

RACE, IDENTITY AND LANGUAGE IN SHIFTING SCHOOLS

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

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Over the past thirty years U.S. schools have been quietly resegregating. This dissertation study examines the function of language in racially shifting schools. Grounded in sociolinguistic and critical studies, this work draws on two cases studies to empirically explore how high school English teachers and their students interact with the phenomenon of racial demographic shift in school. Existing literature has contributed to an understanding of the complex nature of these shifts. However, much of the offered research has focused on policy and quantitative outcomes. This study seeks to add to and expand upon the body of knowledge on race shifts in U.S. schools by highlighting the narratives of English teachers and students – and providing insights into the language and practice of these primary school stakeholders. This study addresses the following research questions: What interactions, if any, have English teachers and students had with this process of school racial demographic shifts? How, if at all, have these interactions manifested themselves during school discourse, and with what effects? How, if at all, do the critically literate practices of English teachers map onto discourse in racially shifting schools?

I explain that the identities of students and teachers, everyday school happenings and teacher pedagogy inform the holistic narrative of racial shift in a school. This narrative shapes the way that teachers and students experience school. I also explore how critically literate practices in English classrooms inform this narrative. Pedagogy grounded in critical literacy does not have a direct positive effect on the evolving story of race change in a school. Next, I delve into the “we love diversity” ethos espoused by all of the study participants. This ethos is in constant tension with the troubling story about incoming diverse populations of students and their families at each school. Through the employment of an analysis framework underpinned by sociolinguistic and critical traditions, distinct language features became apparent amongst and between English teachers and students. A framework for silent dialogue about race and traits of change discourse emerged.

Finally, the data in this study coalesce to suggest that the narratives and discourse associated with racial demographic shifts in a school directly impact the in school experiences of students. Pedagogy in English classrooms can influence both the narrative about race shifts in school and discourse among school stakeholders. Ultimately, this dissertation suggests that close attention to and deliberation in language and teaching practice is essential in racially shifting schools. Teachers and students have the power to impact language and narrative formation to create a positive and affirming learning environment for the entire school community.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my great aunt Carrie, cousin Mitchell and cousin Sand. You were taken from us much too soon. We miss you.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

“Give thanks to Him and praise His name”

(Psalm 100:4 New International Version)

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## KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

AAL	African American Language
AP	advanced placement
CFE	Campaign for Fiscal Equity
CMS	Charlotte–Mecklenburg school district
CS	coded silence
DS	double silence
ISD	Intermediate School District
MTO	Moving to Opportunity
NSS	nonspeech silence
PICS	Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1
SES	socioeconomic status
TCLA	Teaching to Change LA

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

U.S. schools are quietly resegregating. Over the past 3 decades, racial groups have experienced levels of school and residential isolation that rival the Pre-*Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) era, despite a rapidly diversifying population in the United States (Orfield & Lee, 2007; Street, 2005a). When observing segregation trends in individual states, Michigan emerges as the leader in residential segregation. At the time of this study, the Metro Detroit Area being the most racially stratified metropolitan area in the United States, both residentially and in its schools (Iceland, Weinberg, & Steinmetz, 2002; Jacoby, 2000). It is in this environment that I sought to gain insight into the phenomenon of racial demographic shifts in schools.

School racial-demographic shift refers to both the 30-year trend toward racially monolithic schooling experiences for U.S. children, and the modern-day tracking practices in integrated school districts that segregate students by race in schools. Scholars from various disciplines have acknowledged the precariousness of the contemporary retreat toward school resegregation. In 2007, “a social science brief [was] signed by 553 researchers from 201 colleges and research centers and related briefs [were] filed by the American Education Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and other groups” (Orfield & Lee, 2007, p. 6). These briefs were submitted to the G. W. Bush administration during the landmark *Parents Involved In Community Schools V. Seattle School Districts* (2007) case whose affirmative decision outlawed mandated school-integration efforts in U.S. schools. In their analysis of The National Educational Longitudinal Study data, Rumberger and Palardy (2005) concluded that

socioeconomic diversity in schools was a leading variable in high academic achievement for Black and Latino youth. Segregated residential tracts for Black and Latino youth overwhelmingly contain high concentrations of poverty. In their examination of the national drop-out crisis, Balfantz and Legters (2004) discovered that high school drop-outs are concentrated in about 2,000 schools in 50 cities and 15 suburban/rural areas in the United States. Of school-aged children, 46% of Black and 39% of Latino students attend these dropout prone schools. About 11% of White children are enrolled in the same schools. These data proffer compelling motivation to further explore the experiences of students and teachers in shifting schools – particularly schools that are trending toward segregated experiences.

Researchers have conducted many policy-focused analyses of regional school resegregation. However, there is a paucity of microanalysis on the lived experiences in racially shifting schools. This study seeks to add to and expand upon the body of knowledge on race shifts in U.S. schools by highlighting the narratives of English teachers and students – and providing insights into the language and practice of these primary school stakeholders by (a) examining the language associated with school racial-demographic shifts in two Michigan inner-ring suburban high schools, (b) examining the roles of English teachers and students in shifting schools, and (c) proffering insights into how language evolves in racially shifting schools. This scholarly investigation is grounded in the following research questions.

1. What interactions, if any, have English teachers and students had with the process of school racial-demographic shifts?
2. How, if at all, have these interactions manifested themselves during school discourse, and with what effects?

3. How, if at all, do the critically literate practices of English teachers map onto discourse in racially shifting schools?

I posit that language in shifting schools plays an integral role in the everyday experiences of students and teachers. Language features can be used to understand the “new normal” in schools that have undergone significant racial demographic shifts. Here, the term “language” is used to express human dialogue, storytelling, and speech patterns. The field of sociolinguistics lends itself well to systematic codification of verbal and textual features. Thus, the term “language” of school racial-demographic shift is appropriate for this study. Discourse and storytelling in this language may contribute to the transformation of an individual school. The humanization of this process requires an in-depth examination of the interactions between the key stakeholders in the school community (teachers and students). This language can be difficult to uncover when considering the silences around “race talk” in U.S. schools. Here, I propose to uncover language features and discourse in this new language.

### **Critical Literacy and Sociolinguistics: A Framework for Analysis**

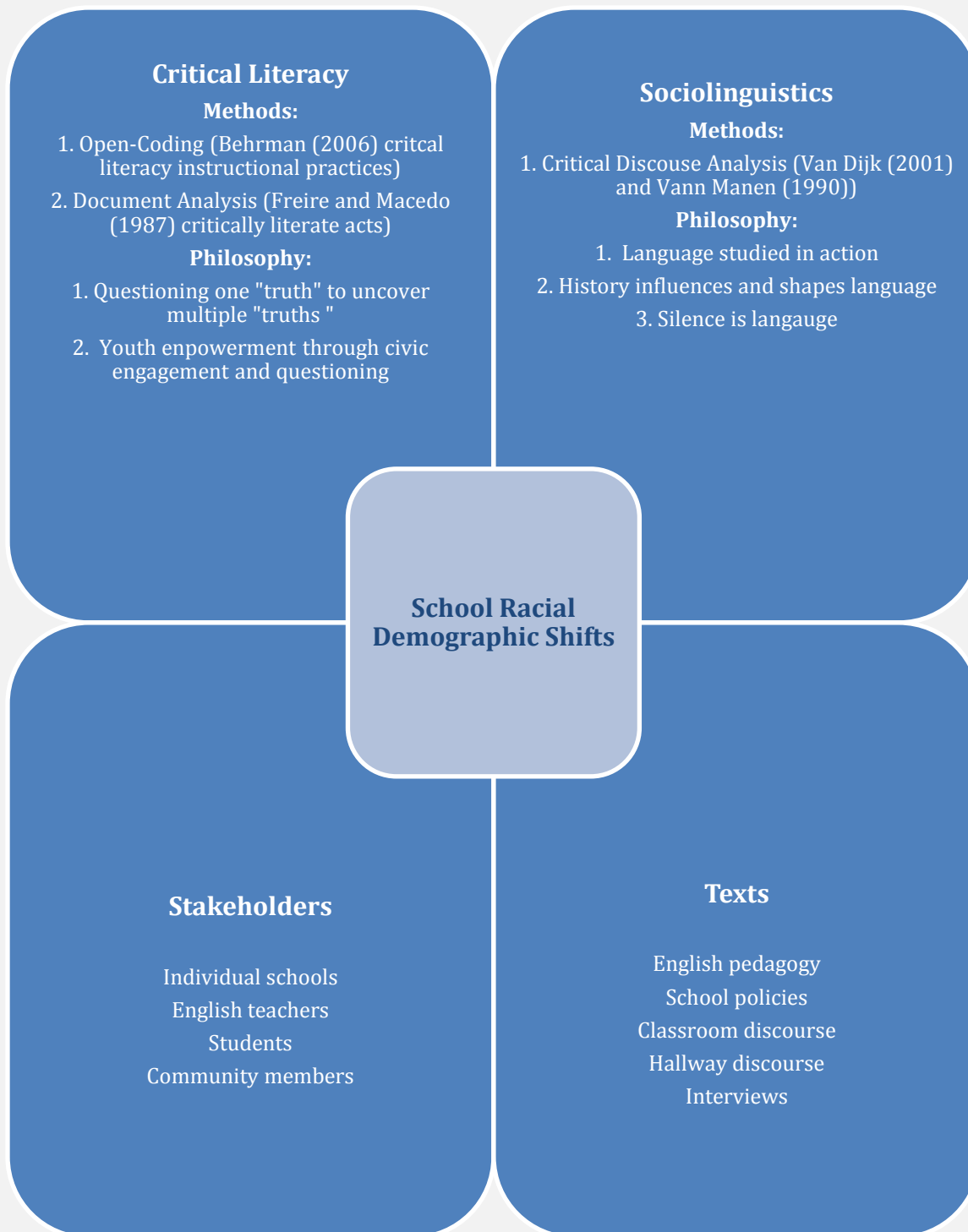
Bakhtin (1981) further complicated the field of language study with a conception of *heteroglossia* (multiple voices). Bakhtin believed that multiple languages could be mixed to create a new language. Languages can interact with one another in a myriad of ways as speech and dialogue are produced. Sociolinguistics can be used in individual school settings to uncover the language related to school demographic shifts. However, critical literacy is needed to *read* the language. These theoretical traditions work together in methodology and in philosophy. Open coding in classrooms for critical literacy practices combines with discourse analysis and with critical analysis of historical and contemporary documents. This work is not the first attempt to think about the combination of these fields of study. Van Dijk (2001) outlined the methodology



of critical-discourse analysis, which provides a critical framework to conduct discourse analysis in research. This methodology provides a framework to examine language through a critically literate lens. This lens can be used to simultaneously question issues of power, equity, and equality, while collecting linguistic data.

The framework for analysis of shifting schools can be extended beyond methodology to include the philosophical underpinnings of these two traditions. Questioning decisions made by school and community officials, while also evaluating the ways in which linguistic features are used, can provide insight into the motivations and processes behind modern school resegregation. The mindset of questioning one set truth and working to comprehensively uncover new truths is foundational in both theoretical traditions.

Figure 1 demonstrates how the philosophies of both traditions can be combined with a methodology for investigation. The figure illustrates how critical literacy, sociolinguistics, school stakeholders, and school texts/contexts all contribute to the central concept of the language of school racial demographic shift. Using my conceptual framework to analyze two individual school settings will yield a variety of data that can then be codified to uncover central themes. These themes and data will then be used to codify language features.



*Figure 1.* Conceptual framework.

I believe language used in discourse between teachers and students can impact the school environment across lines difference. The language used in these interactions can be difficult to uncover when considering the silences around “race talk” in U.S. schools. Here, I construct a theoretical framework to uncover language and interactions resulting from school racial-demographic shifts in individual schools by drawing on the historical foundations and modern-day applications of critical literacy and sociolinguistics. This theoretical framework provides a basis for analysis throughout the dissertation.

### **Dissertation Plan**

This dissertation is my attempt to use a sociolinguistic and critically literate lens to examine demographic shifts in suburban schools. In doing so, I examine narratives, identity, body politics, critical literacy in English classrooms, mindsets about diverse learners, and language features. The dissertation is organized to allow for connective tissue between the findings and themes.

In Chapter 1, I introduce the problem of school segregation and school racial-demographic shifts in the United States. The chapter begins to orient the reader to the trend toward racially homogenous schools. Here, I also describe my intention to study language use in shifting schools. This chapter introduces my research questions: (a) What interactions, if any, have teachers, students, and the school community had with the process of school racial-demographic shifts?; (b) How, if at all, have these interactions manifested themselves during school discourse, and with what effects?; (c) How, if at all, do the critically literate practices of English teachers map onto discourse in racially shifting schools?

Chapter 2 serves as a review of the literature and an introduction to the theoretical framework. The scholarly literature on school-demographic shifts is incomplete without a review

of precedent-setting legislation and ensuing policies. I began with the legislation and policies as a foundation for the key themes in the literature. Critical-literacy and sociolinguistic theories converge to construct my theoretical framework. Chapter 2 provided a knowledge base and a theoretical frame for the dissertation.

Chapter 3 outlines the study design and data-analysis framework. I laid out the site and participant-selection criteria, collected artifacts, and the coding schema. This chapter was the underpinning of the dissertation. The work in the data chapters lean on the clarity of design and analysis frameworks of this chapter. My story as researcher makes its first appearance in Chapter 3. My identity is a participant in this dissertation. Acknowledging this fact is necessary

Chapter 4 described the schools and the people in this study. It also served as an introduction to the school-of-choice law and the shifting racial-demographic numbers at each school. Each participant in this study had a unique story. Including parts of those stories is a critical component of the dissertation. The student and teacher participants gave freely of themselves for an entire school year. This chapter ensured their distinctive voices are primary in the data. Chapter 4 introduces and pays homage to the schools and stories of all of the participants.

Chapter 5 is the first data chapter. The narrative of racial-demographic shifts in each school opens the chapter. These narratives are constructed by the individual and collective experiences of school-community members. Othering of school-of-choice/open-enrollment students, remarks on student achievement at the school after racial shifts, and opinions about parents work, together craft an insidious story of inferiority of school-of-choice/open-enrollment students and superiority of residents of the district. The narrative is racialized and places Black students at the center of the inferiority paradigm. Body politics and identity construction was the

next section in the chapter. Here, I outline how student and teacher bodies are understood in a school environment that has shifted demographics. I also explain how student identity is being formed in this dynamic environment. I end with teacher and student sentiments about the racial changes in the schools. The love of diversity that is universally espoused rubs up against the stories of trauma, antithetical teaching practices, and identity development. Chapter 5 presents the myriad of lived complexities in a racially shifting environment.

Chapter 6 explores the classroom practices of teachers at each school through the lens of critical literacy. The classroom practices of the teachers affect each of the student participants in the study. I put forward the ways in which teachers understand and critically use literate practices in their classrooms, giving students a framework to understand and interact in the changing environment.

Chapter 7 puts forward the racial-silence framework and the change-discourse theory. The silence framework and change theory in action at Fairtown and Northstar High Schools permeate every interaction I observed and participated in at the high schools. I provide definitions and examples of NSS, DS, and CS. I explain change-discourse features and provide examples from teachers, students, and family members. These two overarching phenomena are put forward, crosscutting frameworks for suburban schools experiencing racial-demographic shifts.

Chapter 8 brings the study together. I put forward implications for school policies that impact race. I also write about implications for teachers in racially shifting schools. Finally, I add to the body of frameworks about racial-demographic shifts.

**CHAPTER 2**  
**POLICY AND PRACTICE:**  
**THE U.S. PROGRESSION TOWARD RESEGREGATED SCHOOLING**

**Literature Review: School Segregation and Student Achievement**

**Litigation**

A historical record of school segregation in the United States can be found in the nation's court transcripts. The *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) decision handed down the mandate of separate schools for Black and White students—given the allowance of equal resources for those schools. This mandate was never fully realized for America's school-aged children. Over half a century later, after several attempts to overturn the *Plessy* decision, the Supreme Court reached the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision. The *Brown v. Board* decision was split between two separate cases, known in scholarly works as *Brown I* and *Brown II*. *Brown I* served to rid the nation of the separate-but-equal doctrine, but it was *Brown II* that set the mandate to begin school desegregation (Guthrie & Springer, 2004). Immediately following the court rulings there was substantial backlash from the American public. An opinion poll in Florida following the ruling found that “75% of the state's White leaders dissented from *Brown I* ; 30% disagreed violently with *Brown I* ; and only 13% of police officers said they would enforce desegregation law” (Kluger, 1976). Additionally, in 1956, 19 senators and 89 representatives from southern states created the Southern Manifesto (Guthrie & Springer, 2004). This manifesto stated that its participants would “use all lawful means to bring about a reversal of [the *Brown*] decision which is contrary to the Constitution and to prevent the use of force in its implementation” (“The Southern Manifesto”, 1956, p. 4516).

Despite this public opposition, the federal government continued to work with state and local governments to ensure desegregation efforts were executed throughout the United States. However, the majority of these efforts were carried out in the South. Progress can be seen in comparing school enrollment numbers for the 1962–1963 school year, in which less than 1% of Black students were enrolled in desegregated schools in 11 southern states, to the enrollment numbers in 1973, where more than 91% of the Black students in those states attended desegregated schools (Leeson, 1974).

The progress made during the first 20 years after the *Brown* began to slow after the Supreme Court ruling in the *Miliken v. Bradley* (1973) case. *Miliken*, which was originally tried in metro-Detroit, changed the face of desegregation policy by shifting the focus from ensuring that classrooms had diverse student bodies, to ensuring that segregated school districts obtained extra funding. This decision set the precedent that segregated schools were acceptable, as long as they were properly funded—its similarity to the *Plessy v. Ferguson* “separate but equal” doctrine appeared to go unnoticed.

Following this trend, during the 1990s, much of the racial-desegregation progress made by *Brown* began to be undone as, “The Supreme Court began urging lower courts to declare school districts unitary, meaning that the prior segregation had been fully remedied and a desegregation order was no longer required” (Glenn, 2006, p. 65). With this urging, cases such as *Board of Education v. Dowell* (1991), *Freeman v. Pitts* (1992) and *Missouri v. Jenkins* (1995) began litigation in lower courts without the supervision of the Supreme Court. Each of these cases “created standards for dismissing long-running desegregation orders and allowing a return to neighborhood schools even if doing so meant returning to segregated schools” (Orfield, Frankenberg, & Lee, 2003, p. 19). This institution of the unitary-status clause represents a

milestone in the legacy of the *Brown* decision. Currently, school districts can declare “unitary status,” meaning that districts can claim they have removed all vestiges of segregation and are no longer subject to court-ordered desegregation. The cases of the 1990s provided an opening for the precedent-setting U.S. Supreme Court decisions of 2007. In the *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1 (PICS)* and *Crystal D. Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education* cases, the U.S. Supreme Court restricted the use of race in mandated school-desegregation plans. Districts not already under court-mandated desegregation orders can no longer explicitly consider race in court-ordered school choice options. Since the *PICS*, decision several districts under court-ordered desegregation mandates have submitted claims to be considered unitary—thus outlawing any race-based desegregation mandates. The past thirty years have seen plaintiffs utilize the court system to enact measures that have left many minority children in racially separate and unequally funded schooling conditions.

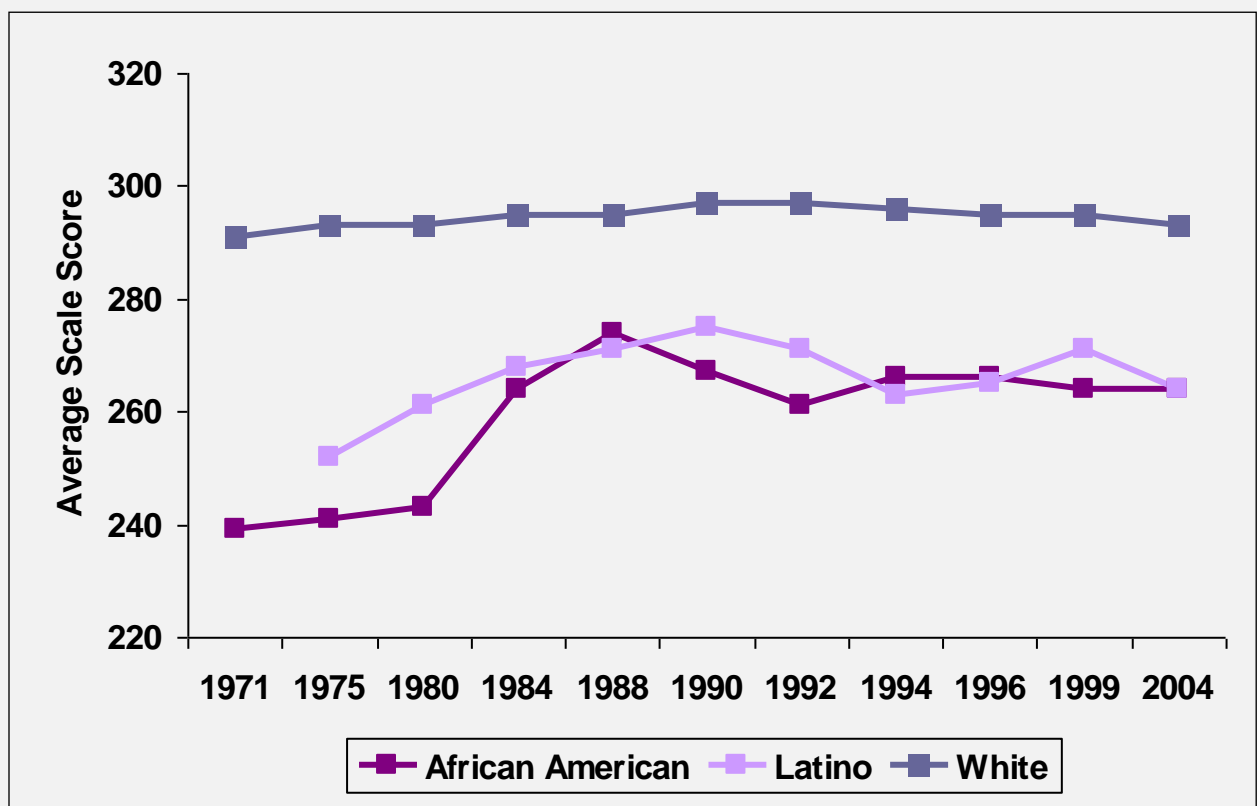
With the major court decisions of the 1990s, and the 2007 decisions, the future of court-mandated school desegregation appears bleak. Litigation will continue to be a major catalyst for change in school racial composition in America during the 21st century. The past 20 years have seen plaintiffs use the court system to enact measures that have left many minority children in separate—and unequal—schooling conditions.

### **School Composition and Student Achievement**

The achievement gap in the United States began to widen near the end of the 1980s (see Figures 1 and 2). The gaps in reading proficiency are currently the widest and the disparity shows no signs of recent narrowing. By the time Black and Latino children are 17 years of age, they consistently lag behind White 17 year olds in reading and mathematics. The research on the connection between student achievement and school racial diversity leans solidly toward positive



affects for Black students, particularly in reading. This is a significant finding, considering that Black students are on par with Latino students in reading disparities, even given English-language learners' challenges for newly immigrated students (see Figure 1). In a review of the research on the effects of school integration on students, Schofield (1987) found that school integration has no effect on White students' reading and mathematics achievement. However, there are statistically significant gains for Black student achievement.



*Figure 2.* National Assessment of Educational Progress reading, 17 year olds.  
Source: National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress 2004 Trends in Academic Progress.

In the early 1980s, “the U.S. Department of Education commissioned seven politically diverse researchers. ... This expert panel concluded that desegregation had a small positive effect on African American Students’ reading achievement” (Braddock, 2009, p. 6). These findings

were corroborated by the extensive Mayer and Jencks (1989) review of the effects of integration when considering both race and socioeconomics.

The review concluded that small gains in reading are evident for Black students after the first year of attending integrated schools. However, 12 years (representing Grades 1–12) in an integrated school, when controlling for SES showed gains in Black student achievement overall when compared to students in segregated schools. These findings provide hope for narrowing the Black–White Achievement Gap.

Other research focused on the intersections of student achievement, race, and SES. Over the past 30 years, the average income for Blacks has risen. However, school-aged children living in urban high-poverty tracts are far more likely to be minority students, and these schools are often racially segregated (Ludwig, Ladd, & Duncan, 2001). In their analysis of The National Educational Longitudinal Study data, Rumberger and Palardy (2005) concluded that socioeconomic diversity in schools is a leading variable in high academic achievement for Black and Latino youth. In fact, one key recommendation was mixing SES in schools to achieve greater academic outcomes for students of color. In their examination of the national drop-out crisis, Balfantz and Legters (2004) discovered that high school drop outs are concentrated in about 2,000 schools in 50 cities and 15 suburban/rural areas in the United States. These schools tend to be clustered in high-poverty areas. Of school-aged children, 46% of Black and 39% of Latino students attend these drop-out prone schools. About 11% of White children are enrolled in the same schools. Additionally, the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) and Geautreaux projects, which moved mostly minority families with school-aged children from high-poverty census tracts to low-poverty areas, showed academic gains for the children enrolled in their new low-

poverty tract schools<sup>1</sup> (Ludwig et al., 2001; Rubinowitz & Rosenbaum, 2000). These data proffer compelling motivation to explore the tipping points for contemporary school resegregation further. Not only are students segregated, but also the educational opportunities offered in segregated schools differ by SES and race. These factors weigh heavily on the achievement gap. If Black and Latino students are relegated to schools where they are at high risk for academic failure and dropping out, then the gap will continue to widen. However, enforcing desegregation mandates has also had a significant impact on Black and Latino students.

### **The Legacy of *Brown v. Board* in Black and Latino Communities**

*I see nothing more dangerous in the world than Negro cities ringed by White suburbs*

—King, 1967

As outlined in the original transcripts of the case after the *Brown v. Board* ruling, school authorities were given the most responsibility for carrying out school desegregation:

Full implementation of these constitutional principles may require the solution of varied local school problems. School authorities have the primary responsibility for elucidating, assessing, and solving these problems; courts will have to consider whether the action of school authorities constitutes good faith implementation of the governing constitutional principles. (*Brown v. Board*, 1954, p. 299)

Not all district desegregation plans were successful. In the aftermath of *Brown II*, school districts began to generate creative ways to navigate the language of the *Brown* ruling. The main tactic was to institute “free choice” programs that gave parents the choice of sending their children to designated integrated schools (Street, 2005b; Wells, Holme, & Atanda, 2005). Still,

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<sup>1</sup> There is some controversy about the outcomes of these two studies. One of the others dissented from the claims, noting that the teenagers were reported to have increased social problems in school.

many White parents, particularly in the Northeast and Midwest decided to flee urban areas for suburban regions where the push for integration was less insistent. Furthermore, a litany of court cases since the 1970s have sought to prove that school-desegregation measures are no longer needed. These factors combined with public disillusionment: “There are [now] enough examples of successful middle-class African-Americans to make many whites believe that blacks have reached parity with them. ... the odd black family on the block or the Oprah effect feed these misperceptions” (Cashin, 2004, pp. xi–xii). The result is an America where 71% of White Americans currently live in suburbs (Ascher & Branch-Smith, 2005).

White flight to the suburbs has caused inner-city schools in the United States to become increasingly segregated, with a spike in the isolation of African American students in the 1990s. Currently, “only 14 percent of white students attend schools where at least three races comprise 10 percent or more of the total school populations ... more than three-fourths of Latino students are in predominantly minority schools” (Orfield et al., 2003, p. 17) and “the average African American student’s school is 57 percent black” (Street, 2005b, p. 15). The old saying of green follows White (Wells et al., 2005) typifies the situation in the predominately minority inner-city schools in the United States. White Americans tend to live in locales with higher residential-property values (Ascher & Branch-Smith, 2005) and higher property taxes. Even in all-Black suburbs, with comparable architectural designs and lot size, property values are much less than that of their White counterparts (Ascher & Branch-Smith, 2005).

Much of the responsibility for carrying out the mandates of the *Brown* ruling during the 1960s and 1970s fell on the Black and Latino communities. Most Black and Latino students attended schools established in their neighborhoods. Thus, to attend the newly mandated desegregated schools, these students were often bused to neighboring school districts, some with

commutes of up to 2 hours (Wells et al., 2005). Busing programs have had a mixed effect on the communities in which they were mandated. One of the most prominent contemporary cases of mandated busing took place in the Charlotte–Mecklenburg school district (CMS). This large urban district in North Carolina began its school desegregation program in the 1970s. The program was successful in racially integrating the community and achieving academic gains in mathematics and reading for Black students. In 2002, CMS was granted unitary status, allowing the school district to move away from race-based policies to a general school-choice option for all parents. Students attending failing schools had the option to choose to send their children to high-performing schools, however, students living closest to the high-performing schools were given “seat preference.” This new unitary system has led to academic achievement declines for students of color, resegregation of Charlotte’s urban center and surrounding suburbs, and an overall increase of underqualified teachers in urban low-performing schools (Godwin, Leland, Baxter, & Southworth, 2006; Mickelson, Smith, & Southworth, 2009). Denver Public Schools and Hartford Public Schools are having similar results as their districts experiment with unitary status. The changing nature of school-desegregation programs appears to be aiding in the resegregation of the nation’s public schools. The legacy of the *Brown* decision is morphing into the post-*PICS* and unitary-status era.

### **Tracking, Teachers, and Bias: Together But Unequal**

In the years after the *Brown* decision, as the public began to acquiesce, greater numbers of America’s schools became integrated. This integration represents a watershed event in the evolution of resegregation practices: the institution of tracking. In many integrated schools, academic-tracking programs isolate students by race and class. Strong desegregation efforts in the South created a public school system in the 1970s and 1980s that began to mirror the racial

composition of the United States; the legacy of racism entered these integrated schools as well. Ladson-Billings (2004) gave one reason for this legacy in reflection on the *Brown* decision: “slavery existed legally in North America for almost 250 years. An apartheid-like social segregation was legally sanctioned for another hundred years. The United States as a nation is but 228 years old” (p. 10). This uniquely American legacy found its way into the schools even after *Brown*. With integration came within-school resegregation (Green, McIntosh, & Cook-Morales, 2005) of minority students, with Black students as the leading victims of this resegregation.

Several educational researchers conducted studies on race in integrated schools (Hudley, 1997; Noguera, 2003); results point to an educational system that has not outrun the institutional racism that it tried to escape with *Brown*. The most common method of within-school resegregation is the creation of more levels or tracks of classes. Tracking “is an insidious but awesome form of segregation, an ingenious circumvention of the *Brown* decision, which assures the continuing relegation of most children of color and poverty to an inferior, separate and unequal education” (Sanders & Holt, 1997, p. 2). This phenomenon has led to a large number of minority students in remedial classrooms, and a lack of African American and Latino students in advanced-placement courses. In a study of graduates of integrated high schools during the era immediately following *Brown*, Wells et al. (2005) interviewed a Latina graduate who earned high grades in her lower level classes and who was “never aware that there was maybe like an advanced, upper-level class for those that made A’s, and that they were all predominately White” (p. 2151). By using tracking to resegregate within schools, integrated schools have sent the message to African American and Latino students that there is a glass ceiling on academic achievement for them.

The creation of different academic-achievement levels within schools is the most overt form of racial stratification in integrated schools; however, a more covert form takes place inside the classroom. Currently, the U.S. teaching force is more than 80% white, monolingual, and female (Zeichner, 2003). Nine of 10 teachers in integrated schools are White females; “Moreover those teachers are from mostly suburban communities and have experienced little contact with African American students” (Casteel, 1998, p. 116). In some cases, this cultural mismatch has produced interesting academic implications for students of color. Casteel (1998) conducted a study of student–teacher interactions and race in integrated classrooms and found, “Concurrently, Caucasian American students received a greater portion of positive interactions such as being praised more often, receiving more positive feedback, and being given more clues by their teachers than African American students” (Casteel, 1998, p. 120). In an earlier post-*Brown* study, Gottlieb (1963) found “white teachers continued to stereotype Black students as fun loving, lazy, talkative, and rebellious, that is, as having characteristics that are not conducive to school success” (p. 12). This covert form of racial stratification in schools exists as a nebulous undertone that is often ignored by teachers and administrators.

Both overt and covert forms of racism have found their way into integrated schools in America. The implications for the African American and Latino students in these schools are overwhelmingly negative. As the nation’s achievement gap continues to widen, and researchers search for answers, the legacy of *Brown v. Board* cannot continue to be ignored.

Residential segregation and school segregation have helped create the steadily widening achievement gap in the United States. Black and Latino students consistently attend schools that are underfunded, underresourced and taught by teachers with less experience and lower test scores on teacher-certification examinations (Darling-Hammond, 1990; Rhee & Levin, 2006;

Street, 2005b). These students are also consistently taught through rote curricula with little room for exploration and discovery of knowledge. “White children made up only about 1% of students in the New York City schools in which such scripted indoctrinational instruction was imposed” (Kozol, 2006, p. 375). The reality of segregation in contemporary U.S. schools belies the progress made in the years following the *Brown* decision.

### **Critical Literacy, Schools, and Racial-Demographic Shift**

Critical literacy is the examination of literate practices through a critical lens. Included in this examination is an inherent call to action. Critical-literacy scholars Lankshear and McLaren (1993) explained that, “in *critical* literacy we are concerned with the extent to which ... actual and possible social practices and conceptions of reading and writing enable human subjects to understand and engage the politics of daily life” (p. xviii). Teachers and schools have utilized this tradition in a variety of ways. In *Becoming Critical Researchers: Literacy and Empowerment for Urban Youth*, Morrell (2004) described work with youth in California. The author implored youth to use critical literacy to question the status quo of their schooling experience, and to take action by researching important issues in their community and becoming civically engaged. In this way, students in the study constructed new truths that helped them navigate systems that had relegated them to remedial classes, urban poverty, and limited life outcomes. Teachers and students across the country have engaged in critically literate practices to read the world around them and effect change (Anyon, 2005; Appleman, 2000; Freire, 1970/1997; Noguera, 2003; Oakes & Rodgers, 2006). Critical literacy has also been used to affect schooling in realms outside of school districts.

In 1993, the *Campaign for Fiscal Equity* (CFE) began a 13-year-long case against the State of New York. In the case, the CFE charged that the state was inadequately funding the



education of students in New York City; these students were predominately Black and Latino. It was the use of critical-literacy practices applied to *the Constitution* and the New York Regents' learning standards that finally ended the case with a victory for the CFE. The CFE's lawyers systematically examined the text of these two documents to uncover what was considered *truth* about the education of the state's children. It was argued that New York City students should not be given more funding because, "sound basic education as a constitutional matter requires only a sixth-to-eighth grade level of education" (Rebell, 2005, p. 38). The CFE team did not accept the centuries-old conception of truth uncovered in these documents and challenged this static belief. By critically examining these documents to uncover new *truths*, the CFE team was able to procure \$5.4 billion for the children of New York City through the court's decision. Questioning of text, in all forms, followed by concerted action are the hallmarks of critical literacy.

One must understand the history of critical practices to begin to apply them in meaningful ways to the contemporary issue of school resegregation. Several researchers examined the legacy of *Brown* through sweeping policy lenses (Orfield, 1996; Street, 2005a; Wells et al., 2005). However, few engaged in critically assessing the interactions between teachers and students in resegregating schools in individual school communities. Critical literacy provides a platform to conduct this research in school communities and classrooms. In Behrman's (2006) review of the literature on critical-literacy practices in the classroom, the researcher uncovered six key instructional practices: (a) reading supplementary texts, (b) reading multiple texts, (c) reading from a resistant perspective, (d) producing countertexts, (e) conducting student-choice research projects, and (f) taking social action.

When observing classrooms in individual schools, coding for these practices aids in uncovering the use of critically literate practices in English classrooms. Skills learned using this

framework are applicable across content areas and have the potential to holistically influence the ways students approach discourse in school. Teachers who use critical-literacy practices push students to use accountable talk in conversations and to value multiple perspectives. Schools missing these vital practices in the classroom may be more prone to the development of language in school that does not value the experiences and voices of all students. In contrast, it could be the case that critically literate practices in schools may cause unrest and tension between students and teachers, as students engage in questioning the status quo. In a critical literacy work with urban youth in an integrated high school, Morrell (2004) coined this phenomenon *backlash pedagogy*:

Backlash pedagogy, like racism, is difficult to document when it does not consist of overt actions or statements. ... Lines of communication would break down even further and students felt more like adversaries of their teachers than young people wanting to learn from them. Those students who chose to critique their instructors and either advocate for themselves or have the project advocate for them inevitably fared worse than the students who silently plugged along. (p. 134)

Examining critical-literacy practices in classrooms can uncover discourse trends in schools and may provide direction to quell the segregation process in resegregating schools. Second, analysts can use critical literacy to examine primary documents. Much like the CFE's examination of documents that had become institutionalized in the State of New York, critical literacy can allow for questioning of school newspapers, disciplinary documents, tracking and grading policies, and curriculum documents. Examining these documents for evidence of what Freire and Macedo (1987) deemed as important critically literate acts—reading the world, political action, questioning canonical texts, and knowledge creation—can garner key insight

into the language of racial-demographic shifts in schools. To understand the phenomenon of school resegregation, one must go inside individual schools. Critical literacy provides a theoretical foundation that engenders discovery and new-knowledge construction. Using critical literacy to examine classrooms and documents in schools and school communities provides a solid foundation for rigorous research that will uncover the language of the school racial-demographic shift.

### **Sociolinguistics, Silence, Schools, and Resegregation**

Sociolinguistic studies have served as a vehicle for advocacy for schoolchildren. In *Talkin that Talk: Language, Culture and Education in African America*, Smitherman (2001) put forth a generation of advocacy for the language rights of Black speakers of African American Language (AAL) and other language minorities. Smitherman's sociolinguistic codification of AAL (along with others) led to political activism in colleges, universities, and school districts. In the court case, *Martin Luther King Junior Elementary School Children v. Ann Arbor School District Board* (1979), attorneys cited sociolinguistic evidence to demonstrate the need for further professional development of the teachers of African American children at King Elementary school. Advocates showed students' language to be significantly different from that of their teachers, and the court ordered the implementation of a new program to aid teachers in addressing issues of bilingualism in the classroom. Similar struggles were launched concerning AAL in the Oakland School District in California, in the Conference on College Composition and Communication, and with student performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. In an article in *Educational Researcher*, Alim (2005) commented on the need for collaboration between educational and sociolinguistic researchers:

Incorporating sociolinguistic theory and methodology with educational outcomes requires dialogue, which in some ways has been underdeveloped between these two fields because linguists may sometimes be perceived as “intellectual snobs” who are afraid of getting their hands dirty in the complex world of classrooms, while educators are sometimes perceived as “advocates” not intellectuals, whose research is either too “teachery” or too “touchy-feely.” (p. 24)

Alim recommended programs for critical language awareness for teachers to stem the tide of resegregating schools. Sociolinguistics and schools have a history in the United States that has affected positive change for students.

## **Silence**

Sociolinguistics also provides a foundation to examine the most complex aspect of any language: the silences. Van Manen (1990) postulated that silence has three forms: literal silence, epistemological silence, and ontological silence. This definition aids in understanding the complexities of spoken and unspoken silences.

To Van Manen, literal silence refers to the absence of speech. ... Van Manen defines epistemological silence as human beings’ experiencing the ineffability of certain types of knowledge or skills in certain contexts. ... Instead of sustaining the dichotomy of silence and speech, ontological silence indicates a need to attend to the dynamic interconnections between them. (Li, 2004, pp. 74–76)

Van Manen’s (1990) three forms of silence provide a structure to examine the silences that exist behind speech. There is silence in discourse about race. The epistemological silence that Van Manen described is a form of silence that is empowered. In this silence, nonspeakers make a choice to be silent due to understanding the limits of language to describe a phenomenon

or to express a feeling. Unlike imposed silence, epistemological silence can be used to resist and subvert; to not say what is expected. Ontological silence, a broad term, describes the dialogue going on beneath speech. It inhabits a space between silence and speech, while indicating “a need to attend to the dynamic interconnections between them” (Li, 2004, p. 76). It is difficult to discern whether this in-between space is a hybrid of silence and speech, or a new space altogether that transcends both speech and silence. When thinking about the silences in schools in particular, it is important to dig deeper into the realities of lived experiences of administrators, teachers, students, and parents to codify the ontological silences that exist in dialogic spaces. Pollock (2005) grappled with the realities of silences about race in an ethnographic study of race talk in an integrated school. Pollock noticed that teachers and administrators were reluctant to address the behavior issues of truant Black students. “For as adults at Columbus kept noticing black students in the hallways and choosing actively not to mention them, they helped black hall wanderers *become* a daily phenomenon that went without saying” (p. 194). Silence can be active. Analyzing the silences in individual schools is an integral component of uncovering the language of school racial demographic shift or resegregation in schools.

“Language” is a nebulous word like “literacy” and “text” that can have a variety of meanings, given the context. I posit that school resegregation can be associated with and reified by a systematic language in schools. Sociolinguistics can provide insight into this language in two important ways: first, by using one of the methodologies used in sociolinguistic studies: discourse analysis. Adger (2001) stated that “discourse analysis in education settings has been used to uncover the ways in which talk at school is unique. . . . Discourse analysis is helping to explicate the actions in which the primary goal of schooling—learning—is realized” (p. 503). Cazden (1988) used this methodology in a study of the language of teaching and learning.

Discourse analysis can be used to analyze “school talk” by teachers as teachers begin to develop the language of school segregation. Using discourse analysis to analyze discourse semantics in particular can be useful in individual school settings. Second, sociolinguistics allow for an examination of history, culture, and contemporary policies that affect language. For example, sociolinguistic analysis allows researchers to consider the history of the *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) case, while also examining contemporary tracking policies in a school to construct a holistic picture of language. Sociolinguistics speaks to the field of educational research, and particularly to the issue of resegregation, in a manner that has yet to be fully explored.

### **Racial Demographic Shift and School Stakeholders**

Few studies have examined racial-demographic shifts from the perspectives of the school’s primary stakeholders (teachers and students). Wells et al. (2005) addressed this disparity by interviewing adults who experienced desegregation efforts as school-aged children. Despite the memories of police escorts and overt racial unrest, participants expressed positive life outcomes from their experiences in integrated schools. They commented on feeling more comfortable interacting with people of other races in adulthood, and some had even maintained friendships with classmates of other races from their integrated schooling experiences. Pollock (2005) presented less harmonious findings. In *Colormute*, the author endeavored to uncover the way students talk about race in an integrated school. In a sense, Pollock was seeking to uncover “the language of racial interaction”<sup>2</sup> in the high school of interest for ethnographic research. The researcher found that students in this school were hesitant to put forth concrete racial classifications for themselves. Instead, many described themselves as a mix of races. There was an inherent *muteness* about the issue of race. Pollock also reported that teachers in the school had

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<sup>2</sup> My own term.

their own language of racial interaction as well. One key finding concerning teachers' race talk had to do with the Black students who roamed the hallways of the school during class time. Teachers were either mute about these students, or said the word "Black" in hushed tones. Pollock noted that, "'black students' were most often the center of racialized adult attention—and they were also most often actively ignored. Language both mirrored and constituted both actions" (p. 202). Pollock concluded that educators in particular need to be more open about race talk and serve as models for their students.

In their groundbreaking study of the MTO program, Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum (2000) uncovered a striking parental perspective about minority students in majority White schools. The families in the MTO program all moved from public housing in high-poverty urban centers to low-poverty suburban areas. One outcome of the move was that the children in the families were sent to majority-White suburban schools. Most students experienced academic gains throughout the years; nonetheless, there were social problems (fights, incidents with teachers, etc.) that arose and a racial achievement gap was still present. Most parents who were interviewed reported that their children now attended "good schools." Despite any evidence to the contrary, parents were convinced that majority White and suburban constituted "good schools." Each of the studies here garnered significant findings from a primary stakeholder in the schooling experience.

Many studies followed this trend, uncovering vestiges of racial-demographic shift from an isolated set of stakeholders. A variety of studies realized findings related to racial-demographic shifts in schools, despite initially having different research foci ( Jacoby, 2000; Morrell, 2004; Noguera, 2003). The gap in empirical data exists in the space occupied by all of the primary stakeholders in the schools where racial-demographic shifts are happening. No one

has examined the phenomenon of racial-demographic shift in schools specifically while garnering parent, student, teacher, and community perspectives.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODS**

#### **Study Design and Data Collection**

I sought to uncover a language associated with school racial-demographic shift by examining the roles of the teachers and students in racially shifting schools. This endeavor required an in-depth examination of key factors and stakeholders who influence the everyday discourse in a school community.

#### **Case-Study Methodology and Site Sample Selection**

I utilized a case study approach in this dissertation. The case study approach involves the study of a case within a real-life or contextual setting (Yin, 2009). In this methodology, a “case” is a bounded system from which multiple data sources are collected and studied over time. The unit of analysis in the case study can be multiple cases (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This dissertation examined two cases. Both cases in this study are large public high schools. Both are also the only high schools in their respective districts. I engaged in purposeful criterion-based sampling to select two case sites for the study. The criteria are based on Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) maximum-variation sampling. Inherent in maximum-variation sampling is the belief that “findings from even a small sample of great diversity yields important shared patterns that cut across cases” (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). The criteria for site selection included an inner-ring (adjacent to a large city) suburban high school, one predominately minority (60% or more) school, one predominately White (60% or more) school, and the recent (within the past 30 years) history of racial-demographic shift in the school. The first case is a predominately African American inner-ring suburban high school in Michigan: Northstar High. The high school has

undergone a stark demographic shift from a White majority to its current enrollment in the past 30 years. The second case is a predominately White inner-ring suburban high school in Michigan: Fairtown High School. The high school has become increasingly diverse in the past 10 years, and the racial achievement gap for African American students has widened significantly during this timeframe.

### **Participant Selection**

At each school case site I interviewed two teachers and four students for a total of 12 participants. The teachers covered a variety of tracked ability levels in each building (general, remedial, and advance placement) and all grade levels (9–12). I prioritized studying the range of experiences gained from working with students across age and ability level to provide holistic insights into school experiences. The students represent Black, Chaldean, and White racial groups (see Table 1). All student participants were enrolled in an English class taught by one of the four teacher participants, and together the four at each school represented at least three of the four grade levels at the school.

As previously stated, skills learned in English classrooms are applicable across content areas and have the potential to holistically influence the ways students approach discourse in school. English teachers who use critical-literacy practices push students to use accountable talk in conversations and value multiple perspectives. Schools missing these vital practices in the English classroom may be more prone to the development of language in school that does not value the experiences and voices of all students. In contrast, one could posit that critically literate practices in schools may cause unrest and tension between students and teachers, as students engage in questioning the status quo.

Table 1

*Interview Participants: Students*

Pseudonym	Ethnicity	School	Year
Mark	Black	Fairtown	Sophomore
Dude	White	Fairtown	Junior
Mary	White	Fairtown	Senior
Faith	Black	Fairtown	Senior
Chipmunk	Black	Northstar	Junior
Chloe	Chaldean	Northstar	Sophomore
Victoria	White	Northstar	Freshman
Jackson	White	Northstar	Junior

Table 2

*Interview Participants: Teachers*

Pseudonym <sup>3</sup>	Ethnicity	School	Grade/Subject(s)	Experience <sup>4</sup>
Ms. Troop	White	Fairtown	9–12 English	Over 30 years
Mr. Smith	White	Fairtown	9–12 English	Under 10 years
Ms. Kline	White	Northstar	9–12 English	Under 10 years
Ms. Stiggins	White	Northstar	11–12 English	Over 30 years

**Data Collection**

Multiple sources of data were collected from each case site. I interviewed teachers and students at each site: 30-year veteran teachers, early career teachers, freshman, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. In total, I interviewed two teachers and four students at Northstar, as well as two teachers and four students at Fairtown, for a total of 12 school community members. I conducted initial 60–90 minute interviews with each participant: students and teachers. I then

<sup>3</sup> All names throughout this study are pseudonyms. Student participants selected their own pseudonyms.

<sup>4</sup> Years approximated to protect participant identities.

conducted follow-up 45–60 minute interviews with each teacher. All interviews were audio recorded. The interviews were semistructured. I used an interview protocol and posed follow-up questions based on participant responses (see Appendices B–D). These semi-structured interviews afforded me the opportunity to gain unique individual perspectives from each participant. Each interview was transcribed and analytic memoranda were written for each, immediately following the live interview.

Table 3

*Data collection*

Mode	Number	Teacher	Student	School(s)
Formal interviews	18	8	8	Northstar and Fairtown
Classroom Observations	34	4	--	Northstar and Fairtown
Analytic Memoranda	78	--	--	Northstar and Fairtown

### **Participant Recruitment**

Each school provided a list of English-department faculty. From these lists, I inquired with the school principals about the tenure of each teacher. I selected a veteran teacher who had been at the school for over 20 years at each site and a teacher with less than a decade of experience in the building. Each was selected to provide generational perspectives on the school community. Teachers with fewer years of experience also served as school newspaper advisors. Many impromptu conversations were held with the teachers in addition to the two formal interviews. These teachers became informal tour guides and provided key insights into the day-to-day operations of the school. They also provided vital resources such as keys to the teachers lounge to conduct interviews and reserving space in libraries for the students and me.

All student participants are taught by one of the four teachers in the study. I interviewed freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors at each school. I conducted the one-on-one interviews with each student in the school building. Informal hallway, after-class, and after-school conversations also occurred with each student participant. These informal conversations were immediately catalogued in memoranda. I also observed the students during classroom, hallway, and cafeteria interactions with other students. Each of these pieces of data informed the study.

## **Data**

I collected artifacts at each school site. These artifacts provided key insight into the social and academic culture at each school. I only collected artifacts that directly informed my understanding of the overall school culture. I obtained English-curriculum pacing guides for Grades 9–12. I collected event fliers for student events throughout the school year at each school. I also collected school newspapers. I collected artifacts with permission from each school-site principal.

I observed students and teachers in a variety of contexts at each school. I conducted observations in each teacher's classroom. I took detailed field notes during each classroom session that focused on the critical-literacy practices identified in the review of the literature. I also observed a school newspaper extracurricular session for each of the newspaper advisor teachers. I used Berman's critical-literacy classroom protocol as my observation protocol (see Appendix A). I recorded field notes from my "wanderings" around each school building after scheduled classroom observations and interviews. I converted these field notes to memoranda (see below). These wanderings led me to cafeterias, hallways, and other outdoor and indoor sites on the schools' campuses.

In total I wrote 78 memoranda. I wrote analytic memoranda after each formal interview, informal conversation, and examination of curriculum-pacing guides and school-event fliers. I wrote field memoranda after each school campus “wandering.” These memoranda served as more than simply an additional piece of data. They regrounded me throughout the data-collection phases. They also served as points of origin for preliminary data analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

The proliferation of qualitative data lent itself well to multiple close readings and coding approaches. My coding process was cyclical in that I coded transcripts and artifacts during the study to uncover emerging themes. The data were then scrubbed of initial codes and reanalyzed as case-study data sets, using the methods outlined below.

### **Diachronic**

I used diachronic discourse analysis to examine each of the interview transcripts. Diachronically oriented discourse analysis is derived from the field of historical discourse analysis. The diachronic approach “involves a study of the changes in discourse marking, functions, and structures over time” (Brinton, 2003, p. 140). This methodology is most appropriate to examine how the language used to talk about race and demographic shifts evolved at both case sites.

Specifically, I examined the texts for a concrete set of features. These features were most present in interviewees “retelling” of historical events as juxtaposed with present day recounting. The categories came from Traugott and König’s (1991, p. 44) “principles of semantic features.” This framework tracks semantic change in discourse by examining the following tendencies:

- Tendency I: from meanings situated in the external described situation to meanings situated in the internal (evaluative/perceptual/cognitive) situation;

- Tendency II: from meanings situated in the described external or internal situation to meanings situated in the textual/metalinguistic situation;
- Tendency III: to meaning increasingly situated in the speakers subjective belief-state/attitude toward the situation. (Traugott & Konig, 1991, pp. 208–209)

I coded these tendencies as they related to the relevant recurring phrases and historical moments described by teachers and students.

This set of features allowed me to examine the function of the language, while also tracking the change of the discourse over time. Each tendency represents a progression toward subjectivity, with Tendency I being the least subjective and Tendency III being most subjective. This framework provides a solid foundation for tracking language that is grounded in fact and contextual truth, while also uncovering discourse patterns that are situated in the speakers' subjective beliefs, attitudes, and story telling. The three tendencies also provide space to codify the discourse that resides on the continuum between truth and subjectivity, allowing for a quantifiable analysis of shifts between tendencies over time. After identifying the initial tendency, I mapped these tendencies onto the selective codes from my grounded-theory analysis of the interview data.

### **Open, Axial, and Selective**

I used Scrivener software to engage in open, axial, and selective coding of interview transcripts. I engaged in open coding. I analyzed the interview transcripts line by line to explore the active functions of each line of the data. Open coding led to the creation of a series of categories.

The initial coding was followed by axial coding. Axial coding is a “set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990,

p. 96). In this step of coding, I literally laid the cut-up slithers of data transcripts on the ground next to one another under their coded category headings. I then asked the following questions:

1. Where did they come from?
2. What are the assumptions?
3. How do the categories develop and change? (Charmaz, 2004, p. 513)

These questions facilitated the collapsing of categories into more succinct or selective headings. Finally, I selected core phenomena from the axial coding. I then returned to the data to trace a path from these key phenomena. Following this path allowed me to narrow my themes.

### **Critical**

I employed a critical lens to the examination of each of the data sources. At the root of all critical analysis is the process of questioning commonly held truths (Giroux, 1988). Thus, at each stage of analysis and with each data source I asked a series of questions to delve deeply into surface-level themes. This approach allowed me move beyond many themes and gain in-depth insights to core phenomena across the interviews, observations, and artifacts. I was specific about researched critical-literacy practices during my classroom observations. I examined my classroom-observation fieldnotes for instances of Behrman's (2006) six key instructional practices: (a) reading supplementary texts, (b) reading multiple texts, (c) reading from a resistant perspective, (d) producing countertexts, (e) conducting student-choice research projects, and (f) taking social action. Coding for these practices aided in uncovering the use of critically literate practices in English classrooms.

### **Silent**

The evolution of racial silence is difficult to track. In fact, few scholars have endeavored to study the complex field. Those who have taken on this task each developed their own structure



for analysis (Pollock, 2005; Van Dijk, 2001; Wolfram, 1969). I followed in the tradition of these researchers and read for the words left unsaid. I listened for codes and allowed silent spaces to persist—rather than trying to fill them with noise.

### **Researcher Positionality**

This study was difficult for me. I am a Black woman and at the time of the data collection phase of the study I was 28 years old. I spent a year deeply steeped in the worlds of Fairtown and Northstar High Schools. I was a constant presence in the hallways, cafeterias, teacher's lounges, classrooms, and other spaces students and teachers occupied. The environments in each schools were unlike anything I encountered growing up. I came to the research with fresh eyes and very few assumptions about the day-to-day realities of the school day. I grew up in underresourced segregated schools. Throughout my K–12 schooling, the teachers and other students with whom I interacted looked like me. I grew up learning about African American culture and history in a steady infusion across the curriculum. My home and community life mirrored this reality. After college, I taught middle school in a segregated school in the South Bronx in New York City. Thus, many of the phenomena that I encountered in the schools and the interactions I had with staff and students were complicated. Two common expectations for researchers are detachment and objectivity. I encountered many situations that greatly tested this positioning.

My constant presence in the schools garnered a spectrum of reactions from my study participants and members of the school community. At 28, with jeans, sneakers, and a sweater I could pass for a high school student. I was often stopped and questioned by security guards and teachers in the school buildings. Many of the inquisitions were overtly hostile until proximity or conversation cleared up any misunderstandings. “Hey, girl”; “Where are you supposed to be?”; and “Stop right there” were part of my reality for the first few months. Some teachers, even after

openly agreeing to work with me and signing waivers, were incredibly visibly uncomfortable around me. One of the teachers visibly jumped or flinched when I walked into the room quickly. I had to learn to knock on the door for some time or approach her slowly and loudly, such that she had time to prepare. Most student participants became very comfortable around me. This afforded me the opportunity to garner very open and honest responses from them in interviews and informal settings. I also had to receive some overtly racist statements from them—across the racial and socioeconomic spectrum. In fact, many students separated me from my race or class and would make an overtly racist statement followed by a, “you know” or “you get it, right?” The range of responses to my presence in the schools could fill the pages of this dissertation.

I cannot write the findings of this study without infusing aspects of my experiences as the researcher. Rereading the interviews, coding the data, and forming theories were intense processes. I had to relive many of the experiences, which I now know resulted in trauma for me. I am not certain if my age and inexperience with the environment contributed to my experience, or if I can compare my experiences with those of Black students in the building. I am still processing these experiences after several years. Nonetheless, I infuse my findings here with my wonderings and feelings, recorded in analytic memoranda and field notes.

### **Research Issues and Limitations**

There are a variety of limitations to this research. First, the case-study model lends itself to isolated results. In-depth study of one site does not necessarily lead to transferrable findings. I have attempted to mitigate this limitation by studying two cases and addressing replicability—however, the limitation of transference of results still remains. Second, selecting only English classrooms limits my exposure to contributing factors that may be taking place in other content areas and curricula. I have chosen to focus specifically on critically literate practices that are

applicable across subjects. Still, there may be practices in mathematics, science, world languages, and the other humanities that contribute to racial-demographic shift. As I move forward with this work in my academic career I hope to be able to study a school through many more lenses. The final limitation I address here is the scope of the data sources. I had several interview transcripts, observations, and artifacts to analyze. This work posed a daunting task for dissertation-level research. I called on my experience working on research projects with professors at the university, my own practicum research, and my paperwork-management skills as a former secondary English teacher to aid in tackling this challenge. Overall, the benefits to be gained from this research far outweigh the challenges.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **THE SCHOOLS AND THE PEOPLE**

#### **Fairtown**

Fairtown is a suburban community in the State of Michigan. The community is adjacent to a midsized urban center. Fairtown has a large university in its city limits and has been a “college town” for over 200 years. A stroll through the city center on a Friday night will find it teeming with college students. The university is a large contributor to the economic stability of Fairtown. The community is thriving. The overall population in Fairtown in 2010 was just over 48,000. Fairtown has eight traditional public schools: six elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. The total student population in the district in 2010 was 3,435. For this study, I focused on Fairtown High School, named by *US News & World Reports* as one of the top high schools in the country (“National Rankings: Best High Schools,” 2014)

#### **Northstar**

Northstar is an inner-ring suburb of a large urban center in Michigan. The community had a thriving industrial workforce for decades after World War II. The industrial decline over the past 20 years has been replaced with a vibrant arts and culture sector. Northstar’s population is just over 20,000, according the 2010 census. Northstar is a mixed-income community that is in the middle of an economic resurgence after a period economic depression, following a significant loss of manufacturing jobs. Northstar has six traditional public schools: a preschool, two elementary, one intermediate, one middle, and one high school. The total student population in the district in 2010 was 3,952. I spent the 2009–2010 school year immersed in Northstar and Fairtown High Schools.

### **Why These Schools?**

Both Fairtown and Northstar High Schools gradually increased in racial diversity over the span of 20 years. In 1996, the Michigan legislature voted to include Section 105 in the state's school-aid act. Section 105 is commonly known as "the school of choice" law. Soon after, Amendment 105c was added and provided additional opportunities under the school-aid act.

Accepting nonresident pupils under Sections 105 and 105c Schools of Choice (S.O.C.) is a district decision. The district must determine if the Schools of Choice will be specific to a building, a grade level, or a program. The district must also determine if the district will accept pupils from districts within the ISD boundaries (Section 105), accept pupils from districts within the boundaries of an ISD that is contiguous to the ISD of the enrolling district (Section 105c), or both. The district shall not charge tuition for pupils who are enrolled under Section 105 or Section 105c. The resident district's approval is not required for pupils enrolled under Sections 105 and 105c. (Michigan Department of Education, 2011, para 4)

This new legislation allowed districts to accept students from neighboring districts with which they share a border. The accepting district could outline the number of students it would accept each year, as well as the grade-level parameters. Legislation of this kind was groundbreaking for Michigan. Students attended predesignated neighborhood schools prior to the passage of the bill. Section 105c allowed additional freedoms for schools residing in an Intermediate School District (ISD). In Michigan, an ISD is a governing body that provides programs and services for several school districts. The ISD is governed by a board of education made up of members of each associated district. Section 105c afforded student in ISD districts to make choices across

districts, borders notwithstanding. Acts 105 and 105c spurred racial shifts at Northstar and Fairtown High Schools.

The phenomenon of significant racial-demographic shifts at Fairtown and Northstar emerged with the school-of-choice law. Tables 4 and 5 illustrate the demographic shifts that took place over a 30-year span using data from 1990, 2000, and 2010.

Table 4

*Fairtown Student Demographics 1990–2010*

	1990	2000	2010
Hispanic	5.8%	6.4%	7.9%
Non-Hispanic White	79.2%	70.6%	70.4%
Non-Hispanic Black	8.3%	11.4%	14.6%
Non-Hispanic American Indian	0.009%	0.008%	0.6%
Non-Hispanic Asian/Pac. Islander	8.6%	10.7%	3.9%
Non-Hispanic Multi-Racial	0.02%	.05%	2.5%

<sup>†</sup> School demographic data obtained from <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sdds/census>

Table 5

*Northstar Student Demographics 1990–2010*

	1990	2000	2010
Hispanic	—	—	—
Non-Hispanic White	85.1%	67.6%	24.4%
Non-Hispanic Black	11%	22.4%	68.2%
Non-Hispanic American Indian	—	—	—
Non-Hispanic Asian/Pac. Islander	0.017%	0.03%	0.09%
Non-Hispanic Multi-Racial	0.01%	0.06%	0.04%

Source: School demographic data obtained from <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sdds/census>

The Fairtown school district experienced about a 10% decrease in its White student population whereas the African American population nearly doubled. The district also lost about 5% of its Asian/Pacific Islander population. Shifts in demographics are part of the public

discourse in the community. Newspapers, local blogs, and recent allegations of racial discrimination are part of the lexicon. The change in student population has been noted and is worthy of further study.

The Northstar school district's shift in student population over the past 30 years is stark. The White student population decreased by just over 60%. The African American student population shifted from 11% in 1990 to 68% in 2010. During the 30 years prior, the student population had held relatively steady with a modest increase in the African American student population. The Northstar community has a Black population of 9.6% in its community, according to 2010 census data. The community is predominately White. Families have chosen to send their children elsewhere. Black students come in from neighboring communities.

The subtle and stark demographic shifts in each school district are of interest. Both schools have shifted racial populations since the institution of school-of-choice law policies. Fairtown has lost nearly 10% of its White student population, dropping from an 80% White majority at the school. The racial make-up of Northstar's schools has changed dramatically since 1990. Black students have shifted from the minority to the majority. This dissertation examines the language of these demographic shifts through narratives, speech patterns, and the lived realities of students and teachers.

### **Description of Each Participant**

#### **Fairtown High School**

##### **Mr. Smith**

Mr. Smith has taught at Fairtown High School for just under 10 years. His room is nestled around a series of corners and it takes 7 minutes to reach from the front door of the

school. Mr. Smith came to teaching after a series of odd jobs and uncertainty about where he wanted to take his future.

I was in publishing—again, literature and language, that kind of a thing. So I was an editor for a series of reference books and then you know, all the other jobs were things to get me by while I was going to school. I was a wine salesman, I recycled ammonia, all sorts of goofy things. Don't even ask, it's bad [laughs] (Interview 1, November, 2009).

He taught in a Catholic school in the state's largest city, a high school in a predominately working-class community, and then transferred to Fairtown High School. He is proud of his Irish heritage and shares this pride with his students through classroom signage and informal conversations during classes: "I mean if you notice over there, *Irish Need Not Apply*, I've got a sign my great grandfather read when he came over from Ireland, saw that sign in a window" (Interview 2, February, 2010). He shares his opinions about identity with his students.

Mr. Smith is a self-described liberal and mostly teaches class from his desk in the corner of the classroom. Mr. Smith has strong feelings about the running of his classroom: "I get some criticism from my colleagues for my style of teaching. It falls under that category of teacher-centered, but I'm a firm believer that for juniors and seniors, I'm the gatekeeper" (Interview 1, November, 2009). He believes in his students' abilities to delve deeply into text and engage in critical discussions. In my hallway wanderings and informal conversations with students it is clear he has a following. Some students credited him with teaching them how to think for the first time. Mr. Smith is also one of the appointed union-contract negotiators and serves as one of the union representatives for the district. At 6'3", some students pointed out he is an imposing figure as he stands at his door waiting to close it firmly at the first bell. Students are either in his class or out of his class.



## **Ms. Troop**

Ms. Troop has taught at Fairtown High School for over 30 years. She is an institution at the school and is one of several teachers with over 30 years experience at the school. Her classroom is not far from the front door of the school in a coveted (according to her) large classroom with an office attached. During our interviews and chats at lunch and prep periods she had a constant stream of students. Students stopped by to say hello, ask questions about assignments, fill her in on school gossip, or simply because they are curious about the chats that she and I had. She addressed each visitor as if he or she was the first of the day. When I mentioned this graciousness to her, she told me a story to illustrate her relationships with students.

And I know this can be a little side story; when my daughter graduated—and she graduated from here 5 years ago—I remember my mother-in-law turning to me and saying, “Why is everybody hugging their teachers up there? The teachers are joking with them ... I don’t ... What’s going on? How close are you people?” She thought it was weird and I didn’t think it was weird at all. And I said, “Because our kids, we like our kids and apparently they like us and we’re special to them and they’re special to us.” I mean it was really kind of, I was taken aback by that statement; isn’t this the way it is? So you know, that’s part of the reason I like teaching here (Interview 1, October, 2009). She was very invested in building authentic relationships with students.

Ms. Troop was also an author and has an interest in short film-making. She has written a book with another 30-year veteran teacher at the school: “It’s a silly novel that we wrote together; but we are working on another” (Interview 1, October, 2009). She sponsors a film club after school. Her students watch new and innovative short films with her and also produce short

films. Her classroom teaching style was student centered. Ms. Troop rarely left her desk to give instruction. She set objectives and her students gathered in preset or new groups to complete the ongoing task for the day. The class very rarely had a lesson or assignment that was unconnected to a series or unit. The classroom environment was structured, yet open. Ms. Troop wants to continue to teach for quite some time.

## **Dude**

Dude was a junior at Fairtown High School. He said he can “trace his family roots back to the Mayflower.” When asked to identify his race and ethnicity, Dude responds, “I’m very, very White” (October, 2009). His parents and grandparents are longtime residents of Fairtown’s neighboring urban center, Stanton. His mother is a medical assistant studying to be a nurse and his father works in construction.

Um, my dad was from four blocks away from where we live now, my mom was um, I don’t know, I’d say she was about three blocks away from where we are—for a while, cause um, my grandfather owns a duplex. My mother lived in the other side of the house she grew up in—like for like the first 8 years of our lives, and we moved like four blocks away from there. My parents are divorced but they live a block away from each other.

They’re not a very mobile family (October, 2009)..

Dude’s father received his GED and neither of his parents attended a 4-year college. They sent him to Fairtown public schools as part of the schools-of-choice program to receive a better education. He started with the district in elementary school and plans to graduate from the high school next year.

Dude was the archetypal class clown. In his classes, I often observed him inserting a witty quip or a well-timed joke. He had the most complex friend circle of the student

participants. In the cafeteria, library, and hallways, he talked to everyone and is accepted in many of the social circles at school. However, he did not have a typical one to three dedicated friends or the typical high school “best friend forever.” I mentioned this phenomenon to Dude. He commented, in a very matter of fact way, “I don’t get close to people” (October, 2009). This sentiment was consistent with his behavior throughout the entire year of the study. Dude was strong academically and is applying to a few east-coast universities in the fall.

### **Mark**

Mark was a sophomore and moved to the Fairtown community from the east coast when he was in the seventh grade. Mark’s father is a professor at the neighboring university and his mother makes traditional African clothing in their home: “She makes traditional dresses, head wraps, jewelry ... the ladies all come to her.” Mark identifies as Ghanaian: “All of my family is in Ghana, everybody. My mother wants to move back someday. We have a house there” (November, 2009). Mark visually presented as a Black teenager; however, he did not claim that identity marker. Mark was very clear about his identity beliefs, many of which come from his strong family heritage.

My skin is not black, it is brown. Everybody here thinks that I am African American. My father does not let anyone call him African American. He says that we are Africans in America—but, I am Ghanaian. There is no box for me. I just check the other box.

Someday I won’t have to check that box (November, 2009).

There were not many shades of grey in Mark’s world. Our conversations indicated a strong belief in right or wrong.

Mark was a diligent student. He did most of his homework at school; thus, when I saw him in the library, at lunch, or after school he was often reading or writing. His life at school

appeared solitary. He sat with other students in spaces—the classroom, cafeteria, and library—but did not speak much. His demeanor was slow and deliberate. He rarely moved quickly. Mark’s English was slightly accented and carried the heavy consonant emphasis of Yoruba. When asked directly about his quiet presence in group settings, he replied, “Oh, I am just listening” (November, 2009).

## **Mary**

Mary was a senior at Fairtown High School. She has lived in Fairtown her entire life. She lives with her parents and younger brother, “My mother is from Iowa and my dad is from New Jersey—but, they met in college and decided to settle down, here” (November, 2009). Mary’s mom is a law professor at the university and her father is a defense attorney. She identifies as White. She and her parents have lots of conversations about Fairtown and the surrounding cities.

I think that we are is set in a very great location, I mean where we are literally in between two—two—the Tale of Two Cities book, within three. We have [neighboring urban city] right next to us and [high-income suburban city] next to us, and you have—you have the mix between uptown and downtown because of that, and I think that the opportunities I at least have experienced at Fairtown are something that maybe not—could have—wouldn’t have been ascertainable at another high school because of the mix that we have (November, 2009).

Mary enjoyed attending school in Fairtown.

Mary was an active student. She was one of the senior editors of the school newspaper, and was a member of the drama and art clubs. Her responsibilities with the newspaper took up a great deal of her time during and after school. “In the winter, I don’t see the sun. It is way dark when I get here and when I leave” (November, 2009). She received a lot of respect in the

pseudonewsroom that took over one of the computer laboratories after school. She took on the role of teacher and supervisor. The other students often waved her over to get her perspective on something they were writing or new information they found. The newsroom was not a representative sample of the schools' racial/ethnic composition. It was a very White space. When I mentioned this fact to Mary, she replied, with a look of confusion on her face, "no, I don't think so. There are a lot of other people on newspaper. Everybody isn't here at one time" (November, 2009). The newsroom stayed mostly monolithic throughout the school year. Most of Mary's free time was spent in this space or with the drama club. In both spaces her friends were White. She rarely interacted with other races/cultures unless there was a direct purpose. She enjoyed her experiences at Fairtown and will start at the University of Michigan in the fall after her senior year.

### **Faith**

Faith was a senior at Fairtown High School. She has lived in the district since middle school. Faith identified as Black. Her parents are from the neighboring large urban city. She lives with both of parents in a home that is "about a 10-minute walk" from the high school. Her father works for the local power company—"He works in the business offices"—and her mother is an automotive-factory line worker: "My mom works second shift—she has, like, the best one and is home at night" (November, 2009).

Faith was quiet. She rarely spoke without prompting in the classroom or in other spaces through the school. English class was the one exception. She joined in the conversations, raised her hand to answer almost every posed question and showed a great deal of interest in the work assignments. She wants to be an English teacher.

Okay, my teacher, Ms. [name omitted], after taking her class, that's when I realized I want to teach English. Because she took her class, it was a writing class, and she ... every assignment we had, not only was it to better our writing and show us different styles of writing, but it like made us kind of take a step forward because it would always ... like something that we were holding in, we would always get it out. Like we had an assignment, I remember, that we had to write a letter to someone that we had always wanted to say something to and stuff like that. And they were actually going to be mailed (November, 2009).

She spent time with two close girlfriends. At least one of her friends was in almost all of her classes. She enjoyed going to school at Fairtown.

### **Northstar High School**

#### **Ms. Stiggins**

Ms. Stiggins has been teaching at Northstar High School for 36 years. Her classroom is on the second floor in the front of the building. Her classroom has much natural light and was quite welcoming. She taught juniors and seniors only this year but, has taught every grade over the years. Ms. Stiggins' grandmother was a teacher and she always knew that this was the profession to which she would devote her life: "Even when I retire I am going to do something to teach other people. I just haven't figured out what, yet" (Interview 2, February, 2010). She enjoys her career a great deal and mentioned this fact in many of our conversations together.

Ms. Stiggins was "obsessed with reading and writing." Her proudest accomplishment during her tenure has been helping to push forward reading and writing across the entire school curriculum.

Finally, people bought into the idea that we are all teachers of reading and writing, because we have to read and write in every class. ... It took time for them to start to bite into it—and they’re really biting into it, because if you go into—I mean if you went into a [omit names] class or Matt—oh I forgot his last name—he’s a new teacher, you would find out one’s in chemistry, one’s in social studies, they’re both doing uh, reading and writing. You go into Mrs. M’s—class, she’s an art teacher, they’re writing—and they’re reading stuff, so that was a big accomplishment, for me in education (Interview 1, October, 2009).

Her joy for reading and writing was apparent in her teaching. She perched on her desk or anyone’s desk as she taught. The beginning of her lessons generally consisted of at least 20 minutes of her giving an introduction to new material or asking questions that led to discussion. She leaned right into students desks and pointed out passages in their books, she quoted passages and page numbers from memory, and encouraged time to write and reflect in the middle of lessons. She enjoys spending time with her family: “I’m lucky my daughters still need me. We spend a lot of time together” (Interview 1, October, 2009). She will retire soon.

### **Ms. Kline**

Ms. Kline has taught at Northstar High school for 8 years. She has loved reading and writing and thought that becoming an English teacher would be a natural outcropping of these interests: “Even when I was younger every job I had was working with kids—life guarding, camp counselor, that kind of thing” (Interview 1, October, 2009). Her classroom is on the second floor in one of the busiest hallways in the school building. She often stood just outside her door during hall-passing time. She periodically spoke to students, but spent most of the time watching.

When I'm out there, I see a kid with—wearing skinny jeans and, you know, a skater hat with a kid wearing, you know, football uniform to a girl wearing, you know, swim cap, and they're just—it doesn't matter, and someone playing a trombone, I mean, they're just—I don't know if it's because they all grew up in the same district or they all went to school together and grew up together, but—that's why I see it more like that rather than like a racial thing out there (Interview 1, October, 2009).

She enjoys the diversity at Fairtown high and cited it as the main reasons she stays at the school.

Ms. Kline pushed herself to develop professionally as a teacher. She took on at least one intensive program each summer and sometimes during the school year.

I did the writing project this summer. [It was] every day, um, for 5—5 days a week for a month, and so just reading various texts through—just to understand different types of people that you might never have been in contact with. And it was amazing, eye-opening (Interview 1, October, 2009).

She was also the advisor for the school newspaper. She taught a newspaper class everyday and remained after school most days to advise the student newspaper staff. She saw herself at Northstar High School for many years to come: “I might go back to get my counseling degree, but I can't see myself anywhere else” (Interview 1, October, 2009). Being part of the school community was important to Ms. Kline. She felt honored to be a part of this diverse community.

### **Chipmunk**

Chipmunk was a junior at Northstar. Her family did not live in the Northstar community. Chipmunk came to the school district through an open-enrollment program that allowed students from neighboring communities to attend schools in the Northstar district. She is an only child and lives with her father and stepmother. Her father owns a successful and well-known heating



and cooling business. Her stepmother is a registered nurse. Chipmunk strongly identified as African American and said she “prefers to hang with Black people more than White people” (October, 2009).

Chipmunk was not hyperbolic in her statement about group preference. She truly did only hang out with other Black students. I noticed a hyperawareness and a seeking out of other students who fit a middle-class Black-student archetype. Where she sat in class, her interactions in hallways, the cafeteria, and after school were all indicative of this preference. Tatum (2003) spoke about this stage of identity development in *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*. Tatum writes about the internalization of racial identity stage – where people of color seek out their own race to begin to truly internalize what it means to be a member of said racial group. My observations placed Chipmunk solidly in this development stage. However, even in those spaces with African American girls who are like her, she never fully let go. An air of hyperawareness of herself and her surroundings always sat with Chipmunk.

## **Jackson**

Jackson was a junior at Northstar and moved to the school district when he was in the eighth grade. His family is from a large east-coast city. Northstar high school has been a big adjustment for Jackson.

The school I went to was kind of like not so typical. Kind of like hippyish. So I would say this is a lot different ... like the school was founded by hippies, my mom included, yeah. Yeah, there’s like no grades or anything like that; it was just kind of learning at your own pace kind of thing. It was like the Montessori schools out here. That’s where my little sister goes (October, 2009).

He lives with his mother and younger sister. His mother is a psychiatrist and works in a large hospital system in the area. Jackson was the first of the student participants who spoke openly and often about another sibling. His sister is a big part of his life: “I am responsible for her” (October, 2009). His responsibility to his family was quite clear for him. When asked about his racial or ethnic identity, he responded, “I guess I’m Jewish by birth but not practicing” (October, 2009). He was quite matter of fact about his identity and did not link himself to any White identity markers in our conversations. He did not refer to himself or his friends as White.

Jackson’s life at Northstar high school was routine. Even in classes with open seating he sat in the same seat everyday. After his fifth-hour English class, he headed to the library to study. He has a group of four friends—all White males. They met between classes at one another’s lockers and in classes they have together. Jackson did not linger. He was efficient in his movements and with his time. He was often the first person in the classroom and the first person out of the classroom. He did not appear to have a very active in-school life outside of his four friends. When asked directly about this observation, he replied, “I’m just ready to get out of here. That’s what you see. I’m so ready” (October, 2009).

## **Victoria**

Victoria was a freshman at Northstar. Her maternal side of the family has been in the community for several generations.

My mom grew up here and our house is right down the street from my grandparents’ house, so my mom grew up in the house down the street from where we live now. And so she went to this school too, so we’ve been around for a while (October, 2009).

She lives with her mother and father. Her mother stays at home and her father works for an automotive company. Victoria described his work as, “a Special Project Manager or something

like that. The way he described it to me is he basically solves the problems that like the corporation can't solve themselves" (October, 2009). She identified as White and was specific about her ethnicity: "We're pretty much half German, half Irish" (October, 2009).

Victoria was a petite girl. Her stature along with her brunette pixie cut gave her a delicate air. She was a very confident freshman girl. I observed her moving adeptly between social groups throughout the school. Her friendships spanned different racial groups at Northstar. She was proud of her ability to navigate relationships across lines of difference. She was one of the few students I observed with this adeptness. Her teachers also appeared to notice her rare social standing and often called on Victoria in class to calm tensions among students. She was also strong academically. Her goal is to go to the University of Michigan and become a veterinarian.

### **Chloe**

Chloe was a sophomore at the high school and has lived in the Northstar community her entire life. She has been attending Northstar schools since kindergarten. Her family moved to the area to provide a better life for she and her siblings: "I've lived here my whole life, but my parents came over from overseas 30 years ago about, both of them. ... From the north part of Iraq" (October, 2009). Chloe self-identified as a member of the Chaldean community, though she mentioned that her parent push her and her siblings to identify as Mesopotamian or Babylonian: "they are proud of our heritage, you know" (October, 2009). She lives 8 minutes from the school and often walks home. Her father owns a convenience store in a neighboring town and her mother works as a cashier in yet another town. Chloe spent much of her adolescence either working in her father's store or taking care of her siblings,

I was in my class ... and my teacher was saying something about, like, a cartoon you would watch when you were younger. And then I was like, "No, Chaldeans don't watch

cartoons when we're younger. We get on the cash register at 7." But really, though, my parents, like I would go to the store sometimes and like I knew the Lotto machine when I was like 8 (October, 2009).

Chloe was the extreme minority in her school and often felt silenced or misunderstood, "People know what I am when they talk to me—but they don't really want to know who I am" (October, 2009). She felt her race and culture are readily apparent in the Northstar community. However, she encountered very few people at school who want to truly take the time to get to learn about her heritage.

My observations and interactions with Chloe in class, at lunch, and in the hallways transmitted a picture of an outgoing and happy teenager. Her teachers described her as outgoing, and as some one who will, "say whatever is on her mind" (October, 2009). She was an active participant in conversations in her English class and spoke up when she does not understand a concept. She was not involved in any extracurricular activities at school. She was very social and apt to laugh. She had many friends and acquaintances in her social circle; most of them were female, Chaldean and Black. When I asked her about this gender and race distinction in her circle, she said, "I get along better with girls and the White people here don't get me" (October, 2009). I pushed on that understanding, but got little response from her. Chloe wants to, "do my best here and go to college" (October, 2009).

### **Summary**

The participants shaped every aspect of this study. Their stories, demeanor, and thoughts are integral factors in the data presented and interpreted here. I owe a great deal to the students and teachers at Northstar and Fairtown High Schools for letting me into their spaces and for providing me with new perspectives. The participant sampling provided a rich array of people.

Each participant provides additional insight into the school racial-demographic shifts and practices in English classrooms.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **LIVING NARRATIVES: RACE AND IDENTITY IN SHIFTING SCHOOLS**

In this chapter, I explain how language, identity and everyday school happenings shaped a narrative about racial demographic shifts in the cases of Northstar and Fairtown high schools – which I refer to as the “shift narrative”. I begin by identifying the cross-case phenomenon of referring to student recipients of the school of choice law as other. This othering was the foundation of the shift narrative at both case sites. Next, I discuss conceptions of student academic achievement and theories about students’ parents and families. I consider the ways that these conceptions and theories were tied to race and identity. I also talk about the everyday happenings of body politics and identity reconciliation at each school. These two phenomena were constantly negotiated at each case site and greatly informed the shift narrative. Finally, I explore how teachers and students used language to celebrate diversity, while openly undermining that value through the shift narrative at the very same time.

#### **Telling Their Stories: Student and Teacher Narratives**

The Michigan school-of-choice law catalyzed demographic shifts at Fairtown and Northstar High Schools. The data show that between the 2000 and 2010 census, the racial composition in these schools changed significantly. The opportunity for students to legally attend school in neighboring districts—combined with a variety of other social factors (i.e., depressed economies in neighboring urban centers, perception of better schooling in suburban districts by parents, etc.)—augmented the social realities of both schools. The voices of students and teachers at Northstar and Fairtown High Schools weave together to create a shift narrative. Hillocks (2007) espouses that a narrative is all about the details – the details differentiate a narrative from that of a story told quickly end-to-end. Appendix E expounds upon the definition

of narrative and how, what I refer to (N)arrative and (n)arrative, coalesce to form shift narratives at both schools. The detailed accounts of teachers and students at the case sites are the foundation of the shift narratives.

### **The Other**

At Northstar High School, the term used to describe students who have benefitted from the school-of-choice legislation is “open enrollment student.” The school district announced its open-enrollment policy in 1998. Northstar High School is part of an ISD. Thus, students from five other neighboring suburban districts have the opportunity to attend the high school through the open-enrollment policy.

Chipmunk is an open-enrollment student. She and her parents lived in an open-enrollment district when she was in middle school. After her parents’ divorce, she and her father moved to a district outside of the ISD. However, Chipmunk continued to attend school in the Northstar district. This phenomenon of illegally attending schools outside of one’s assigned district is common in southeast Michigan schools. One such incident made national headlines in the United States when an Ohio mother, Kelley Williams-Bolar, was convicted and sentenced to 10 days in jail, 3 years probation, and a \$30,000 fine for illegally enrolling her children in a suburban district. At her sentencing she stated, “I had no choices. There it is. I did this for them” (Williams, 2011, p. A4). Chipmunk’s revelation of her residency status – despite the very real consequences – was a manifestation of the trust we built throughout the year.

Q: Okay. So open enrollment, they had that for how long that you know of and then it just stopped this year?

A: Since I was like in 6th grade. That’s how I was able to come here, because they had open enrollment. Because I live in Orleans. And now they’re making this year ... I

mean after this year, Orleans students, people in Orleans cannot come to Northstar.

That's why Orleans. ... Because I used to live next to the Orleans High and they this year

... no, last summer they started doing construction and they made the school bigger

because open enrollment stopped. So they had to like expand the school (October, 2009).

The dangers of illegal school attendance are widely known throughout the district and spoken about in whispers among the staff. Her open-enrollment status made Chipmunk the other in her school community. However, her understanding of that othering is complex.

Chipmunk understood that she is an open-enrollment student; yet, she assigns "other" status to many of her fellow open-enrollment students.

Q: Wow. Why do you think that they stopped open enrollment?

A: Because the quality of the school, if I have to guess. Because like it's true, it's like we call the ghetto people rats and it's like if a lot of them come and they don't care about the school, they're going to tear the school up or they aren't willing to learn, they're going to make the ACT scores drop and stuff like that. (October, 2009)

In my interviews with Chipmunk, she spoke disparagingly about open-enrollment students calling them "ghetto" and "rats." These descriptions become distinctly racialized as the conversations continued. Her parents' opinions also influence her understanding.

I've started seeing more Black people than White people because I think they like. ...

This is what my mom says: if a lot of Black people come to a White area, the level goes

... like the ranking goes down, so White people will escape. So it's like ... They come

from outside. They used to use an address in a district but then come from like across 8

Mile. ... Or from places like Orleans (October, 2009).



Chipmunk is a resident of Orleans and uses a different address to attend the school. Yet, she has separated herself from border cheating and open-enrollment students she saw as bringing down the school. She resigned herself to accept a dominant understanding of open-enrollment students in the school. The negativity associated with the open-enrollment label has caused her to create a disassociated identity for herself. She was aware of her disassociated state and was, in many ways, apologetic for it. In addition to the school narrative about open enrollment and her parents' beliefs about the school's ranking, Chipmunk had her own lived experience that accounted for her separate identity.

Like because I don't think I'm better than anyone but I just hate when people are like, "I don't care. I don't want to be here." I'm like, "Then leave. Why are you here? You're tardy every day, you don't know when to come back from lunch, you talk back to the teachers, you disrespect them." And I'll be like, "Why are you here. When my family got divorced, I was like angry my freshman year but like I grew up, I got over it. And like now people don't take advantage of that because it's like you're. ... I think they're a waste (October, 2009).

She solidly placed herself in a different category from the peers she saw "wasting an opportunity." Separating herself from this group affords her the opportunity to push against typical conceptions of black girls in school. Morris (2007) observed these conceptions of black girls in a middle-class school "Many teachers encouraged these girls to exemplify an ideal docile form of femininity ... at the same time, however, most teachers viewed the existing femininity of these girls as coarse ... leading one teacher to describe them as "loudies" (p. 491). Chipmunk openly rejects that markers of loud, course or angry and embraces a persona that is more accepted in her school.

At Fairtown High School, students who have entered the district through the school-of-choice law were referenced as “school-of-choice kids.” Dude, like Chipmunk, entered the district through the choice program. He attended Fairtown schools since elementary and noticed a distinct change in his experience as his middle and high schools diversified.

[There are] definitely more school of choice kids. Like I just noticed all of a sudden there’s all these people in my grade and I have no idea what their names are. I was supposed to have gone to school with these guys forever but I haven’t, and I’m like, whoa, I thought, did they slip through the cracks or something. But no, they just got here, you know. They were kicked out of their other schools or their parents didn’t—maybe not kicked out, kicked is hasty. There are the kids that were legitimate like, we’re going to do so much better here but then there were the parents that were like, they’re getting into too much trouble here, let’s ship them off over here. I mean, don’t mean to sound like we’re just getting all the non-Whites shipped—I keep saying shipped in—but you know, I’m school-of-choice guy, I shouldn’t have such like a negative view on it, but you know, I’ve been here forever and I don’t cause trouble. And a lot of times, like these kids that are just troublemakers, they come in and they make trouble (October, 2009)

Dude has also separated himself from the school-of-choice student. The narrative he puts forth is distinctly racialized. The “non-White” students are coming into the school and they cause trouble. For him, his Whiteness removed him from the school-of-choice-student. Secondary traits of tenure in the district and not causing trouble made him “different.” Dude recounted a distinct objectification in his school-of-choice narrative. Dude used phrases like “shipped in” to refer to human beings. Fairtown does not have any large bodies of water nearby. This is not a community

that has embraced nautical terms in its lexicon. Shipped in is overtly derogatory and used to further “other” a population of which Dude is a participant.

Dude’s separation of self from the school of choice narrative is also a complex process.

Well, I feel like they probably caused just as much trouble over at their other schools but they fit in more there. You know what I mean? Like here it’s very much—it’s a very subdued thing, and it’s not like we’re above them or anything—like, I mean—there’s a point where we’re just so like repressed here, we’re—again that has a really negative connotation to it, like repressed, we’re just not allowed to feel anything (October, 2009).

Essentially, he acknowledged the act of repressing parts of himself and his life experiences. He felt the need to qualify this repression by stating that he is not above these new students. He and Chipmunk have this in trait in common. He had to leave his problems at home in this school district. The problems that Dude described in our many conversations are socioeconomic. Fairtown High School has no tolerance for problems of the poor, in Dude’s estimation. The other school-of-choice students bring their emotions and problems with them. Dude could not reconcile being part of that group and created a separate identity. He is not “them” or “the other”—he belongs here.

Both Chipmunk and Dude presented unique challenges for me as the researcher. Dude used associative language with me in our interactions and brought me to understanding his separate identity. My Blackness did not exclude me. However, it is probable that his assumptions about my class or what must be my own experiences as “the exception” brought me in. He often used phrases like “you know,” “you get what I mean,” and “but, you understand” when he spoke about other school-of-choice students to me. I did not get it. I did not know. I did not understand.

Despite countless pushes, he continued to bring me into this group in a meaningful way—not just as a semantic feature.

For Chipmunk, I had several analytic memoranda that highlighted my thoughts from our conversations. The traits of the students she described were in direct tension with my own identity. I grew up in the area from which the “other” students in her narrative were transferring to enter the district. The mode of dress, the attitude, and the behaviors that put these open-enrollment students into the “ghetto” and “rat” categories were part of my own identity markers as an adolescent. Thus, as the researcher, the charge to remain objective required a great deal of internal energy and repression of emotion. The mantle of researcher in my interactions with these two students in particular came with a heavy internal cost.

### **Student Achievement**

Teachers at Northstar and Fairtown High Schools framed the narratives associated with school demographic shifts in a number of ways. Like many of the students, the open-enrollment and school-of-choice phenomena were lead actors in these narratives. The influx of other students into the schools’ ecosystems manifested itself most readily in individual classrooms for the teachers.

Ms. Troop’s tenure at Fairtown High School afforded her a unique vantage point into trends and shifts. She has built a great deal of historical memory and called upon it regularly in our conversations. When she spoke about racial-composition shifts in the past few years, student achievement and academic preparedness were recurring themes.

Oh, we’ve changed a lot, as you can imagine, since I’ve been here forever. We had a very. . . . It wasn’t homogeneous; we always have had a little diversity because of the university. You know, that’s certainly going to bring in a lot of students who represent

other cultures. But I would say with the African American population, that's increased pretty significantly. ... But that's changed the population and I say as a result we have students who have more academic needs than we used to. We used to have more students in the same academic skill level, I think, and now we have much more diversity (Interview 1, October, 2009).

Ms. Troop made a direct connection between the arrival of more African American students and diverse academic needs in the school. This current academic reality is new for Fairtown High School. Academic excellence has been a hallmark of the district for decades. When I pushed Ms. Troop to dig deeper into the racialized academic change she expressed, her narrative began to intersect with the othering I heard from students.

Well, I think I know why. Schools of choice opened up a huge number of students coming from, frankly, mostly Stanton and mostly ... I don't know for sure mostly, but a significant number of African American students. And I don't know what all the reasons are. We can guess what they are. I haven't actually done any kind of survey. But that's changed the population and I say as a result we have students who have more academic needs than we used to. We used to have more students in the same academic skill level. ... I don't know what they call it, credit-recovery program, that are things that we really didn't need when I first started here, but we do need now (Interview 1, October, 2009)

For Ms. Troop, these changes started with the arrival of other students generally—and African American students in particular. She was not talking about students like Dude when she referred to school-of-choice students. She racialized her narrative of the school demographic shifts to read as Black students from Stanton coming into the school with significant academic needs. The combination of this narrative with the label of troublemakers with little emotional

control that Dude put forth created a troubling collective series of collisions in the shift narrative. This narrative feature directly impacts the experiences of Black students in the high school – as evidenced by Ms. Troop’s classroom.

Mr. Smith is proud of the academic prowess at Fairtown High School. He has worked in a variety of school environments. This particular high school has high standards and he worked to maintain those standards through his classroom content and his teaching style.

I’m not one for a lot of busy work assignments and some. ... I get some criticism from my colleagues for my style of teaching. It falls under that category of teacher-centered, but I’m a firm believer that for juniors and seniors, I’m the gatekeeper (Interview 1, November, 2009).

I observed Mr. Smith’s classroom during the school year. His gatekeeper ethos was a constant presence in the classroom. He verbally expressed this sentiment in his classroom with his students. It most readily appeared when students brought up his harsh grading after receiving newly graded student work. Like Ms. Troop, Mr. Smith saw the school-of-choice students as academically inferior.

I see that as for lower level. I mean when they get to me as seniors and they don’t know basic grammar skills because in the junior high they were too busy coloring, that irritates me. ... Especially, like I said, the kids who are here from 1 through 12, they get it and the kids who come in ... and it’s not any particular ethnicity or ... but the kids who come into school of choice, they don’t always get that because they often come from homogenous backgrounds and they. ... You know, it’s a culture shock for them (Interview 2, February, 2010).

Mr. Smith makes clear assumptions about the academic support students received before they came to the district. His reference to “coloring” throughout junior high could be interpreted as justification for his gatekeeper practices in the school. He expressed that it is his responsibility to “make sure that these kids are ready for college.” Mr. Smith’s teaching ethos adds another layer to the of school demographic shift at Fairtown. His reflections did not overtly identify a particular race, though he did note that the school-of-choice students come from racially homogenous backgrounds. Instead, he added a paternalistic bent that took on responsibility for bringing the school-of-choice students “up to speed,” making certain they meet the high academic standards of the school before they graduate. The intentions associated with his mode of teaching were noble on the surface. He wanted to ensure that his students are prepared to succeed. However, when coupled with assumptions about students’ academic backgrounds and the narrative characteristics outlined by Dude and Ms. Troop, students from diverse backgrounds entering Fairtown High School have a high probability of having their stories written for them before they even enter the building – thus greatly impacting their school experience.

Ms. Stiggins is just short of her 4th decade teaching at Northstar high School. She was at the school since the beginning of the racial-demographic shifts. She has taught all grade levels and subtopics in the English classroom. She noted some of the same academic troubles for open-enrollment students that Ms. Troop and Mr. Smith noted at Fairtown High School: “I mean, when they started coming here they just weren’t ready” (Interview 2, February, 2010). However, she was confident that most open-enrollment students make their way up the learning curve quickly: “but it doesn’t take them long.” She also mentioned a noticeable separation of students from different races in the school, particularly in advanced-placement (AP) classes.

'Cause I'll walk right up to a kid and say why aren't you in the AP class? I'm not teaching AP. Well, it's my senior year, you know, and I already have some other AP classes and I don't want to add that. But I would like to see more recruitment of them—Because the ones that I have suggested it—especially in 11th grade—I know if they take those classes, they will do well. You know, they will do well in there. And um, I would just like to see from everybody, from the counseling staff, from administration, from teachers, from everybody to encourage in the AP classes and the honors classes (Interview 1, October, 2009).

Ms. Stiggins was hesitant to overtly express whom she was specifically referencing in our initial conversations. She used terms like “they” and “them” to describe the population she wants to see recruited into AP English classes. During our later interview, about 4 months into my data collection at the high school, she was more specific about the population of students that she would like to see more in AP classrooms.

Because I don't see uh, as many African American students in there—they can do the work. I'm positive they can do the work because I've had them, like this year, 12th graders and 11th graders, but I've had kids since ninth grade—ninth graders—and I've seen kids that, uh, really I say, why aren't you in the honors class? You would be doing really well in honors class, and plus, you could take, uh, the advanced placement tests and you could save your parents money in tuition and—and I'd just like to see everybody do it, you know? So if you get a chance to sit in on AP lit that [name omitted] teaches—and AP language, just see how many, uh, African American students are in there. I think there should be more. And I know they can do the work. I'm positive. I'm confident of it (Interview 2, February, 2010).



Ms. Stiggins expressed personal confidence in the open-enrollment students at the school—and in the African American students in particular. She noted that some of her colleagues do not encourage the African American students in the same manner. I observed two sections of AP literature at Ms. Stiggins' insistence. In the two sections, I counted four African American students. The two sections have a combined total of 47 students. Thus, less than 1% of the students in AP literature are African American, in a school with a nearly 70% African American students. The story of inferiority and othering at Northstar manifests in academic opportunities for all students.

### **Parents and Families**

Students and teachers at both schools have developed theories about school of choice/open-enrollment-students' parents and families. These theories add an additional layer to the narrative of racial-demographic shift in the high schools. For teachers, the theories highlight perceived constraints and opportunities in the home or geographic living environment. The student participants have a variety of theories that are—according to them—compiled from hearsay and their personal interactions with students.

Ms. Kline and Ms. Stiggins at Northstar high school believe that parents of open enrollment students have good intentions. Ms. Kline stated, "They're just so supportive and I'm sure that 99% of them are, however I also know that many of them have single parents and so they're probably really supportive but they might not be awake when the kid comes home to—to show that support" (Interview 1, October, 2009). When I ask her to say more about the sleeping—she explains that the parents are working many jobs, "so, they just sleep all the time" (Interview 2, February, 2010). She further explained through the lens of what she sees with her students.

They have to sacrifice, okay I need to take the bus to the library because mom's working, or I can stay after school at 4, but I have to babysit my little cousin because I have to use the school's library but I can't because I have these obligations at home, so it's like—I'm not sure what to do with that. I mean, you need to give them the same experience (Interview 2, February, 2010).

This statement from Ms. Kline came without a clear connection to a specific group of students. When expressing this statement she was openly exasperated. When asked directly about which students she was referencing here, she said, "all of them"—and then moved on to another topic. Ms. Stiggins told a story of her interactions with parents in the community to illustrate parents' feelings about being in the district.

The parents are saying I want to do the best I can—that—and you don't see parents that are discouraged. I'll be in a store someplace and they'll say, oh you teach at Northstar. Oh I wanted my kid to go to Northstar but—I didn't have the paperwork—you know, and I couldn't get him in, and I would just give anything or—if they could be there and they, you know (Interview 1, October, 2009).

Being a student in Northstar High School carries positive connotations, according to Ms. Stiggins. Parents were trying to do what they could to have their children attend. Ms. Stiggins divided open-enrollment parents into racial groups in her reflections later in the school year. The parents of Chaldean students moved to the area and neighboring towns because of prosperity.

Well what I saw with the Chaldean populations and knowing some of their families, when they became more successful financially, um, they moved into bigger homes—and they moved closer to their work places, because instead of just having their businesses in the city—they were spreading out to the suburbs (Interview 1, October, 2009).

African American parents do not necessarily move to the area, but, instead send their children to the district to escape bad school districts, in Ms. Stiggins' depiction.

And I saw uh, a lot of my, uh, African American students have told me that they came here because they wanted a good education—and they wanted to feel safe. And some of them came from city schools—You have a good principal. You have good teachers.

Parents will say that to you at conferences. So, uh, and especially my kids that came from the Detroit Public Schools—they'll say, I just—you know, I'm here to learn and I don't want to get mixed up in any problems or anything like that (Interview 1, October, 2009).

The teachers at Northstar crafted a narrative feature of “good intentions” for the parents of their open-enrollment students. They work hard and have made good choices by sending their students to the district. Undergirding the good intentions are overarching assumptions about lifestyle. A story is crafted of some parents moving to the district because of business prosperity. Other parents not necessarily moving to the district because of prosperity, but, instead sending their children to the school to escape. The theory of most open-enrollment parents working long hours and sleeping when the students return home may be the reality for some students in the high school. However, these parental narrative features are inadvertently being attached to all of the open enrollment kids.

Mr. Smith and Ms. Troop at Fairtown crafted a similar story about school-of-choice parents. For them, these parents are quite different from the parents of their other students. Mr. Smith was straightforward about the differences he observed, “We have the achievers, we have the sons and daughters of professors, government officials, professionals, doctors, lawyers, etc., and then we have the school-of-choice kids whose parents are looking for a better opportunity for them” (Interview 1, November, 2009). He named a dichotomy between the parents of both

groups of students, the students who live in the district and the others. The in-district group is comprised of achievers. The implication for the other group is that they are likely not achievers.

Ms. Troop used different language to outline a story of parental difference.

When those parents can be there and make the effort—if they decide to send their kids to this school, that in itself says how much they value education, to me. And so even if they don't have the wherewithal for whatever reason to be here, they've made that statement symbolically by sending their students here, I think. That's my take on it anyway (Interview 1, October, 2009).

Her statement above could imply low expectations for her school-of-choice parents. Just sending their kids to the school is enough. At the same time, she acknowledged that the school has a traditionally high level of parental involvement: "I see our parents all the time. Especially with the sports and fundraisers" (Interview 1, October, 2009). Ms. Troop and Mr. Smith described a tale of two sets of parents. The use of phrases like, "our parents" to describe one group and "them" to describe the other group imply a value judgment. The school-of-choice parents are othered. They do not belong to us; yet another layer of complexity in the narrative of racial demographic shift at the school.

Some students recounted their own experiences with theories thrust upon their parents. Chloe's Chaldean identity has made her and her parents objects of scrutiny in the school: "I know people where it's always like, 'Do you own a gas station or a store?' And I'm like, 'Come on'" (November, 2009). Chloe's father does own a store. However, she expresses irritation with the fact that these labels are thrust upon her: "What if my dad fixed cars or something, you know. Then what would they say" (November, 2009). Assumptions about her parents' professions and her affluence or lack thereof are part a constant theme in Chloe's schooling experience. Mark's

parents are also immigrants and full U.S. citizens. His accent often triggered students to ask him about his home life,

They say, “How long have your parents been here? Why do you still speak so African?”

They don’t even know—it’s, I mean, it’s—They are so stupid. Who can speak African?

Nobody can. I speak English better than they do. I don’t say it though. I just don’t even say it (November, 2009).

Mark’s frustration was visible when he recounted these incidents with his peers. He mentioned, “They think my dad is a student. He is a professor and we are not just here now. We are here with permanence” (November, 2009). Like Chloe, his immigrant identity markers—speech for him and phenotype aligned features for her—cause other students to create stories about their parents. Both students openly resented these stereotypes and characterizations.

Students who are residents of the districts had opinions about the parents of school-of-choice/open-enrollment students. The idea that their hometown schools are superior in some way was an accepted construct. Resident students like Mary at Fairtown and Faith at Northstar believed that parents have distinct reasons for sending their children to the schools.

Mary:

Um, I think in regards that especially like in the last couple of years, Fairtown has been awarded several things within athletics, within academia, and within all these different fields which attract students from different, um, different local communities, and you have school of choice now, so you definitely—I definitely know those kids’ parents come to Fairtown for certain reasons (November, 2009).

Faith:

I know a lot of kids coming in from Detroit. Their parents are looking for a nice, safer place to go, so I think in that respect the Black population has gone up like a good amount, just because people moving in (November, 2009).

These district resident students believed they have a distinct opportunity at their schools. This opportunity is one that the parents of nonresident students are seeking to gain.

### **Summary**

The act of narrative building is a complex and multilayered process. At Fairtown and Northstar High Schools, the narrative being built around racial-demographic shifts is an organic process. Neither teachers nor students at either school could recall a deliberate story or headline being told about school-of-choice/open-enrollment students. The void left by no explanation from the district or individual school has been filled with a constructed narrative. This constructed narrative contains many shared themes across the two school contexts. The repeating themes are (a) most African American students came to the school through the school-of-choice law; (b) one does not want to be characterized as a school-of-choice/open-enrollment student, even if one factually is a school-of-choice or open-enrollment student; (c) there are lower expectations of parents who use the school-of-choice law to gain access for their children; (d) school-of-choice/open-enrollment students and their parents are other and use the school-of-choice law to escape; and (e) blame is placed on “those” students and parents for decreasing the academic quality of the school. Further probing would likely uncover additional facets of the narrative. However, these repeating themes permeate the experiences of everyday school life. This saturation has resulted in phenomena like low enrollment of African American students in AP classes, assumptions about the home lives of students that lead to lowered expectations and

shame, and identity-based trauma experienced by students. There is a demonstrative power in the narratives about racial-demographic shifts forming at each school.

### **Happenings: Body Politics and Identity**

Each school experienced distinct phenomena or “happenings” that can be traced back to demographic shifts. Happenings, in this text, refer to events or experiences involving teachers, students, or other staff who are part of the accepted practices in the school. These happenings are part of the fabric of schooling experiences and are not considered to be odd. They are simply part of everyday life in the school in its posthomogeneous state.

### **Body Politics**

Nespor (2010) illuminates the complexities of bodies in school spaces. She notes that, “The problem of organizing bodies in classroom space is usually examined from the teacher’s perspective, as a problem of controlling behavior and managing activity” (p.133). In schools, much time is spent on the placement of bodies for order, discipline and socialization. Body politics, or exertion and negotiation of power through bodies, was a reality at both case sites.

Mr. Smith asserted himself as the gatekeeper in his classroom at Fairtown through pedagogical moves and with his body. Mr. Smith is a tall man at over 6 feet. He is broad shouldered and has a voice that would commonly be described as baritone. He identified as Irish American and pointed out the physical markers of his identity to his students. He marshaled these physical characteristics when he encountered or created difficult conversations about race, class, or gender in his classroom. He recounted one such discussion in his classroom when his students were reading *Huckleberry Finn*.

You know, when we do Huckleberry Finn you will have the White kids who are afraid to openly discuss race with Black kids in the classroom. For instance, 2 or 3 years ago ... I

can't remember where he was from, some West African nation, but he'd been here since he was 7 or 8 so I mean he was assimilated and everything. But found the language offensive and when he read aloud. ... But that's just it, he dealt with it right but he refused to say, you know, the word when he read aloud. And other kids, some of the kids knew immediately what he was doing, some of the White kids were like, "Oh, get over yourself." It's just like okay, I'm uncomfortable saying it but I will read it in the text because it's in context. But I respect the fact that he doesn't want to say it at all, you know (Interview 1, November, 2009)?

Mr. Smith noted that the African American student found it uncomfortable when the class read the text aloud with "the N word" included. The student refused to say the offensive term. His peers then proceeded to jeer him. The student was exhibiting tenets of what Ogbu and Fordham (1986) coined as oppositional culture. Oppositional culture is the resistance against the power of the dominant culture in schooling by African American youth. This student was taking his power back. In this retelling, Mr. Smith took on a protective stance with his White students, who he perceived as afraid to engage around issues of race. After telling the story, he made an attempt to use his Irish identity to create affinity with the African American student.

Like I took a great class. ... I was only allowed to take two electives when I took my master's in English and I took one on the language of race and did a paper on the acceptable use of ethnic slurs within the community, that particular community kind of thing. Like when I'm with my family, we call each a bunch of drunken micks, or my cousin, you know, you stupid wop or dego, you know? But God forbid somebody from outside of the group use that term, you know, that kind of a thing. That's always interesting. But yeah, when we deal with material that deals specifically with race, you



can ... it's immediately apparent which kids are comfortable discussing it, which kids aren't. And I respect it but sometimes it gets out of hand before you can even address it, you know? Some kid'll fire off a comment before you can even anticipate it, you know (Interview 1, November, 2009)?

Here, Mr. Smith took on a portion of his identity in an unrelated context and mapped it to the student's experience. This is one of the many bodily political moves he made in his classroom.

I observed many instances in Mr. Smith's classroom where he would spark an incendiary discussion and then step back as the facilitator. In one particular discussion, the students were discussing a short story about the history of Japanese internment in the American West. Mr. Smith asked the class if they thought all the facts in the historical primary sourced text were true. The students began an in-depth conversation that included racial slurs ("Japs") and resulted in a screaming match between students who disagreed. Once the screaming ensued, Mr. Smith jumped out of his chair, loudly slammed both of his hands on his desk and yelled, "Quiet down!" When I ask him about this incident he said, "That's exactly how it is supposed to happen. They were living that text" (Interview 2, March, 2010). Overall, he believed teachers should incite controversy in classrooms.

But with any text, I don't care how offensive to one particular group, I am left wing to the point where it disturbs left-wingers sometimes. Free speech is free speech is free speech. And I try to put it in context for them and I try to help them understand that even though it uses an offensive term, it is actually you know, in support (Interview 1, November, 2009).

I observed similar discussions in Mr. Smith's classroom. He presented a controversial topic; students argued with one another in a disrespectful manner and the discussion concluded

with Mr. Smith physically inserting himself into the conversation. Each of the discussions where I observed Mr. Smith physically bringing the students back to order were about an issue of race, class or politics. Mr. Smith created momentarily bound chaos around two topics that are sensitive in the school. Many students left the classroom having experienced some form of trauma, much like the student who endured the class reading of *Huckleberry Finn* and the repetition of “the N word” day after day.

At Northstar, Chipmunk recounted instances of body politics that were race and gender based. As she was speaking about her experiences in the school she shifted to speaking about a common occurrence that disturbed her.

I’m Black and so I have hips, I have curves, so I’m not supposed to wear skirts. They will tell us, we’re not supposed to wear skirts. They won’t say it directly, but it’s just like don’t wear skirts, don’t wear leggings, don’t wear shorts. White people don’t have any of that; they don’t have hips, they don’t have butts, they can wear booty shorts, they can wear skirts, they can wear leggings. It’s just like wow. White girls wearing tube tops, booty shorts, whatever and they won’t say anything, like the administration won’t say anything (October, 2009).

Chipmunk believed her body type and a phenotypical profile shared by most Black girls—full hips and rear ends—resulted in unfair treatment. She noted that sometimes Black girls are suspended for wearing the same clothes as White girls. She then began to speak about her personal experience with the unspoken policy. And I be like, “Really?” It got to the point where I got so mad, I’m like, “I’m taking pictures.” I was like, “Why is it okay for this and not okay for this?” Because I remember I got caught like three times (October, 2009). For Chipmunk, this unspoken policy created an unsafe space for her. Her experience calls upon tropes in the

economic reproductive theory of schooling. Educational scholars generally agree on the relationship between “schooling” and “power and domination” in the reproduction model (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1985, p. 74). It is believed that schooling is directly related to economic factors in that “relations of schooling are animated by the power of capital to provide different skills, attitudes, and values to students of different classes, races and genders” (p.74). The majority of this capitalist ideology is transferred through an unspoken undercurrent in schools that is implicitly espoused by everything from the arrangement of the classroom to the accounts that students read in textbooks. – to interactions with school security guards. Chipmunk is a Black girl who entered adolescence and is developing her own body identity. Her development was intersecting with her high school experience in a unique and inequitable manner. She was so disturbed by the manifestation of these body politics that she considered some sort of action to change the reality. She talked about taking pictures and reporting the incident – which directly refers to skills that were taught in Ms. Stiggins’ classroom. However, like the unnamed student in Mr. Smith’s story, she remained silent.

### **Identity Reconciliation**

Victoria participated in an honors program at Northstar High School. The advanced program took place in another school building. It brought together advanced students from many school districts across the region. She recounted many experiences from her involvement in the advanced program in our interviews and informal conversations. During one such recollection, she talked about the perception that other students in the program had about her school.

Yeah. I go there in the afternoons for the advanced program. I have AP English language and AP physics there. And from talking to some of those students and even the students that go to other schools, like the lack of diversity is so crazy. Like I was talking to this

guy who goes there and he was like, “We have a lunch table full of Black people,” and I was like, “You’ve got to be joking.” Like it seems like going to Northstar, I’ve been able to get to know people not because of their race but because of who they are as a person. And I think that’s going to help me out a lot in the long run (October, 2009).

Victoria believed that she has a unique opportunity. Her schooling at Northstar High School has exposed her to students from different backgrounds. She expressed a developmentally mature sentiment when she mentioned getting to know people for who they are and not allowing race to hinder that process. She then reflected on how this realization manifested socially for her in school.

I’m involved in like a lot of different things and I think that helps people not see me as a White girl. Like I’m friends with a lot of different people, with a lot of different races, so I think that helps people see me more as who I am as opposed to what race I am (October, 2009).

Her identity as a White girl is being shaped by her “membership” in a multiracial school. In fact, her reflections could be interpreted as the beginnings of a color-blind ethos. Victoria believed she has been able to transcend race, such that people do not see her as a “White girl.” "Vygotsky (1934) described learning as being embedded within social events and occurring as a child interacts with people, objects, and events in the environment" (Kublin, Wetherby, Crais, & Prizant, 1989, p. 287). Each of the interactions that Vygotsky describes taught Victoria something about who she is in the world. She has learned that her identity matters. As I looked across themes and experiences, I wondered if Chipmunk and Chloe would not notice Victoria’s whiteness. Was Victoria’s perceived status the reality of her school identity? Answers to the

questions notwithstanding, Victoria's identity was being shaped by the racial demographics of her school.

Dude reflected on the dissonance between his home and school identities. Dude suppressed parts of his home identity when he was at school.

But we just—we don't have real problems. I do, at my home—but I leave them at home, because again, a lot of my friends, all of their problems are solved, you know. My problems are, you know, if—even if I had done really well in school and could get into any university I wanted to, I wouldn't be able to pay for it. And my parents wouldn't be able to pay for it. My parents don't even have a retirement fund, you know what I mean? We've bounced from house to house. My parents aren't the most socially responsible, neither of them have graduated college. all their parents, they run things, making six figures, they're living in these giant houses, they have everything (Ocotber, 2009).

Dude's socioeconomic status others him at Fairtown. He did not bring that part of himself to school. At the same time, he recognized that his home reality was quite different from that of his peers. His reflections carried overtones of resentment. He no longer wanted to hear his peers talk about their affluence. The resentment also extended to his parents. He noted they are not "socially responsible" because they did not graduate from college. Dude placed a value judgment on his parents that can be connected to college graduation as the first step to success in the culture of Fairtown High School. He also judged their financial status. His disdainful declaration about their retirement fund was a socioeconomic value statement. As a school of choice student, Dude was thrust into a reality that was incongruous with his family life. The effects of this discordance directly impacted the identity he brought with him to school each day.

Faith felt judged by other students with regard to her identity. She identified as a Black girl. Nonetheless, her speech patterns and intonation caused others to question her racial identity.

Q: And you yourself, do you identify with a particular racial group?

A: I identify with more Black people than White.

Q: And so do other people generally identify you with a racial or ethnic group?

A: Um-hmm. Most people are like, “Oh, she’s Black because she hangs with Black people.” But they tell me I talk White so they think that I have some White friends somewhere [laughs].

Q: Oh, boy. So who’s saying, “Oh, you talk White”?

A: White people say it to me. They be like, “You talk White.” I’m like, “No, I talk perfect for a Black person,” because they don’t know. But it’s mostly when I’m on the phone or if they first meet me, they be like, “Wow, you don’t talk Black” (November, 2009).

Faith has lived in small suburban towns like Northstar all of her life. Her speech patterns reflect her schooling history. Being questioned in this manner by others challenged her identity. Brown (2011) talks about this well know phenomenon of “talking white” in her study of Black girls in a middle class school. She notes that the girls in her study gained power by being able to code-switch and decide how the world would receive them. Here, Faith expressed powerlessness over her speech. In fact, in her telling of the incident, she mentioned that “she talks perfect for a Black person.” This statement suggests that she believed the typical Black person speaks less than perfectly. She identified herself as an exception.

Chloe’s reflections point to a misalignment between her school identity and her cultural identity. Her cultural identification placed her in the extreme minority at her school. She is a

Chaldean American student who is trying to find her way in a school that does not make any overt nods to her culture. Her religion, holidays, and cultural markers like food, music, and dress are not present in the Northstar ecosystem.

Like having friends here and like growing up with friends here and then being at home; it's like having two different lives kind of, because it's so different. Like at home you have all this culture stuff and your parents write down these rules for morals for you and you stick by them. And it's like church, all that stuff. So I mean it's not as strict as if we were still living back there, but they brought ... definitely brought lots of stuff over here with them (October, 2009).

Chloe did not see her culture represented at school. She pointed out that she, in fact, feels like she is living two separate lives.

Chipmunk's school identity intersects with her home identity in her understanding of her father's success.

A: My step mom, she's a nurses' assistant.

Q: And did either of your parents go to college?

A: My dad ... I don't know, he keeps saying he didn't but I'm like, "You had to go to college for something because you own your business."

Q: Maybe he just worked his way up.

A: I don't know how ... because he didn't graduate from high school, so I know he got his GED. So I don't know what else he did, because you can't get there without going from college (October, 2009).

The college success focus at her school created a disconnect for Chipmunk between her parents' lives and her definition of success. Her father owns a well-known heating and cooling business.

However, the physical manifestation of his success was not sufficient to convince Chipmunk of its validity. She tried to make sense of how her father can own his own business without even graduating from high school—let alone college. College graduation has become the absolute currency by which one achieves, for Chipmunk. One can posit that this orientation has likely come from her school environment—one that places a high value on college graduation and attainment.

### **Summary**

Body politics and identity reconciliation are components of the lived experience at Fairtown and Northstar High Schools. The phenomena noted here are directly connected to the demographic shifts in each school. Mr. Smith's body pedagogy is used as an attempt to maintain order. The discussions I witnessed were disparaging for students of color. Her schooling has directly impacted Chipmunk's body and success identity formation. She assigned her body features to an inferior category due to inequitable practices at her school. Fairtown and Northstar's attempts to create the "civilized body", as coined by Bakhtin ([1941] 1965) for students – undermines the ethos of equality for all students. Chipmunk's ability to relate to her parents has also been impacted by an archetype of success that pervades her school. Dude joined Chipmunk in his conception of success colored by socioeconomic status. Their school-of-choice law beneficiary status widens the disconnection between home and school. Their parents do not fit into the success quotient that is part of their school experience. Chloe's cultural identity was not affirmed in her school. Her double life experience as an adolescent was helping to form her long-term identity understanding. Their environment is shaping the students and teachers at the schools.



## **We Love Diversity**

Students at Northstar and Fairtown High Schools recognized and valued the diversity in their schools. Each student addressed this reality in her/his own way. Mary reflected on how diverse classrooms have impacted her educational experience:

Like, I mean, you can have all the opinions in the world but if you don't have someone else voicing an opposition or an agreeing opinion, you will never be able to understand and rationalize it from both perspectives or three perspectives or however many, and come to your own conclusion about the literature at hand. So it definitely—class makeup has a huge impact on that (November, 2009).

The variety of experiences of students in the classroom were instructive for her. Victoria expressed a similar sentiment.

But like the way I see it is Northstar is kind of, if you took like every small percentage of the world and put it into a school then it's kind of like that. So it's pretty much you can see what the world is going to be like outside of high school just by walking the halls of Northstar (October, 2009).

The cultures and person-to-person experiences that she experienced at Northstar have been critical to her understanding of the world. Chipmunk was fascinated by all the different cultures she encountered in school. Her feeling about the school overall are positive.

It's diverse because we have Chaldeans, we have White people, we have black people, we have Mexicans, we have Asians, we have people from foreign countries—like the foreign-exchange students come every year. So it's like it's really diverse. And then we have people who are mixed, but not just Black and White but like Mexican and White,

mixed. There are two girls I know, they're twins, they have like five or six different backgrounds and they're just really cool. ... I like it here (October, 2009).

Jackson compared the diversity of his school to that of his friends' schools.

My friends that don't go here don't get it. They stay in the little bubble. In those schools everybody looks the same and thinks the same—it's like a movie. My mom asked me if I wanted to go to private school, but I learn a lot here that my friends don't get (November, 2009).

Jackson saw value in his experiences at Northstar High School and chose to stay in a diverse environment. He saw his friends who attended monolithic schools as "living in a bubble". Mark also saw the value in his diverse experiences at Fairtown High School.

They know that this is the best place for me. We have other Ghanaian students and people from many backgrounds. The people here speak many languages. You can walk in the hallway and hear the different languages of all of the students from Asia and Africa. You cannot get that at every school. It makes this school one of the best (November, 2009).

I recount student voices in rapid succession above to underscore the exuberance that they shared with me around attending a diverse school. Each student participant noted the multiple racial populations in the schools as an attribute. The raw statistics showed student populations that traditionally would not be considered diverse (Tables 4 and 5). White and Black students are the overwhelming majority. Nonetheless, the exposure and ability to interact with students from different backgrounds was important to all of the students.

Teachers at both schools echoed many of the reflections of their students. Again, their exuberance was a constant presence in our interviews and conversations. The teacher

participants valued the diversity in the schools. Ms. Kline cited the diverse student population as her reason for teaching at the school:

That's why I love it here, and that's why I also think it's very authentic because when I visited my girlfriends' schools who are also teachers, it's so not that way. The wall—the walls between races are almost tangible I feel, and here, of course there're going to be certain instances where there are here, where aren't they? Because they're young and there's always ignorance no matter how young or old you are, but it's more—I don't know—it's more accepting and family-oriented (Interview 1, October, 2009).

Ms. Kline was thankful for the diverse and family-oriented environment at Northstar. Ms. Troop also mentioned a diverse family orientation at Fairtown. She told the story of when her daughter graduated from the high school as an illustration.

When my daughter graduated—her grandparents came up and they have grandchildren who've been to about six, seven different school districts, so they've been to all the graduation ceremonies. But I remember my mother-in-law turning to me and saying, “Why is everybody hugging their teachers up there? What's going on? How close are you people?” She thought it was weird and I didn't think it was weird at all. And I said, “Because our kids, we like our kids and apparently they like us and we're special to them and they're special to us.” I mean it was really kind of, I was taken aback by that statement; isn't this the way it is? And then I was reminded it's not by a lot of teachers who've taught other places and by students who've been to other schools. So it's just the best thing, I think, about this school, is that we care about our kids, all of our kids from every background. So you know, that's part of the reason I like teaching here (Interview 1, October, 2009).

Ms. Troop saw Fairtown as a family for all students. She believed in this ethos and defended it to her parents as the reason she teaches at the school. Ms. Stiggins also enjoyed the racial and ethnic diversity at her school.

And I see diversity, you know. I like teaching here, um, there's diversity with race, uh, there's diversity, you know, I mean we have Blacks, Whites, Chaldeans and then others, Filipino students in my classrooms, and um, there was much more diversity in the past. Like we had Chinese students—and you know, but there's still the diversity here at this school. And I think the kids like that, too (October, 2009).

Mr. Smith enjoyed learning from the diverse populations at the schools.

And it's cliché, but I like that we're diverse. I mean we have 50 some odd nationalities. I mean literally, nationals, as in people born in those different countries, in this district. And that's just amazing. I've learned so much interesting stuff just, you know, culturally speaking with these kids. And they love to share it. And it creates an interesting sense of community here, you know (October, 2009)?

All of the teachers valued the diverse communities of their schools. They mentioned the merits of the heterogeneous student population in many of our interactions. Their reflections on the overall diversity of the school were shared with positive intentions.

## **Summary**

The teachers and students in this study valued diversity. However, their actions – as outlined in the previous section – were often misaligned with this espoused value. The same students who stated they appreciated the diversity of the school stayed in same race groups throughout the school day. The only student who has truly built authentic relationships across lines of racial and ethnic difference is Victoria. Teachers at Fairtown and Northstar expressed

genuine joy about working in diverse school settings. Moments later, in the same interaction, the teachers would make a disparaging remark about students from a non-White background. These remarks would then be followed by inequitable practices in classrooms. For me, as the researcher, this created a cognitive dissonance. Actions and espoused mindsets failed to align in nearly every individual case. This created a collective dissonance between actions, narratives and ethos that was dizzying.

### **Discussion**

The constructed narrative about racial-demographic shifts is living, breathing, and expanding at Northstar and Fairtown High Schools. Students and teachers are living daily experiences that add to the overall story of why this change is happening in their school. The school-of-choice/open-enrollment students have been cast in a starring role. Conversations about “them” permeate the classrooms, halls, and other spaces in the schools. Chipmunk and Dude offered a glimpse into what it means to be othered. They create separate personas and other students in their own group. They have formed their own counternarratives: those students are not me.

Students disassociate themselves with the narrative of racial change at Fairtown and Northstar because it places blame. Blame is placed on the students themselves for lowering the academic quality of the school. Creating additional programs, shifting teaching practice to accommodate them, lowering the overall ACT scores of the school, these are shared and openly accepted narrative features at each school. A complex web of blame is placed on the parents of school-of-choice/open-enrollment students. Although these parents are celebrated for seeking better options for their children, their home lives are disparaged. Teachers lower expectations for

their participation in their children's lives. These expectations translate into a lower bar for these students.

Students and teachers at Fairtown and Northstar High Schools have created a shift narrative. This narrative shapes the way that they experience school. The negotiation of identity, body politics, assumptions about one another, academic expectations and home life is difficult. Race is at the center of the shift narrative. This narrative is in constant conflict with an espoused ethos of love. Love for all students, love of diversity and love of school is in active discord with the narrative of racial demographic shift at each school. The environment that this narrative has created suggests a crisis point for kids and teachers. Kuhn ([1962]1996) asserts that crisis is significant because it provides an occasion for re-tooling" (p. 76). The state of the schools provide an opportunity to reassess and begin to build a new narrative for the school communities.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CRITICAL LITERACY: TEACHER PEDAGOGY AND THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM**

The data and themes presented in the last chapter assert that the informal interactions and discourse between students and teachers inform a holistic narrative of racial demographic shift in each school. This narrative shapes the way the students and teachers experience school. In this chapter, I explore how classroom pedagogy maps on to that shift narrative. I begin by sharing data collected from classroom observations of each teacher participant. I explain how that data intersects with critical literacy pedagogy. In this section, I share the data collected from the observations and the teacher reflections. Then, I discuss how teachers at Northstar define critical literacy and use critical literacy practices in their classrooms. The teachers at Northstar differ greatly in their use of these practices. The student experience is inconsistent across contexts. Next, I discuss definitions and observed classroom practices of the teacher participants at Fairtown High. Finally, I explain how the shared case site experience of high school English class is connected to the language, discourse and thus narrative development at each school.

#### **Critical Literacy**

Critical-literate practices can be found in many English classrooms. Here, I use critical literacy as a lens for observation and analysis of the classroom practices of English teachers at Northstar and Fairtown High Schools. Teaching students to approach texts with clear probing questions, encouraging community engagement, incorporating cross-text analysis, and examining the features of language are some of the features of critical literacy. The English-teacher participants in this study each defined their understanding of critical literacy and how those practices translate in their teaching practice. These practices are of particular import in

multiracial schools. The skills learned in the critical English classroom engender student advocacy and the ability to read deeply into lived realities to make connections. Aronowitz & Giroux (1985) point to the import of critical literacy and not that students should embrace “modes of critical literacy that could be crucial to their own liberation” (p. 78). I observed the classroom practices of each of the teacher participants (see Appendix A and Table 6) and surveyed their thoughts about their own practice.

Table 6

*Classroom Observations*

Teacher	Classroom observations	Overall number of critical strategies <sup>5</sup>	Most occurring critical strategy <sup>6</sup>
Ms. Kline	8	6	Reading multiple texts
Ms. Stiggins	8	17	Producing counter texts
Mr. Smith	8	22	Supplementary texts
Ms. Troop	8	7	Reading multiple texts

**Northstar Teachers**

Ms. Kline considered herself a critical pedagogue. She spent her summers learning about the latest reading and writing practices. Her definition of critical literacy is aligned with the current scholarly understanding.

Q: To you, what does the term “critical literacy” mean?

A: Um, this is such a loaded question, because critical literacy is, if I could give you like an anecdote when we were reading *Lord of the Flies* with my ninth graders, we questioned everything and kind of picked out what we didn’t understand and what we

<sup>5</sup> I adapted critical-literacy strategies from Behrman’s (2006) critical-literacy framework.

<sup>6</sup> Strategies include (a) supplementary texts, (b) reading multiple texts, (c) reading from a resistant perspective, (d) producing countertexts, (e) conducting student-choice research projects, and (f) taking social action.



could relate to and from our own life experiences, and so just questioning and analyzing and interpreting based on like our invisible backpack -- okay, the author might have an intended meaning, but then, okay, you have your life, tell me what you—how did you interpret it? And then what if I told you that it was a female voice, then how would you interpret it and just looking at it from different points of view like that. That's critical literacy to me (Interview 1, October, 2009).

Ms. Kline enjoys being an English teacher and takes her craft seriously. She noted that examining issues of identity through text using critically literate practices is commonplace in her classroom.

Q: Do you use any of the listed critical-literacy practices in your classroom, and I just—I have a list here that you have completed

A: Yeah, I said yes to all of them.

Q: Are there any that you'd like to talk about?

A: Um, I mean I could talk about all of them. I think the taking-social-action one [...] Um, just all the reflecting and understanding, okay well I agree with it because here's where I'm coming from. You're agreeing with it because of this reason, but now what about her over there who disagrees? And I mean, they just really have to get that out and be comfortable saying like this is what I'm carrying around with me, these are why I feel, you know, the opinions that I do (Interview 1, October, 2009).

Ms. Kline stated she uses all of the critically literate practices in Behrman's (2006) framework in her classroom. However, my classroom observations and her own storytelling did not align with her intellectual understanding of critical-literacy pedagogy. In particular, her reflections on her teaching of a majority African American classroom are misaligned.

I think one class I had like 28 Black kids and 2 White kids, and we were reading all these short stories—I'll never forget this—because we were flipping through the textbook and one little girl saw a picture of like a—maybe 11- or 12-year-old Black girl with little braids, like pony-tail, um, pigtail braids, and she's like, how come we don't get to read a story like that? She looks like my cousin. And how come we don't—and she's flipping through. ... It broke my heart because I know I've never had to experience that as a White woman, going, I—I don't—why do I want to read this? I can't relate to that. I know I would think that as a ninth grader; you're 13 years old (Interview 2, February, 2010).

Her student's courage and insistence triggered a reaction for Ms. Kline. She did not notice the lack of connection for her students. She did not correct course based on her knowledge of critically literate practices. I noticed a similar pattern in the classroom sessions I observed. Reading multiple texts is the critical-literacy function that appears most in my observations in Ms. Kline's classroom (see Table 5). Student choice, supplementary texts, and providing perspective did not appear in my observations. Ms. Kline has the knowledge. In fact, she has the most aligned understating of critical literacy as it relates to the framework we discussed. Yet, she does not apply this knowledge with fidelity in her classroom.

Ms. Stiggins' articulation of critically literate practices differed from that of her colleague, Ms. Kline.

Q: Um, so what does the term “critical literacy” mean to you as an English teacher?

A: Well, to me it means that the kids are literate, and that uh, they can read close to grade level. They understand what they're reading, they have, uh, they use strategies to help them figure out what they're reading. Um, but I guess that's it.

Q: Have you ever had any sort of professional development around critical literacy within the school, and maybe in things that you do in the summers?

A: Well, I've attended tons and tons of workshops—about literacy, and um, I've attended—because I teach at a community college too. They're always, uh, pushing, uh, staff development, curriculum development, so we do this academic-literacy program every year. And it's really trying to get the students to apply reading strategies (Interview 1, October, 2009).

Ms. Stiggins' description of "reading strategies" as the key component of critical literacy is simplistic. However, my classroom observations tell a different story. She used each of the practices outlined in the framework multiple times in her practice (see Table 5). Ms. Stiggins's description became much more detailed when pushed to further explain the approaches I noticed in her classroom: "Okay. We do like mind mapping, and annotation and think-alouds—and I try to bring that back to the—to this classroom, too, the high school, dialect culture, journals where they're interacting with the text" (Interview 1, October, 2009). Her descriptions of her own practice still paled in comparison to the classrooms I observed. Ms. Stiggins actively pushed students. She brought current events and school debates into class discussions and asked students to connect these texts to the literature. In one English class I observed, the class opened with a scanned text on the Obama presidential campaign and the origin of Obama's "Change" campaign slogan. Ms. Stiggins told the story of how she worked to incorporate reading and writing across the curriculum into the school culture. As she told the story, she outlined the change process in a diagram on the white board. She then asked students to apply the diagram to an issue they wanted to change. She encourages students to share out about something that they saw to be unfair or inequitable. The application was followed by a discussion of students' ideas. She

closed with a writing assignment on change for homework. Ms. Stiggins's teaching practices encouraged her students to be engaged citizens. In fact, she actively embodied a schooling approach, touted by Milner (2007) that has "problematized and disrupted dominant and hegemonic notions of what is characterized, conceptualized, and accepted as "normal" in educational practices" (p. 389). These transferrable strategies can prove invaluable for students in a school where they perceive inequalities.

### **Fairtown Teachers**

Ms. Troop's understanding of critically literate practices focused on a collective learning approach.

Q: So to you, what does the term critical literacy mean?

A: I think, my first thought is to offer the opportunity for students to be able to look at literature and reading, writing, all the elements of literacy, you know, in a critical way. So analyze, understand, bring in your own perspectives but to be able to share information; it's all about communication and sharing information. And we try to do a lot of speaking in our classes where it's not just a discussion led by the teacher but by the students in small groups and pairs—formal and informal speeches and presentations and so on. So giving everybody as much opportunity to share as they can (Interview 1, October, 2009).

Her understanding of critical practices was one of diffused leadership. She saw her role as the teacher as that of facilitator. She gave direction for the day and then sat back and watched the lesson play out. She used few of the critically literate practices in Behrman's (2006) framework. Instead, her focus was on student collaboration and autonomy.

Q: And so you've kind of really led into the next question, which is does critical literacy affect the English classroom in any way?

A: I always think that they really enjoy it. Sometimes it can get a little carried away but I think they enjoy the opportunity to make choices. So for instance when I taught English II, which I did for many years here, that's the sophomore level of English, the required English here, they were given at the end of the year an opportunity to read a book of choice with some parameters, like a certain length and had to be a quality book, but with a lot of open opportunities (Interview 1, October, 2009).

Ms. Troop's students had many choices in her classroom. They were in self-selected groups on most days. The groups were often racially homogenous with few exceptions. On average, Ms. Troop had five to six sets of groups in her classroom. Typically, one of those groups was multiracial. In 14 of the 15 classes I observed, students of color worked by themselves while other students worked in groups. In his later work, Dewey advocated for a partner approach to learning, he asserted that "participatory social inquiry" that requires all citizens to be "equipped with knowledge and competent method" is the key to democratic classrooms (Oakes, 2006, p. 36). Ms. Troop was striving for freedom and democracy in her classroom. However, she failed to achieve her true vision because all students were not participating in social inquiry. Not every child was leaving her classroom fully equipped. Her approach may have worked well when the school population was homogenous. However, the new multicultural reality at Fairtown requires intentionality to ensure all students are active participants, learning across lines of difference.

Mr. Smith has a clear philosophical opinion about critically literate practices. He and his colleague Ms. Troop differed in both approach and mindset.

Q: What does the term critical literacy mean to you as an English teacher?

A: You're going to get into a long philosophical discussion with me. One of my biggest issues as a teacher—and I try not to let this come through in my teaching in terms of criticism of my other colleagues—but far too often I think we're trying to entertain the kids more than we're trying to educate them. English teachers often generate assessments that are based on only objective material which requires little more than memorization as opposed to critical thinking skills. For instance virtually every test I give is essay because telling me, you know, Lennie's last statement in *Of Mice and Men* is not as important as what those last names suggest, you know? And I think that making those connections, I don't care if the kids even remember the novel when they're done, it's the skill set I want them to learn because I think that's applicable to virtually any field they go into. So when you say critical literacy, it's not just having read something, it's having read and maybe not necessarily enjoyed but at least have a full understanding of what it is that they're engaged in (Interview 1, November, 2009).

A deep understanding of the “why” behind a text is what Mr. Smith aimed to achieve in each class session. He incited deep questioning in every classroom discussion. In my classroom observations, Mr. Smith used each of the practices in the critical-literacy framework with regularity. He employed the most critical-literacy practices the most often, compared to the other study participants. Yet, his classroom was not a safe space for all students. Generally, male students spoke more than female students in his classroom. Students of color often did not speak at all. Mr. Smith used critically literate practices in his classroom. However, his pedagogy did not have the desired effects of empowered and engaged students. His practices had the opposite effect at Fairtown High School. Certain students in classroom were disempowered and disengaged.

## **Summary**

English classrooms in Michigan have the charge of ensuring students can read, write, listen, speak, and view. These practices are directly related to narratives, discourse, and other language functions. This dissertation sought to uncover and study these occurrences in two schools. Therefore the happenings in English classrooms are inextricably connected to student and teacher experiences. Each teacher participant had a different conception of critically literate practices. Ms. Kline and Ms. Stiggins worked in the same building and have different definitions of critical literacy. Ms. Kline had the most scholarly aligned definition of all teacher participants, yet, her classroom practice did not mirror that understanding. Ms. Stiggins's definition was simplistic, but, her practice was an exemplar of critical literacy at its best. Ms. Troop and Mr. Smith are also colleagues, living out different forms of critically literate practice. Ms. Troop sought to create collaborative classroom spaces. She failed to do so for all of her students. Mr. Smith, though true to the critical-literacy framework, did not ensure equity in his application. The classroom practices of these teachers affect hundreds of students each school year. Their ability to engage students in practices that affirm their identities, challenge them intellectually, and inspire action is of critical importance.

## **Discussion**

Teachers are the gatekeepers at Northstar and Fairtown. The high academic standards and rigorous classroom content are designed to ensure that graduates meet a high bar. There is little space for critical-literacy practices—meant to empower, engage, and teach questioning—unless the teacher is deliberate in incorporating the practices. In 11 years of watching, coaching, and participating in English classrooms, I have never encountered what took place in this study. In schools where students like Mary, Dude, Mark, and Chloe need to learn the skills of questioning,

reading the world around them and producing counternarratives, these practices are largely either not understood, not used, or perverted. Ms. Stiggins's practice is the one exception. When Chipmunk said she should "take pictures" and report on the issues of body-type discrimination that she sees happening in the schools, it is clear that she is accessing skills she learned in Ms. Stiggins's classroom. Her active civil disobedience parrots the content of discussions she has engaged in as part of Ms. Stiggins's English classroom. I still have many questions. Is critical literacy enough to create an authentic counternarrative to the current story of school racial change? What is there to be said for teachers like Mr. Smith, who use the practices to empower one group of students over others? The fluid narratives leave open space for intervention. One could organically insert a different story, through conversations and data, to add a new dimension to the overarching narrative. The question is, Are these schools ready to accept counternarratives on race and school change? These data, presented here, render the answer to this question unclear.



## CHAPTER 7

### RACIALIZED DISCOURSE: THE LANGUAGE OF DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS

Chapters 5 and 6 explore the lived experiences of teachers and students at the two case sites. These chapters assert that identity, school happenings and teacher pedagogy inform a overarching narrative about racial demographic shift at each school – and directly address the three overarching research questions for this study:

1. What interactions, if any, have teachers, students, and the school community had with the process of school racial-demographic shifts?
2. How, if at all, have these interactions manifested themselves during school discourse, and with what effects?
3. How, if at all, do the critically literate practices of English teachers map onto discourse in racially shifting schools?

This chapter puts forward two distinct theories about language that derived from the research data and themes. Here, I claim that a new language developed at Fairtown and Northstar High Schools alongside the shift narrative. The term language refers to a set of semantic and syntactic features used to communicate. First, I explore *silence*. Teachers and students at the schools have varied levels of fluency in the language of racial-demographic shift. The primary feature of this new language is silence. Next, I discuss my framework for *change discourse*. Members of the school community also engage in change discourse using language. Finally, I assert that silent codes and change discourse are the primary components of the interactions that students, teachers, and the school community have with the demographic shifts at Northstar and Fairtown High Schools.

## Silence

The evolution of racial silence at the high schools is difficult to track. However, the data in this study revealed three levels of silence in the schools (see Table 6). The first level of silence is nonspeech silence (NSS), manifested when complete verbal silence about a specific topic is enacted. At this level a person does not talk about or acknowledge a specific topic. There may also be silent gestures or other signs of discomfort. The second level of silence is double silence (DS). DS is present when a speaker overemphasizes race and silences other identity markers. DS violates the spirit of the dialogic that Freire (1970/1993) advocated, “founding itself upon love, humility, and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between dialoguers is the logical consequence” (p. 152). DS is inherently self-serving, and often gives the silencer power over fellow dialoguers because it allows the silencer to define the conversation. The third level of silence is coded silence (CS). Labov and Harris (1986) developed a linguistic theory about AAL called divergence. In this theory, the authors posited that AAL speakers of the hip-hop generation have created new words and phrases that purposely diverge from Standard English. This divergence is at the center of a struggle for African Americans to maintain their identity. I believe that CS developed from a purposeful divergence from DS by those who have unresolved feelings about equity, but desire to operate in liberal rhetoric. In CS, individuals can use the politically correct phrases of the era to voice their true opinions. CS gives speakers the freedom to say phrases like, “Yes, I believe we should build a fence to keep undocumented workers out of the United States. That fence should be patrolled by National Guardsmen and -women who have the right to use necessary force.” The translation of the code is, “Yes I believe we should build a fence to keep Mexicans out, and those who cross the fence should be shot.” I believe that the internal struggle of DS creates the need for CS.

The features of this silence framework arose from the data collected at Fairtown and Northstar High Schools. NSS was most apparent in the speech patterns and conversations with teachers and students who were residents of the town. Verbalizations of discomfort and avoidance were associated with questions about race. In some cases, denial of race as a factor in the composition of the school community accompanied the interactions. Ms. Kline was the most fluent teacher and employed NSS during formal interviews and informal interactions.

Table 7

*Racial-Silence Framework*

Type of racial silence	Speech features	Silence features
<i>Nonspeech silence (NSS)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoidance</li> <li>• Gestures of discomfort</li> <li>• Silence</li> <li>• Hedging speech</li> </ul>
<i>Double silence (DS)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speech intended to placate or pacify</li> <li>• Emphasizing racial identity without acknowledging other identity markers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speech that silences identity features not related to race.</li> </ul>
<i>Coded silence (CS)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usage of politically-correct terms as code</li> <li>• Hidden meanings that must be decoded</li> <li>• Reference to stereotypes as fact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of translation of code</li> <li>• Refusal to acknowledge the opinions of others in dialogue</li> </ul>

Q: Do teachers in this school speak openly about race?

A: Yeah, how do you expect me to answer that, can you be more specific?

Q: So, um, maybe to one another, or I know you aren't really in one another's classes, um, so maybe like in the teacher's lounge.

A: Like when they're talking about kids?

Q: Talking about kids or when they're talking about things that they want to teach, when you all are thinking about planning or.

A: Okay, well—um, we can't have all books like *Catcher in the Rye*, where he's rich, and he's from the '50s, and—yes, there's the universal themes like depression and being alienated and things like that, which—that's a challenge, I like (Interview 2, February, 2009).

Ms. Kline did not directly answer the question. Instead, she sought to understand what her expected answer should be in the circumstance. She finally attempted an answer to the question and focused on a specific text. Avoidance, hedging speech, and overall silence on the issue of teacher conversations about race are present. Jackson mirrored Ms. Kline's NSS characteristics when asked questions about race.

Q: To your knowledge, has the racial composition of this school changed over the past 30 years?

A: (Sighs) That's a good question. I really don't know.

Q: Okay, all right. So no teachers or students have talked about it, murmurings that you've heard?

A: Nope.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah, so I don't know. I can't help you.

Q: Any thoughts about what the changes might have been?

A: Nope. (October, 2009)

Jackson's "sigh" in his first response to the question was accompanied by a shift in body language. His responses to follow-up questions can be characterized as NSS. He made reference to researcher expectations, much as Ms. Kline when he said, "I can't help you." Ms. Kline was the least experienced teacher of the participants. Jackson has lived in his community for a shorter

period of time than the other district-resident participants. I propose that both study participants have been exposed to an already formed iteration of NSS in their schools. They have acquired the purest form of this speech feature. They are most fluent, using NSS in each direct conversation about race, because they encountered the language feature after it was fully formed.

DS appears across lines of difference in interactions with the study participants. Mr. Smith exemplified DS in his attempts to identify with his students and me across lines of difference. Mr. Smith made small talk about race near the end of my formal and informal interactions with him.

Mr. Smith: Have you ever read any Octavia Butler?

R: Yes, I love her.

Mr. Smith: I love to use her.

R: I'm so sad that she's no longer with us.

Mr. Smith: I know, I love to teach *Blood Child*, because it messes with the gender issue, race issue. She's always messing with kids or readers, period. But I love to give it to the kids and just make them deal. It's overwhelming at times for them because there are so many issues going on.

R: Yes.

Mr. Smith: Especially in something like *Wild Seed*—I don't know if you've read that one, but.

R: I've read all of her series [laughs].

Mr. Smith: She changes gender then the other, the spirit guy changes gender and they start mixing race and ... yeah.

R: It jumps into different issues, yeah.

Mr. Smith: It's just, yeah. ... Yeah, love with that one, yeah, yeah [laughs].

R: [Laughs] Yeah, I'm a bit of a sci-fi nerd, so ... [laughs]. I've read all of it.

Mr. Smith: Oh, no kidding. I've got a great collection called *Dark Matter* you might like. It's a collection of African American science-fiction authors; you might get a kick out of it.

R: Really?

Mr. Smith: Yeah, yeah. Some good stuff. (Interview 2, February, 2010)

All of Mr. Smith's affinity conversations with me were race and gender based. In this interaction, his book recommendations and discussion of the content are racialized. My admission of a love of science fiction prompted him to put forward a collection of African American science fiction. He failed to acknowledge my science-fiction interest without coupling it with my racial identity. He has silenced the nonracialized part of my identity in this conversation. His attempts to build affinity resulted in the opposite affect. I left this interaction feeling alienated. Similar instances of DS occurred with other members of the school community.

Using school-of-choice/open-enrollment students interchangeably with African American students is the most common occurrence of CS. These terms are acceptable in the school community. School demographic data and personal interactions confirm that African American students are not the only students to use school-of-choice options. Yet, students and teachers of all races at each school use the terms interchangeably or associate school-of-choice/open-enrollment closely with African American students. The CS of these terms is generally proceeded or followed by a negative event. Chloe's comments illustrated this CS trend.

I think for a while our school was like open enrollment to Detroit students as well. ... And then I think they closed that. So I mean I remember a lot of people getting taken out of school in the middle of the year. Like my one friend, he got taken out when they started coming. So stuff like that (October, 2009).

Here, Chloe was referring to students being taken out of the school with the arrival of more open-enrollment students. She made a clear association between the arrival of the open-enrollment students and the departure of other students. Chloe did not say African American students in this excerpt. However, when she made this statement to anyone in her school community, there was an unspoken—a silent—understanding that she was referring to the Black students. Ms. Troop's reference to CS was subtle. However, it remains a potent example of the interchangeability and association of school-of-choice students:

Q: Are there any important moments in the history of this school that stick out to you?

A: That's hard to come up with. I would just say the schools of choice (Interview 1, October, 2009).

Ms. Troop talked about the lower academic performance in the district as a result of the arrival of African American school-of-choice students. She has taught at Fairtown High School for more than 30 years. The most important moment she can recall is "the schools of choice." The term carries such heavy weight in the school community that she did not deem it necessary to explain what she means by naming this particular term. CS can be seen in many instances throughout the interview-transcript analysis. The high school communities at Fairtown and Northstar have constructed their own racialized codes.

## **Summary**

Silent codes, silencing of others, and refusal to speak are hallmarks of the language employed when addressing racial-demographic shifts at Northstar and Fairtown High Schools. The teachers and students in this study use the language with dexterity. NSS exemplifies the speaker's power over race talk. Jackson, Ms. Kline, and others in the school community refused to address issues of race, depending on their whim. DS can have insidious consequences for the speaker and the receiver. Not having the ability to decouple people from their race may cause the speaker to view the receiver as a token. Well-intended verbal references leave receivers exposed and feeling undervalued for the full expression of their identity. CS is not a new phenomenon in the United States. The history of oppression in the country created many race codes. The school communities here used that framework to create their own race codes. The meanings of terms are expected to be inherently understood by community members. I believe this language development and acquisition was not purposeful. The silence framework is one of the modes employed to interact with the racial-demographic shifts in the schools.

## **Change Discourse**

Historical, memory, demographic speculation, and storytelling are components of the change discourse at the case high schools. Change discourse refers to conversations with one or more people about the race-related changes in the school community. Nora (1996) makes distinctions between history and memory and asserts that language and story telling make meaning of these phenomena.

Memory and history [...] appear now to be in total opposition. Memory is life, [...] vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and



periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstitution, always problematic and incomplete of what is no longer (p. 8).

The poststructuralist paradigm assumes that “meaning is constituted within language” (Weedon, 1998, p. 172). The four components of change discourse often contradicted one another and added to the overall narrative of school demographic shifts. All student and teacher participants engaged in this change discourse during the course of the school year. Students, teachers, and parents told stories about the current state of the school. School-community members speculated about the actual numbers and percentages associated with the demographic shifts. Teachers and family members passed along history, making moments for the school. These events are all part of the change discourse in the high schools.

Teachers greatly contributed to the discourse about historical moments at Northstar and Fairtown. Ms. Stiggins and Ms. Troop offered a wealth of knowledge about the school’s history. Both teachers taught at their respective schools for more than 30 years. They shared their lived experiences with students, families, and colleagues. Ms. Stiggins remembered the first integration efforts at Northstar in the late 1970s.

I came the year that they had like their big—their last racial explosion—you know, and the principal at that time uh, he just decided to get the leaders of both groups, the White kids and—the African American kids, and got the leaders uh, the so-called negative leaders, the positive leaders, and I think it was a group of 50 kids. And we were out of school for a couple days but they had a summit and they worked out—and then we never had another racial explosion (Interview 1, October, 2009).

Ms. Stiggins experienced a history where talk about race was volatile. The school was closed for days while Black and White students talked through racial tensions. Talking about race brought

about change. Today's Northstar has silenced the dialogue. Ms. Troop's historical memory recalls a monolithic and free schooling experience at Fairtown High School that shifted with the passing decades.

They were encouraged to have a lot more freedom during the day when I started here. That went away a little bit in the '80s and then the '90s came and you had a kind of a mixture and then the 2000s have definitely been different. We've opened our doors to a lot more different kinds of students and different opportunities for students. But I'd say overall it just offers us a more interesting group and I think it makes it more. It's so much more interesting now and the kids are so lively (Interview 1, October, 2009).

Ms. Troop often shared her historical rememberings with her classes. Her students knew the story of a more free and culturally homogeneous school—and the lively diverse school that they attend today. Her opinions and memories are part of the change discourse being told in the school. Ms. Kline gathers most of her knowledge about the school's history from other teachers.

The people who—when I first started teaching here, the past 5 years a ton of people have retired, and those are the people that have been here for 30 or 40 years, so those were the people who I was hearing information from, you know, it was—when they first started, it was, like, 98% White, many of them were from here, and now it's different (Interview 1, October, 2009).

Historical moments shared by veteran teachers are passed on as fact to other teachers. These moments become part of the schools' informal discourses. New teachers consult older teachers to learn about the school's history. Ms. Stiggins's story points to a postracial Northstar High School, where race explosions no longer happen. Ms. Troop's less free and lively assessment of

Fairtown leaves a value judgment for students and colleagues. Veteran-teacher historical memory is a critical component of the change discourse in these shifting schools.

Another change-discourse feature is speculation about the extent of the racial-demographic shifts. Each study participant engaged in this change-discourse feature. Much of the speculation failed to align with the demographic-shift data. The demographic information shown in Tables 3 and 4 show the high schools' current demographic data:

At Northstar, Ms. Kline and Ms. Stiggins have closely aligned understandings of the racial demographics:

Ms. Stiggins: Okay. Let me see. If I had to ballpark it—uh, I would say there's probably around 60% African—and uh, maybe 30% uh, Caucasian, and then 10% Other (Interview 2, February, 2010).

Ms. Kline: Maybe like 60/40, 60 African American, 40 Caucasian. No, no, I'm sorry—reverse that. Yeah. so—and plus, they just weren't—there was not a big baby boom or anything, so we were losing population. All I know is that the school used to be more than double White kids and now we have what we have (Interview 2, February, 2010).

Ms. Kline added her own speculations about the reasons for the shifts. Ms. Troop and Mr. Smith also speculated about the racial percentages and the reasons behind the shifts at Fairtown.

Mr. Smith: Yeah. And again, it's economics. I mean our resident student population numbers have been dwindling and as a result, more school-of-choice kids. I mean school of choice is not just African American. I don't know the percentages but 20% of our student population, period, is school of choice, you know? Because Fairtown, let's face it, their tax base is pretty high, their property taxes are high, you don't get a lot of young families moving in. So the resident population is aging and they're replacing the kids

with kids out of district as opposed to in. So it's a really interesting dynamic that's taking place there (Interview 2, February, 2010).

Ms. Troop: But I would say with the African American population, that's increased pretty significantly. I'm going to guess we have 25 to 30%, I don't know. Honestly, which is sad. I need to get those numbers (Interview 2, February, 2010).

Parents and family members of students at the school pass along their speculations about the demographic shifts through the students.

Victoria: It's actually really funny because my uncle who's older than my mom, and he went here for high school. And we were walking around and he was telling me how like different everything is, because the library didn't exist and like that entire corridor with the band stuff and stuff didn't exist. And so like he noticed all the different kids. He said it was a big change (October, 2009).

Chloe: Yeah, actually me and my aunt and uncle were talking about this the other day, that's funny. Because they said that when they went here, like 70% were like all White people. And even when you go look at the old yearbook, like they're actually right out there, you can all see it's all White people (October, 2009).

The speculation about the extent of the demographic shifts and the causes of said shifts affect the overall narrative. Many stories are being told about the changes at each school. These stories intersect and weave together to create disjointed theories about the schools past, present and future racial demographic shifts.

### **Summary**

Change discourse at the school works to build subjective narratives about the racial shifts. All members of the school community engage in the speculation and adding to the

historical memory—even parents and family members. The passing down of historical moments in the school history is common practice at both schools. Veteran teachers influence the beliefs and mindsets of their colleagues and other school-community members. Their rememberings will continue on after they retire and become part of the narrative of the racial change. Teachers and students in the school pull on their resources—conversations with family members, lived experience, classroom realities—to put forward speculations about the changes in their school. They attempt to make meaning of the changes and tell a story of how and why. These memories and speculations come together to form a complex narrative at each school.

### **Discussion**

Students, teachers, and school-community members have daily interactions with the process of school racial-demographic shifts. I claim that two primary manifestations of these interactions are a silent language and change discourse. Each school developed silent-language. The student and teacher participants in this study use this racial-silence framework in their speech when speaking with me and when talking to one another. New entrants into the community acquire this language and use it to talk about race. Change discourse takes place in many setting inside and outside the school as community members attempt to make sense of the racial composition changes. Historical memory and speculations are the primary modes of communication employed during this discourse. As interpreted by Story (1998) Althusser advocated for reading a text (situation, place, conversation, written prose) for all of its meanings:

Therefore to read a text symptomatically is to perform a double reading: first the manifest text, and then, through the lapses, distortions, silences and absences (the ‘symptoms’ of a problem struggling to be posed) in the manifest text to produce and read the latent text (p. 96).

These meanings are inextricably connected to issues of history, culture and society. I believe that the language of racial silence and change discourse adversely affects student identity and the overall narrative of racial-demographic shifts.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION: COMPLEXITIES AND REALITIES

In this chapter, first, I put forward a brief on class and poverty in shifting schools. I follow those assertions with implications for educational policy and teaching practice. I close by proposing extensions of the current frameworks on school segregation.

#### **Areas for Further Research: Class and Schools**

This study focuses on discourse and narrative features associated with racial demographic shifts in schools. The lived realities of participants at Fairtown and Northstar high schools also possess distinctive class markers in language, experience and identity development. Students recount the lives and careers of their parents in terms that denote socio-economic value assignments. They also discuss their own experiences in terms of class privilege or disadvantage. The teachers at Northstar and Fairtown exhibit similar behaviors. In, *Class and Schools: Using Social, Economic ,and Education Reform to Close the Black-White Achievement Gap*, Rothstein (2005) examines the complex interactions between class, race and student achievement. He utilizes many sets of statistical data to assert the importance of class in examinations of student academic and social success. The data collected in this study suggest that class and demographic shifts in schools is a rich area for further research.

#### **Implications for Educational Policy**

The *Milliken v. Bradley* case was the last instance of legal opposition to the persistent segregation in Michigan. The school-of-choice law, enacted 20 years later, opened borders between municipalities in Michigan for the first time. The residents of urban cities are seeking equal educational opportunities for their children in these integrated schools. The grand hope of

parents and legislators was that this would be a fantastic opportunity for kids. At Northstar and Fairtown, many unintended consequences emerged as a result of the legislation.

The desegregation programs in the South of the 1960s and 1970s were successful by many accounts. Student-achievement gains and anecdotal student accounts of progress have been noted in both scholarly and mainstream literature (Clark, 2004; Cook, 1984; Marcus, 1999). Programs like the postunitary Charlotte–Mecklenburg desegregation plan and others across the South boasted strong implementation and oversight plans that ensured busing programs and school composition were closely monitored. The findings in this study suggest that the modern day racial and socio-economic integration, that was incentivized by school of choice laws, have not seen the same success.

Additional research must be conducted to avoid unintended consequences by uncovering trends and “hot spots” in schools with shifting demographics. I pause here to insert that integrating school districts is hard work. No matter how many test scores or national databases are examined to uncover patterns, children are not numbers. Hour-long bus rides, parental schedules, student health, student social interactions, and a variety of other factors play out in a variety of ways. This work must be done with an in-depth understanding of the individual needs of the students in each district. Narrowing the achievement gap will take the courage to innovate, implement, measure, and adjust. Instituting desegregation programs that offer more opportunities to students from low-SES backgrounds is worth the effort.

Shaker Heights, Ohio, San Jose, California, Yonkers, New York: the list of increasingly Black and Brown suburbs is growing longer with each passing year. This case study of two Michigan high schools is a composite of a phenomenon that is taking place throughout the United States (Arias, 2005; Ascher & Branch-Smith, 2005). The call for a reexamination of



policies post *Brown v. Board of Education* needs to be at the forefront of educational scholarship. It appears the legacy of *Brown* is being lost in a contemporary attempt to ensure that the country at least achieves the goals of *Plessy V. Ferguson* (1896). The need for dialogue is imperative.

### **Implications for Teacher Practice**

If school districts embark on integration programs, teachers must be prepared to teach diverse populations. This work begins with recruitment, continues with teacher-preparation programs, and persists with professional development (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1999). Teachers must be prepared to engage in this work in schools and communities (Oakes, Franke, Quartz, & Rogers, 2002). Teacher-preparation programs must understand, and act on the needs of preservice teachers, whether or not they aspire to work in urban schools. The candidates can begin the work with students' schematic sets before they enter the classroom. Serving on political-action committees in diverse settings, completing student-teaching opportunities in urban schools, and participating in communities of practice both as in-service and preservice teachers is important.

The critical literacy across content areas and social-justice stances that teachers need to be successful teachers of diverse populations is best cultivated before they enter the classroom. The teacher participants in this study demonstrated that not fully understanding these constructs can have troubling impacts on students. The implementation of these frameworks must be monitored and corrected in preservice training. Dewey (1907) advocated for a connection between school and a child's environment. It is through this process that students can best gain critical-thinking skills that will serve them in society. Teachers are the facilitators of this process. The University of California, Los Angeles established *Center X* (Regents, 2004) as a division of

their graduate school of education to address the needs of urban teachers and students. The center prepares teachers in the ways described above, while also working with urban principals and communities in a partnership of preparation. *Center X* also provides spaces for dialogue and innovation for current urban teachers who had not graduated from the center's program.

*Teaching to Change LA* (TCLA) was born out of this project. TCLA engaged students in critical research and social-justice activism in their community. Students whose teachers participated in the program published papers in the TCLA journal, became editors of the journal, and emerged as activists in community issues. *Center X* has provided a model for effective urban-teacher preparation that can serve as a model for preparing teachers for diverse classrooms. The TCLA initiative borne out of this teacher-preparation program exhibits how in-service professional development can be meaningful to teachers and the students they serve.

### **Extending Frameworks on School Segregation**

Silence is a language. In fact, it is the global language. Various cultures and societies assign different meanings to their silences. Nonetheless, we all have the ability to “speak” the language. The historical legacy of the United States will inform the interactions of its citizens for centuries to come. As a nation, the United States is quite young, and has much to learn in its youth. Much of this learning can be accomplished by engaging in intercultural dialogue. However, U.S. schools and residential neighborhoods are currently more segregated than we were pre-*Brown v. Board of Education* (Street, 2005; Wells et al., 2005). The amount of conversation taking place across racial and ethnic barriers is decreasing with each passing year—and NSS, DS, and CS temper the conversations that are taking place. Glass (2005) defined this silence well: “The structural silence of the poor, people of color, and women is not seen as such, and the pernicious effects of the dominant voice functions in an unspoken way within the

background dynamics of the classroom” (p. 19). Only through recognition of these dialogic obstructions can we begin to truly “speak” to one another and understand our commonalities, while celebrating our differences.

This call to dialogue is particularly pressing when considering schooling and the nation’s youth. If we are creating the current history that will inform the memories of the next generation, then we have a lot of talking to do. I propose adding the silence framework to our collective understanding of racial-demographic shifts in U.S. schools. Recognizing these limiting structures will help schools push past many barriers erected by racial difference.

## **APPENDICES**

**Appendix A:**  
**Classroom Observation Protocol**

Critical Literacy Classroom Traits	Present in Classroom	Description
supplementary texts	No/Yes	
reading multiple texts	No/Yes	
reading from a resistant perspective	No/Yes	
producing counter texts	No/Yes	
conducting student-choice research projects	No/Yes	
taking social action	No/Yes	

<sup>1</sup>These traits were adapted from Behrman's literature review of empirical studies on critically literate English classrooms

**Text 1** Title \_\_\_\_\_ Author \_\_\_\_\_ Fiction or  
Nonfiction

- |               |                          |                           |
|---------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| a. Textbook   | b. Chapter book          | c. Article from newspaper |
| d. Trade book | e. Article from magazine | f. Testing material       |

**Classroom Assignment**

- |               |                     |                 |
|---------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| a. Group work | b. Independent work | c. Project work |
| d. Writing    | e. Reading          | f. Speaking     |
| g. Listening  | h. Drawing          | i. Other _____  |

**Appendix B:**  
**Student Interview Protocol I**

*I read the following to participants before conducting the first interview:*

Thank you for being willing to take part in this project. I am going to ask you a few questions about your background and your experiences in this school. These questions shouldn't take more than 90 minutes.

I'm also going to tape record the interview to remember everything that was said, if that's okay with you. I won't use your real name in any of the data that I collect. So, I'd like you to pick a pseudonym or "fake name" for the project.

Before you start, please read and sign the form I handed out. This form is to make sure that everyone I interview is willingly volunteering for the project. Do I have your parent consent form? Are there any questions? Well, let's start!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female

Race (self-identification): \_\_\_\_\_

Demographic information

1. What name do you prefer to be called?
2. How old are you?
3. What grade are you in?
4. How long have you been attending this school?
5. How long have you been in the school district?
6. How long has your family lived in this town?
  - a. Where did your family live before you moved here?
  - b. Did you go to public or private school before here?

- c. Were your previous schools different from this one or the same? How so?
- 7. Do you live close to the school?
- 8. Who do you live with?
- 9. Can I ask a little about your parents/guardians?
  - a. What does [Parent/Guardian A] do for work?
  - b. What does [Parent/Guardian B] do for work?
- 10. Did either of your parents/guardians go to college?
- 11. Would you say your family income is high, middle, or low?
 

Low (20K or below)      Medium (25K-50K)      High (50K+)
- 12. Do you identify yourself with any particular racial group? If so, which group? Why?
  - a. Do other people generally identify you with this particular racial or ethnic group?
 

If not, why?

Knowledge of school racial demographic shifts

- 1. If you could describe your school in three words, what would they be?
  - a. Can you explain why you chose each of those words?
  - b. Anything else you want to say about your school?
- 2. What do you think the racial population percentages are at your school?
- 3. Have these percentages changed during the time that you have been here?
  - i. Can you estimate what that percentage change has been?
  - ii. Why do you think those changes happened?
- 4. To your knowledge, has the racial composition of this school changed over the past thirty years? If yes:
  - a. How so?



- b. Why do you think those changes happened?
- c. Do you know anyone who has talked about changes in the school?

#### Overall schooling experience in the high school

1. What activities are you involved in at school?
2. Who are your friends at school?
  - a. Why are they your friends?
3. Do you like going to school here?
  - a. What are the top three things that make you like/dislike your experience here
4. What does the term “school community” mean to you?
  - a. Do you feel part of a school community?
  - b. Why/why not?
5. What has been your experience in your English classrooms?
  - a. What teachers have you had?
  - b. What English teacher most sticks out for you? Why?
  - c. Did you feel empowered in this teacher’s class? Why/Why not?
6. Do parents or community members participate in activities and/or volunteer at the high school?
  - a. In what capacity?
  - b. How often do you see them in the building?

#### Open-ended follow-ups from the first interview

\*\*Specific to each participant

#### Closing

1. Do you have any questions for me?

**Appendix C:**  
**Teacher Interview Protocol I**

*I will read the following to participants before conducting the interview:*

Thank you for being willing to take part in this project. I am going to ask you a few questions about your experiences as a teacher at X High School. This interview shouldn't take more than 75 minutes.

I'm also going to tape record the interview to remember everything that was said, if that's okay with you. I won't use your real name in any of the data that I collect. So, I'd like you to pick a pseudonym or "fake name" for the project.

Before you start, please read and sign the form I handed out. This form is to make sure that everyone I interview is willingly volunteering for the project. Are there any questions? Well, let's start!

Position at X High School: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female

Race (self-identification): \_\_\_\_\_

Demographic information

1. How long have you been teaching?
  - a. How long have you been teaching English?
2. How long have you been teaching at X High School
3. What grade levels do you teach?
  - a. Ability levels?
4. What brought you to teaching?

5. Have you ever worked in any other profession?

Knowledge of critically literate practices

1. What does the term “critical literacy” mean to you as an English teacher?
2. Have you ever had any professional development in critical literacy? Read any books on the subject?
3. Do you use the following critical literacy practices in your classroom?

supplementary texts	Yes/No	<i>Description</i>
reading multiple texts	Yes/No	<i>Description</i>
reading from a resistant perspective	Yes/No	<i>Description</i>
producing counter texts	Yes/No	<i>Description</i>
conducting student-choice research projects	Yes/No	<i>Description</i>
taking social action	Yes/No	<i>Description</i>

4. Does critical literacy affect the English classroom in any way?
5. Do you think critically literate practices carry over into other content areas? Into out-of-classroom spaces?

Knowledge of school racial demographic shifts

1. If you could describe this school in three words, what would they be?
  - a. Can you explain why you chose each of those words?
2. What are the racial population percentages are at your school?
3. Have these percentages changed during the time that you have been here? If yes:
  - a. Can you estimate what that percentage change has been?
  - b. Why do you think those changes happened?
  - c. Who were the primary stakeholders involved in this change?

4. To your knowledge, has the racial composition of this school changed over the past thirty years? If yes:
  - a. How so?
  - b. Why do you think those changes happened?
  - c. Who were the primary stakeholders involved in this change?

#### Closing

1. Do you have any questions for me

**Appendix D:**  
**Teacher Interview Protocol II**

*I read the following to participants before conducting the interview:*

Thank you for being willing to take part in this project. I am going to ask you a few questions about your experiences as a teacher at X High School. This interview shouldn't take more than 60 minutes.

I'm also going to tape record the interview to remember everything that was said, if that's okay with you. I won't use your real name in any of the data that I collect.

Position at X High School: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female

Race (self-identification): \_\_\_\_\_

School-specific history

1. Are there any important moments in the history of this school that stick out to you?
2. How has the history of this school affected the school today?
3. Are there trends that have remained constant in the school since you have worked here?
4. What has been the history of parent and community involvement here?
5. How has race factored into the history of X High School?

Race and schooling

1. Do teachers in this school speak openly about race?
  - a. What do you hear them say?

2. Do students in this school speak openly about race?
  - a. What do you hear them say?
3. What is the typical racial composition of the classes you teach?
4. Does racial composition of a class have any effect on student learning? On instruction?
5. Have there been changes in the school that directly correlate to the change in racial student composition? Have there been changes in your classroom?
6. Is there anything else that you want to tell me about race and schooling here at X High School?

Open-ended follow-ups from the first interview

\*\*Specific to each participant

Closing

1. Do you have any questions for me?

## **Appendix E:**

### **Narrative**

The fields of narrative study and narrative inquiry are drawn upon rich and detailed phenomenological histories. To merely mention “narrative” in passing in a scholarly text is akin to hinting at an array of methods, ethos and characterizations. This appendix will explain how narrative is used in this text and its purpose. In particular, this supplement will focus on the term shift narrative and explain the relationship to what this researcher calls, (n)arrative and (N)narrative features.

Lower-case (n) narrative refers to the storytelling of individuals. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) assert that, “in understanding ourselves and our students educationally, we need an understanding of people through a narrative of life experiences” (p. 2-3). The students and teachers at Fairtown and Northstar high schools recount vignettes that are personal and experienced first-hand. Their stories of self and school are the foundation of this work. These storytelling experiences are considered to be part of the human condition – a way to catalogue and explain the occurrences that are part of our existence – in a manner that can be recalled and memorized (Bruner, 1990; Hymes, 1996; Sanford and Emmott, 2012). Labov (1997) describes a personal narrative as, “a report of a sequence of events that have entered into the biography of the speaker by a sequence of clauses” (p. 398). In other words, a (n)arrative is the telling of someone’s story by that same someone. The (n) is used to connote a smaller, more private discourse between teller and listener. The (n)arrative itself carries the individual’s sensations and encumbrance – and thus possesses great import. Little (n) has big impact.

Capital (N) narrative is the public narrative that exists in an institution. In this study, the institution is school. Public narrative is the collective story in/of a space. Somers and Gibson (1994) define public narrative as “those narratives attached to cultural and institutional formations larger than the single individual” (p. 31). Here, in this dissertation, each case site school has a public narrative. It is comprised of the recounting of events. Howarth and Torfing (2004) describe public narrative as the way in which we read, “the past, present and future events and capture people’s hearts and minds” (p.15). In this study, each individual school has a public narrative that is retold through discourse.

Here, the many (n)arratives and school (N)arratives collide in meaningful ways to form what I am calling shift narratives (no meaning assigned to case distinction). Narrative inquiry acknowledges contradictions and leans into conflict, while bringing together reason and emotion (Schaafsma and Vinz, 2011). The shift narrative at each school is comprised of the intersections between personal and public narratives. Teachers and students find themselves misaligned and aligned with the institutional (N)arrative – these truths are at the center of the shift narrative of each place. In their seminal work on the narrative framework, Labov and Waletzky (1967) describe a narrative as having six components: 1) abstract (what the story is about); 2) orientation (descriptive details); 3) Complicating action (the core narrative category); 4) evaluation (highlights points of interest and emotion); 5) Resolution (what finally happens); 6) coda (signals the end of a story). The shift narrative in this dissertation is without coda. The story is cyclical and builds upon itself with each new (n)arrative to report the lived experiences of teachers and students in a racially shifting environment.



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