our own lives and dichotomous categorization of those different from us need not take place for us to understand the "story" of someone's life. Uma Narayan (1997) in "Contesting Cultures," states the

importance of this contextualization and connecting of women's stories: "I am arguing that my eventual feminist contestations of my culture have something to do with cultural dynamics of the family life that surrounded me as a child, something to do with my early sense of the 'politics of home'" (p. 398). It is these "politics of home" that are a part of everyone. We all come from somewhere. The borders we must cross, the gaps we must leap to reach others may begin at the front door of our own childhood homes. The point is our common ground: we are all a product of our situations. We must begin here to address who we are as teacher educators, as preservice teachers, as people.

It is after this step that the path gets fuzzier; what to do next? Whose path to follow? The later second wave feminists began to see a need to connect the gender issue to the "issues of race, class and sexuality" (Nicholson, 1997, p. 9) and it is along those lines that a larger group of women may be attracted to the notion that it is possible to win the war against oppression. As feminism moves into a third wave, women of color have separated their voices from those of white feminists in an effort to differentiate their needs and to highlight the fact that women of color were always present in the movement, but that their needs and perspectives are unique and must be considered (Anzaldúa, 1999; Mohanty, 2003; Roth, 2004).

As Mohanty (2003) and Roth (2004) relate, taking on the oppression of women alone is not sufficient; there is the need to consider not only gender, but the other domains of oppression as well. It is a concern that those in power may see the opportunity to further divide women along the lines of race, class, and sexuality in an effort to keep them from collectively acting in their own self-interest. Such a tactic could be very effective in persuading, for example, rich white women, that they are better off in the existing patriarchal system than they would be

fighting other women for the piece of the success pie that they have already tasted through their husbands/fathers/sons.

Feminist theory offered my research the possibility of exploring difference based on the cultural ideals of what is considered valuable by multiple people (Haraway, 1991). Those differences in perception provided the foreground for talk about societal roles, power structures, stereotypes, and the vision and action necessary to create change. All the student participants, including those who identified themselves as preservice teachers, were given the opportunity to explore their own perceptual bases. Feminist theory supports the contention that such exploration may allow them all to more fully understand others.

Additional lenses

Though feminist theory offered the foundation of belief for situating my research, I still found that there were two additional theories that should be mentioned as integral: Reader response theory and Critical race theory.

Reader response theory

Louise Rosenblatt (1995) is cited in several texts on children's literature and reader response as the initiator of the idea that students should have their own voices in the classroom (May, 1995; Nodelman & Reimer, 2003). Her transactional theory of reading provides the freedom for students to engage in the reading of a text and to react to or interact with it in their own unique way, making it new each time. The use of student reflections and responses to the children's literature texts brings up the need for a perspective that represents the transformative potential of individual interaction with a text. Reader response theory provides such a perspective.

Bothers (2004), Dana & Lynch-Brown (1992), Ernst (1995), and Lowery (2002) have also found in their research with children's literature that during the reader's interaction with the text, application to the reader's life may take place, raising the potential for a transformation of the reader. Jung (2005) and Bothers (2004) found the use of self-reflection and self-construction (or reconstruction) to be important when trying to fill the "gaps" (Jung, 2005, p. 33), the areas between people that are not bridged by common experiences, that exist among groups of culturally diverse people. In her study, using texts to initiate dialogue allowed for the development and expansion of understanding among the students and between students and teachers (Jung, 2005).

The use of a theory that supports the transformational potential of interaction with a literature text is foundational to my use of children's literature as a catalyst for social justice dialogues with my study participants. The additional potential for the development of a more cohesive group of learners was equally important.

Critical race theory

Critical race theory (CRT) argues that anti-racism efforts have failed to work because they gloss over the deep-seated racist ideals that are ingrained in the society that is espousing anti-racism – in effect, making the dogma meaningless (Caldwell, 1996; Gillborn, 2006). CRT requires of its adherents reflection on their cultural identities, but as I continued reading from the early writings to the later ones, it became apparent that CRT spoke from a perspective of a person of color – a cultural perspective I do not own. Its use would have become problematic if I grounded my entire work in it. Though I have very limited right to speak from the perspective of a theory to whose demographic I do not belong, the need to include its perception of "whiteness"

was imperative to my understanding of myself and my participants and I included it here on those grounds.

I also take heart in the writings of bell hooks (1997), who encourages white educators to address the issue of “whiteness” in regard to racism by using CRT, so I do so in that context. Other researchers using CRT with a preservice teacher population have found that students were often unwilling to accept their white identity and its accompanying privileges (Lawrence, 1998; McIntyre, 1997; Sleeter, 1993). Ladson-Billings (1998) also recommends the use of CRT in the education of preservice teachers as a means of addressing this problem, but little pedagogical information has been put forth to support how this might best be accomplished. One common strand of thought is found in the work of hooks (1997), Ladson-Billings (1998) and Marx and Pennington (2003): the white educator must address her own whiteness, her own identity before engaging her students in such discussion.

Marx and Pennington (2003) in their research on racial identity in white preservice teachers found, “Whiteness has been avoided in teacher preparation programs owing to the perceptions that it is either immaterial or ‘dangerous’” (p. 106). The authors go on to recommend “that all teacher-preparation programs allow room for the study of Whiteness as it impacts teaching and teachers” (Marx & Pennington, 2003, p. 107).

My inclusion of CRT in this limited way supports the inquiry into my participants’ perceptions of social justice as well as their self reflective work which became an integral part of all of their narratives and discussions. Until they were able to situate themselves, it was difficult, if not impossible for them to come to any definitive statement on social justice or anything else throughout the study.

Social justice dialogues with preservice teachers

Becoming leaders

Marshall and Oliva's (2006) study on school leadership and social justice questions whether social justice is even being addressed by schools or teacher preparation programs. They ponder "What specific structures and behaviors should be instituted in educational leadership preparation programs to prepare future school leaders as social justice advocates?" (p. 106) when social justice is addressed peripherally or not at all in most state standards for student achievement. The authors conclude their work with a call for educators to "become leaders of social justice" (Marshall & Oliva, 2006, p. 106).

A study by Cambron-McCabe (1993), done years earlier, came to a similar conclusion: School administrators [and one could argue teachers] must not only acquire an understanding of schools as sites of cultural conflict, but also understand how they in their official roles legitimate specific perspectives and practices...They must see leadership, not as management, but as a means for working toward the transformation of the school to advance social justice and a democratic school culture (p. 162).

But how are these leaders to be made? College students from a variety of institutions commented on the difficulty of having social justice conversations in a survey done by Chizhik & Chizhik (2002). These researchers reached the conclusion that those from privileged backgrounds are resistant to discussions on social justice. They reported that students felt either pity for the oppressed (which bred frustration in students from traditionally oppressed groups) or the privileged students felt guilty for the oppression (and their self-interest in avoiding guilt feelings contributed to their resistance to multicultural discourse). However, social justice discussion was reported as motivating students toward social change (Chizhik & Chizhik, 2002).

Constructing social justice knowledge

Leistyna, Valendez, & Nelson (2004) recommend that social justice discourse take place in teacher education programs where preservice teachers can be effectively prepared to work with diversity, difference, and discrimination. The author reports on teacher educators' success in sociocultural foundations courses using critical multicultural methodologies based on Paulo Freire's problem-posing pedagogy which is used to examine individual and institutionalized racism, sexism, and poverty, as well as how marginalized communities resist and act against abuses of power (Leistyna, Valendez, & Nelson, 2004). A particularly important lesson is how to deal with students who resist the idea that society is fundamentally undemocratic and unjust; prospective teachers should be led to question the assumptions that inform their classroom perceptions and practices (Leistyna, Valendez, & Nelson, 2004). Sugrue (1997) found that preservice teachers who did such questioning through self-reflection were able to deconstruct and reconstruct their own identities.

Illuminating how these kinds of efforts in teacher education programs might affect beginning teachers in the real world classroom, Leistyna, Valendez, & Nelson (2004) share research that was conducted in a high school in California that has had great success in working with racially subordinated, low-income, and linguistic-minority students. By examining the political beliefs and behaviors of exemplary educators - information extracted from extensive interviews, they identify important pedagogical principles that should be made part of teacher education coursework and field experiences and urge teacher educators to engage prospective teachers in comparing their values, beliefs, and assumptions with those of the dominant society to see how they may be reproducing discriminatory and exclusionary practices in the schools and classrooms where they work (Leistyna, Valendez, & Nelson, 2004). The authors argue that

teacher education programs need to encourage student-teachers to develop a clear idea of their own beliefs so that they can develop counter-hegemonic strategies that are essential to democratizing schools and ensuring the success of all students (Leistyna, Valendez, & Nelson, 2004).

Social justice tenets. Marshall and Oliva (2006), in their research on promoting social justice leadership behaviors in educational settings, revealed that teaching strategies used in class must reflect social justice tenets. In order to set a clear foundation for their work, the authors set their own definition for social injustice: “inequities related to race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and disability” (p. 115). They further note the following specific social justice tenants:

- the value of attention to emotional as well as cognitive learning.
- the use of real-life examples to situate generalized societal beliefs.
- improvement of group dynamics.
- use of a constructivist view of learning.
- promotion of social awareness (Marshall & Oliva, 2006, p. 115).

Jung (2005) and Bothers (2004) found the use of self-reflection and self-construction (or reconstruction) of identity important when trying to fill the “gaps” (Jung, 2005, p. 33) that exist among groups of culturally diverse people. Using different kinds of texts to initiate dialogue allowed for expansion of understanding among the students and between students and teachers (Jung, 2005).

Social justice dialogues such as these have been happening already: Linda Christensen (2000), a 24-year veteran of the public high school classroom developed a reading and writing program based on her interactions with her mainly African-American students, addressing reading and writing as “ultimately political acts” (p. vi). This cultural focus allowed her to work

in the real lives of her students, critiquing the way history has been represented, engaging in hopeful vision for the future, allowing the students to become researchers, and learn to self-reflect and assess. The same methods may be applied to teaching pre-service teachers or to working with teachers already in the field.

Application

How does the research apply to the practicalities of teacher preparation? First, we must look at teacher preparation as more than an applied field, one where a finite list of strategies and methods are taught, if we hope to send practitioners into the schools truly prepared for the ever-changing needs of the K-12 classroom (Butin, 2005; Christensen, 2000; Henkin, 1998).

Preservice teachers, college students seeking state teacher licensure, are required to take a number of education courses meant to prepare them for the pragmatic needs of the classroom (Virginia Department of Education, 2006): methods courses for particular subject areas, survey courses providing an overview of the teaching field, and sociologically-based courses preparing students for the populations they will serve.

Some in the field are already working to this end. Henkin (1998), a language and literacy professor and a former classroom teacher, provides workshops for teachers across the country focused on students on the “outside” of the school classroom, a group his research pointed out that needs to be included in the workings of the classroom. He describes this group as those students who refuse to participate in learning activities or discussions; they remain “outside” the learning. His focus is on striving to engender a sense of social justice in elementary school teachers in order that they may provide safe havens and challenging learning experiences for the range of children present in modern class settings (Henkin, 1998).

A social justice education. Other practitioners, Adams, Bell, & Griffen (1997), in *Teaching for Social Justice: A Sourcebook*, set up a set of "major elements of social justice education practice" (p. 42) which I adapt here. Quality social justice education

1. Provides an environment that is balanced between the cognitive and the affective.
2. Uses real-life examples and anecdotes to make learning relevant.
3. Pays attention to the group dynamics of the classroom and allows students to learn from them while also keeping behavior respectful.
4. Allows learning to be constructed by the students from their own vantage points.
5. Allows for a variety of learning styles.
6. Sets a goal of social change (Adams, Bell, & Griffen,1997).

This inclusive list allows teacher educators to assess their own methods in the classroom and to model socially just methods for their pre-service teacher students. As this tone of openness and awareness is set in the classroom, dialogue and written response may be enhanced as Pradl (1996) suggests when he espouses "circles of reflection and conversation be used to engender greater understanding and respect among teachers and students, ultimately facilitating greater learning, in his case, through reader response. He is joined in this belief by Jack Zipes (2001), a professor at the University of Minnesota with a number of publications in the field of children's literature criticism, who promotes engaging students in thinking deeply about what they are reading, especially as it pertains to U.S. culture (Zipes, 2001).

Teachers as change agents

On a similar tact, Villegas and Lucas (2002) take the role of the teacher educator one step further, with a list of requisites for preparing teachers to be change agents within the educational setting. Teacher educators must

- Emphasize the moral dimension of education.

- Guide prospective teachers in developing their own personal vision of education and teaching.
- Promote the development of empathy for students of diverse backgrounds.
- Nurture passion and idealism as well as a realistic understanding of obstacles to change.
- Provide evidence that schools can become more equitable.
- Teach about the change process.
- Promote activism outside as well as inside the classroom.
- Emphasize the importance of and development skills for collective action and collaboration (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Their research has shown that teachers are very influential and knowing this, they must reflect on their own beliefs, admit politicization, and work within it (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Teacher educators can help bring about this kind of reflective action among teachers by using reflective methodologies within their own classrooms that require preservice teachers to confront their biases. Teachers can, and should, become "moral actors whose job is to facilitate the growth and development of other human beings" (Villegas & Lucas, p. 53).

Making the shift

Of course, preservice teachers must first see inequities before they can begin to act against them. One approach to educating "culturally responsive teachers" (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. xiv) describes a person's "sociocultural consciousness" (p. xiv) as heavily related to race, ethnicity, social class, and language and as such in need of a dose of self-reflection before one is able to truly see others in the same context as oneself. Research done by Cole and Knowles (1993) as well as Bullough and Stokes (1994), also recognizes the significance of self-reflection in identity development.

In that same vein, Leistyna, Valendez, and Nelson (2004) state that the political beliefs and behaviors of exemplary educators, extracted from extensive teacher interviews in an urban

high school, are of import to the preparation of preservice teachers. They urge teacher educators to engage student teachers in comparing their values, beliefs, and assumptions with those of the dominant society to see how they might reproduce discriminatory and exclusionary practices in their own future classrooms. Leistyna, Valendez, and Nelson (2004) go on to encourage the development of self-awareness in order to counteract hegemonic tendencies and ensure the democratization of schools, following in the footsteps of Schön (1983) and Dewey, (1933) who also supported the practice of self reflection's potential for identity transformation.

In learning how to discontinue the marginalization of certain groups, "We must leave behind old parts of ourselves in order to make something new" (Bothers, 2004, p. 19), understanding that nontraditional confrontation pedagogy (Freire, 1999) can be effective at promoting change. bell hooks (1994) adds that the environment we create in the classroom is not only acting upon the students: "Engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower students. Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow" (p. 21), allowing the environment established to help in the further education and enculturation of both teacher and student. Richardson (1990) and Wildman and Niles (1987) report seeing a shift toward a self-reflective paradigm throughout the 1980s that appears to have grown as more current research reveals.

Resistance. Chizhik (2003) describes her challenges as an African American instructor teaching mostly white and female preservice teachers at a private college about multicultural issues in urban schools (Chizhik, 2003). Many of her preservice teachers resisted some of the issues brought up regarding multicultural education. She reveals qualitative data that find three possible reasons for this resistance:

- (a) differing expectations and the need to deal with students' reactions to the curriculum;
- (b) pedagogical matters and understanding how teaching practices affect students' resistance;
- (c) the culture of power and how it reflects on the role the author's ethnicity plays in students' reactions to the course (Chizhik, 2003).

Some scholars contend that the discomfort of confrontational subjects and dialogues is necessary to allow for the growth of the individual (Boler, 2004; Escamilla & Nathensen-Mejia, 2003). "It is this ability to see ourselves truthfully, flaws and all, that is necessary for humanity to progress." (Escamilla & Nathenson-Mejia, 2003, p. 152). Teachers should ask themselves if there is a lack in students who are "other" than the teacher, or if there is just a failure to see what is really there (Escamilla & Nathenson-Mejia, 2003). It may be possible that teachers miss the fact that the students in front of them are complete as they are and not in need of being augmented by the teacher until they are more like the teacher's ideal. Accepting this "completeness" would require that the teacher look to herself first, identify her own biases, and move forward to interact honestly with her students.

To further complicate the issue of teaching to social justice models, Marshall and Ward (2004) encountered a "lack of commitment or interest in schools and communities to focus on social justice concerns" (p. 124). They propose a "fundamental leap into a new paradigm of leadership for social justice; one that places students' interests first, that works toward democratic imperatives, and that promotes moral reflection and action" (Marshall & Ward, 2004, p. 124). Such a leap is not unprecedented as Banks (1994; 2001) makes the same point about the need for a more multicultural / democratic focus for teacher education in earlier research.

The normative function of children's literature

Literature, critical thinking, dialogue, social justice, and teacher education: Can they be used to initiate change? Noted literary theorist Louise Rosenblatt (1995) speaks of literature as an “image-forming media” (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 86) and bids us question how readers interact with a text. If we apply this idea broadly to educational reading, we must ask if what we offer students to read influences their perceptions. Many theorists and researchers argue that it does (Christensen, 2000; May, 1995; Nodelman & Reimer, 2003; Trites, 1997; Zipes, 2001).

Serious literary study of children's literature began in the 1970s in Canada and the U. S. The formation of the Children's Literature Association (ChLA) helped further the cause of considering the field a serious pursuit for academics. The ChLA continues to promote critical study of children's literature with its publications and conferences.

Using a social justice frame to read selected children's literature may help preservice teachers become more aware of their own biases and begin the work toward understanding those biases and adapting teaching practice to mitigate them. Several authors (Bothers, 2004; Dana & Lynch-Brown, 2005; Ernst, 1995; Escamilla & Nathenson-Mejia, 2003; May, 1995) approach children's literature from the perspective that children can be taught to read critically and I construe the same is true of their teachers. Critical reading of literature, the practice of considering the perceptions of author, self and character, is one avenue that may allow preservice teachers to address social justice issues that lay within their texts.

An important audience

Should teacher educators assume that college students already have a clear understanding of critical reading; of their own values? Is it enough to rely on the hope that preservice teachers have learned to read and think critically and will therefore make good decisions when it comes to

choosing literature and leading discussions in their own classrooms? Is there a way to teach these pre-service teachers the ideals of human interaction as they are described in a social justice framework? How important is it that at least some of what they read represents an ideal of equality and justice? What we hand students to read does matter; they may use the books in normative ways, to find themselves and others represented within the pages, to form their values and ways of looking at the world (Trites, 1997; Valdez, 1999; Zipes, 2001).

In fact, the intentional distribution of certain books by authority figures (teachers) to students makes them even more likely to be taken up by the student as an accepted ideal of how life should be; it is normative (Henkin, 1998). This phenomenon gives the educator much power to potentially influence large groups of people. Given this power to influence reading choices that may affect perception, teachers must act responsibly when making reading assignments and must think critically themselves before asking students to do so (Henkin, 1998).

Using the power for good

Several researchers have looked into how this normative function works. Critic Shirley Ernst (1995) investigated Newbery and Caldecott books of the 1990s looking for evidence of social changes that may have occurred since studies of the same sort were done in the 1970s. Her call for authors to become more aware of the kinds of precedents they may be setting when writing for young people supports my contention that literature shapes those who read it (Ernst, 1995).

Writing from a feminist perspective on children's literature, theorist Lissa Paul (1987) highlights that it is helpful to understand how children may be similar to women historically and how this fact has impacted what has been written for them and why. When choosing literature for student audiences, teachers must become aware of such historical contexts and be able to

provide that contextual background to their students so that they may see the text in a holistic way and not be swayed by potentially biased representations of history and/or people. Trites (1997) discusses this issue further and contends that it is important to share views on equality with children while they are forming their impressions of how the world should be. Susan Groenke (2003), in an unpublished dissertation, concurs that students must be prepared to recognize traditional literacies and alternative literacies in classrooms where “promotion of multiple forms of literacy within the post-structuralist frame where critiques of truth and master literacies and their relationships to power are allowed and even encouraged” (Groenke, 2003, p. 4).

It's a cultural thing

Villegas and Lucas (2002), found that people’s perception of and interaction with the world were colored by race/ethnicity, social class, and language which they described as the person’s “sociocultural consciousness” (p. xiv). In the classroom that promotes agency and critical thinking skills though, all students can learn, and their differences become “resources”, not “problems to be solved” (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. xv). These students are “capable of bringing about educational change” (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. xvi) that will open up the education system for students from diverse backgrounds.

The discussion of what literacies are accepted brings up the issue of how a canon developed and has been used in academia. Historically analyses done by academics were written in stone – immovable treatises – set down correctly for the ages and studied as a critical canon (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003). These critical works set certain bodies of literature above others and created literary canons – groups of works that all educated people were expected to know. Obviously, there was more than one literary canon; such groupings might have been formed by

schools, individual teachers, groups of writers themselves, or anyone interested in deep readings of literature (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003).

A question for our own age is why were specific works privileged? There is a consensus that many works in the various canons were there because they reflected the ideals of those in positions of authority in the societies that chose them (May, 1995; Nodelman & Reimer, 2003). In other words, those in power chose the reading material to be disseminated and they generally chose books that reflected their own ideals. Eventually what came out of such arrangements was a canon that represented the majority race/ethnic group, the moneyed class, those holding political power, and those whose values were most mainstream (May, 1995). These privileged works are often still called the “classics.”

Once a work becomes a “classic,” it can be difficult for people to read for any understanding different from the one already accepted by the ruling culture. This phenomenon reinforces the normative effect of the canonical texts (May, 1995). The educated must all read them, therefore they must be valuable and must reveal the “truths” by which we are meant to live. The fact that many “classic” texts might also be bigoted toward any culture other than the one who chose the canon is not readily discussed with students in public school populations, and may not be addressed with those in higher education either (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003). There lies the crux of the issue with critical reading – whose perspective is allowed? Whose voice is heard? Such questions can be addressed well by a feminist theory approach.

May (1995) cautions that we internalize only that which we like, so exposure to literature and time for the reader to build a relationship with the text is important. She goes on to reinforce the need for critical reading in order for readers to “carefully examine how the author uses

writing as a means to communicate with a specific audience and ... author's efforts to instill a particular idea, attitude, or belief in his reader" (p. 65).

Literature is recognized for its power to transform with its emotional and intellectual effect on the reader, and as long as that effect maintains the power structure of whatever system is at work, everything runs smoothly. It is when critical study starts to take place that problems may arise. When students begin to question who the implied reader is, or who the narrator is, conflict with cultural ideologies may follow (May, 1995; Nodelman & Reimer, 2003). But, it is at this point of conflict that learning can take place – learning about similarities and differences among people and cultures (Anzaldua, 1997; Christensen, 2000). It is this interaction with literature that is valuable to the teacher preparation program.

Using children's literature to generate social justice dialogue

Literature is being published continually, but many students are not likely to see it if it is not represented to them as valuable to their educations (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003). Those who read for pleasure are, of course, choosing to read, but most people reading for pleasure are not reading critically (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003). They are not thinking deeply about what they have read. It is this deep thinking, the act of reflection after reading, the immersion into the characters, the ability to look at the book from a different perspective, that leads to potential change for the reader.

Jill May (1995) related that the reader's emotional response to literature, while important, might be deepened by the use of literary theory when approaching children's texts. In not seeking "consensus of thought" (May, 1995, p. 12) among students, teachers can impart that literature has meanings that come from certain stances, from critical theories, and that these theories are integral to complete understanding of a work.

As we look for what Nodelman and Reimer (2003) describe as “the cracks in the text’s structure, places where it disguises illogicalities,” (p. 236) we are able to see where students might find themselves and be able to interact with the text in a unique way, allowing for personal growth. Reading children’s literature texts with the intent of deconstructing them can be a foreign, even daunting idea, but it is an act made plausible by the simple nature of children’s texts

We must consider how everything works together to form the whole, how the context of the text is situated, before we can make judgments about its quality (Rosenblatt, 1995).

We must consider the cultural, social, political context surrounding the author, the text and the reader as we apply all of these theories to form our final critique of the literature. May (1995), Nodelman and Reimer (2003), and Bothers (2004) purport that engaging students in critical discussions of literature will promote deeper thinking and allow for questioning of authority; a necessary function for active participation in a democratic society.

Diving into the conflict

Jung (2005) calls for use of texts in the classroom that call into play the learning “gaps” (p. 33) made apparent when teachers allow time for close reading of a work. These gaps are the areas where students’ experiences – the contextual backgrounds - do not give them the information they need to fully understand the text as others may do. Encountering these gaps forces the reader to form a bridge between what she does know and the new information, thereby constructing a new bit of information. For example, during the study, participants encountered a text which relayed new, and unwelcome, information.

Witness (Hesse, 2005), a novel about Ku Klux Klan activity in a Vermont town in the 1920s, surprised many students with its portrayal of violent racism in the northern U. S., a region

most students believed was non-racist, even during times of slavery. Learning that the geographic region from which many of them came harbored racists when they had been led to believe that only the southern U.S. was guilty of such behavior was difficult for them. They had to talk through their former understanding and accept facts that they had not known before, facts which altered their perceptions. This new knowledge allowed them to look more closely at what they had seen over the years in these northern towns. Examples of racism sprang to mind quickly as they allowed themselves to acknowledge what they had seen, but not reconciled with their prior belief system.

This kind of close reading and application is only possible when readers are allowed to interpret for themselves the voices they hear and use their own experiences to filter the text and come to meaning making (Jung, 2005). Such allowance for personal reaction and interaction by students can cause anxiety within the confines of the rigidly structured public educational system in the U. S., from which many pre-service teachers emerge (United States Department of Education, 2006). May (1995) proposes using critical thinking more often in the public school classroom as an obvious extension of its use in academia, purporting that engaging students in this way will promote deeper thinking and allow for the questioning of authority that is necessary if students are to reach beyond the rote memorization of isolated facts.

Questions for future teachers. Bothers (2004), in an unpublished doctoral dissertation relating literacy to children's literature, addresses the marginalization of certain groups in literacy practices and decisions, and proposes that questions to be raised by those teaching future teachers should include:

- Do assignments within a course allow students - force students - to engage in a diacritical way of thinking, and even begin to critique the very classroom, institution, world they work in?

- Does student narrative allow for a truly multicultural classroom?
- Whose voice is heard?
- Can we dismiss personal experience or should we value what each person brings to the table in order to have a truly diverse classroom?
- How do students identify / define power in the texts?
- How do they respond to it?

These questions are pertinent to the development of critical thinking skills in preservice teachers (Bothers, 2004).

A teacher of children's literature, multicultural education, and teacher research, Lowery (2002) describes research into her own teaching methods as well as the gender attitudes of preservice teachers. She finds that it is important to engage preservice teachers in critical analyses of children's literature in order to allow them to confront their own discomfort with challenging specific gender stereotypes and move away from standard practices. The critical reading, intensive class discussion, and response journals she uses allow preservice teachers to reflect on their own biases and move beyond them (Lowery, 2002).

Taking it to the classroom

Rosenblatt (1995) is cited in many texts on children's literature and reader response as the initiator of the idea that students should have their own voices in the classroom. Her transactional theory of reading provides the freedom for students to engage in the reading of a text, even a classical one, and to react to / interact with it in their own unique way (Rosenblatt, 1995).

Marshall and Oliva (2006) in *Leadership for Social Justice: Making Revolutions in Education*, ask many questions valuable to this discussion. What is it that is valuable? Is it what society values? Are instructors trying to make something out of nothing by finding examples of inequity in every text? Having been made the object of literary criticism, can children's literature

and its proponents turn the tables and recognize their own marginalization behaviors in order to allow a more complete representation of literature than has existed in the past? Moving beyond the basics of traditional interpretation techniques, is it possible for undergraduate students, in this case pre-service teachers, to dive into the theories of literature (Marshall & Oliva, 2006)?

From a more methodological frame, the authors inquire about whether course assignments allow students, even force students, to engage in a diacritical way of thinking, and even begin to critique the very classroom, institution, world they work in (Marshall & Oliva, 2006). Does student narrative allow for a truly multicultural classroom? Whose voice is heard? What are the goals of teacher education programs? Can we dismiss personal experience or should we value what each person brings to the table in order to have a truly diverse classroom (Marshall & Oliva, 2006)? All of these questions are pertinent as we begin to investigate the ways in which critical discussion on social justice may take place.

In this increasingly diverse world, preservice teachers must become “rhetorical critics” (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. 53) engaging in critical discussions of what they think they know and what they are learning in order to model the behavior for their future students. Bothers (2004) suggests that when writing and reading are linked,

the reciprocal relationships help enable the writer/reader to develop new knowledge, not just revisit or reiterate what has been said or read. Having students write and read literacy narratives, in conjunction with one another, may be one pedagogical call to action that invites us to interrupt canon and question our discipline's methods of creating knowledge (p. 30). Preservice teacher education programs can play a major role in determining the ability of these new teachers to responsibly tackle the challenges they will face in schools" (p. xvi, xvii).

bell hooks (1994) concurs with the need for this kind of teacher education as she speaks of those in the higher education field, "Professors who embrace the challenge of self-actualization will be better able to create pedagogical practices that engage students, providing them with ways of knowing that enhance their capacity to live fully and deeply" (p. 22).

Bothers's (2004) and Dana and Lynch-Brown's (1992) prescription for further research allowing educators to gain a better understanding of the relationship between "specific instructional strategies and the development of leaders for social justice" (Bothers, 2004, p. 175) is a wakeup call to teacher education programs that have not incorporated social justice into the required course work of their students. Courses that already exist in the curriculum may be supplemented by intentionally multicultural courses, but the better plan may be to incorporate democratic ideas into many or all courses for preservice teachers (Dana & Lynch-Brown, 1992).

The particulars

Getting down to what all of this means to the study of students engaging with literature in the interests of social justice, Remillard and Cahnmann (2005) spell out the place of the teacher in these knowledge discussions. They see her as needing to acknowledge her own "cultural and linguistic identity" (p. 173) in order to facilitate valuable learning experience for her students who are often of different experiential backgrounds than her own. Luis Moll (2005) in the same text brings the open discussion of power to the table. Power resides with those who have made the rules that others must live within; the way reading must be accomplished; what serves as literacy; and who is successful.

Those at the low end of the power continuum are left lacking when assessment time comes and they do not measure up to their more favorably situated counterparts. The self-reflection by those who are negatively assessed in such a system is often a negative practice.

They construe themselves as poor readers, less able students than other students who “do better” in class, even as bad people. Moll (2005) calls for teacher environmental change – access to more supportive surroundings for reconceptualizing failing students. Such teacher supports could enable more teachers to change their mindsets and behaviors in the classroom, hopefully leading to more positive learning outcomes and increased literacy among their students, but only if those teachers are able to recognize the need for the change in the first place.

Such change is obviously needed. Cheri Triplett (in press) reports on the reasons children may be struggling with literacy in American elementary classrooms. Her findings revealed that “class differences influenced the assumptions of teachers, the practices of teachers, and thus the labels that were eventually used to describe students” (p. 43). She elaborates on a variety of ways that children are labeled and subsequently segregated by the school and further by their teachers based on their supposed reading abilities. Such seemingly blatant discriminatory practices seem out of place in an educational system that purports to leave no child behind.

While all of this talk about adapting to new and different ways of knowing is certainly important, it still misses an aspect I found integral to the preparation of teachers. Along with Christine Cain (2005), I question whether our educational system needs to focus so stridently on problems that may not exist, at least not as they are represented. It appears more likely that society has constructed a problem and then set about searching for ways to solve it based on that society’s perception of how things should be. From a practical sense, that is akin to looking at a field full of different kinds of flowers and instead of seeing the beautiful interaction of the all the varieties blowing in the breeze, focusing on the fact that the flowers are not all the same height, color, or type and setting about making them so in order to make the field “better.”

McCarty (2005) says it well when she speaks of the times in which we live and the educational system we have allowed to arise being at odds with one another: “Teachers should not have to choose between social justice and [teaching] standards” (p. 221). If we are to fully address knowledge construction as it actually exists rather than as those in power might like to perceive it, we must imbue teachers with the knowledge they need to adapt their own upbringings to accommodate a variety of “normals” (McCarty, 2005, p. 221) and then allow them to use their skills inside their own classrooms to build on the multiple voices they will hear there if they are allowed to listen.

Toward a brighter future

The hurt and shame that can occur as the result of social injustice has such a negative impact on the learning environment that teachers must address it if they are to be successful at reaching the children set before them. To ignore that injustice happens or that you may be perpetrating it yourself is the easy way out, but it is an ineffective means toward learning. Children who are marginalized before teaching even begins are cut so far out of the learning environment that the teaching never even reaches them. It is impossible to learn what never touches you.

Awareness of injustice is the first step toward removing it from education. Teacher educators who address these social justice issues with their preservice teachers may see exponential results from their work as these new teachers go out into their own schools. Incorporating social justice ideals in as many areas of teacher education as possible can make for even more thorough dissemination.

Several researchers have addressed the use of critical thinking and reading with children’s literature (Ernst, 1995; May, 1993; Nodelman & Reimer, 2003; Trites, 1997; Zipes,

2001). Many researchers have addressed the social justice training of teachers (Adams, Bell & Griffen, 1997; Bell, 1997; Butin, 2005; Chizhik & Chizhik, 2002; Dana & Lynch-Brown, 1992; Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Darling-Hammond, Lopez & Garcia-Lopez, 2002; Escamilla & Nethensen-Mejia, 2003; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; hooks, 1994; Leistyna, Lavandez & Nelson, 2004; Marshall & Oliva, 2006; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). However, research into the use of children's literature to specifically initiate social justice dialogues among pre-service teachers has not been well documented. Such research will add to the growing body of work on social justice in the teacher education field.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

While the narratives of family life I share can be easily labeled dysfunctional, significantly that fact will never alter the magic and mystery that was present – all that was deeply life sustaining and life affirming. The beauty lies in the way it all comes together exposing and revealing the inner life of a girl inventing herself-creating the foundation of selfhood and identity that will ultimately lead to the fulfillment of her true destiny-becoming a writer (p. xi).

~bell hooks (1996), *Bone Black*

The plot structure

We all tell our stories in different ways. They are unique stories, rich with the details of experiences that make us who we are; forging the identities with which we enter into society. We interact with others based on these personal stories and others do the same with us. hooks (1996), in the quote above, relates that her own story may not be an easy one to read, but that it still produced her – a person set on achievement of her dreams. I chose these lines because they elicited a familiar feeling in me – an awareness that we are produced by our past, but we are not only that production; we must be read at many levels and we are capable of great adaptation. Were I to ask any group of people to provide a personal narrative of their lives, each person would begin differently; the conflicts and resolutions would be diverse, the endings varied.

I have chosen a story metaphor not only because we all have one, but in order to reinforce the creative nature I believe exists in research that involves the close study of people and literature. Harry Wolcott (2005) in writing on qualitative ethnographic fieldwork sums up this nature nicely: “Collecting data can be done scientifically, but fieldwork consists of more than collecting data. Whatever constitutes that elusive ‘more’ makes all the difference” (p. 5). From this frame, as a person’s story is revealed, much can be learned about why she acts as she does or why she holds certain values dear.

With this revealed knowledge in hand, another person - a teacher, a friend - may be able to open conversations about controversial topics with her without putting her on the defensive.

Given the opportunity to self-reflect, a person may be open to reevaluating parts of her story or to including new experiences and people that may alter her perceptions of the world. This possibility of change is what drives my interest in research into peoples' perceptions of social justice and how those perceptions may be illuminated through discussion of select literature. Illumination is a keyword here. I am not searching for answers to how to make the world a more just place. I am hoping to reveal how dialogues on justice evolve and provide some understanding of how reflection may spur people on to listen to others with an openness of mind and heart that may allow justice to become the natural order of things (Noddings, 2003).

I sought to combine the participants' study of children's literature texts with discussion and assigned writings on social justice topics within a freshman writing course serving a cross-section of students at a small liberal arts college, including preservice teachers. Children's literature is often a required, survey-type course for preservice teachers, serving to establish familiarity with what is available to teachers for classroom use. This writing course was titled "Social Justice and Children's Literature" in order to appeal to participants planning to seek teacher licensure at some point; five participants so identified themselves in initial demographic surveys. The remainder of the study population, a heterogeneous mix of students, was intentionally sought in order to broaden the perspectives represented by the study. Detailed participant demographic information is shared later in this chapter.

Adopting children's literature as the framework for the purpose of initiating social justice dialogue has not been well documented in the research though several researchers in the children's literature field note the potential for such use. May (1995), Nodelman and Reimer (2001), and Vandergrift (1993) contend that children's literature is replete with opportunities to

engage students in close reading for the purpose of critical analysis. I built on their contentions as I sought to engage the participants in writing and talking about how they viewed social justice.

Discussions of social justice can be difficult to follow because the term is left undefined in many circumstances and perceptions may range widely (Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Fraser, 1996; Pradl, 1996). Nancy Fraser (1996) asserts that we must construct “a ‘bivalent’ conception of justice that can accommodate both defensible claims for social equality and defensible claims for the recognition of difference” (Fraser, 1996, p. 5). Pradl (1996) calls for the use of democratic, socially conscious practices in the classroom in order to facilitate open dialogues among students, specifically addressing the challenge that the authority of the teacher poses to full democratic interaction within a diverse body. Dantley and Tillman (2006) include inquiry on how institutionalized theories, norms, and practices in schools and society lead to political, economic, and educational inequities in their discussion on defining social justice.

The research model

I conducted a qualitative, participatory action research (PAR) project seeking to explore the social justice perceptions of college students, some of whom have self-identified as preservice teachers. Students read select children’s literature texts as well as critical materials and used self-reflection to explore personal perceptions regarding social justice topics in their class discussions and narratives. I sought to provide an environment in which students felt secure enough to share their opinions and feelings as freely as possible. Such an environment has been shown to support the “emotional reactions of participants” as well as their “political agency” (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005, p. 571).

As one could imagine, there are negative aspects to this type of research. The inclusion of the researcher as an integral part of the study is fraught with the potential for bias and

mismanagement of power, the “issues of voice, reflexivity...informed consent, good and bad stories” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 35) and truthfulness. The same authors also address such credibility and reliability issues from an ethical perspective. Throughout this study, I have used the principles they set forth as a guide to mitigating these potential problems with PAR:

- consultation, negotiation, and mutual understanding
- respect, recognition, and involvement
- benefits, outcomes, and agreement (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 4).

I consulted with my participants from the beginning of the study; most of the writing assignments were constructed from participants’ own narrative responses. I negotiated with participants in regard to assignments topics as well as writing process issues. Interacting with participants collaboratively helped establish understanding, respect, and recognition of their ideas. Many participants benefited from this more secure environment as they revealed in narratives throughout the study. The analysis of the narrative data includes more detailed examples of these principles.

Greenwood and Levin (2005) also address the potential for poor research construction with the PAR model, but ask that such research be judged on a different scale than more positivist researchers might use: “Validity, credibility, and reliability in action research are measured by the willingness of local stakeholders to act on the results of the action research” (p. 54) . The stakeholders in this study, the 19 participants, the student researcher assistant, and myself were fully invested in the study as the analysis that follows will show. All participants provided multiple pieces of data. Many participants were interactive both in written formats and in class discussion. The SRA met with the participants often enough to build rapport and become invested in the class discussions. As I report in the analysis, I become fully participatory and

found my own reactions and perceptions became a part of the data. Many of us, the stakeholders in this study, acted on the results of the research as they emerged and kept doing so, so by Greenwood and Levin's (2005) standard I can report solid validity, credibility and reliability.

The research rationale

In her introduction to a book of essays on democratic teaching and social justice dialogues, Megan Boler (2005) states a need for continued questioning in regard to social justice. The opinions on how such discussions should be had or even if they should be had, is continuing among those currently writing and researching on the subject. My rationale for the study is explained below, followed by an explanation of the pilot study. I also include the purpose of the research, research questions, design, and limitations.

My purpose in delving into social justice dialogues with the students in this study was to ensure that they had the opportunity to reflect on their own beliefs and perceptions while interacting with the children's literature texts. I hope to use the findings to inform my own and other's teaching practices and curriculum choices with the preservice teacher population. The research literature supports such interventions as there is consensus that teachers must become "consciously present in their teaching" (Cuffaro, 1995, p. 9) if they are to fully function in the classroom, working to understand their own cultural backgrounds before they are capable of interacting fully with others unlike themselves. For as Gay (2000) reports, "Much intellectual ability and many other kinds of intelligences are lying untapped in ethnically diverse students" (p. 20); for the purposes of my research, I would expand this statement to include all types of diversity. This pool of potential may be accessed more readily by those teachers who have pondered their backgrounds and perceptions before trying to interact with students who are unlike them (Hatch, 1999). Banks (2006), a leader in equity in education and curriculum, agrees

that teachers should be able to see the value in the differences represented by all of their students, not just the ones who are most like them.

This study is situated within the field of English Education which, as a body, supports endeavors to engage in socially conscious dialogues with students. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), an organization of teachers from all levels of education with an interest in English, publishes several journals related to the field. A recent edition of one of these, *English Education* (July, 2006), makes this effort to define our discipline with the caveat that such definitions are imprecise at best: “Historically, English education has been defined as an interdisciplinary field of academic inquiry focused on the preparation of English language arts teachers, and, by association, the teaching and learning of all aspects of English studies” (p. 279). This edition of the journal goes on to set up a framework for this definition, “We believe that the effort to define the field of English education, therefore, must be undertaken in the context of our larger effort to envision a more democratic and just society” (p. 281).

It is this inclusive context which brings together the components of my work: literature, social justice dialogue, and teacher education. The rest of this chapter and those that follow will reveal how all of these pieces fit together to formulate a charge to society to better prepare future teachers for their work in a diverse world community.

The research point of view

A feminist theory perspective for this research, discussed more thoroughly in chapters 1 and 2, allowed me to explore personal perceptions of social justice as well as the potential for transformation (Fraser, 1996; Harraway, 1991; Narayan, 1997; Nicholson, 1997). As participants read the texts, pondered the stories, and reflected on their own positions within society, I questioned them in regard to those positions. I asked them to talk and write about their

own ideas and those of their classmates. I anticipated that topics such as oppression, bias, and prejudice would arise and feminist theory allowed me to consider those topics from a contextual framework – situated in a certain place and time – our class, amidst the class readings.

The simplicity and forthrightness of the children's books cut through the need for extensive time to be spent on the reading of the literature and allowed that time to be put into post-reading discussion and written response. This simplicity backfired in the case of the picture books chosen for the study as the participants seemed to find them too simple to be taken seriously. Though a few participants did incorporate one or two picture books into their narratives, picture books did not serve as successful initiators of dialogue. More information on the different books titles is included in subsequent analysis chapters.

As mentioned before, I made every effort, given the PAR methodology to mitigate the natural power discrepancy existing between teacher and students, and continually reinforced the value of open and honest communication. Good communication was described as respect for others' rights to voice dissenting opinions, and the need for respectful interaction without personal attack. It was also made clear from the beginning of the course, that a cross-section of belief systems and opinions was welcomed and would, in fact, enhance the quality of the research project produced. These conversations were undertaken as part of the effort to create a climate of trust which has been shown to allow deep discussion and reflection (Wheeler, Ayers, Fracasso, Galupo, Rabin, & Slater, 1999).

Full study methodology

A year after the pilot was completed, I began a semester-long participatory action research study into college students' perceptions of social justice, using selected children's literature texts as initiators of discussion and written assignments in a freshman level writing course. Informal writings, formal writings, and class discussions were used to initiate or elaborate on social justice topics related to our readings. Students had the opportunity throughout the semester to address, anonymously if they chose; any issues they felt were pertinent to the social justice theme of the course.

The catalog description of the course and its title, "Social Justice and Children's Literature," led several preservice teachers (self-identified) to choose the course and they became a sub-group among the other participants. Data were analyzed for the entire group and then for the preservice teacher group separately. Though preservice teachers were the focus of the pilot study, that work led me to include a more heterogeneous grouping of participants for this study in hopes that students outside the education field would provide broader discussion and greater depth of data.

To mitigate the natural power discrepancy existing between teacher and students, I continually made efforts to reinforce the value of open and honest communication, respect for others' rights to voice dissenting opinions, and the need for respectful communication. It was made clear from the beginning of the course that a cross-section of belief systems and opinions was welcomed and that such communication would enhance the quality of the research (Wheeler, Ayers, Fracasso, Galupo, Rabin, & Slater, 1999).

Explanation of the purpose and parameters of the study, as well as full divulgence of the research procedures was made the first day of the course. Students were given the opportunity to

opt out of the study at any time throughout the semester as the course work was the same for participants and non-participants. This opt-out opportunity was never used as all 19 class members chose to participate throughout the entire duration. The confidentiality of participants was protected as much as possible by use of an anonymous, ungraded, online discussion board and a student research assistant who held the list of demographic student data and collected data when needed. As I was a part of this research and also held grading power over the participants, their identities on the online board were kept by the SRA until after grading of the formal essays had been completed. IRB approval for a pilot study of this project was granted by the research institution as well as the study site institution in fall 2006. Addendums were added to these IRB documents at each institution in order to expand the research and approval was extended to include the full study.

Research Questions

Though the pilot study research questions, set out earlier in this chapter, served the pilot well and revealed some interesting data, I restructured them to include the broader participant base (those outside the education field) and hoped that the change would reveal richer data. The group identified in the original pilot questions included only pre-service teachers in a children's literature course. The population for this study was expanded to include freshmen college students in a themed writing course with preservice teachers as only a subset of the participants.

The research study questions follow:

1. How do students in a freshman writing course at a small, private liberal arts college initially perceive social justice?
2. How will critical reading of children's literature texts influence students' perceptions of social justice?
3. How do students self-identified as preservice teachers differ from the remainder of class members in relation to the first 2 questions?

Research design

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, the study was a qualitative, participatory action research project that was set in my own themed-based writing course at a small, liberal arts college, from here on known as Austen College. Some would see education and the students and teachers as what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) termed “a phenomenon of accumulation, coagulation, and sedimentation” (p. 42) used to further the purposes of the colonizing force – the state - that is holding them hostage. In such an educational situation, questions arise over whose voice is actually heard. I have chosen the PAR model because it allows each participants voice to be heard; the students in this study speak in their own words, as do I. The voices you hear are not couched in academic rhetoric, but are allowed to speak to the reader as themselves with their cultural backgrounds intact and their biases revealed.

More positivist researchers might ask why this personal experience should not be dismissed as unreliable, but it is the very realness of the voices that lends trustworthiness to the data (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). We all valued what each person brought to the table in order to build a truly diverse, inclusive classroom (Marshall & Oliva, 2006). All of these points were pertinent as I helped construct the environment in which critical discussion on social justice took place. And so, I included myself in the environment of self reflection and disclosure, believing as bell hooks (1994) states, "Professors who embrace the challenge of self-actualization will be better able to create pedagogical practices that engage students, providing them with ways of knowing that enhance their capacity to live fully and deeply" (p. 22).

But, what does this all have to do with preservice teacher education? Bothers's (2004) and Dana and Lynch-Brown's (1992) prescription for further research allowing educators to gain a better understanding of the relationship between “specific instructional strategies and the

development of leaders for social justice" (Bothers, 2004, p. 175) is a wakeup call to teacher education programs that have not incorporated social justice into the required course work of their students. Such quality multicultural courses must be developed intentionally to serve the needs of preservice teachers (Dana & Lynch-Brown, 1992). I have tried to serve such a purpose in structuring this study within a college course that allowed diversity of participants while also including a number of preservice teachers. Hopefully we will have learned how critical thinking and social justice dialogues can influence future teachers' thinking.

The qualitative approach. A qualitative inquiry approach was chosen for this research due to the personal and complex nature of the research questions. Social justice dialogues are often imbued with passion and many gradations of meaning. The search for understanding of that meaning is the essence of qualitative inquiry (Schwandt, 2001). In the third edition of *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe a "reform" (p. 33) of social science research through action research that is participatory on the part of those doing the research as well as those being researched. Participatory action research allows the researcher to become a part of the study as well as to effect change, all necessities for this project given the need to incorporate emergent ideas as well as the need to provide a venue for the beginnings of identity transformation.

The intent of a method that allows researcher and participants to act as co-researchers is to promote "shared ownership" (p. 560), social change and political action (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). As for further explanation of the researcher's location within the study, Harry Wolcott (2005) calls for total immersion of the researcher in fieldwork. Action research allows for this kind of immersion, allowing the researcher and the participants to interact on as close a level as is possible.

Cautions and defenses. Wolcott (2005) does caution that a number of roadblocks to real immersion and quality interaction exist. He warns that the researcher may overestimate his own importance to this kind of research or he may betray the trust of the participants (Wolcott, 2005). In order to avoid, or at least mitigate the potential for either of these occurrences, I tried to make the research procedures as transparent as possible to my participants. I reminded them of the fact that I would be writing about them and their ideas; when I observed them and took notes, I told them I was noting their interactions with one another as well as their classroom comments. I told them they would have access to the final research findings.

As for the betrayal issue, the thought bothered me throughout the study. As participants became more trusting and shared a more and more of themselves and their thinking, I became more uncomfortable with the thought of writing about them. I have not lost that uncomfortable feeling. I put it aside and wrote about them anyway, relating several very personal incidents, though with the cover of pseudonyms. But I am aware that it may be possible to read between the lines, for a participant reading this research to figure out the identity of another participant. I fall back on the notion that the participants were acting and writing of their own free will and in doing so, took on some of the risk of disclosure, a risk about which I warned them at points along the way. I am not completely comfortable with that answer, but I hope my respect and fondness for all the participants shows in my portrayals of them and that it will serve as a balm to any hurt feelings.

In the end, I decided that the ownership of knowledge within a classroom setting combined with the potential to effect change espoused by this ideology worked well with my study. To become even more methodologically refined, I situated this project as critical participatory action research, defined by Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) as that which is

committed to social analyses which will reveal injustices associated with power distribution and ethnicity, gender, and social class, while seeking mitigate those problems. As researcher, Patti Lather (1991) explains, "the essence of the postmodern argument is that the dualisms which continue to dominate Western thought are inadequate for understanding a world of multiple causes and effects interacting in complex and non-linear ways, all of which are rooted in a limitless array of historical and cultural specificities" (p. 21).

I used the "transactional" essence of Rosenblatt's (1995) theory to generate an understanding among my students that they were creating an individual, contextual relationship with the texts they read and that the depth of that relationship could instigate change. Such powerful transformation may not happen often, but opening up to its possibility appeared to give the students the power to make their own meaning from within their own "interpretive frames" (Lather, 1991, p. 13).

As this model of dialogic interaction is set in the classroom, student discussion and written response may be enhanced as Pradl (1996) suggests the use of self-reflection and group discussion to engender greater understanding and respect among teachers and students, ultimately facilitating greater learning. I used readings, narrative responses, peer reviews, and small and large group discussions to generate the reflection for which Pradle calls.

Reader response theory also calls for interaction with the text with an eye toward self-reflection and transformation on the part of the reader. It was specifically this kind of potential for change that guided my inclusion of children's literature texts from a variety of cultural perspectives. Based on work done by several others in the children's literature field, I hoped to drive the reader to consider the perceptions of others as she considered her own and how they

were all generated as she closely read the texts (Bothers, 2004; Dana & Lynch-Brown, 1992; Ernst, 1995; Lowery, 2002).

Data Collection Methods

I collected narrative, observational, and interview data for the purpose of triangulating the data sources to lend credibility to the findings. Using a student research assistant to collect observational data via field noting, as well as to collaborate on some coding of interview data provided another opportunity to increase trustworthiness of the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Schwandt (2001) describes triangulation as “a means of checking the integrity of the inferences one draws” (p. 257) by using the methods mentioned above: multiple researchers and multiple data sources. These measures allow us to see as clearly as we can into a phenomenon (Patton, 2002).

Narratives. Schwandt (2001) describes narrative analysis as useful when one wishes to closely study form as well as context in regard to “making sense” of textual data (p. 250). Online posting of narrative responses provided the participants the time to formulate deeper thinking than may have been possible during class discussion and it also allowed them to speak with some sense of privacy. Narrative data were collected in the form of literature responses as well as personal narratives used in preliminary essay writing exercises. A student research assistant provided separation of the researcher from the participants by keeping the list of participant pseudonyms selected at the beginning of the study as well as the demographic surveys. Since none of the online postings were graded, participation was not coerced, but was promoted on a regular basis in class.

These narratives, 152 pieces of data, were analyzed using a constant comparative method that allowed me to use emerging themes in class discussion and for construction of subsequent

writing prompts (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Data were also analyzed as a whole at the end of the study, both by me and by the SRA. I triangulated her finding with my own at that time.

A formal, graded writing assignment that was attributed to the authors was also used as data, but only after reiteration of the study parameters, the completion of final grading in the course, and additional consent of the participants. As the topics discussed and written about were often controversial and led to conflicts among students, great pains were taken throughout the course to assure students that their opinions were never being graded. This topic was a concern as controversial topics addressed in class and on the discussion board often made their way into the formal writing assignments which were graded. Rubrics addressing relevant composition elements such as organization, mechanics, and thesis statements were used to clarify expectations.

Richardson (2003) values narrative as a means of research because it allows the researcher and the participants to work together as “producers” (p. 511) of the research. She goes on to say that “writing-stories,” a term defined as “narratives about contexts in which the writing is produced” (p. 513) can lead to identity alteration for the writer. The occurrence of this self-reflective phenomenon was an explicit intent of this study. Elbaz (1991), Connelly and Clandinin (1990), and Alvermann (2000) also support this use of story as a method of inquiry.

Observations. Observation allows the researcher to see what behaviors accompany group discussions and or writing activities; these observations may be used to further validate other data. It was understood that in this study, observations would be conducted by a person outside the research, the SRA, as well as by me, a researcher who was also a participant. This fact is pertinent due to the postmodern concern that an outside observer is not a part of the action and therefore cannot understand it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Schwandt, 2001); and though I agree in

theory with the contentions of those researchers, I used the SRA's notes as a means of balancing my own assumptions and interpretations.

I recorded field notes during and after most class meetings. The notes taken during class were used to capture the exact wording of participants when I thought that those words might be significant to the data. Most of the notes were written at the end of class time and included a recording of discussions, conflicts, and my own interpretations as I pondered the interactions of the students. The SRA attended seven class meetings, at two of those meetings she interacted with the participants alone as consent forms, pseudonyms, and demographic data were collected from the participants. We were both in attendance during the other classes at which she collected her own field notes which she analyzed and gave to me near the end of the study.

Interviews during the pilot helped illuminate how the participants were thinking and/or feeling when writing reading responses or discussing course content. They also provided an opportunity for participants to clarify their meanings, thereby making data collected more reliable. Semi-structured interviews were used at the completion of the pilot study and will be used in the full study also. Care must be taken in the full study as in the pilot to minimize potential for undue influence by the researcher; therefore, interviews will be conducted only after grading in the course is final.

Participants

The course in which the study took place was a required freshman level writing course, formerly known as freshman composition. Now considered a general education course that is a prerequisite for several other required courses, each section is designed around a theme chosen by the professor who develops it. Professors from any department may choose to participate in this cross-curricular writing program and they are given support and training within Austen

College's English Department in the development of the course. Course development occurs during the year preceding and the professor agrees to teach the course a minimum of three times over the next three years. A \$2000 stipend is awarded for these additional curriculum design duties. The course is capped at 18 students and most of the approximately 25 sections offered are usually filled.

Students may choose the course they want based on the theme reflected in the course title, in this case, *Social Justice and Children's Literature*. Given the inclusion of literature for children in this course, it was anticipated that several class members would self-identify as pre-service teachers. Other variables which may have impacted class member composition were time slot (Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, 10:40 – 11:40), as well as the supposition, however erroneous, that the course would be easier than others as it was predicated on children's literature.

Before the class began, I reviewed demographic statistics from the study site (Austen College Enrollment Summary — Fall 2006) in order to situate my participants within a larger context. That demographic data along with demographic data collected from participants at the beginning of the study is included in Tables 1 through 7.

Demographics

A demographic questionnaire was administered to participants by the SRA at the second class meeting. Survey questions included the topics of gender, race, hometown, exposure to diversity, parent education levels, reason for choosing the course, and academic areas of interest. All 19 participants completed the surveys and turned them in to the SRA who held them until after the completion of the course. I chose not to be privy to this information until I had completed data collection because I wanted my relationships with the student participants to be

predicated completely on what was happening during the course, not on any preconceived notions I might have formed from the survey information.

As can be seen in Table 1, the freshmen student pool from which my participants came was a group of 630 men and women with women outnumbering men by approximately 9% of the total student body. The study participants, listed in Table 2, show a much more skewed gender makeup with women comprising 84% of the course. Given the heavy female representation in the study, it is likely that a gendered perspective influences the data.

Fulltime students	Male	Female	Total
Seniors	156	223	379
Juniors	203	233	436
Sophomores	157	251	408
Freshmen	288	342	630
Other	6	10	16
Totals	810	1059	1869

Table 1 Gender distribution of Austen College.

Fulltime students	Male	%	Female	%	Total
Total Freshmen	288	45.7	342	54.3	630
Course Totals	3	15.8	16	84.2	19

Table 2 Gender distribution of study participants.

Participants were also categorized by geographic region. The college records listed students by state as well as by country (for international students). In order to make charting the data more concise, I collected the states into geographic regions: Mid-Atlantic, South, Midwest, West, North/New England, U.S. citizens living abroad, and International students. Tables 3 and 4

represent the college's population as a whole and the study participants, respectively. The college population from the Mid-Atlantic states is 70% of the total students (56% of students are from Virginia alone), with a 17% population from North/New England. Other regions combined comprise the other 13% of the total college population.

US students by region		% of total students
Mid-Atlantic DE, MD, PA, RI, VA, WVA	1317 (1034 from VA)	70% (56%)
South AL, FL, GA, KY, LA, NC, SC, TN, TX	131	7%
Midwest IS, IN, IA, KS, MI, MN, OH, OK, WI,	41	2%
West AZ, CA, CO, ID, MO, NM, OR, UT, WA, WY	19	1%
North / New England CT, ME, MA, NH, NJ, NY, VT	322	17%
US citizens living abroad	4	< 1%
International students (22 countries)	35	2%
	1869	

Table 3 Geographic distribution of Austen College students.

US students by region		% of total students	Significant discrepancy
Mid-Atlantic DE, MD, PA, RI, VA, WVA	8 (4 from VA)	42.1 (21%)	*
South AL, FL, GA, KY, LA, NC, SC, TN, TX	3	15.7	*
Midwest IS, IN, IA, KS, MI, MN, OH, OK, WI,	0	0	
West AZ, CA, CO, ID, MO, NM, OR, UT, WA, WY	1	5.2	
North / New England CT, ME, MA, NH, NJ, NY, VT	7	36.8	*
US citizens living abroad	0	0	
International students (22 countries)	0	0	
	19		

Table 4 Geographic distribution of study participants.

The study participants were less heavily representative of Virginia, at only 21% of the class, though the Mid-Atlantic region still made up 42% of the total class closely followed by the North/ New England with almost 37%. The South and West regions were also represented, making the participant pool a bit more regionally diverse than the general college population. The importance of geographic region became apparent early in the data analysis as it bore heavily on participants' views of their cultures and belief systems.

Racial/Ethnic breakdowns followed the pattern used by the college which listed categories under the heading "Minority groups." I replicated those group categories in Table 5. The total population of students in the following "Minority groups" was less than 10% of the college's total student population: American Indian, Asian, Black, Hispanic. I added another category, "Other," to Table 6 in order to represent one of the study participants.

All participants chose to answer the question, "What is your race/ethnicity?" in their own words. One student did not answer in this category, but was later designated "Other" due to his/her own decision to identify as multi-race, specifically "Mexican/white/?" (Jenna). Though only 2 students identified themselves as "Black," their inclusion in the course is significant in relation to the total number of "Black" students on campus. The inclusion of 3 students from the "Minority group" category, brought the minority representation to 15% of the course, which may be important to the data analysis.

Minority groups	Male	Female	Total	% of student body
American Indian	4	5	9	< 1%
Asian	18	17	35	2%
Black	30	38	68	4%
Hispanic	15	24	39	2%
Totals	67	84	151	8%

Table 5 Distribution of minority groups at Austen College.

Minority groups	Male	Female	Total	% of course
American Indian	0	0	0	0
Asian	0	0	0	0
Black	0	2	2	10.5*
Hispanic	0	0	0	0
<i>Other (Mexican/white/?)</i>		1	1	5.2*
Totals	0	3	3	15.7

Table 6 Distribution of minority groups among study participants.

Participants were asked to describe their exposure to diverse environments with no qualification of the definition for “diverse.” This lack of definition was purposeful and in keeping with the intent of the study to allow participants to fully form their own standards for discussion and writing on social justice issues. Their responses, therefore, must be considered with the knowledge that they were generally unsubstantiated, though later data do pertain to their claims.

Though he/she answered, one participant did not address the question, but made a general statement regarding the positive nature of diversity. A participant who situated herself in the

“minority group” described her very limited exposure to diverse environments even though one set of her grandparents is Mexican.

Of the other 17 participants, only 3 described their exposure as very limited; most of the limitations mentioned were imposed by living in segregated neighborhoods or attending suburban or private schools. Five of the seventeen participants described their exposure to diversity as average, mostly due to travel both in and outside the United States. Nine related much exposure to diversity, generally with no explanation of why they made this statement, though a few related it to public school environments. Analyses of narratives and field notes connected these initial statements with later occurring data sources.

Parents’ levels of education were requested on the survey; I asked this question because it has been shown that education correlates with economic class which was a potential topic within the social justice frame (United States Census Bureau, 2006). Five participants are first generation college students; 2 have one parent who did not graduate from high school and one parent with some college work. Ten have at least one parent who graduated from college; 4 participants have at least one parent with post graduate experience. This breakdown represented a dichotomy between high school and college graduates with “some college” the dividing line between the two larger groups (see Table 7).

	Pseudonym	1 st gen. college	Parent education level				
			<i>Some high school</i>	<i>High school grad</i>	<i>Some college</i>	<i>College grad</i>	<i>Post grad</i>
1	Jenna			X	X		
2	Notorious			X	X		
3	**** College		X		X		
4	Princessa	X		X X			
5	Bunny	X		X X			
6	Boo					X X	
7	Tai Mai Shu	X		X X			
8	Blake					X	X
9	George						X X
10	Sally			X		X	
11	Belle					X	X
12	Lola		X		X		
13	Derek Giambi	X		X X			
14	Molly Lou	X		X X			
15	Goosey					X X	
16	Hello Motto					X X	
17	Southend					X X	
18	Sorella					X	X
19	p-Funk					X X	
		5	2	8	4	9	4
		26.3% of students	11% of students with at least 1 parent in category	42% students with at least 1 parent in category	21% students with at least 1 parent in category	47.3% students with at least 1 parent in category	21% students with at least 1 parent in category

Table 7 Parent education levels among study participants.

Participants were also asked about their interests in a particular field of study. The list of fields was taken directly from the college's demographic data sheet and students (all freshmen) were allowed to choose up to 3 areas. The question was asked in order to identify the subgroup particularly relevant to the study: those interested in education, later referred to as preservice teachers. There was wide disparity in answers to this question. Five participants identified education as at least one of their interest areas; one of those participants listed solely education. Three other categories also had 5 students represented in each: Foreign Language, Health and Human Performance, and Business. Sociology and Political Science were close behind with 4

students each. Since the intent of the study was to use the findings to enhance courses for preservice teachers, the data from the 5 self-identified preservice teacher participants were analyzed separately as well as in conjunction with the other participants.

Finally participants were asked why they had chosen this particular section of the freshman writing courses. In asking this question I sought insight into the mindset of participants before any class interaction had influenced their thinking. Six participants listed their interest in social justice as the determining factor in their course choice: “I love social justice issues...” (George); five listed their interest in children’s literature: “I love children’s books...” (Goosey); four chose the course because it sounded “fun” (Southend and Lola); and 2 chose it because it pertained to education. Four students had no particular reason for choosing the course: “Nothing else available” (Hello Motto), “Only one left” (Tai Mai Shu). Several students listed dual reasons for their course choices: “I chose this GST because I love discussing social and political issues. I love writing, and I think the sociological impact of children’s literature is very interesting” (Belle). The participants’ responses revealed a majority of them took the course because the title, *Social Justice and Children’s Literature*, implied the coverage of at least one topic of interest to them.

My participant sample, while still purposeful as in the pilot, drew from a larger potential pool of students: approximately 500 incoming freshmen. The theme of the course followed the theme of the pilot study: using children’s literature texts to illicit written and verbal responses to social justice issues. The more heterogenous make-up of the class (not all preservice teachers) added trustworthiness to the data collected as there was potential for increasing the depth and diversity of the dialogues, which did lead to greater depth of data.

Data collection procedures

On the first day of class, I introduced myself, had the students briefly do the same and then explained the research that I hoped to do in the course. A written copy of the study explanation was given to each class member along with a consent form. Students were instructed to return the consent form during the next class period, either agreeing to participate by signing the form or not electing to participate by returning an unsigned form. The student research assistant (SRA) collected these forms during the next class meeting so that I was not aware of who was participating until after the completion of the course. As it happened, this concern was not an issue, since all class members chose to participate.

Consent. Students were informed, verbally and in the written consent form, that they were able to remove themselves from the study at any point simply by notifying the SRA. The SRA was instructed to keep this information confidential. Again, this issue never arose, as all participants continued with the study throughout. When consent forms were returned to the SRA, she recorded the student's name and self-chosen pseudonym on a list that remained confidential until after grading in the course had been completed. The consent forms and list of names were kept by the SRA for the duration of the study. IRB approval for a pilot study of this project was granted by the research institution as well as the study site institution in fall 2006. Addendums are being added to these IRB documents at each institution in order to expand the research to the specifications of the current study.

Questionnaire. A demographic questionnaire was given to each participant after they had consented to be a part of the study. Students returned these questionnaires in the next class session with only their pseudonyms noted. The SRA collected these documents. Survey questions regarding participant gender, ethnicity, place of birth and educational level of parents

were retained from the pilot demographic questionnaire. A question regarding exposure to diverse environments was revised to allow the participant to describe his/her experience with diverse environments, thereby eliminating the need for me to define potentially arbitrary limits. Information related to religious affiliation and preference for future teaching positions was not sought as the information was not relevant to the purpose of the study. Information regarding economic class was gathered through means other than direct questioning.

The environment. Attention was continually paid to the uneven power dynamic between students and professor/researcher in the hopes of building trust among the classroom community and allowing them all to speak as freely as they liked. Care was taken in the first few days of class to establish ground rules for respectful communication, but reference was made to the potentially controversial nature of the topics and the strong feelings and opinions that were likely to arise. A discomfited environment may be the result of such encounters, but I prepared the students by forewarning that conflict would occur and that it was a positive reaction to the dialogues I sought (Boler, 2005).

The data. Intermittent data collection occurred throughout the course. Data included 152 short, anonymous writing prompt responses posted online, field notes of class discussions, a transcript of the group interview on the last day of the course, and 19 final essays. Five novels, 4 picture books, and 4 critical pieces were used as textual materials. As in the pilot study, initial discussion and writing prompts were used to spur dialogue on social justice perceptions, diverse environments, and other social justice topics that emerged from the participants' responses.

The online writing prompts

The first prompt asked participants to define social justice. Subsequent prompts were planned for addressing more detailed perceptions of social justice such as how the participants

situated themselves culturally and how people different from the participants were perceived by them. These planned prompts were amorphous because the exact wording did not arise until I had read their responses to the first prompt. As each writing prompt is explained in detail in its own analysis section, I list here only the prompts as the students encountered them in the online discussion board.

1. Please start a new thread and post your personal definition of “social justice.” Fully explain your definition.
2. Reflect on the definition of social justice that you put on the first post. Beyond definition, what specific issues resonate with you? Do certain things really set you off / make you think / make you act?
3. Identify a social justice issue that you feel affects you directly and describe how it does so.
4. POWER – that is the topic. How is it gotten? Used? Kept? Abused? How can it be lost? Taken away?
5. We have spent the last few class periods addressing either bias or stereotypes. You are college students now, but all of you were recently in high school as well. In thinking about your experiences as a student across all educational phases, what do you feel was the most damaging stereotypes you encountered (may be related to you or to someone else)?
6. The last 2 posts have been on power and stereotyping. As I read your responses I noticed some interesting things. Regarding power – you say 1) there is danger in locating too much power in one person (or one entity); 2) that power structures require followers willing to support the leader in charge; 3) that age, physical and/or mental strength, and money locate people at certain levels within a power structure. As for stereotyping – you say 1) people are categorized by others different from themselves and that this is a somewhat “normal” practice that can lead to stereotyping; 2) that those categories are set up along lines of money, race, sexual orientation, gender, and geographical location. I say all of this to initiate some deeper thought on one or both of these issues – power and stereotyping. In reading *Harriet the Spy*, you have mentioned the social hierarchies at

work in the novel. You have also mentioned Harriet's inability to see herself as clearly as she does others. As you observe the world around you, how are you different than / like Harriet?

7. Our most recent class discussion and reading was related to feminism and feminists. The discussion revolved around the dichotomous nature of student comments (the negative and positive). Several of you stated that even though you found some "feminist causes" supportable, you would not consider yourselves feminists due to the fact that you would not want that identity applied to you. Please talk about why you would or would not want to be identified as a "feminist." I will leave it to you to define the term as well.
8. The oppressors are as damaged by oppression as the oppressed. Your opinion?
9. Heritage – yours! Ask your grandparents / parents / other relatives to help with this: From where did your ancestors originate? When did your family come to the US (or have they always been here)? Where has your family lived – go back as far as possible. What traditions do you follow in your family? All of these questions are supposed to be leading you to ponder how you have become who you are!
10. Some of your pseudonyms are so descriptive I felt compelled to ask – What does your name say about you? Why did you choose it?
11. Please post you definition of "social justice." Fully explain your answer. Yes – you did this at the beginning, though I have blocked you access to your old definition so you will have to restate what you think at this point. Please be as complete as you can.

The readings

I intentionally chose texts that addressed social justice topics such as economic class, race, religion, and ethnicity. I chose books that would help me "emphasize inquiry, question asking, and cognitive dissonance" with my participants (Bean, 2001, p. 35).

If the transformational relationships with text that Nodelman and Reimer (2003) and Rosenblatt (1995) speak of are actually possible, then what I handed students to read did matter; they may have used the books in normative ways, forming identities and restructuring belief systems. When their status quo was disrupted, fissures may have appeared in their beliefs and

values, areas that might never have been considered until they were revealed in that gap that formed after a reading (Trites, 1997; Zipes, 2001). Jim Garrison speaks of “mapping the middle passage” (1997, p. xiv) as a way to navigate these gaps and borders where transformation may be possible. Using a wide variety of texts, both novels and picture books, I provided fodder for the minds of my students as they wrestled with the social justice issues we addressed related to their readings.

During these transactions, as we looked for what Nodelman and Reimer (2005) describe as “the cracks in the text’s structure, places where it disguises illogicalities” (p. 236), students were able to situate themselves and interact with the text in their own unique ways, setting the stage for the potential for personal growth and change. The limited time frame of the pilot study (one month) had allowed only one text to be used (*The Tale of Despereaux*), a limitation that was remedied in the full study as I brought in 4 additional novels and 4 picture books as well as 4 critical readings.

The books. Novels used in this study included *Harriet the Spy* (Fitzhugh, 1964), *Witness* (Hesse, 2001), *The Tale of Despereaux* (DiCamillo, 2001), *The Hundred Dresses* (Estes, 1944) and *Kira, Kira* (Kadohata, 2004). Picture books originally chosen included *Crazy Horse’s Vision*, (Bruchac, 2000), *Skin Again* (hooks, 2004), *La Mariposa* (Jimenez, 2000), *Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan* (Williams, 2005), *Stand Tall, Molly Lou Melon* (Lovell, 2001), *Black and White* (Macaulay, 1990), and *Tar Beach* (Ringgold, 1991). However, only 4 of the picture books (*Skin Again*, *Stand Tall*, *Molly Lou Melon*, *Black and White*, and *Tar Beach*) were actually used. The reasons behind this change are explained in the analysis section.

The critical pieces. Strong opinions in the critical works were intentionally sought in order to provide students with a model for their own writing as well as a catalyst for idea

generation on the social justice theme of the course. Critical works assigned during the study included essays, journal articles and book chapters: “Becoming a writerly self: College writers engaging black feminist essays” (Comfort, 2000), “‘There’s no racism at my school, it’s just joking around’: Ramifications for anti-racist education” (Raby, 2004), “A feminist research agenda in youth literature” (Vandergrift, 1993) and *The Pleasures of Children’s Literature*, (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003). These readings also appear in full referenced form in the reference section.

The writings

Through their narratives, written in response to readings and discussions, I asked students to reveal their own perceptions of social justice topics that arose. I questioned those perceptions in follow-up writing prompts and in discussions and asked them to elaborate further. In following this recursive path intentionally, forcing students to reevaluate their own responses in light of new information, I sought greater depth of data, but also I hoped to be as accurate as possible in my continuous analysis of that data by asking students to analyze their own written and oral communications.

Having the students reflect in this way offered yet another benefit to the study; it allowed for personal transformation as they thought through responses and realized that their first attempt was not what they had really meant and that other participants’ views had made sense and were incorporated into their own thinking and a new thought was created. This phenomenon explicated a contention that Villegas and Lucas (2002) made about how teacher educators can become "moral actors whose job is to facilitate the growth and development of other human beings" (p. 53).

Of course students, including preservice teachers, must first be able to see inequities before they can begin to act against them. One approach to educating “culturally responsive teachers” (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. xiv) describes a person’s “sociocultural consciousness” (p. xiv) as heavily related to race, ethnicity, social class, and language and as such in need of a dose of self-reflection before one is able to truly see others in the same context as oneself.

Students are generally not thinking deeply about what they have read. It is only with deep thinking, the ability to look at a book from different perspectives that the potential change for change exists. In not seeking “consensus of thought” (May, 1995, p. 12) among students, I tried to impart that literature has meanings that come from critical stances or theories and that these theories are integral to complete understanding.

Jung (2005), calls for use of texts in the classroom that promote active “listening” (p. 33), which is called into play by the learning “gaps” (p. 33) made apparent when teachers allow for close reading of a work. This close reading is only possible when readers are allowed to interpret for themselves the voices they hear. The study participants were encouraged in the writing prompts and in class discussions (as well as in the graded essays) to use their own experiences through which to filter the texts.

The group interview

An audio-taped, focus group interview was completed on the last day of the course. The SRA also attended this session and field notes were recorded. Audio taping was used in order to most accurately represent all participants' views, thereby providing more viable data. The interview was held in the classroom at the regular class meeting time to help ensure the comfort of the participants. I transcribed the tape immediately after the interview so that field notes could be used to fill in contextual information and help with any inaudible portions of the tape.

My own transcription of the tapes also allowed me to begin analysis as quickly as possible. The digital audio was stored on my recorder and on a backup compact disc which were both kept in a locked office drawer.

The following questions were used to initiate the focus group interview:

1. What was most memorable about this course for you? Why?
2. How would you elaborate on the topic that was most pertinent to you?

Data analysis procedures

Initial analysis took place as soon as data were available which was just after consent forms were signed as field notes had begun on the first day of class. Narrative data were coded using initial codes drawn from the pilot study, but open coding was also used to allow for emerging themes. As the first set of narratives was coded, a code map was drawn so that each subsequent data set could be coded accordingly. A code map is a visual depiction of the coding process and allows the researcher to track how the research questions, analysis codes and findings are connected (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). The study research questions were used to structure the map and then initial codes were categorized according to which research question they applied. As those beginning codes evolved and were expanded, integrated, or collapsed, they were consolidated into more inclusive categories and eventually allowed generation of the themes that are the findings of this research. This iterative process helped make my thought process throughout analysis more transparent and therefore made use of emerging data easier, but it also allows those who read the research to track the analysis process and judge its merits along the way.

Each set of narrative data (online responses) were analyzed individually and in comparison with previous narrative data sets in a constant comparative format (Strauss &

Corbin, 1990). The narrative data were also analyzed against the field notes, both mine and the SRA's. As the field notes contained descriptions of class discussions and participant behaviors, they often added additional insights into the narrative data. Participants often discussed topics about which they had written and vice versa. The inclusion of multiple data sets as well as the comparison among and between data sets lent trustworthiness to the data through triangulation (Schwandt, 2001).

I began analyzing the interview transcript as I transcribed it, using the same codes as were used to analyze the narrative and observational data. These initial codes remained consistent throughout the transcript analysis. Transcripts were reanalyzed after transcription was completed and checked against the field notes from the interview session, and again after the last set of data, the final essays were analyzed.

Nineteen final essays were included as data after the completion of grading and after the interview had taken place. These narratives, the culminating assignment in the writing course, ultimately revealed great depth of data. They were read multiple times before inclusion in the study, at which point they were coded using the existing codes from the other narrative, observational and interview data. These data are included on the code map mentioned earlier.

All data were reanalyzed at completion of the study at which time code mapping was used to track codes, categories, and themes and their relationships to one another. Examples of data were used to ground the research findings, lending additional credibility. The code map appears in chapter 4 where the details of analysis are reported.

Summary

I wanted my white, upper middle class students to attempt to see through the eyes of another – someone who is unlike them. I wanted to help them open their minds to their own

cultural backgrounds and the attending perceptual frameworks from which everything else is seen (Bernal, 2002; Gilborn, 2006). I believed this task was going to be difficult since it entailed some acceptance of responsibility injustices perpetrated on those unlike ourselves (Franzak, 2003). I had found that this critical race theory (CRT) perspective forced me to deal with daily life occurrences at work and with family and friends that disturbed me and forced me to acknowledge my own multiple prejudices. The mirror that CRT requires us to stand before is an unkind one. I do not look pretty in it and I assumed my students might not like their reflections either. CRT seeks to reveal the notions ingrained over a lifetime by parents, family and friends. To divest ourselves of the layers of prejudice may require separation from those closest to us: mothers, fathers, grandparents, best friends. It may require us to make public statements against loved ones or to admit our complicity in perpetuating injustice (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Gutierrez, 2000; Jewett, 2006). It would be much easier if no one asked us to stand before that mirror at all and given that those in power may generally do as they please, we often do not have to! But that is just what I asked of them in this research and some participants, myself included, looked closely.

Cuffaro (1995) speaks of needing “time to achieve [her] integrity” (p. 5) as a new teacher. I hoped this work might help participants begin the journey toward finding what worked for them, how they saw themselves in their futures, whether in classrooms of their own or in other venues. I had asked myself at the beginning of this study if transformation can really happen. I believe my findings point strongly to that possibility.

And if transformation is possible, then there is much research to support that literature should be intertwined in as many lives as possible as it has been shown to help open up those possibilities (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003, Rosenblatt, 1995). Literature reveals characters who

are struggling with life at a variety of points and in a variety of situations, but all of whom are getting the job done; they are becoming more than society would have for them. Whose voice speaks to us from those pages? *Despereaux's* Princess Pea extricating herself from death; Miggery Sow refusing to be led any further by those who do not care what she wants; Despereaux who is not afraid to separate himself from his community in order to live the life he sees for himself; *Kira, Kira's* Katie who can struggle through hardship, not negating that some of the hardships were unjust, but learning to live a loving, productive life anyway.

Are these voices real? They are if the reader makes them so. Characters in these texts are not idealized versions of children and adolescents overcoming strife to come out better human beings in the end. They are characters struggling and being beaten sometimes and winning sometimes, but continuing to struggle. These books leave an impression that change is possible no matter what characteristics are set as the norm by a particular society, be it medieval “once upon a time,” 1950s America, or the 21st century world. These voices have the “combination of access and interpretability” (p. 248) that Nodelman and Reimer (2003) call for in worthy children’s literature. They allow the reader to “use new information to revise their knowledge and beliefs” (Ernst, 1995, p. 76). They allow the empowered voices of their characters to be heard striving for an identity other than that which society bestows. It is a commanding message.

I hoped that the longer time frame, larger and more heterogeneous participant pool, as well as class access to more literature texts would lead this study to reveal deeper, richer data about students’ perceptions of social justice than was found in the pilot. I believe that is exactly what happened and the next chapters will reveal the details of analysis that support that claim.

Dissemination of these research findings is a priority. Higher education faculty, including, but not limited to, teacher educators; practicing teachers; and administrators are the intended audience of this research. It is my hope that the study will facilitate wider discussions on social justice issues among those seeking to serve students in any setting, but particularly in teacher education.

Limitations of the study

Materials

Incorporation of the picture books to the study was problematic; I would not include them again, but would instead concentrate efforts on the novels and articles. Students appeared to need some instruction on how to engage with the picture books, text and illustrations, and I chose not to spend this time on that pursuit as my own teaching interests lay with books for older children. The study participants seemed to see the books as a joke of an assignment, something that was beneath them; again, possibly due to my own greater comfort level with the books for older children.

The idea of using only picture books to do a similar study is intriguing, however. Obviously, were such a study to be done, expressing the value of the picture books to the students would be a priority.

Student choice of texts

Given the action research methodology of this study, greater student input on text selection would have been appropriate and may have improved student engagement (May, 1995). For instance, the lack of engagement with picture books might have been mitigated or avoided had the participants had the option to choose their own books.

Individual participant choice of books at all levels could be incorporated easily by requesting that students choose texts according to theme or subject or whatever parameters prove

most important to the study data collection. Lists of books from which to choose would also serve to provide student choice while retaining control of thematic focus. Such choices would also allow a potentially wider array of social justice topics to be covered as participant choices might prove broader in scope than the instructor might envision. I was continually surprised by some of the experiences reported by several students. It is quite possible that had the students been freer to choose their own reading material, at least to some degree, their reflections and writings might have been deepened by those choices (May 1995).

Research methodology

As this study used a participatory action research methodology, the limitations inherent in this model existed. The potential for researcher bias was great as I used my own class as participants; however, given that action and change are goals of PAR, this limitation is considered unavoidable (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005). The lack of generalizability, while considered a limitation by positivist researchers, is accepted as part of all qualitative methodologies (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). The potential for poor construction of the research is also a possibility when allowing emerging data to drive the research, but as Greenwood and Levin (2005) believe that “validity, credibility, and reliability in action research are measured by the willingness of local stakeholders to act on the results” (p. 54), the data shown in the following chapters reveal that the participants and the researcher, as stakeholders, have acted on the results already. Whether additional stakeholders, other teachers in higher education, other teacher educators, and other college students, will follow suit remains to be seen.

The role of the researcher. Some readers of this study may find its style and tone too alternative, meaning too far outside the bounds of positivist research. However, this fact may be perceived as a positive attribute as well as a negative one given the emphasis on social process,

change and the “democratization of scientific practice” (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005, p. 571)
in PAR.

CHAPTER 4 GETTING TO KNOW YOU

There is no frigate like a book
 To take us lands away,
 Nor any coursers like a page
 Of prancing poetry.
 This traverse may the poorest take
 Without oppress of toll;
 How frugal is the chariot
 That bears a human soul!

~Emily Dickinson

Pilgrims on a journey

This is the story of how a group of people with little in common came to take a journey together that would lead them to examine, and sometimes question, long held beliefs and to work to sort out what was valuable from what was merely habitual. The journeymen do not appear unique at first, but the journey forced out bits and pieces of them that began to collect themselves into portraits so distinct that I soon realized this story was really about them – and me. I had become a pilgrim as well – somewhere in the early part of the journey; I stopped being the leader all the time and the shifting role seemed to allow the participants to respond differently in my presence. My own bits and pieces, made visible to the students, collected into something that was separate from their teacher/researcher. I slipped in and out after that, between the roles of guide and fellow journeyman.

Did that slipping cause me to lose control of the research? Yes, and no. I believe that I only had real control at the beginning anyway, as I structured how things would go at the start. Once I invited the others to participate in my study, some of the control was given over to them, even when I was the one setting out the tasks to be accomplished. The plan was to let emerging data guide the bulk of the research anyway, so relinquishing control was a planned part of the study (Greenwood & Levin, 2005).

Once the data had been collected and read and reread, the pieces began to coalesce into a puzzle that not only revealed the groups' thinking on a number of social justice issues, but that began to form developing portraits of the participants. They began to apply what they read, wrote, and talked about to their own lives and to consider how it might apply to their futures. Their longer papers began to incorporate the texts and class discussions into explanations of why they thought, believed, and acted as they did.

I expected to be writing about how college students, especially preservice teachers, perceived social justice and how the literature texts worked to facilitate social justice discussions. Though part of this study does address that information, the much larger issue became not how they perceived social justice, but how they lived with that perception. That is the story I want to tell and I chose to tell it in chronological order so that the reader may see the story develop as I saw it and be able to connect, as I did, the beginning to the middle to the end, which actually becomes another beginning.

The first day

Molly Lou Melon. The question of how to begin caused me much anxiety. I felt it was very important to set a tone of trust, openness, and security quickly in order to address challenging issues as completely as possible (Henkin, 1998). Given that the potential participants were all freshman in their first semester of college, this goal seemed set particularly high. As the students filed into the classroom, filling almost every seat, silently facing me, I was glad I had decided to open with a read-aloud book. After very brief class introductions all around, I read *Stand Tall, Molly Lou Melon* (Lovell & Catrow, 2001) and let Molly Lou speak for me. I hoped this book choice would convey to them that I valued people who were willing to be themselves and that outspokenness and individuality would be celebrated in this class. When I finished

reading this humorous picture book about a tiny girl who surmounts all of her obstacles with confidence and a smile, I explained the research study that I was beginning and asked them to be my study participants. Some discussion ensued over my background in teaching over the last 25 years and my hopes of completing a Ph.D. with the study I proposed to them.

Then, I asked the students why they thought I had chosen this book. A few said it was because she stood up for herself; others said because she was different; still others thought it was because she figured out how to get along in the world. Most students did not speak at all and I feared that many might not want to participate in something that seemed to hold little concrete value for them. We spent the rest of class talking about how we would use other readings, picture books, novels, and essays to start similar discussions throughout the course while also completing the composition assignments relevant to Austen College's general studies curriculum (Field notes, 8/29/07). The surveys and study consent forms were given out with instructions to fill out both by the next class meeting if they chose to participate.

On that same day, one of the students from class stopped by with a friend to ask if her friend could add the course, which at that point was already at capacity with 18 students. It seemed she had told her friend about the class and how interesting it was going to be and the friend, having an interest in education, was eager to add it. This occurrence heartened me and I began to think that I might get a majority of the students to participate in the project. I allowed the friend to add the course (Field notes, 8/29/07).

Black and White. By the end of the next class period, I had 19 students and all of them had turned in their consent forms and most had returned the demographic surveys (Field notes, 8/31/07). Official data collection began that day and continued through the last day of the course with the group interview. *Black and White* (Macaulay, 1990) is a picture book with four

concurrent plot lines which converge at the end the book. My intention in using it was to begin a discussion on personal perspective and the bigger picture of combining multiple perspectives. I did not anticipate the apathetic reactions the students showed as I read the book aloud. Their body language - turning aside, putting heads down, chatting quietly with one another - led me to believe that they were either uninterested in class or just didn't like the book. Given their reactions, I asked their general opinions of the book before trying to begin the intended discussion on perspective. Several students felt the book was disjointed and unfocused and voiced concerns over not understanding what was going on. Several saw connections among the four separate stories, but did not find the connections facilitated understanding or enjoyment of the book. The hesitancy of any student to take part in further discussion related to this book led me not to pursue further discussion at that time, and we never returned to it (8/31/07).

The online discussion board

An online discussion board was set up to allow students to post anonymously in response to a weekly writing prompt. The prompts posed questions related to readings, writings, or discussions that had ensued the week prior to the posting. Eleven prompts were set out during the course, approximately one per week. A tally chart was kept by pseudonym, to document who had responded to each prompt. Student response rates to the prompts ranged from 27% (2 students) to 100% (6 students), with the majority of the 19 students (12) responding to greater than 73% of the prompts. The lowest response rates were for prompts #8 (43%), #9 (53%), #10 (63%), and #11 (53%), possibly due to these being at the end of the course when workloads in other classes were becoming heavier or to disinterest in certain topics among some of the participants as several of them missed multiple prompts. Prompt #10, though not at the bottom of the participation levels, was the prompt which provided little relevant data. I believe the prompt

did not address what I hoped it might, and the participants were quick to tell me so. The writing prompts are each covered in detail further into this analysis.

The “minority group.” One of the notable occurrences related to the prompt response rates is that one of the “minority group “ students (RC) failed to respond to 8 of 11 prompts (a rate of 27%), while the other 2 students from this sub-group, Jenna and Notorious, respectively responded to 73% and 100% of the prompts. Having so few “minority group” students, I had hoped for strong participation from all of them as I was interested in as much diversity of opinion as possible (Field notes, 9/3/07).

The preservice teachers. The group of preservice teachers responded at rates similar to the rest of the class: Bunny at 91%, Jenna at 73%, Princessa at 64%, Boo at 45%, and Tai Mai Shu at 27%. The wide disparities among this group continued in many areas: discussion participation, class attendance, point of view on issues (Field notes, 11/16/07). Aside from a few demographic factors such as parent levels of education, the members of this group had little in common, a fact I will discuss in more detail in the summary.

Online posting #1: Defining social justice

The first writing prompt, requesting participants give their “personal definition of social justice,” was answered by 18 of the 19 participants. Coding began on the responses immediately as I was using the data to construct the next prompt as well as to guide class discussions. Because the participants’ definitions of social justice were foundational to the findings of this study, I share excerpts from all of their coded responses in the figure below.

Post your personal definition of “social justice.” Fully explain your definition.	
Codes	Data Samples
1A) Equality and fairness to all (subsumed respect and opportunity)	<p>“...knowing that no one in the world is being treated unfairly due to race, economic status, or gender, that everyone has the same basic rights and opportunities available ...” (George)</p> <p>“...social justice is fairness to everyone regardless of social stature.” (Lola)</p> <p>“equality for everyone regardless of gender, social-economic status, sexual orientation, heritage, culture, or appearance.” “Basic rights ... free speech, access to shelter and food, respect from others ...” (Princessa)</p> <p>“When the word pops in my head I think, fairness and equality of the public and giving people the right to think what they want to think. ...however, I don’t think this really exists.” (Sally)</p> <p>“...everyone is treated equal. Every race, ethnicity and religion should have their own freedom ... social justice isn’t taken as seriously as it should be.” (Bunny)</p> <p>“... everyone feels as if they are equal no matter what their gender, race, or age...” (Belle)</p> <p>“...giving everyone fair treatment.” (Molly Lou)</p> <p>“...to ensure the rights of all people. This includes people of all races, sexual orientation and gender. It think is also includes things like social class, etc.” (Jenna)</p> <p>“...fair treatment of all beings ... the goal for all beings ...fair rules.” (Blake)</p> <p>“.. everyone being equal ... no matter your race or gender ... not being biased.” (Hello motto)</p> <p>“...being fair and equal ... despite gender, race, religion, etc. ...disproving all [unjust] traditional norms and stereotypes” (Sorella)</p> <p>“...all social groups ... ethnicities, races, genders, economic groups, political views are treated with respect ...Different opinions and views are accepted” with an “openness and mutual respect ... Social justice is a necessity for a society to function properly.” (Boo)</p>
1A)Obligation to work for justice; to be yourself (subsumed order)	<p>“...in a socially just world everyone must have the same rights and be treated equally ... because I come from a middle class family I ... [have] an obligation to help those who are not so financially secure.” (p-funk)</p> <p>“...the obligation for everyone to be who they are and who they want to be, freely. People should not have to be afraid of who they are due to the attitude everyone else seems to have.” (Notorious)</p> <p>“... moral fairness ... an order, an equality connecting people and their rights ...social justice focuses on the whole community ... adjoining the individuals rights with society ... a community...” (Tai Mai Shu)</p>
1A)Freedom to be who you are (subsumed safety, identity)	<p>“...means allowing people to have a say in what they believe in ... the right to speak their mind ... even if no one else agrees” (Giambi)</p> <p>“People should not have to be afraid of who they are” (Notorious)</p>
1B)Relativism related to definition	<p>“Social justice is a difficult topic to argue because no one person is to say who’s right or wrong in an individual’s thinking... it lies in the eyes of the beholder to decide what is fair or not.” (Southend)</p> <p>“No one can be right or wrong ...” (Giambi)</p>
1C))Negation of possibility of social justice	<p>“... giving everyone the chance to say what he or she thinks without judging what other people say, think, or do. However, I don’t think that this really exists” (Sally)</p> <p>“Social justice between all races and all countries right now is not possible...” (George)</p>

Figure 1 First online posting

With liberty and justice for all?

The majority of participants defined social justice as the extension of equality and fairness to all, regardless of differences. Respect and opportunity are mentioned by several students and were initially used as codes, but I collapsed them into equality and fairness as it appeared they were closely related given the context of the participants' words. To further explicate their focus on equality, participants stated that their ideas about social justice applied to many categories of people: "race, economic status, or gender" (George); "social stature" (Lola); "race, ethnicity and religion" (Bunny); "gender, race, or age" (Belle); "all races, sexual orientation and gender...social class, etc." (Jenna); "race or gender" (Hello motto); "gender, race, religion" (Sorella); "all social groups ... ethnicities, races, genders, economic groups, political views" (Boo). These participants definitions are closely aligned with the one I set forth in Chapter 1: Social justice is the elimination of discrimination on the basis of race, ethnic group, sexual orientation, social class, physical ability, or religious preference (VPI&SU, 2002).

This laundry list of groups may be a recitation of the ideals set forth in high school government classes, not surprising as all the participants graduated from high school only a few months ago. Not all students listed all of the same categories, but I do not believe this reveals any intentional decision to leave out certain groups. Those groups not specifically mentioned in every participant's response are often included by them during class discussions or in later writing samples.

Freedom and obligation. Two additional codes represent areas not addressed by as many students as the first code category, but were areas I felt were worth exploring for the sake of adding depth to the research. A "minority group" student, Notorious, helps establish the "freedom to be who you are" code and adds that fear should not play a part in that right. Giambi

backs up her sentiment that people should be able to “speak their mind.” Obligation works its way into the codes as the “obligation” to work toward social justice (P-funk), the “obligation” to be one’s self (Notorious), and the “obligation” to further the connectivity within a “community” (Tai Mai Shu). Interestingly, the connectivity that Tai Mai Shu brings up in his post is the very theme I was trying to reach with the inclusion of the picture book, *Black and White* (Macauley, 1990). The import of this connection is supported by feminist theorist Donna Haraway (1991) who states that connection to others must be made if humanity is to survive. In addition, Notorious’s obligation to self is reiterated in the words of Uma Narayan (1997) who calls for us to reach out to others, but from the firm foundation of our own “home” (p. 398). Notorious returns to the idea of strength of self throughout the study as do Tai Mai Shu and P-funk.

Relativism. Bringing a relativistic perspective to the definition of social justice, Southend and Giambi argue that social justice is an individual’s call, an “in the eye of the beholder” issue (Southend). This unwillingness to take a stand on a definitive definition for social justice continues into several of the later prompts as well as the final essays of these two participants. Another very interesting point here is that a pilot study participant, Spencer, used Southend’s exact wording to describe this sense of relativism related to justice.

Negation. I also found negation of the possibility of achieving social justice important, though only two students’ responses fit into the category, because the discussion about practical application of findings from this study will be addressed later and that aspect is of particular importance to the overall research. Sally and George agree at this point that social justice neither exists nor is possible.

The fact that many participants had similar social justice definitions may not be unusual given the relative homogeneity of the group, 18-year old students in a private college. What

stood out were those students who put into words their confusion with, questioning of, and negative outlooks on, social justice. Those aspects revealed the individuals' unique ways of thinking and led the research into areas that added greater depth to the data.

The student research assistant (SRA). As mentioned in Chapter 3, a student research assistant (SRA) was available to code data, take field notes, and collect information from participants on a sporadic basis. The SRA coded the online postings at the end of the study and her analysis is included at relevant points. She concurred on the major codes for equality and fairness in this first set of postings. Her analysis also included the necessity for “ensuring” equality for all which fits the obligation code already established (SRA). She did not find that freedom, negation, or relativism were significant.

Grading: Tackling the power discrepancy

Since the prompt responses were due over the weekends, they could be coded prior to the first class of the next week so that the data could be incorporated into the class activities and assignments that week. This practice proved to be fruitful in a number of ways as the students seemed impressed that I had actually read what they were saying on the Discussion Board and that I thought what they said was important enough to work into course assignments (Field notes, 9/17/07). Therefore, not only did using the emerging data help me get relevant future data, it also helped me build rapport with the participants, a by-product on which I hadn't counted. The situation was a clear example of how important pedagogical decisions were to the environment I was trying to create and to the “validity, credibility, and reliability” (Chizik, 2003; Greenwood & Levin, 2005, p. 54) of action research.

There were, however, negative aspects to the anonymous postings as well. Questions arose regarding the distinction between graded work and anonymous work. I pointed out the

syllabus section referring to graded work and explained again that participation in the study was voluntary, but that the online postings were graded on completion (Field notes, 9/14/07). The SRA kept the record of pseudonyms that allowed her to keep track of who had posted to which prompt and at the end of the course, prior to final grading, she would let me know how many prompts had been completed by each student. In this way, the participants' identities were kept confidential until after I had completed grading in the course.

Questions about grading, mainly related to the longer essays, continued to arise and the written study explanation was referenced a number of times in hopes of assuaging the fears of biased grading practices. During these early discussions of grading and the power relationship between them and me, the students related instances from their high school days where they felt the teacher's power had been used against them (Chizik, 2003). Field notes included documentation of one such discussion in which a student expressed doubt that I really meant it when I asked them for an opinion, either during a discussion, or in a written assignment. She stated that she had been removed from class for stating her opinion about the war in Iraq because it incited other students and led to conflict; it also dissented from the view of the teacher, which was her concern in this case (Field notes, 9/14/07).

Another participant was once asked to change clothes at school because a political statement that was printed on her shirt might cause conflict (the statement was not obscene). Several students recounted such events, saying that the result of these incidents was a feeling of distrust toward teachers who said one thing but did another, punishing the very behaviors they supposedly sought. Students in quick succession stated feeling angry, resentful, and hurt by these incidents and as a result said they did one of two things: stopped putting forth any statements that

dissented from their teacher's stance or stopped participating at all in situations that called for an opinion (Field notes, 9/14/07).

At this point it became obvious that it was necessary to more vigorously promote my statement regarding the value of hearing all opinions and all viewpoints in a respectful environment where involvement was encouraged and individuality recognized (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). I decided to provide an opportunity for the students to tell me more about themselves, something that had been somewhat neglected aside from the demographic surveys and initial brief introductions. As I was already having them write on a daily basis, I used a visual format for this next assignment.

The collages: Building rapport

Personal collages, I hoped, would allow a different side of the students to emerge. I wanted to move the focus away from writing to shift them from concentrating on grading and pleasing me with their products. The assignment asked participants to represent themselves in a pictorial way with an option to present the finished product to the class. Collage was used as an example format and every student followed the example, though not in the same way – possibly another manifestation of their desire to do the assignment correctly and please me (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Sixteen of the 19 students did share their collages with the class, speaking from their seats about how their art represented who they were. One student chose not to publicly present and 2 others did not do the assignment (Field notes, 9/21/07).

The portraits. These personal representations allowed students to include aspects of themselves that might not normally have come out in class. Belle included books she enjoyed along with pictures of her pets and her family, even pictures of her European travels. Among other participants, favorite sports teams, clothing styles, books, travel sites, and music were

commonly represented. All participants who completed the assignment, 17 of 19, represented their families prominently. Many included photographs of themselves, their families and their homes. They used text to describe themselves as “obsessed” (Goosey), “passionate” (Sally), “fun” and “fearless” (George), “kind,” “easy going,” and “respectful” (Giambi), “unique” (Notorious), and “sassy” (RC).

Included in Appendix E are several scanned collages. Lola’s collage exhibits several of her interests (art that identified her was blacked out) as well as the issues she often brought into class discussions: her support of gun ownership, her Southern heritage, and her Republicanism. RC’s work depicts people in outline form around a crucified Christ. Her comments in class were parceled out rather sparingly, but when they came, she was straightforward and succinct. Notorious includes herself as a stick figure outside the box of other stick figures of four different colors, white, black, brown and yellow. When speaking out in class, she often mentioned feeling unfairly judged by others due to her tastes in clothing and music. Giambi’s collage is simple, black and white, and represents his ties to home and family, sentiments which coincide with his classroom discussion comments, which are numerous. The words he includes on his collage are repeated often in his writing and in his class comments (Field notes, 10/26/07).

Though the intent of this assignment was to enhance the tone of friendly openness and interest in others that I had tried to set from the beginning of the course, I found that the exercise actually yielded data about my participants. Not much writing had been done to this point and the freedom they exhibited in telling me and the other students about themselves was heartening. I hoped this early effort toward positive environment building was working as we moved into some foundational reading on critical reading and the second online writing prompt (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Reading with a purpose

Critical reading: what is that? As the collages were completed and shared, students were also reading a book chapter from *The Pleasures of Children's Literature* (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003). The information was intended to show them how I hoped they would approach their reading for the course. The chapter asks the reader to identify the "surface ideology" (p. 151) of a text as well as the writer's "passive ideology" (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003, p. 152). In essence, the authors advise that we read with an eye toward what the author says, what he implies, and what his own background may say for him. Obviously this tact is asking a lot of the reader. The class discussion on this reading revolved around the need to look deeper than the surface meanings of words on a page. Jack Zipes (2001), in promoting the active engagement of students agrees that they must read critically especially in regard to culture.

For critical reading to occur we must pay attention to the values put forth, inherently, in the text, though we do not have to accept them as our own truth in order to enjoy or understand the text. This ability to "read against the text" and not necessarily believe everything that it says, gives the reader control over the experience (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003, p. 156). Along this line, and in accordance with Harraway's (1991) views that feminist theory allows us to explore how culture and values relate to difference, we also discussed how culture is passed on in books, toys, games, TV, movies, and how they showcase the dominant values of our society (Field notes, 9/12/07).

Cultural values. And about those dominant values, whose values are those? How did they become dominant? May (1995) addresses the power the majority race, ethnic group, class, or political group has to set the agenda for everyone. So, participants were asked how history and culture worked into their understanding of a text. What did they need to understand in order to

interpret the story? What cultural representations were at work? In this vein, using gender assumptions as an example, I asked why they thought J.K. Rowling used only her initials rather than her full name when publishing the *Harry Potter* books. The immediate response from multiple students was that she would appeal to more readers if they did not know she was female; more males might read her book (Field notes, 9/14/07).

From this example, gender stereotypes arose as a discussion topic and female students reported that they had been told by past teachers that the reason the class read novels with male protagonists rather than female ones was that boys would not read books about girls, but girls never seemed to mind reading about boys (Field notes, 9/14/07).

The class reported that racial and ethnic assumptions included the superiority of white people. This contention surprised me, coming so early in the course. Ladson-Billings (1998), hooks (1997), and Marx and Pennington (2003) have all noted the need for acknowledgment of whiteness and the power it connotes, but this is one of the only areas in the study where participants gave credence to that idea. Also included among race-based assumptions were the instances when people were damned by “feint praise” (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003, p. 169). Notorious mentioned such an instance from her past, relating that people of color were expected to be “representatives” of their race when in the public eye, but the same was never said of white people; they were seen as individuals, not as representatives of their racial group (Field notes, 9/14/07).

Multicultural or stereotypical? I also used the Nodelman and Reimer (2003) chapter to bring up the potential dangers of a multicultural view that categorized people under large headings with the implication being that generalizations could be made about everyone in a particular group. After Notorious’s comment, I felt validated in this effort. After all, are all Asian

students good at math? Do all African American students listen to rap music? Both of these stereotypes were mentioned during class discussion on this topic. These questions generated some discussion on how annoying students found this kind of stereotyping when it was applied to them (Field notes, 9/14/07).

This line of discussion brought up the question, who we are then, if we are not the stereotypes used to represent us? I used that question to jump start the first essay, a short paper on how they were affected by social justice. As the attributed papers were not part of this study, I did not include them here unless discussion about them was relevant according to my field notes. Discussion continued and included the ideologies that help to form us, and if, and how, we feel manipulated by those ideologies (Field notes, 9/17/07).

Bunny related the story of her senior prom to which she went with a boy of another race. Her family's negative reaction, they were "hysterical," was a surprise to her, though she knew that interracial dating was not a norm in her family (Bunny, Field notes, 9/17/07). She assumed that since her family had not openly acted in a prejudiced way before this time that her choice would be accepted. When it wasn't, she was faced with violating the ideology of her family or hurting her friend. She ultimately chose to break from her family's mold on this point and spoke of that decision as a good one, one of which she was proud (Field notes, 9/17/07). Our discussion ended abruptly as I was forced to cut them off for time, something that would become a common occurrence as participation in class discussions became more frequent and more varied.

Online posting #2: Getting real

After coding the students' definitions for social justice from the first posting, I asked them to elaborate on that definition by talking more about the specific social justice issues that they felt were important. The responses to this posting were used during the following week

during work on the first essay. I have shared several samples along with the specific “issues” to which they correspond in order to show the continuity of thought I believe starts to establish itself with this posting.

Prompt: Reflect on the definition of social justice that you put on the first post. Beyond definition, what specific issues resonate with you? Do certain things really set you off / make you think / make you act?		
Codes	Specific issues	Data Samples
1A) Equality and fairness to all (subsumed respect and opportunity)	Gender bias Poverty Use of privilege Racism	<p>“... the main reason so many African women contract AIDS or HIV is because of the many injustices they go through because of their gender” (George)</p> <p>“... great poverty ... medicine isn’t available to those who need it most, and food isn’t available to those who are hungry ...” (Belle)</p> <p>“... people show off how rich and spoiled they are... Think how much money they are spending ...then think how many people just need money for food, and to take care of their families” (Jenna)</p> <p>“What sets me off in the society is when one race or gender is put down by another ... no one should think they are better than others” (Giambi)</p> <p>“Racism is very ignorant to me and I do not tolerate that kind of ignorance ... it makes me sick that people really act that way.” (Notorious)</p>
1A)Obligation to work for justice; to be yourself (subsumed order)	Helping yourself Helping others Striving for change	<p>“giving to those that are too worthless to help themselves ... It really makes me upset when people expect America to be able to help other countries who are in need when America can barely help itself” (Lola)</p> <p>“Another thing that bothers me is when people are living in poverty but are too lazy to do anything about it.” (Goosey)</p> <p>“I have vouched myself to join a form of the Peace Corps or Red Cross when I finish college or graduate school and dedicate a couple years of my life fighting the [AIDS] epidemic as well as women’s rights within the counties of Africa.” (George)</p> <p>“I think a large problem with social justice is our inability to open our minds outside of the familiar. For the most part, we look through own tunnel; our own religion, race, values, sexual preference, etc.” (Boo)</p> <p>“...it’s all about realization and change. To try to make things better. “ (Southend)</p> <p>“... something needs to be fixed” (Belle)</p>
1A)Freedom to be who you are (subsumed safety, identity)	Abortion Gun rights Violence	<p>“What makes me tick? Abortion, ... gun rights ...” (Lola) [elaboration in class revealed that Lola is against abortion and supports gun ownership]</p> <p>“... if this is a free and just society, we should make our own choices ... however, if we control our own choices, what about the choice of life ... as in the ... fetus?” (Blake)</p> <p>“I agree with ... abortion” (Princessa)</p> <p>“Gun control laws also make me mad, I hate guns” (Jenna)</p> <p>... “is any issue really worth our lives?” (RC)</p>

Figure 2 Participants’ explications of social justice definitions

How does it affect me? Having the participants elaborate in this way revealed that several were interested in issues that they felt had a direct impact on them: Sally mentioned a personal relationship to abortion, but did not define that connection, nor her stance; teammates, Bunny

and Sorella were passionate about gender equity as it related to sports; Molly Lou had been penalized for offences others had gotten away with; Notorious and Jenna, members of the “minority group,” questioned the ignorance of racism; and Hello Motto was disgruntled by laws that encumbered those under 21 years of age.

The worldview. A number of students took on issues of global size, but unlike in the first posting, did not appear to consider these issues insurmountable. In fact, students wrote about the need to strive for change, to become advocates, in a number of ways. Chizhik and Chizhik (2002) report that these kinds of discussions of social justice may actually motivate students to work for change as these participants seem poised to consider. In a general sense, one student framed the problem as she saw it: “it’s all about realization and change. To try to make things better” (Southend). Others were more focused on the need for a clearer vision for the future: “I think a large problem with social justice is our inability to open our minds outside of the familiar. For the most part, we look through our own tunnel; our own religion, race, values, sexual preference, etc” (Boo). Boo’s impetus to open up our “tunnel” vision becomes part of a major finding in this study.

Boo’s words, written so early in the semester, were surprising. I had not imagined that the participants would apply the topic to themselves so deeply, so quickly. Their lack of relativism or negativism in this posting was also a puzzle. I wondered where the equivocation from the first posting had gone. It is possible that those who did not answer this prompt might have had something to say in those categories, though the participants who originally appeared under the relativist and negation codes are all represented in this response.

Look out for #1. Not seen in the first posting, the inclusion of “helping yourself” in the obligation category opened up a different path of inquiry. Other participants had written about

the obligation to be true to self and the obligation to help others, but these two students, Lola and Goosey, appeared to take a completely different path, one which assumed that self is more important than the other. This view of the other as less than the self needed to be examined (Zeichner, 1996). For as Lola says, “It really makes me upset when people expect America to be able to help other countries who are in need when America can barely help itself” (Lola). And that view is supported by Goosey: “Another thing that bothers me is when people are living in poverty but are too lazy to do anything about it” (Goosey). Comments made during class discussion revealed these participants to be heavily grounded in these opinions; in fact one of them, Lola, thanked me in her online posting for the opportunity to have her say on the subject! (Field notes, 10/22/07).

Reading all of these responses, I became aware of how the participants had personalized the broader discussions we were having in class. These first steps toward revealing their beliefs put them out in front of one another, even if anonymously. Class discussions that followed these postings often found the students bringing up similar topics in front of their peers as will be shown in the next section as we dived further into the pre-writing exercises for the first paper (Field notes, 9/17/07).

Becoming a “writerly self”

Class brainstorming and the online posts were getting the students ready to draft their papers, but before completing the first formal essay, I wanted the students to reflect on themselves as writers. They were assigned an article from *College Composition and Communication*, “Becoming a Writerly Self: College Writers Engaging Black Feminist Essays.” As the author of this article, Juanita Rodgers Comfort (2000), suggests, I sought to give “meaningful instruction in using writing to assess, define, and assert who they are becoming as

knowing beings” (p. 558). Comfort (2000) espouses the theory that having first year writing students read the essays of black feminist writers will help them chart a course for their own revelatory writing. She spends some time discussing what it means to be “culturally grounded” (Comfort, 2000, p. 541) which fit into our on-going class discussion about how culture had acted on all of us.

Students reported that they heard the article asking them to find their own writer’s voice, meaning they should learn to write from their own perspectives: “you have to be who you are – it’s the only thing you can do” (RC, Field notes, 9/19/07). Discussion included the contention, made a number of times by one student, that everyone’s views should be respected no matter what they were (Giambi, Field notes, 9/19/07). Giambi’s comments seemed to reflect the relativism that appeared in the coding of the first prompt, making the assumption that all opinions were of equal import and validity.

I asked the participants to consider how they felt about Comfort’s (2000) assertion that “The discourses of the university are heavily invested with markers of white race, male gender, and middle and upper socioeconomic classes” (p. 543). Using our own institution as the example, much talk ensued over the gender and socioeconomic categories, with many students agreeing with Comfort on those points, but race was noticeably missing from the discussion. Given that 16 of 19 students labeled themselves white, it did not come as a big surprise that they might be hesitant to implicate themselves in a discussion about power and who controls it, especially this early in the semester. Chizhik and Chizhik (2002), mention this difficulty of addressing oppression when those in conversation are from privileged backgrounds (Field notes, 9/19/07).

The “minority group” students were not yet responding in class as frequently as they would begin to later on. But at this point, I was happy with their willingness to engage with a scholarly article with openness to the ideas and an affinity for the author. Comment was made by one student that she felt the author respected students since she was writing about how they were similar to essayists, and she was proud of herself for understanding an academic piece of writing (RC, Field notes, 9/19/07).

Taking an “active” role in the research

I began to feel as though I might be facilitating for a group that Comfort (2000) had referred to as people “who are personally invested in the world of ideas” (p.543). Though this thought may have been premature to say the least, the idea of it intrigued me and gave me the courage to follow another of the author’s prescriptions: the inclusion of “self-disclosures... through selective, insightful sharing” (Comfort, 2000, p. 545) with the intention of building more trusting relationships with my participants.

I began consciously revealing a piece of personal information in almost every class in hopes of developing more deeply the secure environment that I had envisioned (Noddings, 2003). In addition, I was allowing the students to see my own value system so that my biases might be more transparent (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). I worked under the assumption that self-revelation would display my own idiosyncrasies or weaknesses in a “give and get” way that let the students know I was willing to be a part of our discussion in the same way that I was asking them to be (hooks, 1994).

Rapport with most students seemed good at that point. I estimated there were 5 to 10 students who were not as quick to “buy in” to the social environment as the others; 2 or 3 students were reserved to the point of appearing totally disinterested. I addressed this seeming

lack of interest by using collaborative activities that allowed smaller group interactions among the participants. One or two students, often the same ones who seemed disinterested at times, appeared exasperated by the slow pace of our discussions. They were willing to contribute only at the most surface levels, but showed little patience for delving deeper into the topics when directly questioned (Field notes, 9/21/07).

Skin Again. In conjunction with the Comfort (2000) article, I read bell hooks's (2006) picture book, *Skin Again*, aloud to the class. The primary grade level focus of the book allowed the article's theme of truth to self to be driven home in a straight forward, yet gentle way. As Comfort (2000) had asked them to be cognizant of their own perspectives, I used hooks's (2006) text to generate a deeper look into what perspective that might be: "We are what our skin reveals, but it is not all we are" (p. 4); we must delve into each other's layers in addition to acknowledging the outside reality. In an initial reaction to the reading, all the responding students concurred with the text that we are individuals, not icons of a particular racial group (Field notes, 9/21/07).

Notorious took this opportunity to report that she took issue with the idea that she was bound by the expectations of others, expectations based on her supposed representation of a particular race. She considered herself free to listen to the kind of music she preferred at any given time and free to wear the kinds of clothing that suited her with no obligation to anyone to please others of her race in making these choices (Field notes, 9/21/07). Her comments reiterated the point she had made in the first online response about the obligation to be true to oneself.

Another student, Giambi, expressed similar views in relation to judgments he felt had been made about his clothing choices. Wearing clothes that others feel are traditionally "black" had garnered him stares since coming to college – a reaction he had not encountered in his large-

city home environment. Expressing that overall, he enjoyed the small, southern school he was in, the implied restriction on his choices was surprisingly uncomfortable. Other students noted that he was wearing “Polo” that day, exhibiting a “preppy” appearance more in line with the other students at the college. He resisted the implication that this choice had anything to do with the censure he had encountered, but was just another choice he was free to make. This “freedom” to be yourself was a theme that Giambi already mentioned in his online postings and class discussions. He came back to it many times throughout the semester (Field notes, 9/21/07).

Some of this conversation with Giambi was held in the few minutes after class – a time when 5 to 10 students began remaining in the classroom on a regular basis to add a final comment to a discussion thread or to engage another student in further discussion. I believe these were signs that class rapport was progressing positively and the PAR methodology was allowing the social process necessary to the continued dynamic engagement of the participants (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). We ended class with questions to ponder over the coming weeks: Who are you; what do you have to say? (Field notes, 9/21/07).

The media's representation of social justice

To add to ideas already generated for their essays, the students were asked to peruse the media for examples of social justice issues that they would bring to class for discussion. Some of the reports that students found included genocide in Darfur and the limited U.S. reaction to it; lack of media coverage for the Women's Soccer World Cup; the kidnapping, torture and rape of a young black woman; the rat infestation at an inner city school; and a U. S. group practicing polygamy. A number of students had pulled identical stories from media sources and discussion at first focused on the unfairness of all of these situations, a direct link to their original

definitions of social justice being the lack of fair treatment. Then they became more case specific (Field, 9/24/07).

George spoke out regarding the need to “act” when a wrong was being perpetrated thereby limiting the damage caused by those who would inflict it. Questions arose: Why had nothing been done about the rat problem, apparently a years-long issue? How could a powerful nation, the U. S. not lend its protection to those in mortal danger? Several students alluded to the fact that they had felt victimized or been subjected to traumatic situations in their own past. No one was specific at this point, but the experiences alluded to here are explicated in a number of students’ final papers; no one seemed comfortable going any further with explanations at the time. Even this small revelation did bring up the possibility that they may have taken this course because they had been sensitized to suffering at some personal level, a contention that receives attention in the final section of analysis (Field notes, 9/24/07). As drafts and revisions of essays were completed, other class reading assignments’ and discussions were on-going.

Online posting #3: It’s all about me

In a push to make the topics we had been discussing more personally relevant, as Marshall and Oliva (2006) suggest, I asked participants to respond to the third prompt with a social justice issue that they felt personally affected them. I expected much of what had been said in the first two posts: the importance of equality and respect or the need to work toward a better world, but I was surprised. Power distribution turned out to be the consistent theme of these responses. The initial coding found acceptance, authority, money, fear, and violence to be specific social justice topics by which they had been impacted. In sharing a few of these responses, I explain how all these initial codes led me to retain only power.

Power. An outspoken participant from the beginning, Lola obviously had strong reactions about feeling socially ostracized on the basis of economic conditions. “Here at our fabulous Austen College, social acceptance is a big deal ... it seems like here ... if you don’t have money you are worthless ... they [rich kids] don’t know what it’s like to be rejected or humiliated in front of EVERYONE! ... Thanks for the ranting opportunity” (Lola). Her comments were the first piece of data to address money in this way, though others followed suit in a later posting about power. Her sarcastic tone and the apparent pleasure she derived from having her say, reflected her in-class exchanges as well. Her anger and derision toward “rich kids” came out later on, couched in a discussion on cultural heritage. She reacted to her difference or the perception of it with righteous indignation and defensiveness toward her right to be who she was (Field notes, 9/26/07).

Gender discrimination had come up already, but only as it related to women in sports. Southend related a more domestic and probably more common form of gender bias with her comments on her family dynamics.

I have been discriminated against because I was a girl – not only by strangers and peers but even my own family ... I wasn’t allowed to go golfing with my brother and dad ... my dad would also rarely let me help him when he was building something in the garage or working in the yard ... he would ask my brother ... It’s frustrating to have someone trying to decide if something is right and fair to you, when they’re basing it upon their own feelings and opinions (Southend).

Her final sentence sums up the problem with stereotypes succinctly. Southend had a way of focusing in on the issues, not only as they related to her, but as they pertained to others as well. She was the participant who already stated that social justice was “about realization” (Southend).

The man who wanted everyone to just get along, Giambi, saw his advantages very clearly according to his posting. “It’s tough for me to really pick a social justice problem relating to race, gender, or ethnicity. I am a White American Male. I could do anything I want” (Giambi). In his comments in class to this point, Giambi had argued the relativist stance that everyone should do what is best for himself, and whatever that is, he should be free to do it. Here, he acknowledged that he was already free to do just that, though he seemed to recognize that everyone might not share that freedom or power. His frustration in class became a bit clearer: it is possible that he found it difficult to comprehend *not* having the power to set the world to rights.

That very lack of power is one of the things that made another participant’s words so poignant in comparison to Giambi’s strong statement. “When I hear about racial violence happening in the news to innocent people, it scares me to think that it might happen to me one day” (Notorious). In referring to acts perpetrated on people who are different from the majority or from those in authority, Notorious stated her personal fear. Coming from a forthright, interactive class participant, her words were effective at conveying a personal struggle: she was afraid, but she still had the courage to speak out.

On a less dramatic note, but not an insignificant one, a participant who had never spoken about gender-related social justice in class posted this statement about her personal intersection with bias. “Being a female I face many gender issues. When it comes to sports, it is as though men are always separating us from the games they play ... sports weren’t just made for men” (Princessa). She was not the first female in class to give voice to gender bias, but she added to the list of participants who reported being personally affected by it. Southend’s family experiences, mentioned in this section, as well as Goosey’s, Bunny’s and Sorella’s feelings about

the slights female athletes endure, brought the issue of gender discrimination solidly into this study. Though it is not addressed further here, it became a salient point later in another posting as well as in class discussions related to feminism (Field notes, 10/29/07).

A need for action. An idea that emerged in the first posting, the need for change related to social justice was brought up again by two participants. George stated her opinion that our obligation to care for the environment was a “universal issue” that needed to be addressed before it was “too late” (George). Belle, who already stated in the second posting that all people had an “obligation” to help others, also believed some things should change in order for social justice to become a reality: “...we don’t like things we can’t understand, and there are many things we don’t take the time to understand... sometimes the greatest people and friendships are found in places or people often overlooked because of fear” (Belle). It was interesting that Belle named “fear” a reason people avoid the very situations which might lead to greater understanding and less fear, while Notorious feared the actions of ignorant people. Fear was present all around and the “sociocultural consciousness” (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. xiv) of these participants was being awakened to it as they interacted with one another.

Who’s got the power?

Witness. As I coded these responses and found them all related to power, I was preparing for discussion on our first novel, *Witness*. Karen Hesse’s (2001) book, set in early 20th century Vermont uses free verse poetry to tell the tale of a town beset by racial unrest and violence as the Ku Klux Klan tries to infiltrate the citizenry. I chose this book because of the unique way that point of view is used. Each character is given the role of narrator to his own story, allowing great insight into the motivations of the characters. Much like real people, the characters are mixtures of love and hate, good and bad, making their revelations about racism and violence seem

believable. I hoped to allow room for students to reflect on their own perceptions and the possibility to move beyond them (Lowery, 2002).

The book discussion revolved around what students believed to be motivating the characters to act, namely fear. I don't know if the topic of fear arose because it was already on the minds of the participants who had written about it in the third posting, or if it was related solely to the text's mention of fear, which comes early on. Interestingly, it is a white male character, several years the senior of the young black female protagonist, who fears her because of her "witchy" (Hesse, 2001, p. 4) stares and strong personality.

Participants believed most of the characters in the novel were afraid of anyone who was unlike themselves. That fear drove the KKK to acts of violence; it drove some whites to join the KKK even against their better judgment; it drove non-whites to adapt behaviors that kept them out of the eye of the KKK; it drove lower class whites to seek a scapegoat for their station in life. It all came down to what Belle had described as fear of what we don't know or understand, what I coded as fear of powerlessness (Field notes, 9/28/07).

As the talk was all about fear, I asked the students who had the power in this novel to make others fearful. They responded with multiple characters' names. Many responded that there were different kinds of power – that held over others through fear – as with the KKK – and the kind that was gained by having inner strength that was respected by others. It was this "inner strength" (RC, Field notes, 9/28/07) kind of power that they felt the protagonist in *Witness* exhibited. With no time to discuss this point further, I made power the topic of the fourth online discussion board prompt.

Online posting #4: Power

In the writing prompt that followed completion of *Witness* and the ensuing discussion on fear and power, I chose power as the topic to give participants a chance to elaborate on the opinions they had already stated in class. I asked them to differentiate types of power, levels of power, and relate how power is gained, kept, used, abused, and lost. Their answers at first glance resembled their initial social justice definitions. They were esoteric: “power is the amount of control one group of people ... has over another...” (Sally). But most participants delved deeper and came up with examples to illustrate their points. “The Israelites who were subject to Pharaoh’s rule were powerless physically, yet their thoughts and feelings were free from his control” (Southend).

Obligation. When these prompts were coded, I found that some of the early codes remained viable. Obligation, in one case, the obligation to fight for self, came out in the first response as Southend explained that power could be used for evil purposes, but that “people just let it happen – out of personal weakness perhaps – showing they’ve lost power over themselves.” In that same light, the obligation was to remain in control of one’s situation: “you receive power by being better than someone else ... at a given task [otherwise] you would not be in the position to have power” (Molly Lou). Sally concurred that one gets “power by making the right ... choices.” Jenna followed this line of thinking as well as she related to the power that “followers” have to change their own paths should they not respect the leader: “if I didn’t respect them, they would be powerless” (Jenna). These participants, though they all stated the good and bad characteristics of power, came to similar conclusions. It was for the “followers” (Jenna) to decide to follow; they owned the power to remove themselves, at least mentally, from the “bad” (Giambi) people. Giambi, following suit with his other posts and discussion points, was the most

vehement in this regard: “no one has power to tell me what to do, I make my own decisions” (Giambi).

Relativism. Relativism reared up again with these responses. Several participants felt that culture and environment skewed how power was perceived or implemented. “Power depends on certain situations and places ... Different cultures have power over what people believe and think and how they feel ... Each generation teaches the next generation the roles they must play... Cultures can never be changed” (Princessa). The fatalistic ending of Princessa’s response was much like those of several participants who stated in earlier posts that social justice was impossible to attain. This opinion was a far cry from others who felt a personal obligation to be “better” (Molly Lou) and therefore in control, or not to allow personal “weakness” (Southend) to put them under someone else’s power. George managed to sit on both sides of this argument in her response: “almost everyone in the world has some sort of power ... but that power may not always be respected” (George). Her recognition of the need for others to respect the power that individuals might have was one of the only acknowledgements that individuals may not always control their own situations. Given that fact that her class discussion points were never relativistic, I took her words in this case to be confusion over how power could work in different situations (Field notes, 9/28/07).

Money. Finally, other participants made a distinct connection between money and position, and power. “Power can be gained as easily as being born into an affluent, Caucasian family and lost as easily as depleting economic stability...” (Blake). Lola concurred, but was blunter: “Money = Power” (Lola); while Goosey connected status to the equation. “Power is determined by status and status is connected to your wealth” (Goosey). The discussion on power was merely begun here. It arose again in more subtle ways throughout the rest of the study. It

appeared that *Witness* focused participant attention on a topic that was always in the background of the other prompt responses and discussions; as Ernst (1995) reported, reading allowed the participants to “use new information to revise their knowledge” (p. 76).

With the next two reading selections, the participants continued to focus on who was in control and how that control drove action, but they brought in a consistent focus on stereotypes that shifted the previously academic tone of class discussion and writing to a more confrontational one. These more “emotional reactions of participants” would begin the “social process of transformation” (p. 571) that Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) theorized as foundational to PAR.

CHAPTER 5 THE TONE SHIFTS

The use of talent – one's potential and capacities – becomes an open affair,
as situations spark experience into unexpected pathways.

We become catalysts for each other.

~ Harriet Cuffaro (1995), *Experimenting with the World*

Hierarchies: who is in control and why?

Kira, Kira. Class discussion began on the novel *Kira, Kira* (Kadohata, 2004), the story of a Japanese-American family in 1950s America, and *Tar Beach* (Ringgold, 1991), a picture book used as a coordinating text due to both books' emphases on the close family ties and cultural backgrounds of the characters. Females in the class reported "liking" the novel, even "loving" it, though it was "too sad" (Field notes, 10/1/07) for a children's book. Males in class found it less appealing; it "didn't address social justice" (Boo) as *Witness* did; it was "too girly" (Giambi). This instance was one of the first on which the class split so clearly along gender lines.

During class discussion, I chose three topics from the novel on which to concentrate: femininity, labor unionization, and measures of wealth. I chose these topics given the novel's focus on the family's financial situation and the subjugation they encounter due to their race, as well as the strong characterization of the mother and her imposition of cultural mores on her children. Students soon added "identity" as another theme category because several thought that the main character, Katie, was on a search for hers and it was that search that structured the novel. From these four topics came a slew of additional student comments (Field notes, 10/1/07).

Stereotypes. Femininity brought up gender stereotyping and the implication that "feminine" (George, Field notes, 10/1/07) connoted a delicate, insecure female who sacrifices her own well-being and independence in order to serve the needs of another. The students found this ideal incongruous to the reality of Katie's mother's life in the novel. Though she was

bringing Katie and her sister up to adhere to the gender stereotype of the female who needed to be taken care of, she was working many hours a day at a degrading, often physically demanding job in order to help her husband support the family.

Doing what's right. Unionization and wealth were included as initial topics because they brought together a picture of the power struggle that revealed Katie's family's Japanese cultural views on authority, obedience and loyalty. These views were often in sharp contrast to those of the white characters in the novel and brought up the opportunity to talk about the "right" way to handle situations related to power structures: do you fight back overtly; fight back covertly; acquiesce and remain in an unfair place? (Field notes, 10/1/07). This discussion brought up strong feelings from students on the "right" (Giambi, Lola, & Goosey, Field notes, 10/1/07). way to handle such situations: people should stand up for themselves and fight injustice; they should not let others control them.

Freedom. It was on this somewhat self-righteous note that the inclusion of identity came about. From the students' perspectives we should all be "who you are" (RC & Giambi, Field notes, 10/1/07) and stand up for our beliefs. The practical question of how this standing up might happen without infringing on the "rights" of others to do the same was met with unenthusiastic response. They believed that freedom should be had by all cultures, genders, religions, and "personalities" (Princessa, Field notes, 10/1/07), but not if that freedom for others took something away from them. "Reverse discrimination" (Goosey & Lola, Field notes, 10/1/07) was mentioned as an explication of what they meant here by taking things away from them, but there was no time to explore their meaning further. We returned to the term later on in another discussion.

Discussion on *Kira, Kira*, added an interest in cultural bias. Students brought up the practice of Japanese women having eye surgery in order to appear more European and Lynn's mother fixing Lynne's hair in a Western style even though it was inappropriate to its Asian texture (George & Blake, Field notes, 10/1/07). Reading had so far given students a chance to apply the biases they were encountering in the books to what was happening in the real world around them (Harraway, 1991).

Leaving the picture books behind. There was little discussion or comment on *Tar Beach* (Ringgold, 1991), even after I tried to initiate it regarding the author's use of her own heritage in the illustrations; she uses a collage technique reminiscent of her family's use of story quilting. It became apparent that the novels were eliciting greater discussion and better written participation than did the picture books. This fact may be due to my own presentation of the materials; especially the time spent with the texts, but may also have been related to the participants' inexperience with analysis of a mainly visual representation (the picture books). They seemed to take the novels more seriously and looked at the picture books as peripheral material. No one had yet made reference to a picture book in any writing, though many references to the novels had been made. Given the participants' reactions, I dropped the remainder of the picture books from the study and concentrated on only the novels and critical readings (Field notes, 10/26/07).

In the future, concentration on one or the other type of book might facilitate better use of the materials. Using picture books exclusively would force recognition of their significance and more time spent on instruction in how to interact with visual media could be helpful as well (Vandergrift, 1993).

Study progression: So we go on

Different students began speaking up in class on a regular basis, including one of the participants who had appeared disgruntled and non-participatory earlier on. There were still two students who were rarely participating in discussion and one of them, Tai Mai Shu, was not regularly posting to the online board. Otherwise, participation on the board was consistent and regular. I was using the class discussions as well as prior prompt responses to structure the discussion board prompts. One participant had already expressed appreciation for the chance to “rant” (Lola) on a topic of interest. Such “rantings” seem to have given participants a chance to say what they really meant as they had time to consider their words before speaking and the anonymity offered them protection from potential censure from me or their classmates.

The thought process. As I pondered the data, it became evident that its real value might lie in revealing the thought processes of early college students as they encountered issues and value systems with which they had limited experience. Their narratives could be used to peer into that process as it developed throughout the semester as they read and reacted to texts. The field notes have allowed some context as I continued looking into who was speaking out on what, as well as on the general dynamic of the class (Field notes, (10/1/07).

Work to this point to create a collegial environment by sharing food during class, sharing personal family information and experiences, and sharing my interests in current events had appeared successful. All of these actions were taken in hopes of making the classroom a safe, friendly place to be and making myself a part of that safe environment (Henkin, 1998). The level of personal sharing shown in the prompts and class discussion supported my assumption that many class members felt comfortable revealing private matters even when doing so may have shed a negative light on the writer/speaker.

Confrontation: The tone changes

In order to reinforce the value of our conversation on the cultural / racial bias present in *Kira, Kira* (Kadohata, 2004), I used another journal article, Raby's (2004) "'There's no racism at my school, it's just joking around.'" I was not surprised that the students jumped right in to the discussion on the high school students interviewed by Raby given that they had just left high school themselves. In order to capture as much of the conversation as possible, I used an overhead transparency on which to record the responses. Raby's article addresses whether teen girls think racism exists at their schools. Initially, the participants of my study described the article as "boring" and the interviewed girls as "stupid" because many felt that the girls contradicted themselves throughout their interviews (Field notes, 10/1/07). The girls do just that, denying racism exists while reporting clearly racist incidents.

The most interesting part of this discussion occurred just after the students began to express negative reactions to the article. In a lull after the "boring" and "stupid" comments, I asked the group why they thought I had them read this article. Answers were slow to come at first: "because it's about racism" (Sorella); "it gives examples of racism" (Belle); "it shows what counts as racism" (Notorious); "it talks about 'reverse discrimination'" (Lola). These last two comments brought the most elaboration (Field notes, 10/1/07).

What is discrimination?

Participants revealed that they, too, were often confused about what constituted racism and admitted that maybe the girls in the article really weren't that stupid. It was after all, "hard" (P-funk, Field notes, 10/1/07) to see yourself and your friends as racists. This piece of information, buried in the middle of a regular class discussion, became pivotal to the rest of the study. The difficulty of breaking out of the way things have always been was being reported and

several students affirmed that their own schools were much like those mentioned in Raby's (2004) article. Though they saw and heard discriminatory actions and comments regularly as had the girls in the article, the study participants also judged these occurrences "unimportant" (Sally, Field notes, 10/1/07) to the overall atmosphere of their schools, which were not "that bad" (Bunny, Field notes, 10/1/07).

Reverse discrimination was defined as "white defensiveness" to the "truth" (George); "an excuse" for continued discrimination (Blake); "black on white" discrimination (Sorella); "affirmative action" (Lola). It is a "bullshit term" (P-funk) used by those in power; there is only discrimination. It is "discrimination toward the 'norm' within society" (Blake), although she doesn't think it actually exists. This topic was intended to lead to discussion of the list of biases categories gathered from student online postings of definitions of social justice, but the group became so vehement as they got into what constituted discrimination that the topic took on a life of its own (Field notes, 10/1/07).

Calling names. What was political correctness? Who was just hypersensitive? One student shouted out that discrimination began with stereotyping and we should talk about all the stereotypes that led to bias (Blake, Field notes, 10/1/07). We never got past the "stereotype" category as "redneck" (Giambi), "white trash" (Lola), and "Yankee" (Sorella), were bandied about quickly and the voices became more heated. Three students faced off over the appropriateness of display of the Confederate battle flag as a representation of southern heritage vs. support of slavery. One student, self-identifying as Jewish during her comments, called another student on her repeated referrals to her roommate's Connecticut hometown, asking why the roommate's state kept being brought into play as a relevant issue (Blake, Field notes, 10/1/07).

I was forced to end the talk for time as well as to avoid degeneration of the group into increasingly personal verbal attacks. Several students shouted their requests for the chance to revisit the discussion in the next class. I assured them that we would return to the discussion as we had left it. Eighteen of 19 students were present and 14 of those 18 commented at some point in the discussion - I had used tally marks next to the names on the class role as people spoke out (Field notes, 10/1/07). Recording field notes during the class was inefficient and incomplete, though I added to them as quickly as possible immediately after class.

I made arrangements for the SRA to sit in on the next class in order to have a more objective perspective on the conversation as well as another recorder. The SRA used an observation guide I constructed to help her record the data as efficiently as possible. Included on the guide were categories for participant interaction, my own participation level, and the body language of participants.

Picking up the thread. The discussion was picked up in the next session even before all the students were seated. The SRA noted that we began by reiterating that stereotypes were the basis of discrimination, but the discussion returned to its Northern – Southern battleground (SRA field notes, 10/3/07). Southerners (Lola, Goosey, & Bunny) reported that northerners were mean and impolite. Northerners (Blake, George, & Sorella) reported that southerners were known to be slow of wit and action. Both groups mentioned the culture shock of adapting to a new geographic location. One participant (Giambi) noted that a large city made assimilation easier than the small town he found himself in at Austen College. Many participants stated that anywhere different from home could have a bad connotation because it took you out of your comfort zone. One had only to say something in the new place to be labeled an outsider due to colloquial speech and vocabulary differences (SRA Field notes, 10/3/07).

Race talks. It was interesting that geographic region was what sparked such heated debate; the discussion had, after all, begun on racism. Several comments led me to believe that race was so highly charged a topic and students had been so sensitized to political correctness, that their more raw opinions were couched in geographic terms rather than racial/ethnic ones (Field notes, 10/3/07). It is also possible that the participants' setting and demographic make-up, approximately half of the class being from the Northern U. S. and half from the Southern U. S., just made geography more personally relevant. However, the following participant comments reinforce the first possibility regarding race.

Three white participants voiced that they had "close black friends" (Sorella, Princessa, & Boo, Field notes, 10/5/07) in what appeared an effort to assert their anti-racist beliefs. Two other white participants voiced their hesitancy over how to physically describe a friend of another race: should they use skin color as a descriptor or tip-toe around it? (Belle, Field notes, 10/3/07). Should roommates of another race be deferred to in music choices because one type of music might be offensive to them? (George, Field notes, 10/3/07). Neither participant was comfortable asking the person of color in question. One participant from the "minority group" revealed that her own roommate situation was similar; she felt that the other girl deferred to her because she felt uncomfortable not doing so (Notorious, Field notes, 10/3/07). Notorious shared that she found this a humorous situation, though it made her uncomfortable as well.

These interludes were poignant in their honesty and in the naiveté exhibited by the speakers. They exhibited a strong curiosity as well as a desire to "do the right thing" (Notorious, Field notes, 10/3/07), but also feared appearing racist if caught asking the wrong questions or making the wrong assumptions. Participants were caught between the two options and so often did nothing at all. Paul (1987) addresses how the power of the culture may act on situations such

as this one to drive people's perceptions. Clearer communication was obviously in order, but these students were encountering the burden of many years of stepping carefully around the issue of race (Bothers, 2004).

It was my intention for the class to inspect our motives, learned behaviors, and cultural values more closely as we dived further into our reading and writing (Trites, 1997; Valdez, 1999; Zipes, 2001). At this point the inhibitions seemed to have been relieved a bit and some participants were more willing to engage in contentious conversations. I tried to facilitate these increasingly volatile exchanges without leading them and the SRA sat in on and recorded field notes over the next two class sessions, both to record events and to evaluate my role in the research.

They're all alike: The nature of stereotypes

As the topic of stereotypes had come up over the last few online postings, I worked to get participants to illustrate the word in class. Several students shouted out gender, religion, race and sexual orientation as categories where stereotyping was often applied (Field notes, 10/5/07). At this point another student, Notorious, stated that she thought all of the topics we had discussed in class so far related to stereotyping in some way; that if people didn't generalize about all of these groups, then bias and discrimination would probably have no basis and people might see the error of their ways (Notorious, SRA Field notes, 10/5/07). Many students agreed with her and wanted to use "Stereotypes" as the topic under which would fall many social injustices. The figure below represents those topics as they were worded and organized by the participants and recorded in field notes by the SRA and me.

Race		Geographic region	Money	Gender	Culture/religion	Sexual orientation
<p>Black</p> <p>Humor Is there a line? Embraces difference? Reinforces stereotypes?</p> <p>Food fried chicken watermelon</p> <p>Clothes Gangsta brands Timberland South Pole</p> <p>Sports track basket ball football</p> <p>Music hip hop rap</p> <p>Speech reveals class Ebonics Educated</p>	<p>White</p> <p>Labels redneck white trash</p> <p>Sports soccer hockey swimming</p> <p>Clothes Preppy brands Abercrombie Polo</p> <p>Music country pop</p> <p>Speech reveals class Country Standard English</p>	<p>Yankees jerks rude transplants</p> <p>Southerners Slow moving Dim witted Confederate flags White trash</p>	<p>Power old money new money social status education</p>	<p>Female roles domestic – laundry, cooking workplace – support roles appearance – sex appeal</p> <p>Male roles Gentlemen Leaders</p> <p>Female attitudes catty needy bitchy</p> <p>Sports lesbians powder puff</p>	<p>Muslim racial profiling retaliation/abuse</p> <p>Jews stinginess love Asian food</p> <p>Southern Baptists radical evangelical fire/brimstone</p> <p>Jehovah's Witness annoying</p> <p>Mormons polygamy</p>	<p>Gay men feminine fabulous fine as long as humorous serious not acceptable</p> <p>Gay women masculine lipstick lesbians butch lesbians</p> <p>Metrosexuals straight, but dress well</p> <p>Bisexual confused overly sexual slutty females are okay</p> <p>Marriage unacceptable who cares?</p> <p>Gays in military non-issue - “don’t ask; don’t tell” big issue to conservative military “types”</p>

Figure 3

Stereotypes chart from class discussion

Topics on the list were being shouted out in quick succession. To capture everything in the exact words of the participants as often as possible, I just wrote on the overhead transparency and did not ask for clarification during the initial phase of idea generation. Several of the points elicited much discussion and some argument.

One category that generated particularly vehement sentiments was, again, geographic region. The participants who aligned themselves strongly with a particular place, namely the U. S. “north” or “south,” began a heated argument over the “war of northern aggression” (Lola, Field notes, 10/5/07). Sorella jumped into the fray as a representative of the “winning side” to ask how anyone could fight “for slavery” (Sorella, SRA Field notes, 10/5/07). As the exchange became more volatile, the SRA tried to accurately document the main ideas of the argument so that I could later analyze how things had gone in this direction so quickly.

“But, that’s not what I meant...”

As slavery worked its way into the discussion, it became clearer that the regional topic was opening itself to the issue of racism; the discussion had come full circle. Participants appeared far less comfortable with this turn and began to sputter as they spoke and to revise their statements as they were spoken (Field notes, 10/5/07). Exasperated students who felt they were being misunderstood became heated as they tried to explain that they were not being racist in their comments, just “realistic” (Goosey, SRA Field notes, 10/5/07). There really are race differences, after all, and these differences show up, “such as in sports; everyone knows that black people are faster. If I am on the playing field and a black girl is facing me, I get so nervous; I know she will be faster than me” (Goosey, Field notes, 10/5/07). Other students concurred that these sports related proficiencies were common knowledge: “like in basketball;

they [black players] are just better” (Giambi, Field notes, 10/05/07); “and with track, same thing” (Lola, Field notes, 10/5/07).

Interestingly, the class never addressed which sports whites were better in at the time, though they had listed soccer, tennis and swimming initially as “white sports” (Field notes 10/5/07). Participants appeared unwilling to speak of anything in which they felt white people excelled in any particular way. It may have been that they had nothing in mind, but prior statements belied this prospect and led me to surmise that they were unwilling to make the comments because students feared appearing racist (Field notes 10/5/07).

The “minority group” students did not participate in this discussion, though all were present. I did not prod their participation, though other students continually looked at them while speaking as if seeking some kind of visual feedback (SRA Field notes, 10/5/07). None of the three “minority group” students gave any verbal feedback, nor did their countenances reveal any judgment that I discerned (Field notes, 10/5/07). I do not imply, here, that these students ever responded as a block contingent. They did not; though two of them were always seated together and the class often looked to them during racially charged discussions. All three “minority group” students spoke out on a regular basis, though generally not collectively.

None of the students in this discussion thought that her opinions about racial differences were tied to stereotypes, but to grounded facts (Field notes 10/5/07). This assertion led students to talk about the kernels of truth they felt lay in all stereotypes. Though everyone who commented agreed that there was truth in many stereotypes, none felt that it was good to generalize to a wider population because a few individuals might fit the stereotype, but that process was, unfortunately, viewed as “inevitable in the real world” (George, Field notes,

10/5/07). George's comment, coming at the end of class time, prompted the next discussion board prompt addressing the participants' experiences with stereotyping.

Online posting #5: Let's get personal

'Nerds, retards, and ugly kids.' Participants were asked to consider their own recent lives and talk about the most damaging stereotypes they had encountered. Many responses began with the qualifying statement that even though stereotyping was wrong, it "comes natural to everyone" (Molly Lou). And most participants felt that categorization of people along socially defined parameters was the intent of most stereotyping; those parameters being set by the group in charge. Being different from that group generally set up the negative actions the students related. General differences in appearance or behavior led to people being labeled "nerds, retards, [or] ugly kids" (Molly Lou).

Failure to align oneself with a particular group was also cause for concern:

at my school, if you floated around to different social groups without sticking to one, people thought that you were stuck up.... No one seemed to want to break the barrier between the set groups and just be friends with everybody. You couldn't fraternize with 'those' people or 'these' kids without having your reputation changed (Southend).

In a more specific sense, race, gender, economic status, and sexual orientation were categories with enough responses to warrant their own sections.

'Wigger's and 'gangstas.' Racial stereotyping reported by students ran the gamut from the assumption of a white "norm" (P-Funk), to the violent tendencies of people of color (Princessa), the "nerdiness" (Sally) of Asian students, and the intellectual superiority of whites (RC). Bunny, who is white and earlier related her interracial prom dating story, felt that her date had been stereotyped by her parents even though "he was a NORMAL person" (Bunny).

Princessa found that “Whenever there was a fight in school everyone knew it was between the black kids because they were always fighting with each other” (Princessa). Sally related a wider array of stereotyping from her school experience:

You had the white kids calling the black kids ‘gangstas’ or other names, Then you had the white and black kids calling other white kids who dressed ‘gangsta’ a ‘wigger.’ Then there was the making fun of the nerds/geeks, mostly Asian kids. If a black or white person was considered smart, they would be the social outcasts (Sally).

As damaging as these examples appeared, one of the “minority group” participants stated that she found one stereotype particularly damaged her own self-image. “The most damaging stereotype for me was most black people are stupid and ignorant. It was one of the reasons I lost my self-confidence” (RC). RC’s comment is particularly important when set in context with other comments she made in class about her difficulties with self esteem, high school grades, and her later revelation of living with domestic violence; all issues she felt might keep her from getting out of a life situation she wished to escape (Field notes, 10/8/07). More elaboration on RC’s background appears in the section on final papers, as it was there that she revealed the depth of her struggles.

‘Bitches’ and ‘sluts.’ Gender stereotyping had been raised in relation to females in sports as well as in domestic life, but another, separate issue, arose here. Two participants, both of whom had spoken about gender bias before, brought up the damage caused by the labels “bitch” (Goosey) and “slut” (Sorella). Though they were the only two to write on this topic, during class comment on this online posting, many students, both male and female, weighed in with concurring opinions (Field notes, 10/8/07). Sorella related the dichotomous view of promiscuity as it relates to males and females:

Boys, no matter how promiscuous, would never be considered a 'slut' ... he would instead be high-fived for his sexual conquests. Once a girl is stereotyped a 'slut,' there's no turning back ... people will never forget the stories, or lies, that got her into that group in the first place (Sorella).

Goosey's comments on female behavioral attributes revealed her frustration with gender related assumptions: "One of the most damaging stereotypes to me is bitch. People who don't know you...and just assumed that they [girls] are mean and rude" (Goosey). She argued that this moniker was applied to females who were "just shy or stand off-ish or opinionated" (Goosey). She went on to explain how unfair and damaging this stereotype was to her personally.

The haves and the have nots. "Reverse discrimination," mentioned in an earlier post and in class discussion, appeared here as well, though it was related to economic condition this time. There was the implication that because one had money "[I am] stuck up, conceited, and have no real regard for the world around me" (Boo). Boo was bothered by that implication since she reported her interest in social justice issues was on a world-wide scale as she had been to a number of different countries and had spent time living in several where she did mission work. From another economic perspective, Lola felt that the "jocks and cheerleaders" perpetrated the stereotyping of others such as "the ones that had little to no money, [received] reduced lunch, [the ones who] wore 'ol' hand-me-downs" (Lola). As she commented in class discussion on this topic later, she felt that the groups with the power of popularity behind them were free to make the rules for everyone else (Field notes, 10/8/07).

The 'faggots.' I left the sexual orientation stereotyping category until the end because many students reported during class discussion that this category was the one they felt had the most potential for lasting damage to an individual. The narratives addressed this issue only twice,

but when it arose in class, the discussion revolved around it for at least half of the class time (Field notes, 10/10/07). Sally's comments about one of her "best friends from high school," set this stage well:

I have never heard meaner words than what some kids said to him. They made comments on the way that he dressed, how he talked, and how he was only friends with girls. He was scared to come out and let people know that he was gay....Most of his abuse came from guys in our grade, they would call him... 'faggot' ...he took it like a champ though...he didn't let it change the person he was. And we all loved him for that (Sally).

The fear that Sally mentioned, as well as her use of the word "abuse," lent credence to the students' spoken opinions that this category of sexual orientation might be a significant one, at least for their age group as several participants mentioned the dangers of being gay in high school (Field notes, 10/10/07).

Giambi concurred that "If you were considered gay, there was not much you could do. If you didn't show you were tough or have people to back you up, the gay kids would be constantly made fun of" (Giambi). The emotional intensity of these posts supported my earlier contention that the participants were invested in social justice issues, but tended to "fence sit" until the issue affected them directly. They were caught between fear and the need for action: fear of being a member of one of the maligned groups while also feeling obligated to "back up" (Giambi) the people under fire.

Rising awareness

Harriet the Spy. Reading in our next class text, *Harriet the Spy*, a novel by Louise Fitzhugh (1964), began in the middle of our stereotypes discussion and though I had chosen the book for its attention to stratification of economic classes, I did not lead the discussion down that path initially. The students found stereotypes in the novel and pursued that topic first. Their

focus was on the children who populated Harriet's class: the poor boy, Sport, who is Harriet's friend; the pretty little rich girls who are popular and revered by most of the other children; the homely Pinky Whitehead who is avoided by most of the other people in the book (Field notes, 10/10/07).

When I asked why they thought I had chosen this novel, I was surprised by their answers. No one in the class could figure out how the book fit into the theme of the course. They reported that they "got why I chose *Witness*" (Sorella, Field notes, 10/10/07) since it was about racism and the KKK; and they understood the racial diversity represented by the picture books so far; but they did not see a social justice topic in the pages of *Harriet the Spy* (Fitzhugh, 1964) – it was "just a regular kids' book" (Lola, Field notes, 10/10/07). After some discussion, and questioning on whether there were examples of tradition, culture, or economic status in the book, participants were able to identify several potential social justice issues, but did not recognize those areas before questioning (Field notes, 10/10/07).

Can you "see" it? This inability to "see" became a recurring theme, one that the participants had already initiated in the second posting: If one does not "see" (Belle) what is happening, then nothing can be done about it, no action is necessary. Several participants mentioned this need for "vision" (Boo) if social justice advocacy were to take place. At this point, students brought up the way Harriet and her parents treated Ole Golly, dismissing her without comment and assuming that her private time was unimportant in comparison to the needs of their family (Field notes 10/10/07). The people that Harriet saw on her detective runs were also brought into focus: the old man who lived with his cats and barely had enough food for himself; the wealthy old woman who did nothing but lie in bed all day; Sport, who budgeted and cooked for himself and his writer father. The people's differences became more visible and

Harriet's attitudes toward others were judged harshly after this awareness dawned (Field notes, 10/10/07).

As the participants had begun to discuss Harriet's blunt insights into other people's lives and feelings, I used their feelings about Harriet's inquisitive nature to generate more discussion and writing with the next online prompt.

Online posting #6: Who are we?

The way Harriet saw the world and treated the people she spied on bothered the participants. They found her blunt to the point of rudeness and lacking in compassion for others (Field notes, 10/10/07). I considered these factors along with the participants' former comments on the need for vision when I structured this prompt. The directions asked them to consider a number of things they had previously talked about in class and in their writing: power, stereotypes, and the ability to "see" (Belle) situations clearly.

Seeing. Harriet's lack of understanding of others and her inability to see her own faults while being adept at pointing out those of others were common responses (Field notes, 10/10/07). I include these examples not only to highlight those points, but also because these participants connected Harriet's behavior to their prior statements in some way. Belle, who had previously written about the need to see difference as a positive thing and to look inward at our fears, thought Harriet

had a huge ability to name and judge everything and everyone that comes along her path, and most often it's things that are different than her and things which she doesn't understand ... it's much easier to give regard to others' faults than it is to judge your own (Belle).

Along the same lines, Goosey, who had written and talked about being considered “bitchy” by others, admitted that “I tend to overanalyze people’s flaws” (Goosey) as Harriet seemed to do. Blake, a very outspoken participant often at odds with others in class, including Goosey, found a connection between them on this point: “I like this question, because I think a lot of characteristics that I do not particularly like in Harriet, I see in myself” (Blake).

Continuing this personal realization wave, Southend agreed that “reading *Harriet the Spy* (Fitzhugh, 1964) showed me that even though I wish I didn’t, I do make mean judgments about people” (Southend). She went on to support the contention made by several other participants in an earlier post that these tendencies to judge were normal: “who doesn’t make these judgments? Harriet says what everyone else is already thinking” (Southend)! Hello Motto expressed similar sentiments, but added an interesting statement about the impetus for such behavior to the end of her post. “If you have to judge other people and bring them down, you are just trying to get satisfaction for yourself and remind yourself that you are better than them ... But most likely, someone is doing the same thing to you” (Hello Motto). Her insight into a phenomenon that other students brought up early in the course, that of discriminating against a group in order to elevate your own status, was a significant tie in to this novel. It was not something I had put forth in class, as I had never considered the connection.

A different perspective. Giambi stood out in this discussion, once again, as someone who believed he knew himself well and liked the way he was: “unlike Harriet, I know where I stand [socially] ... and I have no problem with it” (Giambi). Lola, another strong personality who was often coupled with Giambi in a dichotomous stance against the rest of the class, veered into relativism in her response. She often contended that she was a product of her southern upbringing and was proud of her heritage, a stance that eventually brought severe negative

comments from the class in a later discussion (Field notes, 11/16/07). Her comments in this post were a precursor to a volatile class discussion:

I put myself in so many different shoes, I feel as though I'm a better person because I'm more rounded and understanding! I feel so open minded that I could argue with the fact that racism is wrong. I could argue with anyone about all the wrong things in the world being right! I put myself in the shoes of those who see it as being okay and I understand how they could do it and say it and believe it (Lola)!

This passage is so powerful when connected to Lola's later comments about slavery, southern heritage and race, that I am dumbfounded that it was only in reanalyzing the prompt responses that I found the significance between the response and her later comments. Lola appeared to be trying very hard to be anti-racist, but her comments here implied that her anti-racist rhetoric was just lip service to a politically correct cause in which she did not really believe (Field notes, 10/22/07).

Hierarchies. Notorious was reasoned in her response and brought up a word used in a prior class discussion on power, "hierarchy," (Field notes, 10/22/07). "I observe the world around me and take notes in my head, but ... I observe myself also. I know what 'hierarchy' I am in" (Notorious). Like Giambi, she stated her self-awareness, but her mention of note taking grounds her comments in an analytical framework that reinforced her acknowledgment of her placement in the stratification of society. An earlier discussion of hierarchies within power structures had led to comments on how race, gender, and money situated people along a power continuum (Field notes, 10/1/07). Those with the most money were said to be at the highest point on the hierarchy while race and gender factored in on a lesser scale (Field notes, 10/22/07). The topics of hierarchies, power, and bias were picked up again many times, especially during the impromptu, after-class talk sessions that had begun to occur.

Just between you and me

After class. It was the chance comment by students, the interaction after class, which provided some of the greatest fodder for deep class discussions after this point. Often, it was the same group of six students who relayed these comments: Giambi, P-Funk, Lola, Sorella, Blake, and Goosey. Giambi and Lola regularly stayed after class alone to talk to each other and to me. This pair often espoused the dissenting opinion in class discussions and may have been seeking a sense of acceptance from me for their dissent from the majority view. I was not usually in agreement with their political and social views, but I was careful to allow them to discuss their own points of view in these impromptu settings without any overt feedback from me. I made the effort to be receptive and encouraged them to continue speaking out in class (Field notes, 10/22/07).

These discussions usually took place right after class which was just before the lunch break, so there was generally no rush to leave. Conversation usually began with personal chit-chat on how their day had been or how other classes were progressing. The students quickly advanced to what was on their minds in regard to our class and usually revealed that they had discussed the issues outside of class as well (Field notes, 10/22/07). Giambi and Lola, who intentionally voiced their “we’re just friends” (Lola) status to me, appeared unlikely friends at first glance, one being local and rural and the other from the urban Northeast. However, they shared a working class background which they both mentioned in class frequently. One, however, espoused very anti-racist, anti-gender biased views, while the other strongly declared her immersion in “southern culture” to be a “part of who she is” (Lola), though negated the idea that her cultural background was racist in any way.

Giambi and Lola may have felt my disagreement with their views, and they seemed to seek out whether I held their opinions against them. As these meetings went on, I surmise they found me a respectful listener who allowed them the space to air their beliefs. I did comment or question them in these conversations when my own values were impinged, such as in our informal discussion on the rights of homosexuals. Both participants voiced their personal aversion to “seeing” (Lola) anything overtly homosexual while defending the stance that neither of them was prejudiced against homosexuals and would treat them well unless they were too overt in their behaviors (Field notes, 10/22/07). I asked if this statement did not mean they were saying one thing while meaning another and though I anticipated some antagonism from them, they both agreed that they were somewhat confused about their feelings on the subject (Field notes, 10/22/07). Though they each continued to participate regularly in open class discussion, the depth of their opinions was revealed more often in these end-of-class talks.

The other students, P-Funk, Sorella, Goosey, and Blake, who stayed after to talk or sometimes caught me outside of class, tended to stay on a less regular basis than Giambi and Lola. Several asked if I taught the next section of their required writing course as they liked “the way we talk about things in this class” (Sorella, Field notes, 10/22/07). One of these students, a female who described herself as “conservative” said she did not get an opportunity to think about “all of this stuff” (Goosey, Field notes, 10/22/07) often. After a bit of conversation about what “stuff” she meant, she relayed that her classes were generally filled with only the content of a particular subject, “it’s all about learning the vocab or the test material” (Goosey, Field notes, 10/22/07), apparently leaving little room for her to try to make application of how the new knowledge fits in (or doesn’t) with what she already knew or believed.

Though I was often caught off guard by some of these discussions at the end of class, I found them a validation of the secure environment I tried to create as well as a time to check my own understanding of the participants' views, something that Denzin and Lincoln (2005) believe is foundational to ethical qualitative research that strives to mitigate the effects of the power differential in PAR.

Not just the teacher's pets. These six students represented only a subset of the entire group, but other students began to follow their lead as the course continued and they, too, stopped in to talk when class was over or before it began. By the end of the course almost every student had come by to reflect on a topic or to discuss personal anecdotes related to it. In retrospect, the simple observation of another's course would have been much easier to document; however, it was the chance comment or interaction from my own students that often led to the most interesting piece of narrative later or to the most contentious and productive discussion. Had I not been in my own classroom, I don't know if these things would have happened (Schwandt, 2001; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

The feminist view

As *Harriet the Spy* (Fitzhugh, 1964) and our next novel, *The Hundred Dresses* (Estes, 1944), were both written long before the study participants were born, it was relevant to address why they were still valuable to our course. I used Kay Vandergrift's (1993) "A Feminist Research Agenda in Youth Literature" as a starting point for this explanation because it addressed the issue of the "literary canon" (p. 23) and its impact on power hierarchies and culture. The author's views on using literature to construct learning so closely fit the parameters of this study that I wanted the participants to read her words first hand and I asked them to consider several questions as they read: 1) How is a canon formed? 2) Why should we continue

to read certain, older texts? 3) Where do stereotypes appear? 4) How is a feminist approach significant? Participant reactions to the four page article were surprising.

A bad word. They were fixated on the term “feminist.” Many students wanted to know why I had chosen to be gender biased by reading something that promoted feminism (Field notes, 10/24/07). As I was somewhat taken aback by this initial query, I chose to ask if they had considered the first three questions as well as the last one. This tactic, possibly not the best way of beginning the discussion, led to a bit of conversation about the “classics” of literature and how they came to be such. Students also mentioned that our two most recent selections were over 50 or 60 years old (Field notes, 10/24/07).

But, my efforts to lead the discussion through the questions in order were overtaken by the students who wanted to talk more about gender and feminism. It was questions 3 and 4 of my earlier instructions that had struck a chord with them. So I followed their lead and we began what became a two-day diatribe on feminism (Field notes, 10/24/07). It was clear early on that a definition for feminist or feminism would be a good beginning if any clarity were to be reached in further writing or discussion. I put the terms “feminist” and “feminism” on the board and asked for word associations. This activity generated “radical,” “extremist,” “man-hater,” “butch,” and “nag” (Field notes, 10/24/07). I then asked for a definition for either term and George provided, “one who fights for the equal rights of women” (Field notes, 10/24/07). Several students concurred that this definition suited them as well, but when asked if that changed any of the terms they had just listed as descriptive of feminist and feminism, they only added “advocate” to the list (Field notes, 10/24/07).

Discussion ensued over the negative connotation of the majority of the words they had chosen. Many students reported that though they believed that women’s rights was an issue they

believed in, they had such a bad image of feminism in their minds that they would not like to be identified as feminist (Field notes, 10/24/07). As I hoped they would explain their opinions in more detail if allowed to ponder them and write anonymously, our next online prompt asked that they talk about why they would or would not like to be identified as a feminist.

Online posting #7: are you a feminist?

No. way. The narratives immediately became as dichotomous as the discussion had been along the lines of equality being good, but feminism being bad. Participants wrote statements that conflicted with what they had said in class and even with what they had already written in their own posting. “I am not a feminist...Having equality is good but wanting to be better than males is bad” (Giambi). Notorious reported that “when I hear the word ‘feminist,’ I think extreme” but went on to say she still “believes in some of their views” (Notorious). Belle did not want

to be defined as a feminist for the negative connotations that come along with it...a feminist is someone with very strong views who is kind of close-minded to the other side and the realization that some realities aren't discrimination...I agree with equal rights for everyone, women and men (Belle).

Maybe. Hello Motto, like Belle, spelled out the dichotomy of thought on feminism: “I am not a feminist. I am for equal rights. I believe women have every right that men have” (Hello Motto). Lola also worded her narrative in a completely dichotomous way: “The good feminist is very passive and still understands that there are some things women can't do as well as things men can't do...A bad feminist thinks that women can do everything better than a man” (Lola). Her use of “passivity” to connote the “good” (Lola) feminist was reminiscent of a female fairy tale character-type, a good girl who doesn't become too aggressive or curious. Southend at first

appeared to be supportive of feminism, but ended her narrative with a resounding “baloney!” (Southend) in regard to supporting the strength of women.

Two other classmates were somewhat in agreement with the thought that feminism was basically a good thing and stated that while women should not be discriminated against, they should also not assume they will ever reach equality as it is “unrealistic” (Sorella) and is really only possible “to a certain extent” (Goosey).

Yes. Only one participant did not equivocate in her support of feminism and feminists, though there were several participants not represented in this posting as they did not answer. Jenna contended that she thought “that feminists are looking out for women’s rights, they aren’t trying to take over the world, they just want equality”(Jenna). She continued that she found certain gender assumptions irritating: “I don’t like that people think it’s weird when I drive my boyfriend around” (Jenna).

The realities of gender differences and the level of discrimination toward women, or men, were major issues for these participants, but I found, as with earlier postings, unless the discrimination had touched them directly, they were unlikely to embrace the issue. Interestingly, several of them had already mentioned their distress over gender bias as it related to sports and social interaction, yet they did not bring those issues up in the context of feminism (Field notes, 10/26/07).

Power, again

The Hundred Dresses. As this discussion on feminism continued, the class was also reading *The 100 Dresses* (Estes, 1944). The novel’s focus on economic status led the participants away from their feminist conversation and into one about how bullying happens and why it is

allowed by observers, victims, and by those in authority. Students reported liking this book more than they had anticipated; most had expressed doubt that a book so old could have much to say about social justice (Field notes, 10/29/07). Wanda Petronski, the main character in the novel, is put through much torment by the other girls in her class who disparage her both because she is poor and because her last name connotes an ancestry foreign to others in her town. In the end though, the bullying girls learn that they have done Wanda an injustice and they are truly sorry.

Who “has your back?” After brief comment on the negative feelings toward Wanda’s tormentors, most of the discussion revolved around the bullying they had seen in their own school years prior to college. Giambi mentioned the need for someone who “has your back” (Giambi, Field notes, 10/29/07), a comment he had made before and one about which he wrote as well. His belief that a friend should lend support in cases of bullying was widely held by other students as well, but very few of them actually exhibited the behavior during class as Giambi did. He made a common practice of defending Lola whenever she spoke out and was attacked, or even questioned, by other students in regard to her beliefs (Field notes, 10/29/07). As Lola was commonly in disagreement with the class on many issues, Giambi had many opportunities to show how he had “her back” (Giambi). Lola returned this behavior toward Giambi when he was the odd man out in a discussion, but she also added her contention that the bulk of bullying was perpetrated by the “popular” or “rich” kids who “controlled the social climate of the school” (Lola, Field notes, 10/29/07) and little was done by those in authority to end the bullying.

Other students also weighed in on the authority figures’ responses to the bullying they had encountered; most of these accounts were of teachers and principals who did little or nothing to stop the abuse of other students. Goosey countered Lola’s argument that it was the popular kids who did the bulk of the bullying; in the private school she attended she found “teasing” and

“kidding” (Goosey, Field notes, 10/29/07), but no real bullying. Her comments on this issue reflected those of the girls in the Raby (2004) study who did not see the racial discrimination going on around them. Goosey’s observations strove to put a more palatable spin on bullying behaviors, possibly because she set herself among the popular group of students often perpetrating the “teasing” (Goosey, Field notes, 10/29/07).

In bringing the discussion around to the novel and the behaviors that constituted bullying, several points were made by a majority of the students: 1) Teasing is a form of bullying as it seeks to gain power or exert power over others by holding them up to ridicule. 2) Bullying is similar to what happened to blacks just after the Civil War when poor whites were cruel to them in order to remain at a higher social echelon. 3) Bullying continues because those in authority either don’t know how to stop it or think the victim needs to “stand up for themselves” (Giambi) in order to make it stop (Field notes, 10/31/07).

I asked the participants how any of this discussion applied to social justice. Students were quick to say that bullying was all about social justice and who had power over whom. Power was controlled by the popular kids around them in school and wielded harshly against those who failed to conform to expected behaviors – those kids who did not fit into an accepted stereotype or those who were different in some way (Field notes, 10/31/07).

Stereotypes, again

We came back around to the stereotypes discussion and Boo reiterated that it was really bullying behavior by those with authority that forced people with little power to behave in a certain way, a sentiment she had expressed in an earlier online posting. She went on to say that she did not necessarily mean that those in authority were adults or teachers – often they were

other students – students who were allowed by adults to wield authority over others through their popularity, intellectual ability or their athletic prowess (Field notes, 10/31/07). Interestingly, anecdotes of just such behavior were highlighted in the final papers of Tai Mai Shu and Blake (see the next chapter).

Discussion ended as I introduced the next novel and asked the students to consider how it might relate to others we had read so far. As they began reading *The Tale of Despereaux* (DiCamillo, 2001), they were also coming to the 8th online writing prompt as well as endeavoring to complete the second required essay.

Weaving the threads together

The Tale of Despereaux. Initial response to this novel about a mouse who becomes a princess's knight in shining armor was subdued. The question regarding the novel's application to social justice arose again as it had over several of the other book choices. As only the first part of the book had been completed as discussion began, I chose not to answer their questions at that time and the discussion moved quickly into the "unfairness" (George, Field notes, 11/2/07) of Despereaux's treatment. The use of "fairness," a code chosen early for the online responses to reflect the students' definitions of social justice, was of interest as other students had just reported the inability to see a social justice connection. We were not far into the discussion before others picked up on the social justice connection as well.

Difference. Students hated the way Despereaux's own mother treated him just because he was "different" (Hello Motto, Field notes, 11/2/07) and had very large, unattractive ears. Other students began to chime in on the unfairness of Despereaux's situation: unaccepted by his own family, drawn to human pursuits and finally removed from his community for violation of the

community's laws. Not all students concurred, however, that Despereaux's treatment was unfair; a couple believed he had made choices he knew to be illegal and was called to pay the consequences in a fair manner (Lola and Goosey, Field notes, 11/2/07). These students' responses were not a surprise as they had already distinguished themselves with their conservative approaches to following the rules set out by the family, community, or government. There lack of sympathy for the "rightness" (George, Boo, P-funk, Field notes, 11/2/07) of Despereaux's cause did shock other students, though. Students were taking stands consistent with their statements in online writings and in other classroom discussions regarding individual rights vs. the rights of those in authority and the stands brought up many questions.

Power and freedom. Power: who wielded it, and with what authority? Was Despereaux oppressed and within his rights to rise up against that oppression? Several students thought he was oppressed and had an "obligation" to "follow his heart" (Notorious, Field notes, 11/2/07). Notorious's response was also not a surprise given her previous responses to prompts in which she spoke of the obligation all people have to be themselves and to stand up for what was right. Most students concurred that Despereaux had every right to fight for his own freedoms, but the two students already mentioned, Lola and Goosey, were joined by Sorella and another student in the defense of the mouse community's action in sentencing Despereaux to death for his violation of mouse laws. These students believed that the upholding of the law was sacrosanct and trumped the individual freedoms of anyone who might fight against its imposition (Field notes, 11/2/07). As the class time wound down, I mentioned that the week's online prompt covered such issues as had been discussed, namely oppression and its aftermath.

Online posting #8: Oppression

The eighth prompt was short: The oppressors are as damaged by oppression as the oppressed. Your opinion? I was succinct because I wanted a continuation of the class's discussion in this more anonymous venue. The idea had arisen that Despereaux's family and even the other mouse leaders were themselves hurt by their treatment of Despereaux (Field notes, 11/2/07). As it turned out, this prompt had one of the lowest participation levels of any to this point. Students later reported that they did not answer it because of time constraint, not because they were uninterested in the issue, a point supported by their continued interaction in the discussion on the same topic the next class period (11/5/07).

Who is hurt? Prompt responses were separated into two main categories: 1) power level of the oppressor and 2) loss of diverse environment. Belle's words were explicit in the first category noting that "the oppressors are at a different power level than the oppressees...the oppressors got to choose what they were doing" (Belle). Other respondents went further in trying to explain the reasons for oppression: "Oppressors are feeling anger inside of themselves, so they take out their anger on others...People who oppress others can often have been oppressed themselves" (Molly Lou). Blake concurred that the oppressors may be "equalizing the playing field and making themselves feel that they are not the lowest rung of the world, but rather, one up on those who they themselves oppress" (Blake). Blake's position in this prompt is especially interesting in light of her revelations in her final paper about mercilessly bullying a classmate in order to feel more power herself.

Lola's response was vehement and interestingly mentioned slavery, a topic of major contention in an earlier class: "The oppressors become foul creatures...the oppressors lose their moral sight...Ex. The 'higher' slaves may see the 'lower' slaves as worthless" (Lola). The loss

of “moral sight” Lola mentioned was completely contradictory to her argument in class as she defended the practice of slavery as long as it was being used to safeguard something she held more dear, namely her family or their livelihood.

Southend supported the second category of these responses: The oppressors are “losing out on seeing and sharing the gifts and talks of the people who are oppressed” and they “don’t even know themselves anymore” (Southend). In *Despereaux*, the rat, Roscuro let his hate consume him...and he missed out on experiencing true love and friendship” (Southend). Sally was the dissenting responder who believed that oppressors “are the ones that have the control” and they were not the ones hurt by the oppression they foisted on others.

Classroom discussion about *Despereaux* and the character’s relation to this prompt continued into the next class meeting briefly, but was cut short by the need to focus on the second formal essay and other composition issues. The next week of class was spent in these other pursuits. The papers that were being written, though not used in this study were calling up issues of heritage and cultural background of the participants. As we worked on the drafts of this essay during class, I was privy to the connection between the participants’ topic choices and their relationship to the ideas we had been discussing in class. Their focus on connections to family and heritage became the topic for the next writing prompt.

CHAPTER 6 THEIR FINAL SAY

My will shall shape the future. Whether I fail or succeed shall be no man's doing but my own. I am the force; I can clear any obstacle before me or I can be lost in the maze. My choice; my responsibility; win or lose, only I hold the key to my destiny.

~ Elaine Maxwell

In their own words

Online posting #9: Heritage

A number of cultural backgrounds were claimed by these participants: Polish, Cherokee, Irish, German, English, Scots, French, Canadian, Italian, African, Jamaican, Austrian, and Romanian; almost one category of descent for each participant! Many participants had voiced these associations during class as well and had spoken several times of the impact of the “way they were raised” (Lola, Field notes, 10/29/07) on their family interactions and those with others outside the family.

Given the literature previously mentioned on the importance of early experiences on social justice perceptions, it was not surprising that the students referenced their own backgrounds throughout the course (Narayan, 1997; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). The final papers also reflected this bent as the participants based the knowledge they had built to this point on the experiences they had had and on the opportunities to reflect on those experiences. What became most significant about this prompt were the similarities among all of those descent categories: 1) the importance to the individual of family and cultural traditions, and 2) the dichotomy between assimilation within U.S. culture vs. the retention of cultural values.

Family and culture. The first code, family and culture, was illustrated by several students. George, Blake, and Notorious mentioned a number of attributes they believed came from their heritage. George traveled extensively to live with family in Ireland and in the northeastern U.S.

“Ever since I was born I’ve been living back and forth between Ireland and the US...we have a huge party on St. Patrick’s Day... [we] inherited the superstitious trait from...the fishermen and farmers” among my family (George). Though she had not traveled as much as George had, Blake also was well-grounded in her family’s traditions: “My grandpa grew up in Romania where his family were gypsies... we have many family recipes which we keep secret and pass on as a coming of age” (Blake). Notorious mentioned her African and Jamaican heritage especially as it related to her grandmother with whom she spent much time, “My family is very superstitious, especially my grandma...she has remedies for everything” (Notorious).

Keeping culture? The second code within this prompt, assimilation vs. retention of cultural heritage was exhibited most clearly by two of the participants, Southend and Sally. Southend represented the retention of culture as she explained that her British grandparents, who live in the U.S. “always had tea at around 5:00 in the afternoon when they came home from work. We still say adorable English expressions in our house...My mom sings old folk songs her great aunt and uncle used to sing...My dad often wears his Scottish clan tartan” (Southend). Sally reported the opposite phenomenon in one of her examples: My actual last name used to be **** which shows my Polish heritage a lot, but when my great grandparents came to America they changed their last name so they could fit in better and be more accepted in the US” (Sally). But, she also supported the retention of cultural heritage as well in another part of her narrative: “We eat a lot of Polish food and my Grandpa could speak fluent Polish” (Sally).

Keeping consistent. A few other participant narratives were notable because they supported the other writings and discussion points of those students. For instance, Giambi reported that his Italian family “stick closely together” sharing all holidays over big meals and that “family comes first” (Giambi). These points are ones he came back to many times during the

course and the values reflected were supported by his actions in support of his friend Lola and his statements about looking out for yourself while also supporting those close to you.

Though she comes from a completely different cultural heritage, noting her connection to Britain, Germany and France, Lola names family togetherness and very structured family hierarchies as significant to her as well: speaking of her family's love of a tight schedule for family gatherings, she says, "[my grandpa] likes a schedule. But I do too! That way I always know when to take off work and when to be where!" (Lola). This love of structure that Lola mentioned was something that she brought into many class discussions and other narratives. Her adherence to what appeared to be a rigid way of thinking put her in contrast to many of her classmates on a regular basis.

I had written this prompt in the hopes of using the narratives to provide context for what the students were writing in other prompts and saying in class discussions. The responses did help with that contextualization, but they were not as full as I had hoped they would be. It was not until I had read the final essays that I knew they had been only a jumping off point for the students' thinking as several of them included large portions of their own cultures in those final products which are analyzed further on in this chapter.

Online posting #10: Pseudonym choices

This next to last prompt was answered by only 6 participants and their answers were of little value to the study. I included two recurring themes that were mentioned by the six responders: the importance of family and a connection to life experiences that have helped shape who they have become. Each of these themes was mentioned in other online posts, in class discussion, or is discussed in the final paper section.

The pseudonym I found most interesting, Molly Lou, which I assumed might have been taken from our first reading, was not explained. That participant related that “it just kind of came to me” (Molly Lou). Others, such as Giambi and Belle, were chosen to reflect a personal interest, in sports and Disney, respectively. No participant reported that their name choice was significant to them.

Online posting #11: Consistent definitions?

In asking the participants to once again construct a social justice definition, I was seeking two things: to know if their definitions would remain consistent from the beginning of the course to the end, and to check for the addition of details that might reveal something about the use of the texts or the thought processes of the participants over the course of the semester.

Some participants who answered the first definition prompt, did not answer in this final format. I was very disappointed about this omission, but the other narrative postings that came in between helped with fleshing out each participant’s feelings, even if those ideas were not set out directly in response to this last writing prompt. Excerpts from all participants’ postings for this prompt appear in the figure below. They are set into the same coding format as the responses to the first prompt for ease of comparison.

December 7:	
Equality / Fairness to all	<p>“Social justice is the amount of equality and fairness giving to different ‘types’ of people. (Sally)</p> <p>“Social justice to me means everyone receives equal opportunities in life...” (Molly Lou)</p> <p>“... finding equality within every aspect within a society; be it gender, race, personal views, etc.” (Sorella)</p> <p>“...equality of all races and all human beings” (Bunny)</p> <p>“Social justice is giving the same respect and acting the same way towards the same person, no matter how different they are.” (Hello Motto)</p> <p>“Social justice ... it’s about everything. Race, abuse, equal rights, and class. ... It’s about being fair to everyone and treating people with some type of respect.” (Giambi)</p> <p>“... I believe social justice is one treating another with the same respect and kindness one would want in return.” (Lola)</p> <p>“... everyone should be treated with equal respect. Everyone deserves the same opportunities in life whether they are white, black, rich, poor, gay, straight, pretty, ugly, young or old, and so on.” (Jenna)</p>
Freedom from categorization / from prejudice	<p>“Social justice is not being looked down upon and not being categorized. Social justice is prejudice and discrimination not existing, and getting to know a person before you judge them. Social justice means justice for all, and not just those at the top.” (Belle)</p> <p>“...being able to be who you are and who you want to be freely.” (Notorious)</p>
Relativism related to definition	<p>“I’m probably more confused than ever ... let every person base what they think social justice is upon their own emotions, opinions, and experiences.” (Southend)</p> <p>What one person believes social justice is, another person is there to shoot it down (Giambi)</p>
Negation of possibility of social justice	<p>“Our emotions get in the way of basic reasoning ... even if we say we aren’t going to judge someone we do it all the time ...” (Southend)</p>

Figure 4 Final online writing prompt

Fairness and equality. It was apparent that the original codes are still relevant, though there were some shifts among the details and among where participants’ comments located themselves among the code categories. As can be seen in a comparison of Figures 8 and 11 many participants’ statements changed very little. Sally is still equating social justice with fairness and equality, but has left off her negative contention from the first prompt that equality doesn’t “really exist” (Sally). Lola added a golden rule-like ending to her final definition: “I believe social justice is one treating another with the same respect and kindness one would want in return” (Lola). Southend is still confused and relativistic. Notorious is still calling for people to be themselves without fear.

Negativity and relativism. Some participants added or deleted more significant pieces to their definitions. Giambi goes from “Social justice ... it’s about everything. Race, abuse, equal rights, and class. ... It’s about being fair to everyone and treating people with some type of respect” in the first prompt to his negative, relativistic response in the last: “What one person believes social justice is, another person is there to shoot it down” (Giambi). Belle expands her definition with more situational details about what equality is and how it happens: social justice is “getting to know a person before you judge them. Social justice means justice for all, and not just those at the top” (Belle).

It was significant that “obligation” a strong code in the first prompt, did not appear here. I have no explanation for this occurrence. It is possible that the students had already addressed obligation in other ways throughout the course. It is also possible that it became a less salient code. Based on the final essays that were coded at the end of the study, I have chosen the first possibility as more probable. Many participants work obligation heavily into the final papers, a fact that is discussed in more detail at the end of this chapter.

The focus group interview: Tying up the loose ends

The group interview was held during the last hour-long class meeting and was audio-taped and attended by the SRA. The protocol included only two questions as I had found the group to be verbally interactive and capable of directing the discussion without much intervention. I kept field notes as well in order to contextualize the audio transcript. The SRA’s notes were taken separately and I analyzed them along with my own and the transcript.

The “North-South thing.” We began with the following questions which were written on the board at the front of the class: 1) What was the most memorable experience from this course? Why? 2) What reading from the course was most relevant for you? Why? I explained that we

would begin the interview with the first question and they were free to move about the discussion at the will of the group. Multiple students responded immediately: The North-South thing; that was most memorable; that was the thing that got me going; that was the weirdest thing. Sorella added independently, “definitely the Northern-Southern thing, I couldn’t believe it, but...” (Sorella, Transcript, 12/7/07) and Lola concurred, “for me too – that was it” (Lola, Transcript, 12/7/07).

I had expected this to come up, but was a bit surprised that it was first on the list of importance as it had occurred about 6 weeks prior, and I said as much to the class and asked them why that particular discussion was so memorable. Blake answered with attention to the “whole Confederate flag discussion. I had no idea people felt that way about it...that people could see that as a positive symbol” (Blake, Transcript, 12/7/07). Sorella followed up with a statement on the differences between people in the North and South and Lola jumped in to represent the Southern side: “My blood pressure was the highest that day! The flag thing was a big deal” (Sorella, Transcript, 12/7/07). Blake concurred that the South had a “different way of looking at things” (Blake, Transcript, 12/7/07). At that point a general rumbling could be heard on the tape and field notes reported those near one another talking in low voices to each other throughout the room (Field notes, 12/7/07).

“Tunnel” vision. This North-South topic was one of the only times in the course when difference took on a negative connotation that was voiced by the participants. The “tunnel” vision that Boo mentioned in an earlier narrative was revisited by multiple students who were indistinguishable on the tape and by Lola who was very clear in her stance during the former discussion. Sorella stated that “[use of the Confederate flag] represents...blindness to what is actually there” (Sorella, Transcript, 12/7/07). Lola countered with “we see home...it’s the way I

was raised...I don't really think about it as a human rights issue...it's not the holocaust you know...I would fight for my own no matter what it took...[why] rehash it; it's over." (Lola, Transcript, 12/7/07). Sorella added that those in the north were taught "from a more unbiased view" (Sorella, Transcript, 12/7/07) than those in the south while Notorious appeared incredulous at Lola's response: "I can't believe...no matter how much they were like the family...were they getting paid to work? No. Slavery is wrong! It is always bad to keep people from being free" (Notorious, Transcript, 12/7/07). Notorious's words were much stronger here than during the original class discussion in which her comments were minimal (Field notes, 10/3/07). George, consistent in her support of personal freedoms throughout the course, concurred with Notorious: "I can't believe you could think anything other than that I [slavery] is wrong" (George, Transcript, 12/7/07).

Giambi brought his continuing support of Lola into the discussion: "it's [slavery] just the way it was – it was accepted...no one's fault," and Lola adds, "they didn't know any different" (Giambi and Lola, Transcript, 12/7/07). The participants continued to isolate Lola and Giambi in the discussion until Goosey jumped to their defense: "it sucks that people see us [Southerners] in the ways they do – racist and prejudice and all that... it is not our fault...it's just the way things were" (Goosey, Transcript, 12/7/07).

Lola, Giambi and Goosey took a position that the way things were, was unchangeable and therefore not the fault of those who perpetuated the slavery system. The relativism exhibited in that view as well as the implication that change was impossible was discrepant with the narratives that most students posted throughout the course, though the impossibility of social justice was a theme in the first posted definition of social justice. Giambi went so far at this point in the conversation to say "If you don't like the south go back to the north...just go back. You

don't have to stay here" (Giambi, Transcript, 12/7/07), implying that the answer to injustice or disagreement is to leave the situation rather than try to change it, another discrepant piece of data. Prior to this time, action related to change had been seen as a positive attribute.

The rest of this discussion topic degenerated into the majority of the participants attacking Lola and Giambi, though not Goosey, who made only that one foray into the discussion. I chose to interject and asked the group if they wanted to stay on the topic at hand or move in another direction as we were approximately half way through our class time.

"Hurtful" stereotypes

Sally, who had not spoken yet, asked to move the discussion onto feminism. She reflected the aforementioned openness to change as she related her memory of a prior feminism discussion. "I found the discussion about feminism interesting. I thought of feminists as loud and annoying. That was my first thought as the topic came up, but that opinion changed as we began to talk...some of them [feminists] are just trying to get their point across" (Sally, Transcript, 12/7/07). Sally's comments about feminists being loud and annoying brought stereotypes to the mind of Goosey and the discussion topic gravitated to stereotypes in general.

After looking at the writings of some of her classmates in prior narratives, Goosey was "surprised to see" what some of them thought were damaging stereotypes. She had not thought about the hurt caused by categorizing people, though she did admit being hurt by a stereotype herself: "bitch – that one is really hurtful to me. I've had that said to me a lot" (Goosey, Transcript, 12/7/07). The part of Goosey's comment that is most interesting to the study findings immediately follows her relation of her own experience with stereotyping.

It's like homosexual stereotypes – they are bad too I guess, but they don't apply to me, so it's not as damaging you know? I guess it has to be used against you for you to think of it all that much (Goosey, Transcript, 12/7/07).

Goosey's revelation that she did not see the damage that stereotyping could cause unless it applied directly to her was another example of the need for increased student experience and reflection. She was not averse to seeing the hurt that could be acted on others by stereotyping once she had had a chance to ponder how it had hurt her. Her field of vision increased and she seemed at least more willing to think about how others might be impacted by the same phenomenon that impacted her. Goosey was an interesting case as she followed these comments with the pronouncement that very little of this discussion applied to her since she was “in the middle” (Goosey, Transcript, 12/7/07) of most arguments and did not have to be on one side or the other. She was the consummate fence sitter, supporting the relativistic code that emerged early in the study.

Epiphanies. Other student comment on stereotyping followed and many sought to build a hierarchy of the worst stereotypes: “Some are definitely worse than others – more hurtful” (George, Transcript, 12/7/07); “the changeable ones are less hurtful” (Sorella, Transcript, 12/7/07); “I'm not killed for being a bitch like Matthew Sheppard was for being gay” (Notorious, Transcript, 12/7/07). The implication of these participants' words was that the “worst” stereotyping left the victim open to the most severe repercussions and that there are categories over which the victim has no control. Several students mentioned that Goosey could stop “being a bitch” if she wanted to rid herself of the stereotype, but that “trailer trash” (Sorella, Transcript, 12/7/07) kids could not change where they lived. Sorella's comment shifted the discussion away from homosexuality and on to economic disadvantage and she has a revelation about the economic disparity she observed in her public, but mostly affluent, high school and the

contentious discussion that always arose over whether school uniforms should be instituted (Field notes, 12/7/07).

It just now occurred to me – right now! We should have had uniforms. It was the rich kids who didn't want them – the uniforms, because it would take away their uniqueness. I'm really upset with myself now – I didn't know any better (Sorella, Transcript, 12/7/07).

Sorella had another, similar epiphany in her final paper and her remarks supported the finding of the students' willingness to seek change as long as they can ground it in their personal experiences.

George concurred with Sorella that the uniforms worn by her private school classmates helped them remain on more equitable footing as little time was spent judging the looks of other girls, and she even waxed nostalgic on the issue: "I miss my uniform...you didn't have to be afraid of being judged for how you looked" (George, Transcript, 12/7/07). Sorella furthered the discussion by bringing in one of the novels as a reference point: "*The 100 Dresses!* That book was so true. It's big here you know...what your clothes are. People judge you here" (Sorella, Transcript, 12/7/07). Notorious jumped in to this part of the conversation on being judged, "I hate that...people stereotyped me all the time here" (Notorious, Transcript, 12/7/07).

A shift to self interest. An abrupt conversation shift occurred just after Notorious's comments and Goosey took the floor to bring homosexuality back into the discussion, again applying the stereotyping of homosexuals to her own situation, women in sports, and several of her classmates supported her comments. "You know how it is for us – the stereotyping about lesbians and all" (Goosey, Transcript, 12/7/07); "like because we always have on sweat pants and all" (Bunny, Transcript, 12/7/07); "lesbian athletes like us don't dress up" (Sorella,

Transcript, 12/7/07); like you look like crap, so..." (Princessa, Transcript, 12/7/07); "whatever" (Goosey, Transcript, 12/7/07).

RC speaks. After this exchange, all of which was not audible on the tape, RC, a "minority group" student who made few comments during class broke in, speaking to Bunny, Sorella, and Goosey: "You three are interesting" (RC) and Sorella responded, "So are you – I feel that way every time you talk;" to which RC responds, "Thanks" (RC, Bunny, Sorella, & Goosey, Transcript, 12/7/07). RC followed up on this discussion of homosexual stereotyping by changing the subject once again and her question was phrased and delivered as if she had been waiting some time to pose it.

With the stereotypes thing – I have this friend that wants to work in the media – and I find that is interesting – the media – the way they do things. And it made me think – I want to ask everyone in here – how does the media affect the way you view black people? (RC, Transcript, 12/7/07).

Responses were slow in coming, but finally George was the first, though she did not answer RC's question at all, but stated that she preferred to "have something real to base judgments on" (George, Transcript, 12/7/07). Princessa did answer the question, but denied that the media, in this case, specifically films, had any impact on her views as "they are just actors." (Princessa, Transcript, 12/7/07). Goosey related the question back to her own situation once again and couched her answer in the realm of sports media. "Athletes – that's what I notice in the media. I think about that issue a lot – how I judge black people through sports. Like black people are fast – can jump. That's how I see it...I don't really stereotype though...It's true" (Goosey, Transcript, 12/7/07).

Sorella's answer to RC's question appears at first to be similar to Goosey's,

I don't see color so much in the media as I do in real life. Like I watch a movie or show or something and it doesn't matter what color everyone is. I had a black fiend in high school, but once I was speared from her I didn't have that real association anymore. The only black people I knew after that were gangsta types – or like on Cops. But I don't think the media influences all that much (Sorella, Transcript, 12/7/07).

Sorella had often been a participant who reflected on her experiences openly in narrative and spoken venues, so her lack of reflection in this statement was surprising. She did not appear to catch the discrepancy in her characterization of blacks as they are seen on Cops, as “gangstas,” as a representation of how much the media has influenced her. Only Notorious added another answer to RC's question when she responded that depictions of crime on television are filled with black perpetrators. RC listened to all of the answers, smiled at each participant as if they were speaking directly to her, which several of them were, but she did not add anything to her original question (Field notes, 12/7/07).

Time's up. At that point time had run out on the interview. As I closed the discussion, several participants provided a spontaneous verbal evaluation of the course. “I have really enjoyed talking about all of this stuff. I wish we could keep going. I'm going to miss you” (Blake, Transcript, 12/7/07); “I'm going to miss you and all of this – it's been really great having the chance to talk like this” (Sorella, Transcript, 12/7/07); “this class almost made me want to do education so I could take more classes with people who are like you – I never had the chance to talk about all of this stuff before now without getting yelled at” (Goosey, Transcript, 12/7/07); “yeah – I've like it; it's been interesting” (RC, Transcript, 12/7/07); it's been fun – some of its been a little crazy” (Giambi, Transcript, 12/7/07); “it was good being able to be yourself and say what you think. I didn't always agree with the conversation, but it was ... I don't know what it was (laughing)” (Lola, Transcript, 12/7/07).

But, no one's leaving. The interesting part of this exchange was what was going on in the class at the time. Time was running out for discussion, RC and the other three students sat facing each other on opposite sides of the room as they had all semester, but the sincere friendliness of their demeanors, smiling, nodding toward one another, making consistent eye contact, was a change over what had been there before. Up to the interview time, I do not remember any of these students speaking to the other either during discussion or outside it, but apparently each side had been thinking about the other as was reflected in both Sorella's and RC's interview comments. After the interview was over, Sorella and RC did stop to converse as the class ended and side conversations were initiated. Independent conversations continued for 10 or 15 minutes as students trickled out of the room slowly, finally leaving Giambi, Lola, and Sorella as the last participants (Field notes, 12/7/07).

I found it difficult watching them leave as I, too, wished I had another semester to spend with them. I was surprised by the depth of these feelings. I am usually sorry to see the semester end as I have formed a relationship not only with particular students but with the group as a whole. It was this group dynamic that I mourned the loss of as the students filed out that last day. It seemed it had taken almost the whole semester to build the camaraderie and rapport necessary for open discussion and even then, not all students participated as freely as others, though the quieter ones had begun to speak up more toward the end (Field notes, 12/7/07).

I have to use this: The final essay

The group interview was originally meant to be the final data collected for this study. However, after I had read the final essays, which were graded in the days preceding the interview, I knew I wanted to use these culminating essays to finalize this project. Though the 19 papers added a sizable amount of data to my original plans, not using them would have left a

hole in the data that I found did my participants a disservice. They were all gracious enough to give me permission to use their papers in their entirety (permission was requested after they had received their grades and after papers had been returned to them). All of the participants returned their original papers to me at the end of the course and the analysis of those narratives appears here.

A bad beginning

The last few classes of the course focused on completion of required work, but as we began the final paper assignment, a self-reflection on how they came to be who they are, there was a great deal of resistance to the assignment. The day topic ideas were due, only about half of the students had completed the assigned task. I mistakenly assumed that this was a work ethic problem and spent the class working with the students who had done the assignment while the others were told to complete it. Thesis statements and potential paragraph topics were due next, when, again, several students ignored the assignment. My own irritation was met with frustration from participants who finally voiced their concerns with the assignment: “I thought this topic would be easy; I don’t know what you want; I don’t understand what we are supposed to say” (Field notes, 11/14/07). I was surprised by the hesitancy and frustration over the topic – one they had been willing to discuss throughout the semester. I was most confused by their hesitation to even begin; so we spent class time recapping some of the reading in hopes of mining the texts for details that might spur their own thought processes (Field notes, 11/14/07).

I can “see” clearly now. Finally, by the end of the class, questions and comments from the students became more refined and I was able to focus on what turned out to be the gist of their problem: in putting their focus on what I wanted, they were having trouble believing that I really meant for them to be truthful and to put their entire focus on themselves. They were also

worried about being “too informal” and “too personal” (Sorella & RC, Field notes, 11/14/07), either of which they believed to be non-academic. Questions also arose about the peer review process we had used for all the formal writings to this point. Concern over revelation of details too personal to be shared among classmates made them anxious (Field notes, 11/14/07).

I was embarrassed to have overlooked this particular fear after trying so hard to remain open to the power discrepancy between them and me; I was blinded to the interpersonal relationships that existed among the participants as well. I changed the revision process to include only help from me or from any other peer reviewer with whom they were comfortable. This accommodation appeared to alleviate their relevant fears regarding privacy and they appeared able to begin the assignment.

Revelation. Thesis statements with paragraph details finally came in and I was amazed at what they were willing to share. Many of their theses were intensely personal and some were painful to read. Several students appeared pugnacious as they discussed their theses with me during private meetings; others whispered their questions during class time (Field notes, 11/16/07). As we worked through the fundamentals of refining the writing, I found they were willing to reveal a great deal of personal information. No wonder they had been struggling initially! They came through the writing process of these papers with courageous revelations.

With the reading of each draft, I remembered why I wished I were teaching the second part of their writing course next semester. As diverse in personality as they were, they had grown into the group dynamic that provided a place for each of them to speak and write. They carved out niches for themselves that allowed them to interact with me and with each other in varying degrees of depth.

Context. Most of them had physically positioned themselves in the classroom early on and remained in the same seating location the entire semester. One or two moved to accommodate friendships that formed in and out of class. One student who was absent often and generally was unengaged in discussion and assignments sat alone toward the end as the other students who had been near him found other seat mates. Three female students at the front of the room were sports teammates; two of them among the most outspoken of the participants. Two non-white females, also at the front, sat together, both regularly participating, though not until midway through the course. Two students, self-identified as “working-class” sat together often supporting one another’s assertions during class discussion (Field notes, 11/16/07).

Frustration, fear, action, disappointment, loss

Another issue that arose was the nature of what started to appear in the longer, graded papers. Connections were being made by many participants between what was said in class, online, and what was being fleshed out in greater depth in their longer, attributed papers. As it was not my intention to use the graded papers for my research, I did not code them at the time the paper was completed, though the field notes reflected what was happening in class during the writing activities and that observation data was analyzed. After reading their first essays, I realized that I would like to include excerpts from their work as the participants were taking ideas initially addressed on the online discussion board and making personal applications from them in their papers. I chose to ask participants’ permission to include the final paper. Written permission was granted by all participants and they returned their papers to me at the end of the course. In referring to the data from these papers, I identify the authors by their pseudonyms as I had access to the list of their real names after the course ended.

Sorella

Sorella was one of the most outspoken participants in the study. She brought vivacity to the class climate, though some other students found her abrasive, a fact she noted herself in class discussion (Field notes, 11/14/07). As one of the speakers on the Northern side of our dialogue on the Civil War and slavery, she was very open with her opinions and willing to be confrontational with other students (Field Notes, 10/1/07). Her beginning of the final narrative was hard fought. Sorella battled with me for days over whether I was serious about the informal style I had said they could use for their final papers. She counter argued that she had been caught before between what a teacher said and what was true later on when grading took place. After much persuading and use of models of other essays written with an informal style, she finally decided to take me at my word.

Her beginning let me know right away that she had, in fact, believed me and was “going for it” (Sorella, Field notes, 11/18/07). “When I was first given the assignment to write about myself, I was thrilled. I’d been waiting nineteen years for someone to be genuinely interested in my story, but as I sat down...I realized there’s more to me than I thought...I became frustrated” (Sorella). She dealt with this frustration by going to the journals she had been keeping for a number of years and rereading her own writing in order to get the perspective she sought for this assignment. Her voice was so clear; her paper spoke to me as if she were standing in front of me; her wit and sarcasm permeated the piece. After an account of adolescent misbehavior and its repercussions, she described falling into self pity,

One night while I was dictating my emo thoughts into my journal, I stopped and read over some of the things I had written...Something crazy happened...I stopped crying. I thought to myself, ‘what are you doing? How the hell is anything going to get better if all

you do is sit and sulk all the time? Enough already...you screwed up – learn from it and MOVE ON!’ (Sorella).

Like many other participants noted in their papers, Sorella sought a behavioral change from herself – a shift toward a more mature way of being.

Lola

Lola also spoke of experiences that she found frustrating and “embarrassing,” but she did not come away from those experiences with the same feelings as Sorella. Lola, who had spoken out clearly all through class, usually in defense of an unpopular stance on one of the social justice topics, also showed a defensive tone in her final essay which went back many years to events she said “affected who she is now” is a major way.

Embarrassment...all through elementary school, middle school, high school, and even now, in college...embarrassment has been a close friend of mine...and I am sure it will stick with me for the rest of my life. All because of a stupid blue dot on my forehead” (Lola).

Lola received an injury to her face in early elementary school when a classmate’s pencil penetrated her forehead and left part of the pencil lead under her skin. The remaining mark apparently darkened over time and is still visible. Lola recounted the teasing she endured throughout her schooling because of this mark and though she keeps a somewhat humorous tone, she expresses anger over the bullying as well. Authority figures in her schools did nothing to stop the teasing and she found herself “fighting back” with her own taunts directed at others and finally fought back through physical means as well. Given the near invisibility of this mark, it was shocking to me that it caused Lola such anxiety, but it appears to have fed the defensiveness she still retained in her interactions with the other participants. Alongside her account of being

taunted by “rich kids” (Lola) in an earlier narrative, this narrative and its focus on teasing and bullying may help explain Lola’s zealous defense of her “heritage” (Lola) throughout the course.

P-Funk

P-funk led this section of his essay with a stream of consciousness piece on his life and his failings:

I am a white, skinny, middle class male. I am Catholic by birth, not choice, a middle child in between two girls, and the son of two lawyers.... I tend to believe I am more affected by the negative that happens in my life than the positive...my diagnosis of Crohn’s disease, my finding out about my dad’s alcoholism and his recovery, the ensuing divorce of my parents, and the shooting and paralysis of my best friend (P-funk).

He went on to discuss his behavioral degeneration from middle school, throughout high school, up to the shooting of his friend, and describes himself as “acting like a character from MTV’s *Jackass*” (P-funk). Drug and alcohol abuse permeated the narrative and culminated in admission of a depression diagnosis.

His account of a friend’s hospitalization after being shot was heart wrenching:

he looked dead, there was blood everywhere and tubes in just about every place you could fit one. I busted out crying and woke him up.... I tried...not to look weak or scare him....I went back to school...where I became more depressed...I went to class, came back and got in bed most days (P-funk).

I share these excerpts, not because they were the most tragic of the narratives, but because they allow a focus on the mindset of this student as he prepared to share his views on life. “I’ve learned that most if not all of my problems are caused by me and that I can change my situation...I realize how many people are less fortunate” (P-funk). His attention to the need for and the possibility of change and of his relation to others with problematic lives is significant and

he was only one of many participants who voiced similar feelings of personal responsibility and connection to others.

P-Funk also added an “Afterword” to his paper in which he speaks directly to me as the instructor. I include it here in its entirety to add validity to the claim that the environment that was generated during this course was of paramount importance to the revelations of the students and to their learning.

Sorry it's [the paper] so late. I don't have another excuse. I really enjoyed your class and I am sincerely sorry if it did not appear that way by my lack of effort. Sadly I actually tried harder in your class than my others which will obviously yield limited results in my GPA. Oh I'm also sorry about missing pizza day, I was looking forward to getting into a huge argument with half the class for the full time. But seriously your class was one of two I actually enjoyed and the other class my teacher was not very good. If you teach a similar class at a higher level please email me with the course as I would like to take it. I hope you have a good break and a merry Christmas and happy new year. By the way I'm not sucking up I know this paper is not very good and I don't expect rave reviews (P-funk).

George

George discussed her frequent travels back and forth to Ireland for visits with family and though the initial thought regarding her situation might have been that she was affluent and fortunate, she described quite a different experience. Her immediate family went to Ireland for an extended stay to care for a dying relative, one living a very rural life style to which she was unaccustomed. “My life in Ireland taught me compassion and appreciation for family and life....This experience enlightened me to different aspects necessary in life...generosity, kindness, loyalty, compassion, charity, love, independence and at times dependence” (George).

Goosey

Goosey reflects on her life's beginnings and the people who have helped form her and in doing so she also identifies loss as a catalyst for her sensibilities.

From the moment my mother found out she was pregnant at the young age of 18, he [Goosey's father] wanted nothing more to do with me. ...I have gone 18 years without knowing who he was and with only seeing two pictures of him, one of those pictures I found on Google...the truth is there is a huge hole inside of me (Goosey).

It was her grandfather and mother who were the positive influences in her life and she credited them with teaching her "high morals...to always strive to do my best...and take advantage of the opportunities I have" (Goosey). Her prior statements in class made considerably more sense in the context of these life experiences: Goosey had said numerous times that people must be responsible for themselves and work for what they want rather than expecting it to be provided by others.

Boo

Boo concurred with Goosey on the importance of family to her current views on life and she, too, illustrated this contention with a tale of loss. Boo's family, part of whom lived in Japan were visiting the Thai coast when a tsunami devastated the area in 2004. All of her family members were saved, but the experience initiated a desire to do charitable works in Thailand. "I researched service groups that traveled to Thailand...and thought of a mature way to present it to my parents...they immediately refused, but...my second attempt was successful, I just had to raise the money to go" (Boo). She was 16 years old when she took the 30-hour trip to Thailand for 3 weeks and was quickly overwhelmed by the enormity of her decision.

I saw flashes of rubble, broken houses, wandering dogs and lost children. I could feel my heart sink deeper into my chest, was I ready for this? ...During the day we worked on

picking up destroyed homes and beginning to build new ones. In the afternoon and evening we were able to spend time with the children of the community...I felt bad that they were so naïve about their situation and how little their life had to offer, but at the same time I was happy that they were protected from the real world and realization of the restricted opportunities and life of complete poverty (Boo).

This last part of Boo's account in which she despairs for the life situations and ignorance of the children in the village reveals the very attribute that I tried to describe in chapter one as I wrote about the idealism and zeal of preservice teachers. She is a member of the preservice teacher sub-group and her clarity in stating this phenomenon is helpful to my earlier explanation of it. She elaborated on this idea a little further into her paper as she wished for the wherewithal to "offer each of them [the children] more in their life, such a hope for leaving their village, hope for a better home and hope for better health" (Boo). The presumption that the children, or their families, would want to leave the village, or that in doing so they would find a better home is part of the Western idealism exhibited by a number of preservice teachers, including those from the pilot study preceding this research.

However, Boo is able to bring back home a growing awareness of the disparities of the world and her position within them.

I arrived home with a new perspective on my life....As I drove from the Philadelphia airport, through the city, and out to the suburbs by my house, I remembered...Just like in Thailand, there was a clear separation of money...When I arrived at my house, I stood outside and looked at it. Six bedroom house, two acre yard, pool, TVs, bathrooms, real showers, kitchen stacked with food; my family is fortunate...Not only can I compare myself as being fortunate to the people of Thailand, but also to people across the US...I woke up early the next morning.... I wrote letters to my entire family, friends, and loved ones telling them about my trip...I urged them to put themselves out there in the way I did, and see life from a different angle....I hope to motivate my family members to do

something different....After my letter....my mom, her two sisters, and their daughters went to Mexico to build homes. A group of my friends travelled to New Orleans to help with hurricane relief. One set of grandparents visits a soup kitchen every Wednesday; one brother will spend his summer in China (Boo).

She clearly impacted a number of people in the wake of her own experiences with people different from herself. Such action was what several of the participants, including Boo, had called for in earlier writings.

Jenna

Boo was not the only participant for whom travel outside the country lent a new perspective. Jenna, though she described herself as mixed-race, also related her immersion in the affluent culture of her hometown, a place of “postcard-like beauty,” a “tidal-pool bubble” that was “beautiful and elaborate and wealthy” (Jenna). It was a service project trip to Costa Rica during her senior year of high school that opened up the world for Jenna. She was scared at first as she arrived to work in and on the local high school, “we were both [she and a friend] thinking the same thing: get me out of here!” but she hung in there and learned to cope with “no makeup and no hair appliances, just us” (Jenna). She described her encounters with the people as “one of the most rewarding aspects of the trip” as she never imagined actually making friends with the people in the village. As many participants reported earlier, stereotyping was a common occurrence in their experience and Jenna admitted to holding stereotypes of the people with whom she was working:

I sub-consciously grouped the other kids...into social stereotypes: Geek, Jock, Brat, Sleaze...but I realized that all of the labels I unfairly assigned were false....The Geek ended up being the kindest, most down to earth person....However the most surprising friendship...was with two girls who had...bad reputations...I found out we had a lot in common and were so fun to be around...Each person taught me something that I will

carry with me forever. They changed me. What I learned...stuck with me, and I never went back to the person I was before (Jenna).

Princessa

Princessa's story included tragic loss and the effect that loss had on her and her relationships with others. She described her parents' separation and her father's ensuing despair. As he left the house following a disagreement with her mother, Princessa worried about him and later learned of his death by suicide:

My dad said I may never see him again....He told me he loved me and was going to miss me more than I could ever imagine. He said goodbye to my sisters and took off....my father burned himself, but was still alive....he had third degree burns all over his body....The next morning I woke up and my older sister told me he had passed away (Princessa).

In addition to this horrific experience, a sports head injury a couple of years later left Princessa with amnesia that continues to the present. She related that she used these experiences "to build my strength of self-esteem and self-confidence" (Princessa).

Belle

Another participant moved from her own near death at birth through the loss of her mother's husband (prior to her birth), and finally to a national loss to situate her feelings about her own beliefs. Born at just over one pound, she never had any of the problems that doctors predicted and she described a "blessed" life (Belle). September 11, 2001 was significant to Belle; she was the only person to write about the terrorist attacks on the U. S. She reported that she learned "change can happen in an instant...we are lucky to be free" (Belle). She was the only participant to bring citizenship directly into her narrative, though many others alluded to it and its obligations. But it was the more personal losses, that of a high school friend and a beloved

pet, that brought about her reflection on loss and its impact on her. Her friend's death at age 17, was a new experience; "this was the first time death had affected me at such a close level" (Belle). A short time later her golden retriever's death two days before her departure to college "may have been the hardest loss of all...Ben...was my childhood friend...a touchstone to many of my childhood memories...saying goodbye to Ben felt like saying goodbye to my childhood" (Belle). She theorized that "at the beginning of our lives, we all have a very clear idea of how they are supposed to turn out, whom we will end up to be....The secret is that things don't turn out as we think they will...everything is different.... It all depends on how we react to it" (Belle). Belle's reference to action precipitated by experience is repeated by several others. These personal moments appeared to be the catalysts for much of the participants' pondering on the sufferings of others.

Tai Mai Shu

I continue to think and worry about the four students whose narratives appear under this heading. Their writing included such graphic examples of devastating circumstances that they stood out even in relation to the other young people who had sustained the loss of loved ones or significant personal injury.

Tai Mai Shu, a participant who often missed class, failed to do assignment, and generally appeared totally uninterested in class discussion or writing, came through with a final narrative that was heartbreaking in its personal revelations regarding his current state of mind.

At present my life is disorganized, aimless and without real purpose. I go through each day as if it was a robotic exercise....I have no roots...my life is gone. No unified family, no family home, nothing to anchor me (Tai Mai Shu).

Tai Mai Shu's essay reported that when he began college, he was a successful athlete with a history of using his physical attributes to his advantage. He related several instances during high school where consequences for misbehavior were averted due to his athlete status. This practice ended during his senior year and an infraction cost him not only his final playing year but his position in the school as well. College life did not work out much better for him as his family fell apart upon his arrival at Austen College. His parents separated; one parent left the country; the family home was sold, and the remaining parent's living arrangements were in flux. Six weeks into the college semester he had no home to return to. Things fell apart and Tai Mai Shu left the college at the end of the semester in which this study was completed. The narrative from which these words come was handed in a few days before his departure. The most significant thing within his essay was his acceptance of responsibility coupled with hope for the future:

I don't have to be the product of a dysfunctional environment. Only I can make my environment functional. Only I can break the cycle....I see myself as taking control over future experiences....I want a career that allows me to express who I am. If that is teaching I want to be able to foster in my students the motivation and foresight they will need to break the cycle of being defined by negative experiences...I am a work in progress...I am a product of my environment but I am not a stagnant product. I am changing (Tai Mai Shu).

Tai Mai Shu's focus on change and progress was surprising given his near non-engagement in the class activities, though I did meet with him individually a few times throughout the course to discuss missed assignments. He is also one of the preservice sub-group members, as is referenced in his quote. It is possible that he was attending to more of the course than it

appeared, but it is also possible that a catalyst other than this course precipitated Tai Mai Shu's revelations.

Notorious

Another student, also struggling with domestic difficulties, espoused virtually the same outlook on life. Notorious addressed the struggle to overcome life's obstacles in her narrative which based everything on where experiences have brought her. She referenced Frederick Douglass as she wrote that "progress" cannot be gained without struggle and then added her own wry sense of humor, a humor she credits with giving her the power to "get through" her difficult life (Notorious).

It always seems that every time I take two steps forward, I get knocked back ten more steps... My childhood was very rough. Having to deal with a drug addict father... [who] was always in and out of jail...He used to come home at night high and / or drunk and I would wake up and sit on the stairs with my brother. It was a ritual...my mom puts us back to bed...My dad was already back out on the streets. This would happen almost every day; every day up until one day...this argument ended up being the straw that broke the camel's back....She [her mother] told him to get his stuff and leave...My dad ended up throwing all of my mom's things out the window and into the street; all of it....She...awoke my brothers and me. We got up and she told us to pack up as many clothes as we can...that was the last time I was ever in that house (Notorious).

Her father made intermittent stops in her life after that, but was not a stable force and she was unable to forgive him, a fact she lamented. The economic realities of Notorious's life were difficult as her mother made only "enough money to get by...I was joked at as a little kid...I dreaded going to school" (Notorious). Conditions improved in her middle school years and she was able to join the "cool crowd," and she used this power to limit the bullying she saw perpetrated around her; "I felt like I was obligated to help, but obligated in a good way"

(Notorious). This obligation she expressed was the same one she and several others mentioned throughout the study – the obligation to act when injustice was perpetrated. Interestingly, though, as she found power in her stance against the bullies of her classmates, she found herself bullied by an authority figure that had stereotyped her as a ne'er do well:

I had nobody to believe in me. It was one day though that a teacher told me that I will never make it to high school let alone college. I still don't know what really made me angry about that, but I applied myself just to prove her wrong; and look at me now. In a tragedy the hero has a downfall; well I figured it can happen the other way around and for me it did (Notorious).

Notorious's story was not a simple one; she also struggled with Type I diabetes and more recently had to extricate herself from a physically abusive boyfriend: "it wasn't until one day that he cut me with a knife...I realized, enough was enough," (Notorious) but her outlook continued to be goal-oriented and proud.

Blake

Blake, a student who was engaged with the course from the beginning and often participated in discussions, shared an equally disturbing story of a childhood friend's drug addiction and death, a personal account with such detail that I felt as though I were watching it happen myself. She begins, much like Sorella who couldn't believe she could really write as herself, "Who knows what reaction this essay will receive?" (Blake). But, she went on for she had the "desire to scream out my years of mistakes to anyone that will listen" (Blake). She went on to recount her bullying of a girl in her elementary school.

I picked on her as others picked on me, and I loved the fear I could see in her eyes. It hurts me to even view myself as such a cruel person, but at a time when I needed enough power to feel as though I wasn't the smallest, most inanimate being on the planet, I used her (Blake).

Interestingly, this statement reinforces that of other participants in a prior posting who believed that those who lacked power often abused power over those weaker than themselves.

Strangely, after continuing throughout middle school with this bullying behavior, the other girl became friends with Blake in high school. Blake came to admire her friend's differences from the popular girls at their school. During these times she recounted drug and alcohol use and the "dark force" that appeared to be taking over her friend: "Her affection for cocaine...was escalating quickly...I pretended to find it humorous" (Blake). Mental institutions and drug rehabs followed for her friend with Blake making intermittent visits during those times, but the devastation occurred once the friend was out of treatment. After a visit, Blake, back at boarding school, was told of her friend's death by heroin overdose: "her mother described the dirty New York City hotel room, filled with cockroaches and stained walls and the dirty bathtub that her ...body was found in" (Blake). Blake continued to spend time with the friend's family and equated her own "growing up" with her friend's life and death: "It was through the rollercoaster ride of [her] life which I rode on for so many years, that I became a strong, loving, and independent person" (Blake).

RC

Perhaps the most disturbing narrative of all, RC's final paper recounted the episodes of domestic violence, molestation, and bullying endured by her and her family. She began her paper strongly even as she talked about her own weakness. "My dad used to beat my mom...I was a timid doormat and didn't stand up for myself. Neither did I have a voice of my own" (RC). This revelation came as a complete surprise to me as RC had talked of her father before in class in what seemed positive ways though she had never spoken of her mother (Field notes, 928/07). She went on to describe the abuse:

My mom must have said something my dad didn't like....next it was a round of curse words from my dad and more yelling and screaming. Then he'd hit her; throw her against the wall and other terrible things. When the arguing and beating happened at night I tried to drown out the sound with my pillow, but that didn't always work. I was so scared for me, my sister, and my moms' life. I was afraid, sometimes, that my dad would end up killing her! (RC).

She recounted that her family situation led her to cower before other forms of abuse as well as she watched a babysitter hurt her little sister and as RC was, herself, molested by another sitter:

One [female teen-age babysitter] hit me in the chest. The oldest then pushed her on me. I tried to push her off, but she was so heavy and I was so scrawny! She put her tongue in my mouth and started kissing me. It was awful....I once again said nothing. Why would I tell him [her father] I didn't think he cared...I felt they both had enough problems....I became depressed...and at daycare that made me an easy target [for bullies] (RC).

She wrote of coping with her situation as best she could but still felt that she hadn't reconciled any of it though she was hopeful she would. It was the hope and strength contained in her narrative that led me to include her words here to explicate how important reflection is to the building of new awareness and knowledge. "There is still part of me that hasn't dealt with the abuse itself and the molestation. Right now I'm working on that, even as I type this paper. Nevertheless I've still become a stronger person. I am no longer stagnant" (RC). "Stagnant" is a state these participants apparently found distasteful, reinforcing their emphasis on the need for change and their belief that change can, even must, occur (RC & Tai Mai, Shu).

Relationships with the texts

Giambi

Giambi, a participant who had commented most vociferously on the rights of everyone to be themselves and be left alone, had an interesting comment regarding the characters of two of the novels we used in class. “The only people I know of that have been through some of the things that I have been through are in the books ... *Kira, Kira* and *Harriet the Spy*...It’s easy to relate them with my personal experiences because they faced injuries, death, cancer and people who they love dearly going away” (Giambi). He had found his own situation represented in these novels and they spoke to him through his interaction with them (Rosenblatt, 1995; Trites, 1997; Valdez, 1999; Zipes, 2001). His mother’s illness was mentioned often in class as were the deaths of his grandparents; this narrative was the first mention of his own health problems, apparently stress-induced, during the time his mother was fighting cancer. He wrote that reading the two novels let him “see that it got better as time went on” though he still described himself as “if I was 50 years old...I don’t see the fun acting childish or having stupid fun...I’ve seen and felt more loss than anyone I know” (Giambi). He combines the categories set out here, the loss and the personal relationship to the texts. Other students reported building similar relationships with the texts.

Sally, George, and Belle

Sally found similarities between her own experiences and those of the characters from *Kira, Kira* (Kadohata, 2004) She spoke of the closeness of her family and its importance in regard to frequent moves that separated her from friends: “*Kira, Kira* reminds me of what my family and I dealt with when moving around....Katie has a hard time making friends when she starts school....It reminds me a lot of myself” (Sally). George also related to this novel as she

reflected on her move to a foreign country as a child: “Just as Katie in *Kira, Kira* could not ‘see why’ (p. 20) she has to move, I could not see why I had to either” (George). She goes on to recount seeing her father upset over the illness of a close relative for whom the move was precipitated: “Just as Katie experienced, the first time I have seen my father cry was when he walked out of my uncle’s somber bedroom....this ...terrified me” (George). She rebounds from this experience and decides to begin thinking of others more: “In Ireland I grew up, matured and started caring for my family” (George).

Belle

Belle referenced several class texts in her narrative. *Kira, Kira* (Kadohata, 2004) reminds her of her own family’s working class background: “All our jobs are not high paying jobs, and they are especially not jobs that need much education ...but they [the family in *Kira, Kira*] are a family who cares for each other and works together...And that is exactly like my family” (Belle).

Boo and Southend

Boo chose to relate her life to the characters in *Harriet the Spy* (Fitzhugh, 1964). “My family has helped to shape me....Just as Golly plays the part of inspiration for Harriet, my family had done the same” (Boo). While Southend connected to Harriet’s goals in life: “Just like in the book *Harriet the Spy* where Harriet is determined to become a writer when she grows up and doesn’t give up when everything in her life is going wrong; I too am determined not to give up on my dreams” (Southend).

Bunny

Bunny wrote her entire narrative on the strengths of her ties to her family and their support of her. She described her family as “working people” who have “made good money by working hard” (Bunny) and can therefore afford to provide many luxuries to her, such as her

private college education— an opportunity her parents did not have. She brought up *Harriet the Spy* (Fitzhugh, 1964) as an example of how families should not be. Bunny found Harriet's relationship to her parents aberrant and cold, a situation she had trouble imagining as her own was in such contrast to it. Bunny was thankful for what her parents had done for her and “wants to make them proud” (Bunny) by working hard herself. Bunny was one of the quieter participants in class, but she did all the assigned work and was attentive, even when not participatory.

Hello Motto and Molly Lou

In another vein, Hello Motto, who situated herself as a child of a very destructive divorce, used the same novel and Harriet's behavior in particular, as a contrast to her own way of interacting with people.

In the book *Harriet the Spy*, Harriet writes down flaws about all her friends and spies on them. I do not relate....The way Harriet went about writing about her friends is something I would never do. Being so poorly treated by my own father has given me awareness of how to treat other people (Hello Motto).

A school guidance counselor is Hello Motto's “Ole Golly” (Fitzhugh, 1964), befriending her in the midst of her parent's divorce and becoming the model for Hello Motto's career goal of becoming a teacher. “I talked with her at least every week and it was so comforting...I never knew someone could impact a life so greatly...Because I know what she did for me, I want to return the same gift back to other teenagers”(Hello Motto). Molly Lou agreed that Harriet's situation was not one she would like reflected in her own family. “In the book *Harriet the Spy*, Harriet and her family were not very close...that seems very depressing to me...because if I was not connected with my family, especially my mom, then I would feel lonely and left out” (Molly

Lou). On a side note, Molly Lou was the only participant to reference one of the picture books in her writings. Used here in the final paper, long after the picture books had been removed from the rest of the study, Molly Lou references *Stand Tall, Molly Lou Melon* (Lovell, 2001):

She [her mom] thinks I am a beautiful person inside and out and she gives me the confidence that a lot of the time I need. Just like in ...*Stand Tall, Molly Lou Melon*. Molly's grandmother kept telling her to be who she wants to be and no one else...that is exactly like my mom...she takes what I think is a negative and turns it into a positive (Molly Lou).

Given the pseudonym chosen by this person, I questioned whether she had chosen it due to the book character, but the online prompt that addressed the reasons for choosing participant pseudonyms did not reveal a connection to this book.

Jenna

Jenna brought in another novel to illustrate her narrative: *The Hundred Dresses* (Estes, 1994). Jenna, as a member of the “minority group” sub set of participants, revealed that she was often “self-conscious about how I looked” among her much more affluent classmates:

I would say in the hierarchy of society my family is middle to lower class, however growing up in [a very affluent town] made me almost feel poor....In the book *100 Dresses* a girl in school is alienated by her peers because of her appearance and economic status....I would like to say that that doesn't happen in the real world but it does...when you're a teenager it's hard not to get sucked into that (Jenna).

Many of these participants revealed life-altering experiences in their final narratives. Some built on positive experience and were driven to action; some used the negative, even tragic, in their lives as a catalyst for change. Some had just begun to consider that change might

be possible. Others were following a plan set out for them by their parents in order to “make them proud” (Bunny).

As teachers of these students, we must ask ourselves several questions. Do many of our students have such experiences to reconcile? I believe they do. Can we tap their energy and use it to help us teach? I believe we can.

From all of these individual participant portraits that have emerged across the course of this study, I have drawn five conclusions. Though the breadth of some of these conclusions may be surprising, they are supported by the data in multiple ways as revealed in these last three chapters and as summarized in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 7 AND SO WE END AT THE BEGINNING

I want to be able to foster in my students the motivation and foresight they will need
to break the cycle of being defined by negative experiences...

I am a work in progress...

I am a product of my environment but I am not a stagnant product.

I am changing.

~Tai Mai Shu (2007)

Relationships

It seems I am ending at the beginning – the engagement with social justice issues that I hoped for was reached and led us all to want more of each other. However, that fact was not apparent until the very end of the study; the cloud of dust I stirred up when I began had to settle before I could see it. It was a slow process: the slow beginning as we got to know each other; the familiarity that bred confrontation; the reasons students were hesitant to begin the last assignment. The true faces of the students who had been sitting in front of me all semester were revealed, washed clean of their masks of conformity, standing out starkly, bravely, as individuals shaped by their experiences, particularly their difficult ones.

As I reviewed the surveys and began to correlate the participants' survey answers with the other study data sources, it became apparent that the most relevant piece of this study, the real moral to the story, was focused on the participants, not the social justice issues that were the original the focus of the work. The social justice topics, brought into play through the readings, receded into the background and became the foundation for both the work the participants produced and the attributes I found in them as I analyzed the collected data.

The teacher/researcher role

I found self realization one outcome of doing participatory action research. The months spent with this class, as we dealt with the research questions and slogged through difficult and

often contentious discussions, were some of my most exciting teaching moments. They rivaled the new teaching days when my enthusiasm and energy were high for the job ahead. I have come to know something important about myself – I like people of this age and stage of life – college students transitioning from adolescents to adults. They are full of life and idealism, but they may also be damaged, struggling souls, often far from home, looking for support and warmth. They are endearing for all of that, and the more I learned about my students the more I appreciated them, liked them, and wanted to teach them.

Perspective makes all the difference

The somewhat obnoxious speed talker became funny and witty. The often absent slacker turned into a coming-of-age novel character. The country girl became best friends with the big city boy. Watching all of it happen was like being let in on their growing up – being present for the birth of something. I have come to know that I always want to be present for such moments. I want to teach more to this age group – these just beginning adults. And I am already applying what I learned from them in my courses with other college students.

Changes have been made in the way I approach contentious topics and how much time I allow to be spent on what would seem to be tangential material. I have also learned that students' trust is hard won – available to me only because I shared some of my own life with them and took the time to listen to them respectfully. It took the entirety of the course, 3 months, to begin to gain that trust. Many participants questioned it throughout, coming back to the same questions over and over – “are you sure that's OK?”

Several asked if I could teach their next GST (general studies writing) course – and I wish I could have. Having to let them go when we had just begun to learn so much from each other was a trial. In the end I know that I was the recipient of much of the new knowledge

gained. I like to think that our class discussions and assignments led them to new learning, and the data appear to support that contention, but I can attest more vehemently to my own learning.

I had the intention of categorizing the study participants in a hierarchy of readiness for change – a process continuum of sorts - with one end of the continuum at uninvolved and the other at “work in process” with those in between moving along the continuum from uninvolved, to open to new ideas, to pondering change.

As I began this categorization, the process of it felt wrong and in contention with the findings of the study. Perhaps listing all the participants along this continuum and finding that many were at or near the “work in process” end, might have supported my findings more strongly. But that listing might also have misconstrued the participants’ real situations, situations about which I have only the slightest knowledge. It would also have fixed them in a set position when their own words speak to the dynamic nature of their lives. I preferred, in the end, to let the participants’ words speak for themselves. I believe this practice allows the readers of the research to draw their own conclusions about the participants’ levels of engagement in the study as well as the veracity of their statements on social justice issues.

The feminist approach I took in this research not only allowed me to rely on my participants to speak for themselves in this way, but actually required me to do so in order that each participant’s voice is heard in context. I chose not to aggregate the voices in any way or try to decide who held what I might consider prejudicial beliefs. The interpretation of the data did not require these actions as the intention of the study was to explore the students’ beliefs and the potential impact of the readings and writing activities on those beliefs, not to find the level of prejudice among them.

The code map: seeing the connections

Figure 5, a code map adapted from Anfara, Brown, and Mangione (2002), documents the progression of my data analysis and illustrates my findings. As the original codes worked themselves into more consolidated notation form, memos I had written during coding of the online narratives, the field notes, and the SRA's notes became more thematic. I found that I kept hearing the same words repeated by multiple participants, by the SRA, and in my own notes: the importance of background and family, the need for an opening up of vision, the need to find a fit between self and the world, the need to work toward change. As I analyzed and reanalyzed, five themes coalesced from the 152 short narratives, the 19 essays, the field notes, and the interview transcript. There is no implied hierarchy to this listing.

- Students and teachers should interact dialogically on their own cultural backgrounds as they consider their social justice perceptions.
- It is possible to go beyond the “tunnel” vision of prejudice and see “difference” as a positive attribute.
- All students, but particularly preservice teachers, need to wrestle with how they “fit” into a larger world context and teacher education should provide this critical opportunity.
- Personal, critical reflection on texts and discussion within a caring, secure environment can foster change.
- Students embrace change as they hope to avoid becoming “stagnant.”

Code Map		
*Adapted from Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002.		
Third Iteration: Themes		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students and teachers should interact dialogically on their own cultural backgrounds as they consider their social justice perceptions. 1A, 1B, 1C, 2A, 2C • It is possible to go beyond the “tunnel” vision of prejudice and see “difference” as a positive attribute. 1A, 2A, 2B • All students, but particularly preservice teachers, need to wrestle with how they “fit” into a larger world context and teacher education should provide this critical opportunity. 1A, 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B • Personal, critical reflection on texts and discussion within a caring, secure environment can foster change. 1A, 2A, 2B • Students embrace change as they hope to avoid becoming “stagnant.” 1A, 1C, 2A 		
Second Iteration : Codes consolidated		
1A) Tendency toward advocacy is scripted by cultural background 1A) Possibility of change exists 1B) Promotion of politically correct rhetoric 1C) Lack of power breeds apathy	2A) Self revelation 2A) Empathy for others 2A) Need for vision / change 2B) Dissonance between personal definitions of SJ and application of SJ advocacy 2C) Abuse of power	3A) Societal need for preservice teachers group to consider social justice 3B) Preservice teachers may not have diversity of experience of general college population
First Iteration: Initial Codes		
1A₁) Equality / Fairness to all (subsumed respect and opportunity) – (ND), (FN) 1A₂) Obligation to work for justice; to be yourself (subsumed order) – (ND), (FN) 1A₃) Freedom to be who you are (subsumed safety, identity) – (ND), (FN) 1B) Relativism related to definition – (ND),(FN) 1C) Power - Negation of possibility of social justice – (ND),(FN)	2A₁)Equality / Fairness (subsumes only opportunity)- (ND), (FN), (FGT) 2A₂) Respect for the differences of others becomes stronger component - (ND), (FN), (FGT) 2A₃) Need for Vision / Change – expanded Obligation, 1A - (ND), (FN), (FGT) 2A₄) Freedom from categorization / from prejudice added to Freedom to be who you are, 1A – (ND), (FN), (FGT) 2B) Relativism – (ND), (FN), (FGT) 2C₁) Power - Negation diminished - (ND), (FN), (FGT) 2C₂) Power – oppression breeds oppression – (ND), (FGT)	3A) Similar distribution of opinion (ND), (FGT) 3B) Demographic disparity majority (4 of 5) will be first generation college grads (PS)
Q1: How do students in a freshman writing course at a small, private liberal arts college initially perceive social justice?	Q2: How will critical reading of children’s literature texts influence students’ perceptions of social justice?	Q3: How do students self-identified as preservice teachers differ from the remainder of class members in relation to the first 2 questions?

Figure 5 Code map

A narrative explanation

Though the code map is an explanation of how the themes above are answers to the original research questions that structured this study, it may be beneficial to also relate that information in narrative form as well.

Question #1. How do students in a freshman writing course at a small, private liberal arts college initially perceive social justice? Participants' initial responses to this direct question were generally esoteric, relating a belief in the goodness of "equality" and "fairness." Discussions and further writings revealed that participants' perceptions of social justice were heavily influenced by their own experiences and cultural backgrounds and ranged from the practicality of Goosey's and Lola's views that people should look to their own and their family's needs above all others to the idealism of George and Boo who wanted to save the world through good works and self-sacrifice.

All participants paid lip-service to the ideas of equality and fairness toward all people, but in reality, few participants had strong, specific feelings about injustice unless they had been touched by it themselves. The significance appears to lay in the connection of the social justice topics to the abilities of the participants to "see" injustice, which is directly related to their experiences and backgrounds. Those with more experience with environments different from their more often voiced the ability to recognize injustice and to see the need for change.

Question #2. How will critical reading of children's literature texts influence students' perceptions of social justice? As the reading began, participants were not always aware of how the texts fit into the social justice theme of the course. Their ideas of what constituted social justice were so narrow that they had difficulty discerning bias or discrimination when confronted by any but the most obvious forms of it. Again, they related most strongly to the episodes in the

books that resembled their own life experiences. Along the way though, during the reading, writing and discussing, the participants did begin to apply the reading in new ways. They began to use it to try on other personas, to see themselves as the characters and reflect on how they would feel in similar circumstances. These text applications generated further reflection on life experiences they had had that might have gone differently had they applied a different perspective.

Sorella exhibited this kind of application about half way through the course as she is stunned to realize that she had been oblivious in high school to one of the lessons in *The Hundred Dresses* (Estes, 1944): people can be ostracized because of the way they dress. It seems a small thing, but she had never put herself in the place of another in quite that way before and she was amazed at her former blindness to how lack of money may have affected those around her.

Significant data reveal the connection between the participants' abilities to learn to "see" injustice even through the experiences of characters in a text. This ability to learn from experiences that are vicarious can help expand the participants' cultural awareness of the larger world around them.

Question #3. How do students self-identified as preservice teachers differ from the remainder of class members in relation to the first 2 questions? The answer to this question came as a surprise, as there were no discernible differences in how these two groups related to social justice perceptions or to the texts. The only difference between them lay in the demographic data. The preservice teachers were more likely to have parents with lower education levels than those in the non-preservice teacher group. Few participants (Goosey, Bunny, Lola, and Giambi)

ever brought up their parents' educational levels, and the ones who did were no more representative of the preservice teacher group than of the other career paths.

It appears that the preservice teacher group is not in need of different interaction or instruction than any other groups of college students in order for them to engage with social justice topics. However, it is still apparent, based on prior research, that preservice teachers are more in need of these kinds of engagements than the general college population as they will be responsible for the teaching of diverse groups of students in the near future (Henkin, 1998; Leistyna, Valendez, & Nelson, 2004).

Summary

I inadvertently began this study doing exactly what I accused my beginning preservice teachers of – trying to reinforce my own ideals and beliefs in a group of needy participants (Escamilla & Nathenson-Mejia, 2003)! As we began to read and discuss, my attitudes and beliefs were revealed to the students and I was forced to address the biases with which I had begun the study, both in regard to the readings as well as to the participants. I had formed preconceived notions of them as somewhat empty vessels in need of the social justice teachings I had to offer; it is no wonder that initially they had difficulty believing me when I told them I wanted to have open and honest discussion. Fortunately, I recognized this presumptuous attitude early on and was able to admit it to the class and move beyond it. It took time, but being as truthful as I could with the participants appeared to lead them to do the same with me, both in class sessions and in their narratives. As they came to trust that I was telling the truth, they became more open and vigorous in their comments.

Several points became evident. If, as teachers, we expect to get meaningful thought, discussion, and action from our students, we must first learn who we are, who they are, and care

enough about them to engage them with the teaching we place before them. This kind of engagement with learning not only allows delivery of information to be successful, but it may allow personal transformation of the students and teacher (hooks, 1994). I found such transformation, theirs and mine, a possibility when I read the moving final papers of my students. The analysis of the final essay data proved to be important to this study as it deepened what had come before it. Almost every participant revealed deeply personal information; many tying their narratives directly to books we had read in class or to discussions that had ensued as a result of our readings. Several shared experiences that revealed why they might have chosen to be in this course/study in the first place. Figure 6 is a visual representation of the significant factors I found in this research: experience which allowed vision which drove change for the participants (including myself).

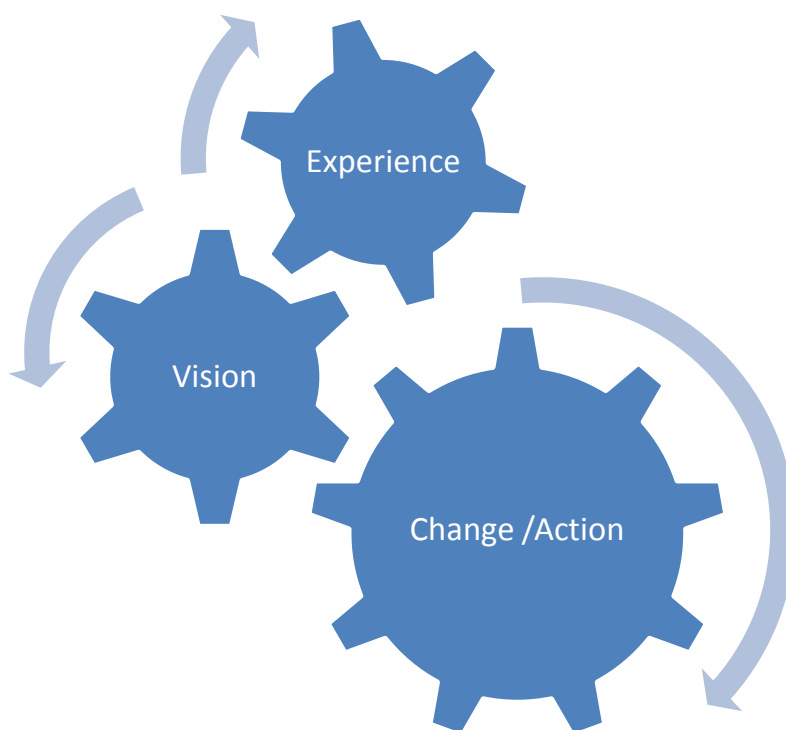


Figure 6 Significant factors for transformation

From the researcher-participant perspective, I found myself changed by my experiences with the other participants and their narratives. I remembered why I love teaching. I remembered why I love young people. The participants, in revealing themselves, led me to reveal myself, and the relationships that were formed among us were valuable to me, not only as data for this study, but on a personal level as well. Reading their final narratives allowed a fuller picture of each participant to form in my mind. Many of them reported feeling a similar connection to me and to the course.

It was during the individual meetings over these final essays that I began to grasp the import of the students' writing. Each paper said something so poignant about its writer, that I was shocked at what they were able to put on paper. Some of the details they were willing to share were chilling in their intensity; some were so sad they brought tears to my eyes; still others showed a self-deprecating sense of humor that made me laugh out loud. I was amazed by their efforts. This kind of work from freshmen? Who knew they had such experiences and such feelings?

Well, now I did. But I might never have known. What if I had not extended the invitation to become part of a group that could talk and write about real feelings and opinions? What if I had only discussed what was on my own agenda, disregarding how the topics there might have affected the students already? I am so glad that I asked the questions and really listened to the answers. Students have much to say if given the opportunity and a secure venue in which to express themselves. It is up to individual teachers in higher education to provide those venues and opportunities if we expect to fully engage students in their own learning. They must see the application of what we are teaching to their own lives; they must believe that their best interests are being served; they must trust that they truly are in a community of learners.

The preservice teachers' needs will be served as members of these more productive learning communities. They will not have to wait to encounter their education courses to engage with issues that may help them reflect on their values and beliefs, setting the stage for more informed reflection as they refine their career goals and move further into teacher education. The assumption here is that education courses will include these reflective opportunities given the research that supports the inclusion of social justice education for preservice teachers (Butin, 2005; Christensen, 2000; Henkin, 1998).

Implications for Austen College

Austen College is a small (approximately 2000 students), private, liberal arts institution on the U. S. East Coast. The population is mainly split between in-state students and those from the upper Northeast. Many students come from affluent backgrounds and are predominantly white. The teacher licensure program at Austen includes approximately 250 students; making it one of the largest minors at the college (an education major is not available at Austen College). The implications for teacher education apply strongly to Austen College since approximately 1/8 of the student population is engaged in the teacher licensure program.

In addition, Austen's demographic make-up creates an atmosphere in need of diversification. The preponderance of affluent white students leads to a dearth of experience with people of color or lower socioeconomic status. Stereotypes abound in such environments, as the participants of this study have shown. The breaking down of stereotypes should be a goal of liberal arts education, but without the advantages a more diverse environment would offer in this pursuit, Austen College should strive to intentionally address social justice in as many areas as possible.

These areas might include freshmen writing courses (such as the one in which this study took place); other general education courses required of all students; and all academic departments. All faculty should incorporate opportunities to allow students to reflect on their own cultural backgrounds in relation to the course material, either in writing assignments or during class discussion.

Efforts should be made to connect learning in all subject areas with the experiences students bring to the classroom, which requires that some time be spent in communication with students, both in groups and as individuals. Such a focus on the students as people with existing knowledge can motivate them to achieve (Chizik & Chizik, 2002).

Several participants commented on the judgmental atmosphere that exists at Austen College. Students from all social classes reported feeling stereotyped according to their clothing, music, and peer choices. Minority students in particular felt that other students were afraid to get close to them for a number of reasons: fear of offending them, fear of not having anything in common, fear of the unknown. There are so few minority students at Austen College that such attitudes are not helpful in growing a more diverse student body.

From the study pool of 19 participants, 3 left Austen College at the end of the semester in which the study was completed: Tai Mai Shu, Blake, and Princessa. All three of the students reported that a perceived lack of fitting in at Austen was the impetus for their departure. All transferred to other schools. Tai Mai Shu mentioned the lack of connection to others and a feeling of being totally alone. Blake felt that there was a general lack of interest in academics on the part of other freshmen that she found distasteful. Princessa noted the long distance from home and a need to be closer to family as her main reason for leaving. Could Austen have

prevented the departure of any of these students? Possibly not, but a closer, more connected relationship among students and between students and faculty might have helped.

Concentration on the development of relationships, with faculty and other students; engagement in learning; and a belief that most students, including freshmen, are capable of scholarly work could help raise the level of student and faculty satisfaction at Austen College.

Implications for higher education

What does all of this mean to a wider audience? None of these findings are generalizable to all college classrooms. There are too many variables at issue. But the findings do serve to explicate the theories already set forth on building caring classroom communities (Noddings, 2003), transformational learning opportunities (hooks, 1994; Villegas & Lucas, 2002), the use of text to drive change (Rosenblatt, 1995; Trites, 1997; Vandergrift, 1993; Zipes, 2001), and the value of dialogue on social justice topics to preservice teachers and others (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lowery, 2002; Marshall & Oliva, 2006).

Each person who shared his or her story potentially added to the growing awareness of every other participant, including myself. Not all participants had epiphanies about becoming more socially aware individuals, but many of them did ponder their own backgrounds and ask themselves questions about how their perceptions were built. It was getting to that stage of thought – the pondering of perceptions other than our own – within a cross-curricular college course that makes this research significant.

The findings of this study imply that there is a basis for using literature to engage students in social justice discussions and writings and that such activities may further the students' interests in seeking changes to their environments. I do not imply that all students will be personally engaged by such activities or that those who are engaged will become change

agents. However, the open discussion and opportunity to reflect in writing on topics raised by a text, did appear to generate a tendency in the study participants to engage in thought that ranged beyond their own experience levels and for some, drove actions based on their reflections.

Higher education courses are ripe with opportunity for discussions and writings that allow students to reflect on their own experiences while adapting to the content knowledge of any academic area. Such student reflection done while in the process of learning new information can only serve to deepen meanings and thereby facilitate learning. A number of study participants mentioned that this course was the first time anyone had ever asked them for an opinion or seemed to care what they thought about an important topic.

If we in higher education expect critical thinking from our students, we must stop belittling their efforts, as this study's participants reported, and let them practice their critical thinking on what they already know. These findings support the contention that college students may be full of experiential knowledge that just needs to be tapped. We may find that the outcome of our efforts will be more engaged students who produce more thoughtful work and we will no longer be able to complain about the sad state of thinking among our current student populations.

Implications for teacher education

These findings are helpful to those educating preservice teachers in particular, due to the diverse populations with which most new teachers will work at some point in their careers. The ability to self reflect and to remain open to learning even as one is engaged in teaching others, is important to the teachers who wish to most effectively meet the needs of their students (Christensen, 2000; Leistyna, Valendez, & Nelson, 2004). Taking the time in education courses to allow this self-reflection after course readings or discussion may help preservice teachers open their fields of vision to include more than their own experiential perspectives. The ability to see the need for and the possibility of positive change may allow education students to envision self

transformations as well as the learning transformations of their future students. Since many preservice teachers are from middle class, white backgrounds, it is important to expose them in whatever way possible to diverse populations (U. S. Census Bureau, 2006). Using literature to accomplish this task is both efficient and practical (Trites, 1997; Valdez, 1999; Zipes, 2001).

Education departments must help preservice teachers see inequities before they can begin to act against them. Making our preservice teachers more “culturally responsive teachers” (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. xiv) will help build their “sociocultural consciousness” (p. xiv) as it relates to race, ethnicity, social class, and language. The political beliefs and behaviors of teacher educators must be transparent so that they can be a model to the preservice teachers under their influence (Leistyna, Valendez, and Nelson, 2004). These teacher educators must urge their students to compare their values, beliefs, and assumptions with those of the dominant society to see how they might reproduce discriminatory and exclusionary practices in their own future classrooms (Leistyna, Valendez, and Nelson, 2004). Teacher educators and preservice teachers can grow and change within the same environment they are creating for their own students (hooks, 1994). Change is possible if we can gain the experience and vision necessary to drive it forward.

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RQ1: How do preservice teachers perceive social justice tenets?	RQ2: How can critical reading of children's literature impact preservice teachers' sense of social justice?	RQ3: What social justice topics will preservice teachers find resonant within the literature presented?
Third Iteration: Application to Data Set		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Many people exhibit ambiguous feelings toward diversity. 2. The consequences of difference may be positive and/or negative. 3. Categorization of people occurs "naturally" for many. 4. Personal transformations may occur as a result of interaction with those unlike ourselves. 		
Second Iteration : Codes consolidated		
1A. Categorical thought process revealed 1B. Dissonance between political correctness and real belief	2A. Empathy for others initiated 2B. Shared experience	3A. Ambiguous nature of difference 3B. Being different causes "consequences"
First Iteration: Initial Codes		
1A. Them vs. me 1A. "Types" of people 1B. Verbal agreement with tenets 1B. Situational dissonance with tenets	2A. Student empathy toward characters 2B. Story situations shared by all	3A. Difference as "good" 3A. Difference as "hard" 3A. Consequences of difference 3A. Teachers' behavior toward difference 3B. Existence of segregation 3B. Segregation based on class, religion, culture 3C. Different types of discrimination

*Adapted from Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002.

Demographic Questionnaire

Please choose a pseudonym and write it in the space provided.

Pseudonym _____

1. What is your gender?
2. What is your race/ethnicity?
3. Where did you spend most of your childhood – City, State?
4. How would you describe your exposure to diverse environments?
5. What is the level of education of your parents? Post college graduate, college graduate, some college, high school graduate, some high school.
6. If you chose a field of study today what would it be? You may choose up to 3 from the list, but please rank your choices.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| — Art | — French |
| — Art History | — Health & Human Performance |
| — Athletic Training | — History |
| — Biochemistry | — International Relations |
| — Biology | — Mathematics |
| — Business Admin. | — Medical Technology |
| — Chemistry | — Music |
| — Computer Information Systems | — Philosophy |
| — Computer Science | — Physics |
| — Criminal Justice | — Political Science |
| — Economics | — Psychology |
| — Education | — Sociology |
| — English | — Spanish |
| — Environmental Policy | — Theatre |
| — Environmental Science | — Theology |

7. Why did you choose this section of GST 101?

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

Title of Project Telling The Real Story: Using Children's Literature To Address Social Justice With Preservice Teachers
Investigators Ms. Lisa Updike, Dr. Cheri Triplett

I. Purpose of this Research/Project

The goal of this pilot study is to explore the nature of preservice teachers' perceptions about social justice. Children's literature will be used to elicit written responses related to social justice issues such as discrimination based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, or social class. I hope this study will inform teacher educators, preservice teachers, and current teachers.

II. Procedures

This study will focus on Ms. Updike's children's literature class made up of 24 pre-service teachers, all of whom are potential participants. Participants may join the study after reading and signing the consent form which will be available online.

Data will first be collected through anonymous written responses to three prompts made available through an online discussion board. Anonymous interaction among study participants on the discussion board will be encouraged and the Ms. Updike may also interact with participants in this written format if clarification is needed.

Ms. Updike will analyze the online responses using a coding system that allows for identifying emerging themes. Identities of participants will not be known to the Ms. Updike or to other participants.

At the end of the study, after final grading in the course is complete, focus group interviews will be available to participants who wish to participate in them. The interviews will give participants a chance to ask Ms. Updike questions, clarify their own responses, and/or represent themselves in whatever way they see fit. These interviews will be audio-taped for future transcription.

III. Risks

There are no more than minimal potential risks to this study. Every student participant will be anonymous to the researcher and to each other. At the end of the study, participants who wish to may come forward for group interviews, but may still choose to keep their responses unattributed to themselves.

The interviews will be audio-taped, but participants may ask at anytime for the recorder to be turned off or for what they have said to be stricken from the recorded data. The interviews will be conducted in a conversational manner and will be held in a neutral environment.

IV. Benefits

There are no specific benefits for students related to participation in this pilot study. No promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage participation. Participants may request results of the study in January, 2007 by emailing Lisa Updike at updike@roanoke.edu.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

Participant numbers will be assigned and documents will be coded using these numbers. Tape transcripts will not identify participants by name. Audio-tapes will be destroyed after they have been transcribed. The data collected will be stored in a locked drawer in the office of Ms. Updike. The information gathered will be used only for educational purposes. Presentations and publication of the research will make use of participant numbers only and will not identify schools or regions.

VI. Compensation

No compensation is offered for participation in this study.

VII. Responsibilities of Participants

Participation in the study is voluntary. Study participants will spend approximately 3 – 6 hours outside of class time over a 2 month period completing written responses and possibly taking part in the optional end of study focus group interviews.

VI. Freedom to Withdraw

You may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason without explanation by contacting Ms. Updike or one of the other reviewers listed below.

VII. Approval of Research

This research has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, by the Department of Teaching and Learning and by the Institutional Review Board of your college.

VIII. Consent

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

Student signature

Date

Should I have any questions about this research, I may contact:

Ms. Lisa Updike, 774-1191, updike@roanoke.edu
Investigator

Dr. Cheri Triplett, 231-8343, ctriplet@vt.edu
Faculty Advisor

David M. Moore, 231-4991, moored@vt.edu
Chair, Virginia Tech Institutional Review
Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research Compliance
1880 Pratt Drive, Suite 2006 (0497)
Blacksburg, VA 24061

Appendix D

Course syllabus

Course Syllabus**GST 101W – Social Justice and Children’s Literature****Lisa Updike****Fall 2007****Course Goal:**

The primary objective of this course is to provide students the opportunity to further their thinking and writing skills within the framework of children’s literature texts and social justice issues. Using the texts, critical materials related to them, and additional research materials, students will form opinions and substantiate them in coherent, convincing writing.

Expectations of students:

Thoroughly read the course materials and complete class writings related to them.
 Actively participate in class discussion, writing workshops, and peer reviews.
 Write three formal, thesis-driven papers using the social justice theme of the course.
 Use the course readings, class dialogues and outside research to support theses.
 Attend one individual conference with professor related to each paper.

Attendance:

Class attendance is mandatory. Much coursework is collaborative and is begun during class time. If you are absent you not only suffer, but you impede the progress of your classmates. **Class work and/or quizzes may not be made up; they will be calculated as zeroes.** After two absences, your final grade will be lowered by 2 points per absence.

Required Texts:

Bauman, G. (2003). *Ideas and Details*, 5th ed. Boston, MA: Thomson-Heinle.
 Hacker, D. (2003). *A writer’s reference*. 6th ed. Boston: Bedford-St. Martin’s.
 DiCamillo, K. (2001). *The tale of Despereaux: Being the story of a mouse, a princess, some soup, and a spool of thread*.
 Estes, Eleanor. (1944). *The hundred dresses*.
 Fitzhugh, L. (1964). *Harriet the spy*.
 Hesse, K. (2001). *Witness*.
 Kadohata, C. (2004). *Kira, kira*.

Picture books: (instructor’s copy on reserve in the library)

Bruchac. (2000). *Crazy Horse’s Vision*.
 Cholofsky, M., Finland, G., Wallace, J., & Kass, I. (1992). *Changing places: A kid’s view of shelter living*.
 hooks, b. (2004). *Skin again*.
 Jimenez, F. (2000). *La Mariposa*.
 Ringgold, F. (1991). *Tar Beach*.
 Williams, M. (2005). *Brothers in Hope: The story of the lost boys of Sudan*.

Excerpts and Articles (provided by instructor)

Questions for you to ponder at the beginning of the course and revisit at the end:

1. Who are you?
2. What/Who do you want to be?
3. How do you plan to use this class to get you there?
4. How does social justice affect you?
5. What is the greatest good you can claim?

Papers: 3 formal papers will be written

Paper #1 Essay with preset thesis – ideas generated by small group class work; theses composed as a group

Paper #2 Essay with student chosen thesis – idea list generated by small group class work; individually composed theses

Project Research project with student chosen topic and thesis

Paper #3 Personal narrative essay

Daily writing / discussion activities will include, but are not limited to:

- ✓ Précis of articles – Summaries in your own words
- ✓ Frame paragraphs leading to thesis writing
- ✓ Exploratory writing
- ✓ Argument generated from raw data discovered by the student
- ✓ Small group generation of class questions on the readings
- ✓ Peer work-shopping of draft essays
- ✓ Individual conferences with professor for each essay (*some* class time will be allotted)
- ✓ Reading quizzes

Grading: Paper grades include peer reviews done during workshop time. More discussion of how peer responses will affect grading will occur in class.

Paper #1	10%
Paper #2	15%
Research project	15%
Paper #3	20%
Daily work/quizzes	25%
Exam	15%

Grammar / Mechanics Expectations:

Mechanics problems will be addressed as they arise. Some time will be spent in class on these issues, but extensive, individual problems will be referred to the Writing Center for individual tutoring.

*****Correct usage is an expectation in the final draft essays.*****

Writing / discussion activity explanations

Précis of articles – One page, double-spaced summaries (this length may vary according to the material read).

- Two questions that arose during your reading should be listed individually at the bottom of the page.
- Use 1” margins all around and 12 pt. font.
- Your name and the article title and author should be in the heading.

Frame paragraphs leading to thesis writing

- These assignments give you a framework from which to begin your writing.
- You will supply the details within the given structure.
- Feedback will be given in small groups.
- Revisions will be made based on that feedback.

Exploratory writing

- Writing intended to allow you to think through your subject/topic while you write
- Focuses on the thought process rather than the product.
- I am looking for engagement in the subject and deep critical thinking rather than correct spelling and grammar.

Argument generated from raw data discovered by the student

- Information is gathered for the purpose of building an argument (research).
- Simple fact recitation is not considered a viable argument.
- Should be supported by evidence and cited accordingly.

Small group generation of questions / problems

- From these questions may arise theses for your papers
- Note-taking on these sessions is important so that you may use the ideas generated at a later time.
- Allows you to build on the ideas of others and to expand your own thinking.

Peer work-shopping of draft papers

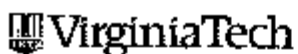
- Time-intensive work with another student’s paper.
- Your responses to your peers’ essays must be typed and must be specifically helpful.
 - Tell them why something doesn’t work and how they might fix it.
 - Let them know when something works particularly well.
- Your responses will be returned to the writer in person as you explain your comments.
- Time will be given for further discussion about these workshops as they will be used extensively.

Individual conferences with professor for each paper (*Some class time will be allotted for this purpose, but outside time will be necessary as each conference will be approximately 15 minutes long; Sign-up times will be posted on classroom door*)

- I will confer with each student at the rough draft stage of each paper.
 - These rough drafts will already have been work-shopped by peers and revised.
- Editing will not be the focus of these conferences.
- Students will be expected to take notes during these conferences and implement the revision suggestions in the final draft.

Reading quizzes

- Short answer and/or objective quizzes may be given as needed to promote reading of the class materials.
These quizzes will be unannounced.



Office of Research Compliance
 Institutional Review Board
 2001 Kraft Drive, Suite 2006 (0497)
 Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
 540-231-4991 Fax 540-231-0959
 e-mail: mmonroe@vt.edu
 www.irb.vt.edu
 F: 202-222-7211 T: 1-800-527-1010
 IRB # 1116601-587

DATE: November 6, 2007

MEMORANDUM

TO: Chen F. Triplott
 Lisa Updike

FROM: David M. Moors

Approval Date: 11/30/07
 Continuing Review Due Date: 10/19/2009
 Expiration Date: 1/3/2008

SUBJECT: **IRB Expedited Continuation 1: "Telling the Real Story: Using Children's Literature to Address Social Justice with Preservice Teachers"**, IRB # 06-592

This memo is regarding the above referenced protocol which was previously granted expedited approval by the IRB. The proposed research is eligible for expedited review according to the specifications authorized by 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. Pursuant to your request, as Chair of the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board, I have granted approval for extension of the study for a period of 12 months, effective as of November 5, 2007.

Approval of your research by the IRB provides the appropriate review as required by federal and state laws regarding human subject research. As an investigator of human subjects, your responsibilities include the following:

1. Report promptly proposed changes in previously approved human subject research activities to the IRB, including changes to your study forms, procedures and investigators, regardless of how minor. The proposed changes must not be initiated without IRB review and approval, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.
2. Report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.
3. Report promptly to the IRB of the study's closing (i.e., data collecting and data analysis complete at Virginia Tech). If the study is to continue past the expiration date (listed above), investigators must submit a request for continuing review prior to the continuing review due date (listed above). It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain re-approval from the IRB before the study's expiration date.
4. If re-approval is not obtained (unless the study has been reported to the IRB as closed) prior to the expiration date, all activities involving human subjects and data analysis must cease immediately, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.

cc: File

Imprint the Future

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE UNIVERSITY AND STATE UNIVERSITY
 An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution

**ROANOKE COLLEGE
HUMAN SUBJECT RESEARCH
EXPEDITED/FULL REVIEW FORM**
(Tab between fields to enter data.)

TITLE OF PROJECT: Telling the Real Story: Using Children's Literature to Address Social

PROJECT STARTING DATE: 10/30/06 **ENDING DATE:** 12/16/06

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Lisa Uedlke **DEPARTMENT:** Education

ADDRESS: 221 College Ave. **E-MAIL:** uedlke@roanoke.edu **PHONE:** 5405208860

CATEGORY OF PROJECT:

Faculty/Staff Research Project Funding Agency: _____ Due Date: _____
 ► IF previously approved: IRB Approval Date: _____ IRB Study #: _____

Student Research Project Course Title & #: _____ Professor: _____

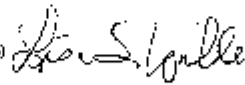
Class Research Project (Faculty Only) Course Name & #: _____
 ► IF previously approved: IRB Approval Date: _____ IRB Study #: _____

**If this is a previously approved study, and you have made changes to the original protocol, please attach a separate sheet listing the changes.*

As the principal investigator, my signature testifies that I pledge to conform to the following:

As one engaged in investigation utilizing human subjects, I acknowledge the rights and welfare of the human subject involved.
 I acknowledge my responsibility as an investigator to secure the informed consent of the subject by explaining the procedures, in so far as possible, and by describing the risks as weighed against the potential benefits of the investigation.
 I assure the IRB that all procedures performed under the project will be conducted in accordance with those Federal regulations and Roanoke College policies that govern research involving human subjects. Any deviation from the project (e.g., change in principal investigator, research methodology, subject recruitment procedures, etc.) will be submitted to the IRB in the form of an amendment for its approval prior to implementation.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

(type/printed name) Lisa Uedlke (signature)  (date) 10/26/06

As the faculty sponsor, my signature testifies that I have reviewed this application and that I will oversee the research in its entirety, through the termination report.

FACULTY SPONSOR:

(type/printed name) _____ (signature) _____ (date) _____

DEPARTMENTAL REVIEW (if applicable):

This proposed project has been reviewed and approved by the departmental human subject review panel.

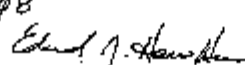
(Panel Chair typed/printed name) _____ (signature) _____ (date) _____

IRB REVIEW

This protocol for the use of human subjects has been reviewed by the Roanoke College Institutional Review Board, and the following action has been taken:

Exempt Approval Expedited Approval Full Approval Not Approved Withdrawn

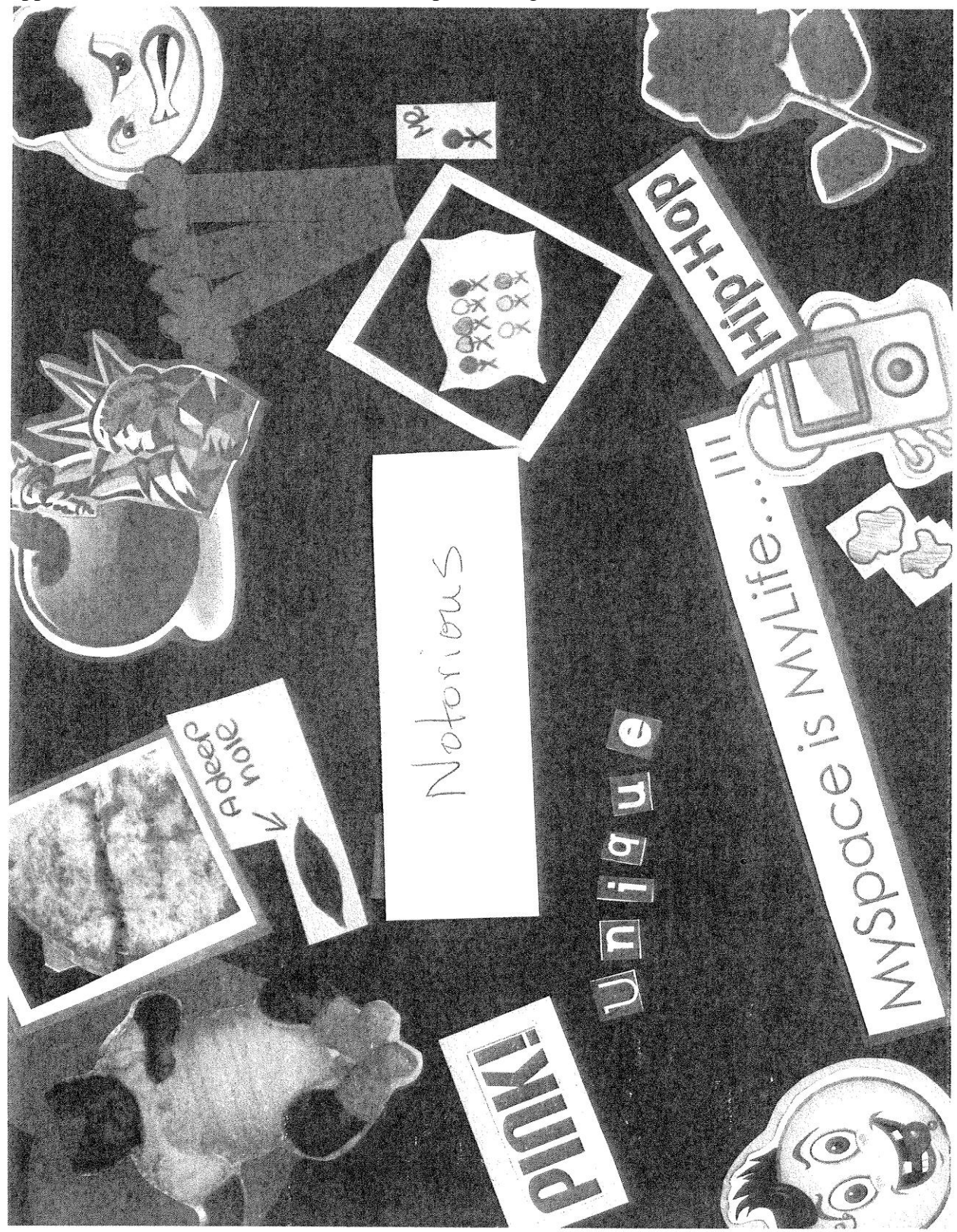
Study Number: 07ED008

Chairperson/Agent IRB Signature:  Date 10.24.06

RC IRB Review Form Revised: 2/04

Appendix G

Participant collages





8 Psychology

EAGLES Dairy Queen

THE FEW THE WISE THE COLLEGE REPUBLICANS

CSI

EAGLES
Vince Buckley

SOUTHERN FRIED
Chicken

MAYBE PARTYING WILL HELP

ROCK & ROLL

EAGLES



Carmy Hines

PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN
TREASURE CHEST

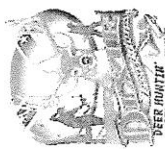
Redneck

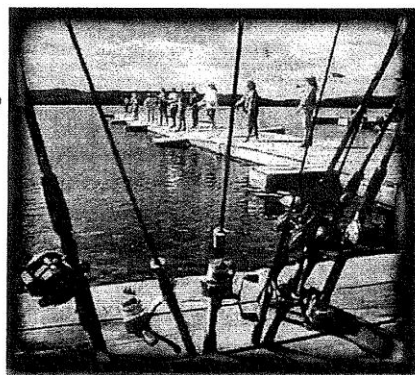
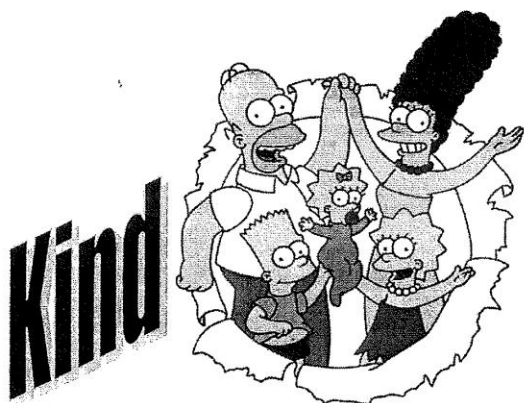
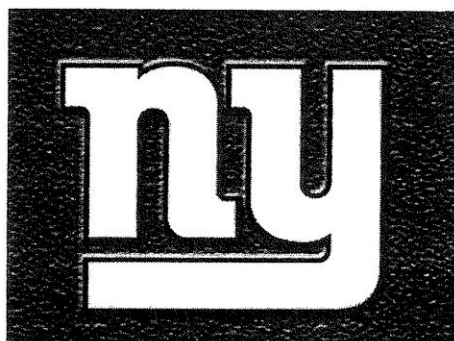


ALL
THE
GUNS

HALLMARK

Eagles

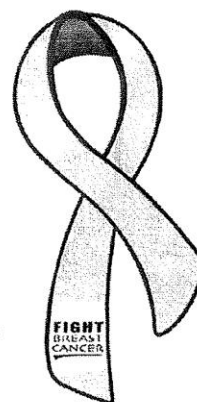




Respectful



*Easy
Going*





A pilot study was conducted in fall of 2006 at a small east coast liberal arts college. Six participants from an original pool of 23 children's literature class members were asked to respond to several writing prompts on an online discussion board. All prompts were drawn from class readings and discussion of *The Tale of Despereaux*, by Kate DiCamillo (2001). After grading in the course was completed, a focus group interview was conducted with 3 of the 6 participants. Classroom observations were recorded in field notes during class discussion of the novel as well.

Pilot research questions

The pilot study sought to expand existing knowledge on teacher preparation of socially conscious preservice teachers and centered on the following research questions:

1. How do preservice teachers perceive social justice?
2. How can critical reading of children's literature impact preservice teachers' sense of social justice?
3. What social justice topics will preservice teachers find resonant within the literature presented?

I chose to collect narrative, observational, and interview data to triangulate my findings as I analyzed the variety of data sources looking for corroboration or negation of themes. Narrative data were collected in the form of online writing responses.

Pilot participants

Preservice teachers are preparing to meet the educational needs of future generations. Because they may interact with so many children throughout a teaching career, I chose them as the purposeful sample for the pilot with the intention of engendering critical dialogues about subjects pertinent to anyone who will work with diverse groups. Choosing preservice teachers who were also in a required children's literature course allowed for generation of the study within a framework potentially relevant to many teacher education programs. I chose my own class because it provided choice of class textual materials, access to an online discussion board, and the opportunity to construct the writing prompts, allowing for the gathering of deeper, richer data than I might have been able to access from another population.

The participant pool included 23 students enrolled in the course. All were traditional age (18-22) and were in a preservice teacher education program of study. All were white; 22 were US citizens; one was an exchange student from western Europe. There were four males and 19 females. Inclusion in the study was completely voluntary and participants remained anonymous throughout unless they choose to participate in the focus group interviews offered at the end of the course.

Six of the 23 students participated in the online discussion board. Demographic questions posed to these participants at the end of the pilot identified them as five females and one male. Three participants attended the focus group interview: two females and one male. Further details on these six participants are included in the section devoted to the data collection and analysis of the pilot study.

Consent. Participant consent for the pilot was generated from an online form read prior to admission to the discussion board. Students' consent was implicit with initiation of the first

participant response. A detailed written description of the study accompanied the online consent form. Participants also had been read the study description in class. Consent for the focus group interviews was initiated online as well, with a printed form of the document presented to the principal researcher by participants at the beginning of the focus group interview. Participants who chose not to attend the focus group were able to return a signed consent form via email along with their answers to the same interview questions that were used with those attending the group interview. Consent for the interviews included documentation of participant awareness that their identity would be revealed to the investigator during the interview, but only after grading in the course had been finalized.

The only direct benefit to the participants was a \$15 pizza gift certificate given at completion of the course either via anonymous pick up in the education office or at the focus group meeting. A potential indirect benefit to participants may be the enhancement of critical thinking and writing skills as a result of interacting with the text and prompts.

Demographic data

Personal data on participants was only collected at the completion of the pilot study as the participants remained anonymous during the children's literature course. Demographic questions were posed to all six participants; three appeared at the interview in person to complete this phase and three participants responded online to the questions. The participants were asked the following questions:

1. What is your gender?
2. What is your race/ethnicity?
3. What is your economic class (or that of your parents)?
4. Where did you spend most of your childhood – City, State? Is this a large, medium city or a small town?
5. What is your religious affiliation if any?
6. How would you describe your exposure to diverse environments? Major, Moderate or Limited exposure.
7. At what grade level would you like to teach?
8. What is the level of education of your parents? Post college graduate, college graduate, some college, high school graduate, some high school.

Narrative and Observational data

Class discussion and writing prompts were built around the children's book, *The Tale of Despereaux* by Kate DiCamillo (2001). *Despereaux* is the story of a young mouse, born into an environment that does not accept his differences (physical, mental and emotional). As Despereaux follows his heart through his early life, he encounters multiple instances of discrimination and ultimately must choose between sacrificing his principles or his life. The ensuing drama takes the reader through Despereaux's efforts to save himself, his love, and his way of life. Along the way, other characters, human and animal, interact with Despereaux and provide numerous examples of prejudices and the abuses related to them.

Four prompts, which appear in their entirety further along in this section, were used over a one-month time period. The responses from participants were not part of the required work in the course, a fact which I believe impeded participation as well as diversity of response since only the most motivated and interested students may have chosen to participate. In addition to these formal prompts, participants were able to respond to one another while the researcher

followed the discussions. Member checking for clarification was accomplished by responding to the comments made on Blackboard (eliciting clarification such as the definition of a word used or elaboration of an idea that seemed ambiguous). The second, third, and fourth prompts were developed based upon participant responses to the prior prompts. In this way, maximum elaboration was sought on topics the participants found relevant.

Initial introduction to the text material took place in the children's literature course in the first course session with all students present. Group observations were conducted during class and field notes were written immediately after class or during class if I was not facilitating the discussions. Field notes included class interactions as a whole and discussion topics in particular, but no personally identifying data were collected at those times. I recorded comments made when the discussion became particularly heated or when groups of class members situated themselves along clear lines of opposing opinion. These field notes were used only to create an overall description of the atmosphere of class and the peripheral discussions and assignments that were occurring when the actual research documents were being written. The field notes did reveal interesting delineations of student opinion on such subjects as how difference should be tolerated and how majority rule was defined. The notes were ultimately helpful in contextualizing coded data and deriving themes.

At the completion of the course, three participants consenting to the focus group met at a coffee shop, the location of their choice, for a semi-structured group interview. Participants' identities had remained anonymous to both the investigator and to each other until this meeting (at which time grading in the course had been completed). Online interviews, completed at the end of the course, did not ask for participants to name themselves, but did focus on clarification of narratives and exploration of emerging data as well as basic demographic information such as gender, college year, hometown, and economic situation. These questions were used for member checking, clarification of questions, resolution of inconsistencies, triangulation of data, and to give participants the opportunity to most accurately represent themselves.

Due to the noisy atmosphere of the meeting place, the focus group interview was recorded in field notes and expanded upon immediately after the completion of the interview. The field notes were then analyzed by coding them using corresponding codes from the narrative analyses of course documents and class observation field notes.

Narrative analyses of written responses were used as the primary data source. The participants' narratives were posted anonymously to the online discussion board where they had the opportunity to post as often as they liked as well as to interact with other participants. Prompts sought to initiate discussion of conflicts within the text that had social justice implications. Ties to the issues espoused in the definition of social justice were sought. On-going clarification was sought after writing prompt responses were read by the principal researcher, but anonymity was retained.

Participants were identified only by pseudonyms they chose. Two participants did not choose a pseudonym so the researcher chose one for them in order to maintain clarity and consistency of the data. The responses were referenced only by pseudonym. The principal researcher coded and analyzed the initial written responses and follow up responses using a constant comparative analysis method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Iterative code mapping (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002) was also used to search for emerging themes, to clarify data, and in order for emerging data to guide subsequent writing prompts, as well as the focus group interview questions. The process was repeated for each set of data collected and was then repeated once more to combine all of the data.

Writing prompts. The prompts specifically addressed the social justice issues related in the initial proposal, generally discriminatory practices. As stated earlier, the first prompt was the only one that was written prior to initiation of the study. All prompts follow:

1. We spoke in class of “difference” and how people / characters are different from each other and how this plays out among groups of people / characters. In keeping with that thought – discuss what “differences” make a difference. What is important about “difference” and why is it important? You may use examples from your reading or from life to illustrate your thoughts.
2. You mentioned “innocent” groups and “mature” groups using “difference” to enhance the “quality of the group.” How does inclusion of different people – cultures, classes, races, and genders have been mentioned – alter an environment such as a classroom?
3. Despereaux was finally pushed to take a stand for his unique values when he was asked to renounce reading in the library and speaking with the princess. Have you ever been pushed to take such a stand to support your own beliefs? Describe that circumstance and why you acted as you did.
4. Do you believe American society follows similar discrimination patterns to what we see in Despereaux’s environment? Give relevant examples.

It was noted that no one responded to prompt number three; it was surmised that the more personal nature of this prompt was intimidating to participants, but it is possible that the wording of the prompt implied that only a “big” stand would be considered appropriate to mention. Since sweeping social stances are not the norm in everyday interactions, students may not have thought they had anything to recount. Further exploration of this supposition was sought during participant interviews and is reported in the “Findings” section.

Interview data

Three informants attended the focus group interview. A semi-structured interview process was used, beginning with questions intended to elicit elaboration on written participant responses that had been posted to the discussion board during the study. The initial interview questions appear below:

1. What is your attitude toward teaching as a career choice?
2. Why do you want to teach?
3. What do you believe about bias?

Participant responses to these structured questions drove additional questioning that was allowed to emerge during the open discussion among participants. Emergent questions included but were not completely limited to the following:

1. How idealistic do you think you are about teaching?
2. How important is a child’s home life to their educational experience?
3. How is gender relevant to this discussion on bias?
4. Elaborate on bias – when, where, and how does it exist?

Though these questions elicited some engaging discussions on difference, bias, and the participants' career goals, they failed to address adequately the issue of participant identity and only touched on participant awareness of others' identities. The focus group interview protocol will be completely reworked for the full study after initial data gathering and early analysis are done.

All three focus group participants took part in discussion on each question, though the interviewer did prompt answers if no initial response was given. Such prompts were limited to calling the participant's name and asking if he or she had anything to add on the particular question at hand. Each participant so prompted did add to the discussion. Though these prompts by the researcher may be construed as intrusive and leading, they were minimally so and appeared to give quieter participants the opening in the conversation they may have needed to interject comments. Field notes of these interviews revealed several instances where participants gave the appearance of beginning to speak only to be cut off by another participant. One of the participants was quite a bit more talkative than the other two in the beginning of the interview.

Trustworthiness of data

Though participants wrote hesitantly at first, later responses became longer and deeper and reflected that other participants' responses were being read. All became more willing to share personal stories as illustrations of their views. The speed with which participants formed a personal investment in the topic was unexpected, but led the researcher to surmise that the narratives tended to be authentic representations of the participants' beliefs. Aforementioned measures of credibility such as member checking, reanalysis of data, and triangulation of data lend trustworthiness to the data and findings (Patton, 2002).

Data were stored in the locked office file of the principal researcher who has the only access to it. All data will continue to be stored in locked files in the researcher's office until the completion of the full study. Five years after completion, all data will be destroyed, paper files shredded and electronic files deleted.

Pilot findings

Initial themes

Four themes emerged through analysis of the narrative, observational, and interview data: (a) the ambiguous nature of participant feelings toward diversity, (b) the perceived consequences inherent to a diverse environment, (c) a tendency to categorize people, and (d) a perception that diverse environments may lead us to personal transformation. The categorization of people and the possibility of personal transformation themes led me to question why participants had trouble bridging the dichotomous gap between their perception of others and their stated belief that diverse environments are positive entities. The three data sources were considered individually first and then together with triangulation of the data serving to provide a more complete analysis than might otherwise have been possible. Additional reading on democratic classrooms (Noddings, 2002;), self-reflection (Dewey, 1933; Schon, 1983; Zeichner, 1996), and identity formation (Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermut, 2000; Sugrue, 1997; Woods & Jeffrey, 2002) leads me to link participant ability to construct or reconstruct identity to the ability to consider the identities of others.

Ambiguity

Ambiguous feelings towards diversity was the first theme derived from the coded narrative and observational data. The back and forth nature of the discussion (both oral and written) regarding difference showed up in almost all of the responses and was supported by the field notes on class discussions as well as the notes from the focus group interviews. After reading responses to the first writing prompt, which centered around how differences among the characters in the novel were perceived, several interesting points about perceptions of diversity came to light. Participants noted that diverse settings, such as classrooms, allow for differences among people to be noticed and accommodated, but all also related at least a potential downside to being a part of a diverse environment.

Wanda, the first participant to respond, relates in her first narrative that “some differences are more important than others” and that differences matter more if you are “the sole minority” (Wanda). She goes on to report that physical differences are “more important” since they are easily seen and may leave one open to discrimination (Wanda). She broaches what comes to define one of the most salient points in the study, the ambiguous nature of perceptions of difference: “Of course, being different is not a bad thing, although I tend to associate it with negative experiences...being excluded or discriminated against...” (Wanda). Spencer concurs that being different is a “good quality,” but that it is “hard” (Spencer).

Ghost relates during the interview that if she “were a minority; [she] might feel uncomfortable; unable to relate to the culture” of the teacher in the classroom; it is a “complicated problem” (Ghost). This disconnect between cultures is one of the reasons diversity is “hard” (Spencer). All respondents in the interview stated the need for higher numbers of teachers of color to help with this issue, but also saw the practicality of needing to address culture with the existing teacher pool rather than dismissing practicing teachers outright as culturally ignorant. As this statement was a shared construction during the interview process, I let it stand as it is, but “cultural ignorance” and its implications will need to be addressed in full study.

Consequences

Susie references “types of kids” five times in one narrative response, always in connection with poor classroom behavior or difficulty fitting into the class environment; her term for this phenomenon, “acting out,” is also referenced a number of times during the one response (Susie). She worries that other students and even the teacher will ignore such a student due to this poor behavior pattern, though she still labels “diversity” a “wonderful tool in helping educate kids into the real world” (Susie). She also voices the opinion that teachers must be prepared to teach such diverse students. The second theme, the consequences of diversity, though exhibited by several other participants, gets its impetus from Susie’s voice.

Field notes from the course show a number of the same issues arising in full class discussion, though there was no way to know if those speaking out in class were participating in the study. In beginning discussion on the novel (*Despereaux*), students complained vociferously about the “unfair” treatment given to the main character, Despereaux, treatment covering everything from social ostracization to implementation of his execution. The class was in consensus on the “wrongs” that were done to Despereaux as well as to other significant characters who are also mistreated due to circumstances of class, species, or gender. However, the discussion did become more pointed as one student noted that some of these characters “brought this treatment on themselves” by choosing to go against the “laws” of their society.

Interview field notes revealed a continuing concern from all participants that diverse environments pose challenging – sometimes insurmountable – obstacles to teachers. Spencer voices his feelings on the teacher pool: Being white and middle class “may make it difficult to connect to students who are diverse, but it is a practical issue – who wants to teach (Spencer)?

Categorization

Opening up talks on the positive and negative “consequences”(Susie) of difference may be an important step in trying to include the views of those who do not believe they are socially unjust, but who may act in ways that bely their perceptions. In responding to prompts two and four, other participants stated similar opinions about difference. Susie brings in a dichotomous view of people - them versus me - as she discusses how the inclusion of people from a variety of cultures, classes, races, and genders can alter an environment. From her perspective, there are “problems” arise due to “where these different types of kids are coming from” (Susie).

The identification of the tendency to see “types of kids” (Susie) as noted by this one participant but alluded to by several others is important. Though it may seem a further elaboration of the ambiguous nature of perceptions of diversity, I believe it is salient on its own given the import of separating people along categorical lines.

A later class discussion on difference and tolerance of those unlike ourselves brought a similar reaction. Two students became adamant regarding the “right” of the majority (us) to make the rules. These students felt that the majority was within their “rights” when setting the rules for others to follow simply by virtue of those rules being “best” for the majority, whether or not they were in everyone’s best interest. The other students, approximately 20, did not concur and voiced this opinion by murmured dissent and a general rumbling of discontent with the path of the discussion. Two additional students, from the dissenting group, then spoke to their concerns: that laws should take the minority view into account and that the majority was not automatically “right” and did not have more “rights” than the minorities, solely based on their larger number.

The end of course interviews revealed the depth of the dichotomous perception of people. Even Ghost, who held one of the most hopeful visions for the future of diversity within society states that she finds it easy to stereotype people according to long-held belief systems imposed during her childhood. The “complicated” (Ghost) nature of the problem of categorization comes up several times with her. In addition, though all interview participants related that they were “realistic” about the challenges of teaching, all also admitted to limited or no engagement with groups of people culturally different from themselves.

Personal transformation

Transformation of self through interaction with others, is the most hopeful of the themes that have emerged in this pilot. Several of the participants allow for this kind of change being possible, but only one speaks to it directly: “interacting with people who are different from us allows us to fill in the gaps that would otherwise be left empty” (Ghost). Taylor, speaking of diversity, chooses to define the term in her response: she is unhappy with what she considers the limited value of considering only culture, class, race, and gender and wishes to include life experiences, interests, and learning styles. She goes on to relate that lived experiences with difference allow “us to better make our own decision about our beliefs” (Taylor). This statement stands out from the others because it is not diluted by any references to the negative effects of diversity or difference.

The last participant to join the study, Ghost, chose to respond only to prompt number four. However, her response is one of the longest and most intensely worded. She speaks of the segregation of the “classes” she feels exists in the “land of the free...” (Ghost). She repeats her views on the continuation of segregation several times, twice coupling it to religious discrimination, the first mention of this topic in any of the responses.

Her example of a school related instance of religious intolerance is chilling: “what is the difference between a pizza and a Jew? The pizza doesn’t scream when you put it in the oven” (Ghost). She goes on to say that no one spoke up against this “joke;” not even the teacher who overheard it. “Some teacher might take a stand occasionally, but still it is not often enough” and apparently from Ghost’s perspective only certain kinds of discriminatory issues elicit any response (Ghost). The “n word” causes a stir with teachers, but “cracker” used in a similar way, as a racial epithet, gets no reaction from authority figures (Ghost). She ties up her views succinctly: “We are still segregated; America is still no better than *Despereaux*” regarding hostility toward difference (Ghost). She longs for some sense of justice consistent with the ideas in Prompt #3 which asked if participants had ever been involved in an altercation of just this type and had stood up to voice an opinion. It is possible that Ghost was answering this prompt as well as the one that followed it as she answered only the one time in written form.

Though several of the participants voiced their hopeful opinions about the transformative nature of diverse environments, in the interviews the participants were unanimous in their view that “older kids are scary” and no longer “teachable” (Ghost, Alex, and Spencer). All responded that they were seeking to teach younger children – elementary aged - due to the perceived adaptability to the learning environment. Two female interviewees referenced that teaching would allow them the “freedom for family time with [their] future children” (Ghost, Alex). The admission that some children, even large groups of them, may be lost to the education process is a frightening thought coming as it does from preservice teachers. All of these examples highlight the complicated nature of social justice. They also serve to contextualize the responses that were more clear in their depiction of discriminatory processes and personal biases.

But, all three interview participants readily acknowledge the ease with which personal bias is acted upon. Spencer saw bias as an issue “in the eye of the beholder” (Spencer) while Alex added that “we’ll all struggle with bias, personally, forever” (Alex). It is the willingness to admit bias and speak their minds that these three participants exhibited that may allow studies such as this to be of use to the field of education. Harry Wolcott (2005), in *The Art of Fieldwork*, suggests that interviews revolve around a few “big issues” (p. 195). It was just such issues I hoped to find participants elaborating on in the end of course interviews and this proved to be the case.

As data were reanalyzed after all prompts were complete and interviews had been conducted, there was an expectation that shifts in initial themes might occur. Such was not the case; the initial themes became richer, but no additional ones were added, nor were any deleted after the interview process. The respondents’ answers did serve to illuminate how they may have come by their beliefs or how they situated themselves within the education field.

Limitations – Point of view

Using my own class may leave this study open to a charge of researcher bias, but the anonymity of participants helped limit this possibility. The chance of participant intimidation due to the power discrepancy between teacher and student was also mitigated by the anonymity afforded the participants. In addition, if an entire course is based on student response through

discussion and written documents, the familiarity built among the class members and the instructor will help mitigate this power differential as well. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) relate that researcher bias has always been present and that participatory action research allows this bias to be publicly addressed within the research.

Participant homogeneity was unavoidable in the pilot due to the purposeful sample being used. All potential participants were white and of traditional college age. Twenty-three were U. S. citizens; one was European. There were four males, 20 females, and all were self identified as education minors. One possible remedy to homogeneity in the participant group is the addition of non-preservice teachers.

Additionally, this pilot study was limited by the participation of only six students. The demographic breakdown of actual participants was unknown during the children's literature course timeframe, but was revealed at completion. There were 5 female participants (Ghost, Susie, Alex, Taylor, and Wanda) and one male (Spencer). Four participants were sophomores, one was a junior (Wanda) and one was a senior (Taylor). Two participants were commuter students (Susie and Spencer) while the others lived on campus. Two students (Alex and Taylor) were from outside the state of the study. Three students (Alex, Susie, and Wanda) had attended private elementary and/or secondary schools. All participants hoped to eventually teach at the elementary level. One participant (Ghost) described herself as from a military family – moving six times during the course of her K-12 education. Parents of five participants were college graduates; Spencer's parents were listed as having attended college.

Participant incentives deserve further thought as initiation of participation was quite challenging. However, in speaking with the focus group, all said the most pressing drawback of participation was lack of time to engage in an activity additional to their course load. They reported not being at all influenced by the gift certificate offer. The use of already existing course documents may provide a solution to this problem for the full study. Further, an extended time frame could allow for greater depth as well as quantity of data.

Pilot summary

Findings showed several emergent themes when the narrative, observational, and interview data were coded and analyzed: the ambiguous nature of participant feelings toward diversity, a tendency to categorize people, and a perception that diverse environments may lead us to personal transformation.

Though several of the participants voiced their hopeful opinions about the transformative nature of diverse environments, in interviews the participants were unanimous in their view that “older kids are scary” and no longer “teachable” and diverse populations cause more “problems” than ones made up of the dominant culture (Ghost, Alex, and Spencer). The admission that some children, even large groups of them, may be lost to the education process is a frightening thought coming as it does from preservice teachers. Other responses relate many instances of discriminatory processes and personal biases from the participants' educational experiences. For these participants, those willing to “take a stand” (Ghost) against injustice are few and far between, and teachers are no more likely than anyone else to do so.

All interview participants readily acknowledged the ease with which personal bias is acted upon. Spencer saw bias as an issue “in the eye of the beholder” (Spencer) while Alex added that “we'll all struggle with bias, personally, forever” (Alex). It is this willingness to admit bias and speak their minds which these participants exhibited that may allow studies such as this to be of use to the field of education.