EDUCATION AS PRACTICES OF FREEDOM: CRITICAL LITERACY IN A 5TH GRADE CLASSROOM

By

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ABSTRACT

EDUCATION AS PRACTICES OF FREEDOM: CRITICAL LITERACY IN A 5TH GRADE CLASSROOM

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James S. Damico

There is no shortage of important theoretical work concerning issues of social justice and critical literacy. We also have an increasing number of accounts describing what critical literacy approaches look like in classrooms. However, despite this burgeoning knowledge base, few accounts attend to the voices and ideas of students in a classroom across an extended period of time, especially how students reflect on their experiences with critical literacy. Moreover, examples of how novice elementary teachers have navigated teaching literature response with a social justice orientation remain scarce. This dissertation addresses these gaps, as I examine the following two questions: What happens when a group of racially and socioeconomically diverse 5th graders and a first-year teacher, who is committed to issues of social justice, read and respond to a set of texts during a literature-based language arts unit focusing on issues of freedom and slavery? How do two sets of factors shape these responses: the inquiry-based perspective of the teacher, including her planning ideas, choices of texts, and in-class instructional moves, and the ways the students engage with each other and with their teacher through class discussions, journal writing, and project work?

This dissertation is a qualitative study of one language arts unit taught across a five-month period. Data sources included videotaped unit planning sessions and whole class discussions, student work, observational notes, informal interviews with students

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and the teacher, and audiotaped interviews with students. Findings from the data analysis point to four framing concepts that can be used to better understand what transpired in this classroom: *building community, making and deepening connections, cultivating critical perspectives* and *acting with compassion for social justice.*

These concepts, what I call **practices of freedom**, are rooted in the idea of relationships, and they point to implications for K-12 classrooms and teacher education. Through dialogue and inquiry, classroom teachers and teacher educators can collaborate with their students to critically engage with and deepen their understandings of socially complex content (e.g., slavery, freedom, social injustices). Findings from this study also invite dialogue about fundamental questions in education, questions that not only challenge collective conceptions of young children's capabilities, but questions that impel researchers and educators to rethink what might count as becoming literate and what might count as becoming a democratic citizen.

Dedicated to the 5th graders in Rita's classroom –
for being inquiring students and gifted teachers.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The critical insights and compassionate energy of many people nurtured the creation and development of this dissertation. Without them, my work would not have been possible.

My dissertation committee members deserve special thanks. Laura Apol, Ernest Morrell, David Pearson, and Avner Segall guided me through the research and writing process, helping me see and re-see my work through their own discerning eyes. Many colleagues and friends at Michigan State also contributed to this dissertation in direct and indirect ways. I especially acknowledge Mark Baildon, Kevin Basmadjian, Doug Campbell, Gina Cervetti, Susan Florio-Ruane, Ted Hall, Rachel Lander, Shari Levine-Rose, Wanda May, Pat Norman, Michael Pardales, Kaustuv Roy, Steve Sharra, Eliot Singer and Brian Vance for intellectual support and friendship.

I am also indebted to family, both the Damico and Lowenstein/Fisher clans, for much support and encouragement. I want to especially thank my parents, Carol and Floyd Damico. My father died during the early stages of my doctoral program, yet his influence in my work and life continues to run deep. My mother's optimism and unconditional support also continue to keep me grounded and inspired.

I owe the greatest debts of gratitude to my advisor, Cheryl Rosaen, "Rita" whose work as a first-year teacher frames this dissertation, and my wife and partner, Karen Lowenstein. As my advisor and dissertation committee chair, Cheryl skillfully mentored me through every step of my doctoral program, brainstorming creative possibilities, reading countless drafts, and offering insightful feedback. I always left each interaction with Cheryl feeling acknowledged for what I was trying to do as well as challenged and

inspired to deepen and extend my work. I can only hope to pass on some of the many gifts that she has shared with me.

I cannot begin to articulate how much I learned with and from "Rita" these past few years. She invited me into her classroom and her life, always willing to collaboratively explore ways of better understanding and supporting students. She is a gifted educator and has become a treasured friend.

Karen Lowenstein, my wife and partner, has offered so much wisdom, understanding and support. We began this dissertation journey together, migrating from New Jersey to Michigan, to collaboratively embrace all the unforeseen challenges along the way. I am most grateful for her knowing and trusting that we could traverse these paths with compassion and grace.

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CHAPTER ONE

TAPPING INTO POSSIBILITIES: CRITICAL LITRERACY IN A 5TH GRADE CLASSROOM

Rita[1] (Teacher): In the past 50-100 years life has improved for African Americans. There is still a way to go, but no longer are African Americans enslaved, kids from different cultural or ethnic backgrounds can be together in the same school and learn together, African Americans have a lot more rights, and...

Delvin (5th grade student): Things have changed, but they really haven't.

Muttered almost under his breath during a whole class discussion in December 2000, this response from Delvin could easily have been ignored or forgotten. In the context of classroom discourse, it could have slipped into cracks between a teacher's agenda and perfunctory responses from students. However, in the classroom Rita shared with Delvin and his classmates, this was not the case. Rooted in her own reaction of surprise and confusion, Rita, a first-year teacher, saw possibilities embedded in Delvin's response and imagining these possibilities, used his response as the catalyst to create an inquiry-oriented, literature-based language arts unit entitled "Exploring Freedom."

This dissertation is a story of the possibilities for critical literacy Rita envisioned for her students and what this group of students did with these possibilities. As the story unfolds, readers will see how Rita and her 28 racially and socioeconomically diverse 5th graders explored and examined issues of slavery, freedom, cultural differences and social injustices. During this five-month journey, Rita and her students read and responded to a range of texts, including the primary text in the unit, a full-length biography entitled *Freedom Train: The story of Harriet Tubman* (Sterling, 1954), various picture books, newspaper articles, web-based resources, two movies, and several songs. The students

[1] Pseudonyms are used for all participants in this study.

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also designed and completed individual and small group inquiry projects (several which examined contemporary child slavery conditions around the world), critically read, responded to, and wrote poetry, and created a CD of digital video clips to represent, communicate and preserve their work. Throughout the unit, Rita and the students wrestled with big ideas and questions. Some of the questions the students asked and pursued were:

- Does anybody know the real definition of freedom?
- How can we define freedom if none of us has ever really experienced it?
- Can someone be free and not free at the same time?
- How do you know if what is in a book is true?
- What does it mean to be an American?

Research questions

As a researcher interested in issues of social justice and critical literacy, my work was guided by the following research questions:

- What happens when a group of racially and socioeconomically diverse 5th graders and a first-year teacher, who is committed to issues of social justice, read and respond to a set of texts during a literature-based language arts unit focusing on issues of freedom and slavery?
- How do two sets of factors shape these responses:
    - the inquiry-based perspective of the teacher, including her planning ideas, choices of texts, and in-class instructional moves, and
    - the ways the students engage with each other and with their teacher through class discussions, journal writing, and project work?

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I remained most intrigued with the ways the students and Rita generated and explored critical literacy possibilities. These possibilities are inseparable from freedom, as Maxine Greene has noted:

> My concern is not with the closing off of possibilities; it is with the ways in which individuals deal with possibilities, the ways in which they act upon the freedoms made available to them, the ways in which they bring values into their worlds. (1978, p. 150)

Addressing critical needs

There is no shortage of important theoretical work concerning issues of social justice and critical literacy. Fortunately, we also have an increasing number of accounts describing what critical literacy approaches look like in classrooms. As I will show in the next chapter, despite this burgeoning knowledge base, few accounts attend to the voices and ideas of students in a classroom across an extended period of time, especially how students reflect on their experiences with critical literacy. Moreover, examples of how novice elementary teachers have navigated teaching literature response with a social justice orientation remain scarce. This dissertation addresses these needs, as I closely examine the ways a group of children with their novice teacher engaged with critical literacy across an inquiry-based, language arts unit.

Sustaining a collaboration

Rita is an African American woman, who at the time of our initial collaboration (January 2000) was married with two young children. After serving several years in the military, Rita entered college and earned a degree with a disciplinary major in history.

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She chose teaching as a career path based on her goals to make a difference in the lives of children from marginalized groups. I am a European American man, a former elementary and middle school teacher with interests in teaching and learning for social justice. At this time, I was a second-year doctoral student with interests in critical literacy and reader response perspectives.

Typically teachers, especially those enacting critical perspectives, can be isolated and energy depleted (Boozer, Maras & Brummett, 1999; Dyson, 2001). Rita and I have confronted these challenges by engaging in countless conversations about social justice teaching, learning, and research. Although focused primarily on a five-month period, this dissertation is a product of my longer term collaborative relationship with Rita, a collaboration conceived and sustained through mutual inquiries into how we as educators can better help children (and ourselves) become more critical and compassionate learners and citizens.

When Rita and I began our collaboration in January 2000, she was a teacher intern halfway through her final year in a five-year teacher preparation program. In addition to completing a year-long internship in a 3rd grade classroom, Rita was taking two Master's level courses at the university. At this time, I was a second year doctoral student and teacher educator and Rita's instructor for one of her university courses entitled "Reflection and Inquiry in Teaching Practice: Language Arts." Critical literacy or teaching for social justice was one set of perspectives I used to frame the course. Rita created and taught her 3rd graders a five-week literature unit that centered upon African American characters and a social justice perspective. Rita hoped the unit would curtail if not eliminate some racial tensions among her students (e.g., racist name-calling and

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fighting). Ideally, students would become more proactive and socially aware problem solvers. While teaching this unit, Rita also engaged in an inquiry project (framed in the course as action research) to examine how her students responded to the texts. My interests aligned with Rita's, so the ways students interacted with Rita during the unit also shaped a pilot research project I conducted in Rita's classroom. After working with Rita throughout the unit (i.e., videotaping thirteen whole class literature discussions, conducting interviews with Rita and her collaborating teacher, and providing written feedback on her plans and reflections), I studied how she selected texts for the unit and how she facilitated her 3rd graders' responses to these texts.

Observing Rita skillfully facilitate and nurture a range of student responses to the children's picture books in the unit and talking with her extensively before, during and after the unit deepened and complicated my ideas about critical literacy and teaching for social justice. In particular, Rita helped me better understand the importance of affect in children's responses to the literature they read and discussed, nudging me to ask questions like: What happens when young children experience a range of upsetting emotions while responding to certain texts? How and to what extent can a teacher facilitate students' aesthetic[2] and critical responses? How does a teacher scaffold different kinds of responses with young children? How might texts imply or shape different responses? What is the role of children's literature in teaching and learning for social justice?

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[2] At this earlier point in my work, Rosenblatt's (1978) aesthetic-efferent continuum of response helped frame my analysis as I focused on students' aesthetic responses, i.e., their experiences while reading a text including the myriad sensations, feelings, desires, etc., which are evoked during the reading process. However, in my current work I no longer use the construct of aesthetic response. Instead, I turn to transactional reader response theory (based on the work of Rosenblatt) for its more explicit attention to a reader's relationships with other readers in a social context.

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Rita and I concluded this initial stage of our work together with a commitment to explore these and a host of related questions the following school year, Rita's first as a teacher of her own classroom. We met several times during the summer and roughly eight times during Fall 2000 to explore ideas about creating units in language arts. In December 2000, Rita decided to teach a unit, to begin in February, based on the book, *Freedom train: The biography of Harriet Tubman*. Our collaboration intensified during this time as we met fourteen times in January and early February 2001 to plan the unit. These planning sessions as well as the teaching of the unit (February – June 2001) serve as the primary context for this dissertation.

The unit: Critical literacy through socially complex content

Rita entitled the literature-based unit "Exploring Freedom," creating it as a language arts unit, in part, because at the time she was not teaching social studies, the subject area she felt most passionate about. She taught two sections of science, welcoming another group of 5th graders into her classroom for science while her students experienced social studies with the neighboring 5th grade teacher. Although conceived as a language arts unit, "Exploring Freedom" can be best understood as an integrated unit, an organic merging of language arts and social studies. The social studies components included key historical content: slavery in the 19th century American South as well as content connections to relevant current events (e.g., racial profiling, child slavery). The unit was also grounded in Core Democratic Values, a staple of the Michigan social studies curriculum standards. The language arts content emphasis included the examination of biography as a literary genre (Rita was required to teach biography as part of the district's language arts curriculum). And throughout the unit, the language arts

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processes of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing served as the foundation for all learning activities. This aligns with Pearson's call to view literacy as "foundational knowledge." He writes:

> ...we should regard literacy as *foundational knowledge*, just like learning theory or social foundations, that is required for learning in the subject areas of the elementary school. It is not hard to make such a case for language and literacy. The constructs of language and discourse are central to building knowledge in any subject area -- not only language and discourse in general, but also language and discourse in those particular disciplines. And literacy, in the sense of mastery, is central to most disciplines, and it is captured in our use of terms like mathematical literacy, scientific literacy, and civic literacy. (2001, p. 16)

With literacy as foundational knowledge, the unit delved deeply into socially complex content, or "important ideas" (Bomer & Bomer, 2001), as the students moved between the past, present and future in generating new insights and understandings about freedom, slavery, racism and national identity. Harraway explains this historical work as "learn[ing] to remember that we might have been otherwise, and might yet be..." (2000, p. 171). And in terms of this remembering and imagining, Foner reminds us that any study of freedom must simultaneously be a study of slavery. He notes:

> ...both the reality and the idea of freedom have been powerfully affected by the existence and the concept of slavery. ... Far from being an exception, an aberration in the narrative of American freedom, slavery shaped the lives of all Americans, white as well as black. It affected where Americans lived and how they worked, underpinned the widespread belief in inherent racial differences, and

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became the issue around which their political debates revolved. Slavery both helped define the idea of freedom –giving it a powerful exclusionary dimension – and provided an idiom through which groups outside the boundaries of American freedom could challenge their exclusion. (Foner, as cited in Esptein, 1998)

Rita and her students could have framed their study of slavery and Harriet Tubman solely in terms of what happened to slaves. They could have ignored the ways White people shaped and were shaped by slavery. But this was not the path Rita and her 5th graders pursued. Enacting what Foner suggests above, Rita and her students examined "how slavery shaped the lives of all Americans, white as well as black."[3] They discussed different ways that authors describe slavery by interrogating and comparing the content, illustrations and language across texts used in the unit. For example, they compared passive grammatical constructions like "The slaves came to America" with more active and explicit constructions like "White European slave traders enslaved Africans and forced them to America against their will." The students and Rita also explored and examined contemporary race relations between European Americans and people of color, primarily African Americans.

Contributions of this study

With a richly described account of a novice teacher and her young students enacting a critical literacy approach, this dissertation makes several key contributions to educational research, with implications for classroom practice. First, it highlights how a group of racially and socioeconomically diverse children and their teacher responded to

[3] This description of "all Americans" ignores other groups – e.g., Latino/a, Native American, and Asian American. Although Rita and the students began their inquiry focused on the relationship between African slaves and European Americans, they broadened this focus when they conducted individual and small group inquiry projects and when they studied and write poetry (Chapter 7: Enactment 4 – Leaving a legacy: Coming to know about social justice through inquiry projects and poetry).

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texts and to each other as they cultivated insights about slavery, freedom and social injustices. With the voices and ideas of students in the foreground, I consider how they learned to question textual authority, negotiate meanings, construct new understandings, and take action to make their learning public. Drawing upon interviews I conducted with 24 of the 28 students at the end of the school year, I also explore how they made sense of their experiences during the unit. In all, these findings can serve to challenge common perceptions about the analytical and emotional capabilities of young children as well as to "illustrate how classroom diversity is a potential classroom resource for individual and collective growth" (Dyson, 1997, p. 6).

This dissertation also contributes insights into how a novice teacher grapples with the challenges of planning and enacting a critical literacy approach. I weave analyses of fourteen pre-unit planning sessions between Rita and me with analyses of the classroom interactions between Rita and her students during the unit. This provides readers with a window into this relatively unexplored area. This analytic focus also helps me surface key questions. What might it look like to engage children in socially complex issues? How might dialogue be fostered among a group of 28 students? What are some of the challenges in supporting students to ask and pursue their own questions and inquiry topics? This study thoughtfully considers these questions by offering nuanced understandings of what happened in one classroom and how it happened.

Finally, this study invites dialogue about broader fundamental questions in education, questions that not only challenge collective conceptions of young children's capabilities, but questions that impel researchers and educators to rethink what might count as becoming literate and what might count as becoming a citizen in a democracy.

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Plan of dissertation

The next two chapters provide readers with a conceptual map for the study as well as my research methodology. In Chapter 2, Education as practices of freedom: A conceptual framework, I provide a further rationale for the study. I point to how my work addresses three key gaps by: a) offering a comprehensive account of critical literacy in one classroom, b) attending to the voices and ideas of a whole class of students, including their reflections of what happened during the unit, and c) considering how a novice teacher envisions and enacts a critical literacy approach. Drawing on critical literacy work from theory and practice, I also introduce four framing concepts of the dissertation in Chapter 2:

1. building community,
2. making and deepening connections,
3. cultivating critical perspectives, and
4. acting with compassion for social justice.

These concepts, what I came to call **practices of freedom** provide a mental map for the chapters that follow. In Chapter 3, Developing and sustaining relationships: A research methodology, I describe my work as a researcher through all stages of the study, beginning with how this dissertation developed from my collaborative relationship with Rita.

My data analyses comprise Chapters 4-8. Chapter 4, Building community through dialogue: Posing and pursuing questions through whole class discussions, offers an up-close look at one whole class literature discussion which took place less than two weeks into this five-month unit. Drawing on theories of dialogue (e.g., Burbules, 1993) and with

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an emphasis on the practice of freedom, *building community*, I examine how the students and Rita worked to create a dialogic classroom. Chapter 5, "Why are we doing this?": Making connections and raising questions while reading multiple texts, considers what happened when students began to read multiple texts about slavery and Harriet Tubman. This analysis takes the reader inside two whole class discussions that took place roughly two and a half weeks apart. In both discussions, the students grappled with the following question that Rita posed: "Why might we read more than one story about a topic or person?" As the chapter title indicates, the corresponding practice of freedom most salient to this analysis is *making and deepening connections*.

Chapter 6, The complexities of response: Reading testimonially, illumining multiplicity, examines the individual responses of four students as they responded to challenging subject matter in the unit. The first example focuses on Anne, a European American girl who expressed "feeling guilty" for what her White ancestors might have done to slaves. The next three examples come from students' written responses to one picture book, *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road* (Lester, 1998), a provocative text that graphically depicts the brutalities committed against African slaves. This chapter sheds light on the practice of freedom, *cultivating critical perspectives*, in two ways. Rita works with Anne regarding her feelings of guilt, thus highlighting the import of a testimonial reader response perspective. Second, the other three students seem to resist how the author and illustrator of *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road* positioned them as young readers. Chapter 7, Leaving a legacy: Coming to know about social justice through inquiry projects and poetry, examines how the students extended their inquiries into freedom and slavery by creating final projects and engaging in a whole class study of

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poetry. These two areas become integrated as the students and Rita created a CD that included digital video clips of students performing skits, reading essays, and reading and reciting poetry. The practice of freedom, *acting with compassion for social justice*, comes into play with this chapter.

The two concluding chapters point to the significance of the overall study. Chapter 8, Looking back across the unit: Students making sense of their experience, considers student reflections of their experiences during this five-month exploration of slavery, freedom, cultural differences and societal inequities, as I draw upon interviews I conducted with 24 of the 28 students at the end of the unit and school year. In Chapter 9, Practices of freedom as critical relational literacies, I look back across the study to pull together the four practices of freedom – *building community, making and deepening connections, cultivating critical perspectives,* and *acting with compassion for social justice* – as a conceptual framework. I then refashion the four practices of freedom as relational literacies. The idea of relationships was integral to each aspect of this study, yet I develop it here to stress its significance and to suggest a re-seeing of the practices of freedom as relational. This leads me to sketch implications for K-12 classroom practices and teacher education, as I consider how children, teachers, and teacher educators can embody and enact critical relational literacies.

Tapping into possibilities

In *The Dialectic of Freedom*, Maxine Greene "seeks an audience of the incomplete and the discontented, those who educate with untapped possibility in mind, with hope for the attainment of freedom in a difficult and resistant world" (1988, p. xii). Terms like freedom – as well as democracy, citizenship, love, and patriotism – are not self-evident

categories. They implore us to engage in hope-filled struggles to achieve a more humane world. They invite us into dialogue and inquiry and push us to uncover and explore "untapped" possibilities. This dissertation is written with untapped possibility in mind.

CHAPTER TWO

EDUCATION AS PRACTICES OF FREEDOM: CONCEPTUAL BEGINNINGS

I pursue two interrelated subjects in this dissertation. The first is the critical literacy possibilities that Rita, a first-year teacher, envisioned and enacted during a literature-based language arts unit focusing on issues of slavery and freedom. The second and primary subject of this dissertation is what a group of 28 5th graders did with these possibilities. In order to examine these possibilities, I draw upon critical literacy work from theory and practice. I began this study with an understanding that critical literacy perspectives involve socially situated practices and particular ways of responding to texts. My work with the students and Rita in the classroom extended this understanding. My ongoing analysis while crafting this dissertation has led me to eventually see critical literacy as a cluster of four framing ideas that I call *practices of freedom*.

Critical literacy

> ...there is no generic critical literacy, in theory or in practice. Rather there is a range of theories that are productive starting points for educators working on social justice issues through the literacy curriculum. (Comber & Simpson, 2001, p. x)

As Comber and Simpson (2001) suggest, a range of theories with "productive starting points" informs critical literacy. These starting points might be grounded in economic and social critique, as with Marxism and critical social theory, or with challenging "banking" conceptions of knowledge (Freire, 1970). Other starting points emphasize expanding our understandings of multiplicity and difference, as with feminist theories (e.g., Boler, 1999; Luke, 1992), critical race theories (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1999), and

poststructuralism (e.g., Cherryholmes, 1988). Additional starting points impel us to consider relationships among politics, culture and power. This shifts attention to the many texts of everyday life as opportunities for critical interrogation and transformation, as with cultural studies (e.g., Hall, 1999). Although some of these perspectives diverge (e.g., poststructural feminist theories and Marxism), what stands out across all is a commitment to "criticism of oppression and exploitation and the struggle for a better society" (Kellner, 1989, p. 46).

With this foundational commitment to social justice, this dissertation works with two understandings of critical literacy. The first is that literacy practices are social and situated. The second concerns a particular way of responding to literature.

Critical literacy as socially situated practices

Willinsky conceptualizes literacy as "a social process, a form of life that connects community and school, history and biography" (1990, p. x). Students and teachers enter classrooms with diverse personal experiences or "funds of knowledge" (Moll, 1994), share a space in a particular sociohistorical context, and create unique discourses and communities of meaning (Bakhtin, 1981; Fairclough, 1989, 1995; Gee, 1992). This resonates with sociocultural perspectives of learning (Moll, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978) as well as work in the New Literacy studies (e.g., Gee, 1996; Street, 1995; Willinsky, 1990) and situated literacies (e.g., Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000). For example, Barton and Hamilton contend "literacy practices are more usefully understood as existing in the relations between people, within groups and communities, rather than as a set of properties residing in individuals" (2000, p. 8). This means literacy is a "social and political practice rather than a set of neutral, psychological skills" (Siegel & Fernandez,

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2000, p. 18). Participants learn from and with each other, and construct knowledge collectively, where knowledge is viewed as socially constructed, multiple and context dependent rather than value-free, ahistorical, or universal (Bartlett, 1994; Morgan, 1997). Learners are political beings and knowledge creators. They are not passive, neutral receivers of information or knowledge (Freire, 1970, McLaren, 1999). All learners are also viewed as always culturally and historically situated and embedded in differential relations of power (McLaren, 1999; Nodelman, 1996). As a result, students and teachers exist within a complex web of relationships where history, culture, race, class, gender, religion, and other identity markers and social constructs are woven together.

Critical literacy as reader response

Some perspectives of reader response to literature are consistent with a critical literacy perspective, and this study draws upon three of these perspectives: transactional, sociopolitical, and testimonial. Transactional reader response perspectives (Rosenblatt, 1978) conceptualize response as a personal transaction between a reader and a text, maintaining the interdependence of both author and reader, holding neither determinate of meaning. Readers are active, emotional, and analytical creators of meanings; they are not blank slates or empty vessels waiting to be filled with textual knowledge. As a result, multiple meanings can be created as readers engage with texts. A teacher's role is, in part, to foster students' personal connections with texts and help them access relevant prior knowledge and experiences as they make meanings with texts in the social context of a classroom.

Building from transactional response, with its emphasis on the individual reader's relationship with a text, sociopolitical perspectives of reader response understand

response as a social or dialogical process, "steeped in history and culture, preexisting the individual, yet remaining a human product upon which human beings make their impact" (Corcoran, 1992, p. 50). Responses are never neutral; issues, such as race, class, gender and religion, always shape them. Since both texts and textual responses are never neutral, sociopolitical perspectives encourage readers to analyze how texts carry representations of the world because these representations have implications for how gender, class, race, ethnicity, nationality, individuality, etc. are viewed and, in turn, constructed. With sociopolitical response, readers embrace a healthy skepticism toward all texts and issues of authorship. Students reflect on their own perspectives and experiences to develop critical attitudes or dispositions toward texts by asking questions like what view of the world is advanced in the text and whether they should accept this view (McLaren, 1999). The goal is to develop and harness readers' critical abilities as they strive to understand how texts work (Luke & Freebody, 1997). This process empowers young readers, as Comber notes:

> ... it is in children's individual and collective interests to know that texts are questionable, [that] they are put together in particular ways by particular people hoping for particular effects, and they have particular consequences for their readers, producers, and users. (1999, p. 7)

Critically examining all texts, as well as one's position in relation to any given text, implies a connection to a broader transformative agenda, an agenda that needs to be articulated with "a language of critique and a language of possibility" (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993) or "a narrative for agency and a referent for critique" (Giroux, 1988). In other words, readers use discourses to interrogate texts and their own experiences through

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lenses such as race, class, gender, and sexual orientation; and readers also use discourses that embody hope and promise toward more socially just ends.

I began this dissertation with perspectives of transactional and sociopolitical response. However, after being in the classroom with the students and Rita, I realized these two were insufficient. Witnessing the ways the students and Rita responded to a particularly challenging text in the unit, the picture book, *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*, propelled me toward testimonial response. Drawing on literary theory (Felman, 1992), psychoanalysis (Laub, 1992), and history (Simon & Eppert, 1997), testimonial response posits that readers must "bear witness" to events in texts, typically texts of historical trauma involving war, genocide or slavery. This type of response requires a reader's willingness and ability to see, hear and deeply connect events of the past to the present, as they enter into texts and forge relationships with the characters who share their stories or offer their testimonials. Readers often experience strong emotions as they develop empathy and also assume responsibility to act in ways that reduce the likelihood of similar historical traumas taking place.

Pointing to some gaps

There is a growing knowledge base of what teaching for critical literacy or social justice can look like in the context of real classrooms. Several edited volumes (Allen, 1999; Ayers, Hunt & Quinn, 1998; Bigelow, Christensen, Karp, Miner & Peterson, 1994; Bigelow, Harvey, Karp & Miller, 2001; Comber & Simpson, 2001; Edelsky, 1999b), themed issues of academic journals (e.g., *Language Arts*, May 2002; *Primary Voices*, Oct. 2000), along with other work (e.g., Allen, 1997; Ballentine & Hill, 2000; Lehr & Thompson, 2000; Tyson, 1999) describe classroom enactments of critical literacy. This

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work highlights efforts of educators to bridge the rift between critical or social justice theories and classroom practices. Across a range of contexts, this work underscores teachers and students working to cultivate critical perspectives and to act in ways that reduce societal inequities in their communities and in the world. Yet, despite this burgeoning body of work, several gaps remain.

Scarcity of comprehensive contributions from teachers and/or researchers

Some of these accounts come from classroom teachers. These include succinct pedagogical and curricular suggestions as well as reflections and stories (e.g., see Allen, 1999; Edelsky, 1999b; and the edited volumes from *Rethinking Schools* – Bigelow, et. al, 1994; 2001) that offer invaluable contributions to our "teacher lore" (Schubert & Ayers, 1992). Reading these accounts, often richly described vignettes, leaves me with a renewed sense of teachers' struggles and successes and a heightened appreciation for their students' capabilities. Researchers have also contributed to this growing knowledge base, typically offering more conceptually situated, methodologically grounded, and empirically driven work. Some of this work comes in the form of action or "practitioner research" (Fecho, 2003), as teacher-researchers or researcher-teachers (depending on where hang their coat) wrestle with the tensions of living in two worlds (e.g., Fecho, 2001; Gallas, 1998). Though not necessarily action research, some researchers have assumed more participatory stances while in classrooms. Moller, for example, shared teaching responsibilities with the classroom teacher, with both acting as "facilitators, scaffolders, modelers, participants, and observers" (2002, p. 469). While other researchers have opted to be less directly involved with their participants (e.g., Dyson,

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1993, 1997; Lewis, 1997), instead playing the role of the "quasi-friend" or "tolerated insider in children's society" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 88).

While accounts from classroom teachers and studies from researchers continue to build our knowledge base of critical literacy practices, there remain few comprehensive studies of critical literacy in individual classrooms (for exceptions, see Dyson, 1993, 1997; Gallas, 1998; Lewis, 2001; and for a school-wide emphasis, Goodman, 1992). Though journal articles and book chapters provide critical windows into substantive teaching and learning challenges, by necessity, they must sacrifice depth to meet space limitations.

Few examples of an entire class of children critically engaging with literature

There are studies of teachers working with students across age ranges: with students in higher education (e.g., Clarence-Fincham, 2001; Jarvis, 1999; Shor, 1996; Wallace, 2001), students in the upper middle school grades and high school (e.g., Bigelow, 1995; Christensen, 1995, 2000; Martino, 2001; Stein, 2001), and with young children (e.g., Dyson, 1993, 1997, 2001; O'Brien, 2001; Vasquez, 2001). Many of these examples highlight teachers and students cultivating critical tools to examine texts and their social worlds. Some examples describe teachers working with more racially homogenous or economically privileged children (e.g., Busching & Slesinger, 1999; Foss, 2002; Sweeney, 1999), while other accounts focus on children from ethnically diverse and lower socioeconomic backgrounds (e.g., Dyson, 1997). For the most part, these accounts are situated in social studies (e.g., Bigelow, 1995; Sweeney, 1999) or literacy/language arts classrooms.

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While some researchers have examined critical literacy issues through children's writing (e.g., Dyson, 2001; Lensmire, 1994; Rowe, Fitch & Smith-Bass, 2001), another generative area in literacy/language arts research has focused on what happens during literature discussions (e.g., Lehr & Thompson, 2000; Lewis, 2001; Moller, 2002; Tyson, 1999). This body of research often brings the voices and ideas of children to the center, as researchers analyze how students respond to a range of texts, from Mother's Day catalogs (O'Brien, 2001) to socially complex stories (e.g., Heffernan & Lewison, 2000; Lehr & Thompson, 2000). Despite the insights gleaned from this area of research, most studies focus on a small group of children, where focal students are selected to ground the study (e.g., Lehr & Thompson, 2000; Lewis, 2001; Tyson, 1999). Research that maintains a lens on all students in a class across a more extended amount of time is scarce. Moreover, a systematic investigation of how students came to understand their experiences with critical literacy, i.e., their reflections after a critical unit of study, remains a conspicuous void.

Few accounts of critical literacy with novice teachers

Examples of how novice elementary teachers have navigated teaching literature with a social justice orientation remain limited. Vinz (1996) and Darling-Hammond, French & Garcia-Lopez (2002) offer some insights at the secondary level. Vinz (1996) tracks the experiences of four teacher interns and four first-year teachers as they endeavored to teach literature response, and Darling-Hammond, French & Garcia-Lopez (2002) compile accounts written by novice teachers describing their social justice commitments. Ladson-Billings (2001) presents an account of eight novice teachers with social justice orientations working in elementary classrooms, but her analysis emphasizes

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these teachers' general struggles and successes; she does not closely examine classroom life, the interactions between these teachers and their students. Lewison, Flint & Van Sluys (2002) offer more explicit connections to classrooms, considering the work of two focal teachers to distill some general points about how a group of "newcomer" teachers (those with no awareness of critical literacy curricula) and "novice" teachers (those with some background in critical literacy) enacted critical literacy approaches in their classrooms. Lewison, Flint & Van Sluys (2002) help map the conceptual terrain of novice teachers engaging in this work, yet the workings of the classroom and the voices and ideas of students remain in the background.

By offering a richly described account of a group of students and their first-year teacher "negotiating critical literacies" in their classroom (Comber & Simpson, 2001), this dissertation addresses several gaps: the scarcity of lengthier comprehensive studies of one setting, the efforts of an entire class (including their reflections of their experiences) rather than a small group of students, and the work of a novice critical educator.

Practices of freedom: An emerging framework

Through the course of working on this dissertation, a cluster of ideas to explain what I was witnessing in this classroom slowly began to form. These ideas took on more shape after all data were collected and my analysis intensified. This analysis – examining a wealth of data, discerning patterns, revising initial understandings – corresponded with my readings of critical literacy work from theorists and practitioners. Particularly illuminating were my readings of the philosophical work of Maxine Greene (e.g., 1978, 1988, 1995), especially her unwavering commitment to the hope, power, and promise of and for education. Given Greene's call for education to "achieve freedom" (1988, p. xii)

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and my understandings of critical literacy as social, situated practices with social justice commitments, this initial cluster of ideas eventually developed into a conceptual framework that I call four **practices of freedom**:

- building community
- making and deepening connections
- cultivating critical perspectives
- acting with compassion for social justice.

I introduce these four concepts here to provide readers with a mental map for the rest of this dissertation. Again, it bears noting that I did not begin the study with these concepts clearly mapped out. This organizing framework emerged across time as I attempted to make sense of what happened in this classroom. The first practice of freedom, *building community*, considers factors that shaped the learning community created and shared by the students and Rita. The next practice of freedom, *making and deepening connections*, concerns the range of connections the students and Rita explored during the unit, including past to present connections (e.g., slavery and racial profiling), connections across texts, and connections between texts and personal experiences. The next practice of freedom, *cultivating critical perspectives*, primarily addresses two issues: how the students assumed critical stances toward texts (e.g., resisting the way an author and illustrator position them as readers) and how they adopted critical stances toward their own learning (e.g., defining their roles as readers). The fourth practice of freedom, *acting with compassion for social justice*, considers how the students explored provocative, socially complex issues and took action, primarily through the creation of a CD, to inform and encourage people to reduce social injustices.

Chapters that follow (especially chapters 4-8) show how these practices of freedom help describe what happened during this five-month language arts classroom inquiry. The practices of freedom are not mutually exclusive; they overlap and intersect. Moreover, although there is evidence for each practice of freedom across chapters 4-7, I highlight the salience of one practice of freedom with each chapter. In the concluding chapter, *Continuing the inquiry, deepening the dialogue: Practices of freedom as relational literacies*, I pull these practices together as I highlight the importance of relationships in literacy teaching and learning.

A "process of futuring"

In *The Dialectic of Freedom*, Maxine Greene argues that freedom is best understood as a struggle of perpetual becoming, a "process of futuring, of releasing persons to become different" (1988, p. 22). Although this "process of futuring" never concludes definitively, it is always shaped by defining moments: instances where individuals come together to critically and creatively wrestle with core questions and issues about "what it means to be alive among others" (p. xii).

Through the course of this dissertation, I came to see how the four *practices of freedom* introduced above offered a framework for understanding how a teacher and group of students wrestled with big ideas and questions about the meaning(s) of slavery and freedom, what counts as truth(s) and what it means to be American. Through a careful and critical look at what transpired during this unit, this dissertation offers one account and vision of a "process of futuring." Most importantly, my hope is that this study can engender questions about what it means to teach and learn with and from

literature, as well as raise provocative questions about what it means to live in a democracy.

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CHAPTER THREE

DEVELOPING AND SUSTAINING RELATIONSHIPS: A RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

> It is not a matter of starting from certain theoretical or methodological problems: it is a matter of starting from what we want to *do*, and then seeing which methods and theories will best help us achieve these ends. (Eagleton, 1996, p. 183)

Teaching for me has always been about relationships. As a former elementary and middle school teacher and now a teacher educator, my relationships with students and connections to colleagues have always offered the greatest rewards. Literature and writing are my passions, and these are ignited and kept aflame in and through relationships. As a result, it comes as no surprise to me that what I "want[ed] to *do*" as a researcher derived primarily from my goals to cultivate and sustain relationships with those involved in my research. As this chapter describes, my research questions, research design, data collection decisions, and all analyses remained rooted in my relationships with Rita and her students.

Developing a relationship

Rita and I began our collaboration in January 2000 when she was beginning her culminating semester in a five-year teacher preparation program. Like all students in this program, Rita was taking two Master's level university courses while completing her year-long teaching internship. I was Rita's instructor for her language arts university course.

As a teacher intern, Rita worked in a 3rd grade classroom at Parkside School. Part of a city-wide district serving 17,000 K-12 students, Parkside participated in the district-

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wide "school of choice" program. Situated in a middle-class, suburban neighborhood, the school and Rita's classroom for the most part reflected the ethnic and socioeconomic diversity of the larger school district, serving children from the local neighborhood who were primarily European American and children from lower income families across the city who were predominately African American and Latino/a. Table 3.1 provides demographic data about the district and Rita's classroom. (See Appendix A for list of all students in the class).

Table 3.1

Demographic data of district and Rita's classroom

School district – 17,300 students[4]		Rita's classroom – 28 students	
White	46%	White	36%
African American	33%	African American	36%
Latino/a	12%	Latino/a	14%
Asian American	5%	Asian American	0%
Native American	1%	Native American	0%[5]
		Multiracial	14%

When her teaching internship began (Fall 1999), Rita noticed that many of her 3rd graders frequently had difficulty working together. Leading up to a literature-based language arts unit she created and began teaching in February 2000, problems among students escalated: problems that increasingly emphasized racial tensions, through name-calling and fighting. As a response to these problems, Rita created her literature-based language arts unit with one overarching goal in mind: to help build a more respectful and supportive classroom community where students could learn to become more compassionate, skillful and socially aware problem solvers. Rita called this unit a

[4] Reflects data obtained in April 2003.
[5] Of the four multiracial students in the classroom, three were of Native American descent. (See Appendix A).

"conflict resolution" unit. For Rita, this was grounded in a commitment for social justice. Reading and responding to literature would empower her students as they learned with and through the stories that Rita carefully chose to read to them. With the overarching goal of building a more collaborative community, Rita created a five-week unit designed to emphasize one picture book for each of the first four weeks – *Amazing Grace* (Hoffman, 1991), *Smokey Night* (Bunting, 1994), *Ruby Bridges* (Coles, 1995), and *Your Move* (Bunting, 1998) – and a culminating activity for the final week in which students were to create a conflict resolution plan and program for the entire school.

Interested primarily in the ways this group of 3rd graders would respond to these texts, I worked with Rita throughout the unit, both as her university course instructor and as a research assistant working on a K-5 literacy project at the university.[6] We discussed the struggles and successes Rita was experiencing, focusing on ways to help her students negotiate some of the volatile issues that were surfacing during the whole class literature discussions. These issues included escaping from fires, living in shelters, and family members being killed by a gang. In addition to these conversations, I provided written feedback on Rita's plans and reflections, videotaped thirteen whole class literature discussions, collected writing samples of her 3rd graders, and conducted interviews with Rita and her collaborating teacher. This wealth of data also supported my own pilot research project, as I examined how Rita selected texts for the unit and the ways she facilitated student responses to these texts.

[6] As part of my responsibilities as a university course instructor, I visited all students who asked me to come into their K-5 Language Arts classrooms. At times during these informal visits, I worked with small groups of children during literature discussion groups or held one-to-one writing conferences with the children, yet typically my role was that of an observer, taking notes about something the teacher intern wanted me to look out for and debriefing with the teacher intern afterwards. I visited Rita's classroom much more frequently due to her involvement in the university-based literacy project.

A learning realization from our first year of collaboration

As Rita and I began considering possibilities for working together the following school year, we realized that conceiving the unit as a "conflict resolution" unit predisposed a particular way of teaching literature response. Rita had linked a social justice perspective with *actions* that students would take. This led to an approach that emphasized obtaining answers, solutions, or guidance from the texts in order to act differently. In other words, students would learn that they, much like Grace in *Amazing Grace* (Hoffman, 1991), Ruby in *Ruby Bridges* (Coles, 1995), and James in *Your Move* (Bunting, 1998), possessed the agency to resolve their own conflicts. As a result, responding to these texts with a social justice perspective meant that students would recognize their own agency and work toward solving their own problems (i.e., acting more compassionately and critically – e.g., reducing name-calling and fighting). Though we acknowledged that students learning to solve problems and taking action were worthwhile goals for students, something was missing, as Rita noted during one of our meetings after the unit concluded:

> The students wanted time to respond to each of the books. They had a lot of ideas and were making a lot of personal connections to the stories. They also taught me about the need to go beyond the right answer. Issues are usually not that black or white. There is a lot of gray, and I was reminded that children often know this. I also found out that we could discuss and explore these gray areas together. (7/20/00)

In our ongoing discussions, Rita and I noted this shift from teaching literature response primarily as finding answers (e.g., how to solve conflicts) from a text set of children's

books, to viewing literature response as entry points for classroom discussions of these conflicts. As this first year concluded and Rita was hired at Parkside Elementary to teach 5th grade, both of us were eager to pursue a range of questions together the following year, Rita's first year as a teacher in her own classroom. Some of the questions we created jointly were: How might Rita's students lead literature discussions based on their own ideas, questions and personal experiences? How might this support teaching and learning for social justice? How might a group of 5th graders respond to provocative texts like *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*?

A critical collaborative research stance

Our initial collaboration set the stage for this dissertation in three fundamental ways. It shaped an emerging set of guiding theoretical perspectives within critical literacy and reader response, it forged my stance as a critical collaborative researcher, and it helped me see how these two areas – theoretical perspectives and a research stance – were intimately entwined. In other words, my stance as a researcher needed to mirror my interests in critical literacy; it needed to be praxis-oriented (Lather, 1986). As Segall suggests, praxis-oriented research cannot "be only about participants; it must also be for them in the sense that it allows them to do, learn, and/or do something about/within the research context that they would not be able to do without it" (2002, p. 29). Noddings (1986) makes a similar point, advocating for research *for* teaching not simply research *on* teaching.

In order for me to be "for" Rita and her students, I needed to adopt a collaborative stance of co-inquiry. As I shared with Rita when we began the study that informs this dissertation, "we're in this together" (7/20/00). At this time and throughout the study I

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reiterated to Rita my stance as a co-inquirer and co-learner, noting that we both had questions and ideas we wanted to explore and that I believed we could best pursue these questions and goals together. As a result, for me, being "for" Rita and her students during the language arts unit that frames this dissertation (Feb.–June 2001), required that Rita, the students, and I blur or share our roles and responsibilities during our time together in the classroom, as Figure 3.1 highlights.

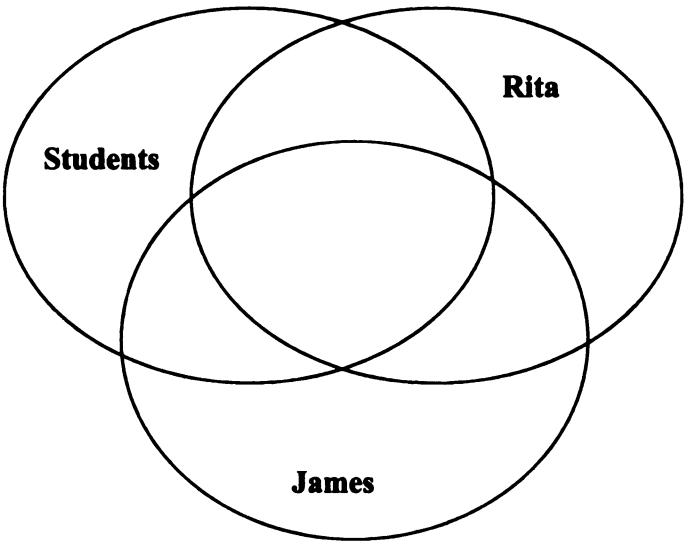

Fig. 3.1. Description of roles and responsibilities for the students, teacher and researcher.

To some degree, we accomplished this goal. During this language arts unit, I, as the researcher, assumed teaching responsibilities by facilitating a few whole group literature discussions and also participated as a student during several small group discussions (i.e., I jotted down comments in my own "reading log" and shared ideas at my designated time in the structured conversation). As the teacher, Rita brainstormed research questions with me, offered ways to enhance data collection procedures, and shared ideas concerning initial data analysis (e.g., pointing to critical moments in the unit). Rita also viewed herself as a student of her own students, stating "they are teaching

me all the time" (1/26/01). Assuming a student role for her was further facilitated in this context with my presence as her former course instructor. Rita's 5th graders also enacted multiple roles. They assumed research and teaching responsibilities by completing their own research projects (e.g., examining current instantiations of child slavery around the world) and teaching their classmates as well as other groups of students within the school about what they had found.

To some extent, this blurring of roles and responsibilities continued after the language arts unit concluded. For a university-based literacy project, Rita and I worked together to create a videocase of her teaching. We reviewed and analyzed videotapes of some of the whole class discussions (especially the discussion described in Chapter 4 of this dissertation) and constructed a case study designed to support preservice teachers in considering ways to facilitate literature discussions. Rita and I also shared aspects of this work at two conferences. For another conference presentation, four students in the class joined Rita and me and took the lead in sharing parts of their learning during the unit. For this presentation, which took place months after the unit concluded, the students assembled collages of "big ideas" from the unit and prepared a demonstration of the CD they and their classmates created.

Figure 3.1 highlights the interdependence that was enacted among the students, Rita and me, and one of my dissertation goals is to honor the symbiotic qualities of these relationships. However, it is important to note that the primary identities and the accompanying roles and responsibilities for each of the stakeholders in Fig. 1 also remained intact throughout the study. The students completed work and received grades, Rita handled the numberless teacher tasks (e.g., scheduling, taking attendance, collecting

forms, grading, etc.) and earned a paycheck from her school district, and my office space and accompanying institutional obligations were located at the university. Moreover, since completing data collection, I had the time, space and support as a researcher to work on this study. Consequently, though much of the analytical work in this dissertation grew out of my collaboration with Rita, I have conceptualized and completed this study. In the following sections in this chapter, I describe my work as a researcher.

Moving into the dissertation

Data collection

In this study, I offer rich descriptions and nuanced understandings of critical literacy practices in Rita's classroom. Although my collaboration with Rita began in January 2000, this dissertation examines two sets of data collected between July 2000 and June 2001. The first set of data helped me examine the critical literacy possibilities Rita envisioned for her students; the second set enabled me to analyze what her 5th graders did with these possibilities. (See Appendix B for timeline of procedures).

First data set: Teacher planning and thinking.

With the goal to consider the ways she was thinking about creating language arts units, I met with Rita four times in July and August 2000 and eleven times from September to December 2000. I took notes during each of these meetings and audiotaped four of our discussions. During fall 2000 when Rita and I met to discuss unit planning and other "burning" language arts issues that Rita was experiencing, I visited the classroom to get to know the students. Rita introduced me as "my teacher from the university who will be coming into the classroom from time to time to see what we're doing and to help us out." Because most of my meetings with Rita took place after

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school, my interactions with students the first few months of the school year were limited. In November and December my visits to the classroom increased, as I observed the students and Rita engaging with the book, *A Wrinkle in Time* (L'Engle, 1976), occasionally sitting in on small and large group literature discussions. Though I would not claim that my presence had no impact on these discussions, I often remained silent, only speaking when directly addressed. When I did contribute verbally, typically my responses bounced the questions students posed to me back to them (e.g., "That's an interesting question. What do you think?"). In January, as my meetings with Rita focused on unit planning with the book, *Freedom train: The biography of Harriet Tubman*, I became a "regular" in the classroom. In late January, during a special parent party during the school day, I introduced the research project that developed into this dissertation to the students and their parents/guardians.[7] Before the unit began in February, 26 of 28 students consented to participate in the project.

After Rita decided to teach the unit based on the book, *Freedom Train: The biography of Harriet Tubman*, we met 14 times in January 2001 and early February to plan the unit. Each of these sessions (between 20 and 75 minutes) was videotaped. My role during these discussions, and throughout this study, was that of a "critical colleague" (Lord, 1994). I shared a range of resources with Rita, including picture books, songs, and poetry, some which Rita elected to use in the unit. I was also a soundboard for Rita as she shared ideas, and, as a co-inquirer, I raised questions for us to think about. Typically

[7] The purpose of this initial meeting was to provide parents/guardians with information about a literacy project I was working on at the university. Soon thereafter, forms were sent home asking for their consent to participate in this project. Much of the data I then collected aligned with the goals of this larger university research project. However, in May I did draft another consent form, which gained human subjects approval in mid-May. With this form, I asked parents/guardians for consent to photocopy students' work, the only permission not covered in the original consent form.

these questions challenged Rita's thinking. This role was agreeable to both of us. In fact, during several of these planning sessions, Rita explicitly asked me to pose questions that would push her to rethink ideas. The following excerpt highlights me doing this:

> **Rita**: ...Many of these kids will just take that and that's it. They don't want to hear anything else because they have an answer. And that's what they're looking for anyway. So my job is to keep them looking for the answer and to...
>
> **James**: Is there an answer?
>
> **Rita**: Well, not, not necessarily. Well, yes. There can be answers. There can be more than one. But what I'm trying to say is if I give them one answer, they'll take that as the only answer. And not continue to explore for other possible avenues. (1/27/01)

In other words, our sessions were not conducted as traditional interviews. Instead, they were in "a form of collaborative, interpretive practice, involving respondents and interviewer as meaning-makers rather than as asker and tellers" (Segall, 2002, p. 29). My goal was "to activate ways of knowing – the possible answers – that respondents can reveal, as diverse and contradictory as they might be" (Holstein and Gubrium, cited in Segall, 2002, p. 29). Rita noted the "diverse and contradictory" qualities of our interactions.

> You used to make me mad, asking all those questions. Because you would answer a question with a question. So then I didn't get an answer. And we're taught, in a lot of schools, to just find an answer and write it down. (1/27/01)

Once the unit began, my data collection shifted to the students. However, throughout the unit I continued to record field notes of my conversations with Rita.

Second data set: Classroom interactions.

The second data set focused upon classroom interactions during language arts from February – June 2001. When the unit began in February, I was in the classroom just about every day through the end of the school year. Usually arriving 15-20 minutes before language arts began and departing after lunch recess (a generative debriefing time for Rita and me), my daily visits typically ranged between 2-3 hours. During language arts for most of February and March, I assumed more of an observer role with the students, videotaping daily and engaging with students more informally, before and after whole class literature discussions, in the hallway, and during lunch recess. At times I participated in small group discussions, mainly as a listener and "tolerated insider in children's society" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 88). Occasionally I spoke to the whole class when prompted with a question or comment from Rita. As the unit progressed and expanded to include inquiry projects and a study of poetry, my role shifted, primarily because I videotaped less frequently. There was a greater amount of small group and individual work, and I moved from group to group, typically sitting with two groups during a block of instructional time dedicated to small group literature discussions or inquiry project work. My participation in these small groups varied. Typically I listened to the discussion, only speaking when students addressed me. Other times I entered the discussions more directly, asking students to further explain their thinking, guiding the students to the discussion prompt or learning task Rita posed, or encouraging students who rarely spoke to share their ideas.

With the primary purpose to examine the ways the students responded to texts, each other and Rita, data collection combined: a) observation, field-note taking, and

videotaping class discussions, b) procuring copies of students' written and creative work (i.e., journals, four quizzes based on the book, *Freedom train: The biography of Harriet Tubman*, student poetry anthologies, inquiry projects, and the CD the whole class created), and c) interviewing 24 of 28 students at the conclusion of the unit. During my time in the classroom, I videotaped on 29 days, with each day's taping ranging between 20 minutes and 90 minutes. Most of the videotaping was completed between February 11, the first day of the unit, and April 27 when the students had already begun their individual and small group inquiry projects. My primary focus of the videotaping was on whole class literature discussions, though I gathered some footage from small group discussions. I composed field notes after videotaping, but the bulk of my field note writing took place on days when I did not videotape. I photocopied all student work near the end of the school year, and interviews with students were conducted the last week of the school year.

Sustaining relationships

My research design and data collection supported my relationships with Rita and her students. Because data collection included conversations between Rita and me about what she wanted to talk about (i.e., planning the unit), she felt supported as a teacher. She acknowledged that she was taking some risks with this unit (e.g., using a range of supplementary texts with a focal text and encouraging students to lead whole class discussions), and she expressed gratitude that she had me to collaborate with, share unit resources, and think through these ideas. I was also readily accessible for conversation, being in the classroom almost daily and available by phone in the evenings. The learning from our interactions, however, was never a one-way street. Our collaboration was

supported by my stance as a co-inquirer, prepared to learn with and from Rita. I did not have all the answers and was eager to pursue the questions and issues we both puzzled over.

Similarly, the research design and data collection also supported my relationships with students. Rita introduced me early on as her "teacher from the university" who would be "in our classroom helping us out during language arts." The students understood the purpose of the research project to which they had given consent as designed to help future teachers, and, based primarily on the way Rita framed the project, they were honored to be a part of this work.[8] Consequently, the students considered me a helper and as the unit progressed, eventually came to view me as a co-inquirer. When they began their own inquiry projects into such topics as child slavery and racial profiling, I shared that we would all be learning together about these complex topics.

Data analysis

Because I agree with Hammersley and Atkinson that "data analysis is not a distinct stage of research" rather it encompasses the "pre-field work phase...and continues into the process of writing" (1983, p. 174), I analyzed data throughout the dissertation. After each day of data collection, I reviewed and revised field notes as well

[8] For participants, especially children, granting consent to be part of a research study is not an uncomplicated process. Though Rita's students consented to be part of this project, it could be argued that they and their parents/guardians perceived that there was little room to not grant consent. For example, what they knew was that their teacher was excited about this opportunity, believed being involved in the project would help them as a 5th grade class as well assist future teachers, and wanted the students to be willing to be part of the project. As a result, not granting consent could be viewed as a vote of no confidence in Rita, as well as the researcher(s).

Another complicating factor concerning consent relates to the fact that most students and their parents/guardians seemingly had little experience regarding the ways the students' work might be represented for research purposes. Rita and I addressed this concern several times with the students by explaining how we might use some of the materials we were collecting. For example, at one point in late May, I explained how Rita and I were planning to share part an excerpt from one of the class discussions at a conference just days after the end of the school year. I discussed how the students would be protected with pseudonyms and that our goal was to consider and share with a group of educators the different ways the students were exploring issues of freedom and slavery.

as noted and partially transcribed segments of the videotape. I also added additional written reflections, typically preliminary content analyses as well as new sets of potential research questions or codes for analysis. When the language arts unit concluded in June 2001, my data analysis intensified.

Data analysis was guided by my two overarching research questions.

- What happens when a group of racially and socioeconomically diverse 5th graders and a first-year teacher, who is committed to issues of social justice, read and respond to a set of texts during a literature-based language arts unit focusing on issues of freedom and slavery?
- How do two sets of factors shape these responses:
    - the inquiry-based perspective of the teacher, including her planning ideas, choices of texts, and in-class instructional moves, and
    - the ways the students engage with each other and with their teacher through class discussions, journal writing, and project work?

One significant methodological challenge in this study was maintaining an analytical focus both on the students and on Rita. Though forewarned this would be a daunting challenge, I found through the course of my fieldwork that the two could not be adequately separated. I needed to attend to the work and ideas of both the students and Rita. Because both Rita and I were most interested in how the students engaged with the unit content and each other, after all data were collected I elected to focus first on the students and their work in the classroom. For example, I examined the whole class discussions and categorized student contributions in terms of the content and process of their talk. Some content codes used to analyze the discussion data included freedom,

slavery, race, differences, consequences, personal experiences, and laws. In terms of process, I created charts and tables of student participation patterns within and across pivotal (explained below) whole class discussions. This led to codes such as questions asked to Rita, questions asked to other students, explicit references to other students during a discussion, and duration of student responses. The next chapter, Chapter 4, highlights some of this analytical work.

After attending to the voices and ideas of the students, I considered Rita's in-class moves, examining the ways she facilitated responses from her students. For example, I looked across the whole class discussions and noted the questions she asked. These included yes/no questions, content and process questions, questions about students' personal experiences, procedural questions, questions that asked for text-based evidence, and questions that required students to move between the past and the present – e.g., "How would you feel crossing that border to freedom?" (3/22/01). Other data codes included when and how she encouraged students to consider larger purposes for an activity – e.g, "Why are we reading all these texts?" (as Chapter 5 highlights).

Lastly, I stepped away from the classroom interactions and considered Rita's ideas or plans, i.e., what she envisioned for various parts of the unit. Often my first strategic choice was to examine the planning data in terms of the text used in a particular class discussion. For example, when I was analyzing how the students engaged with the text, *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road* (Lester, 1998), during the unit (3/7/01 & 3/8/01), I examined when Rita and I talked about this book during the planning sessions. I also analyzed the planning data in terms of the specific challenges Rita anticipated or risks she believed she was taking (e.g., how to teach a provocative text like *From Slave Ship to*

Freedom Road or how to teach a unit with a collection of texts). Each of the ensuing chapters (Chapters 4-7) highlights my analytical work across these three areas: the ways students engaged with texts and each other, the in-class moves Rita made to support the students' engagement, and the plans/goals Rita envisioned for her students with this unit.

Another methodological challenge was devising a way to account for the range of literacy events and practices in the piles of data. After all the videotapes were cataloged, I took on this task more directly. I reviewed initial themes from my fieldnotes, and examined the videotape data with "types of student responses" as a preliminary code. What were the ways that students responded to texts and to each other? I noted that students responded orally during whole class and small group discussions; they responded in writing to a variety of journal prompts Rita posed as the class was engaging with *Freedom Train: The story of Harriet Tubman* and the other texts in the unit; and they responded by creating inquiry projects and poetry. Because I remained committed to my collaboration with Rita, in looking across the data, I also noted the lessons or particular moments within lessons that Rita or both Rita and I believed were pivotal parts of the unit. Rita and I talked about these pivotal data segments during the unit and afterward while we were creating the videocase of her teaching. Each of these segments addressed a key pedagogical challenge for her, including how to support students to lead discussions, how to teach with multiple texts, and how to facilitate responses to particularly provocative texts. Combining my preliminary and ongoing analyses and the pivotal data segments Rita and I discerned, pointed me to three segments of data to analyze in greater depth: a whole class literature discussion early in the unit, student

responses to a challenging text, *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*, and a shift for some students in thinking "poetry is sappy" to thinking poetry can be about powerful ideas.

Eventually these segments developed into the four middle chapters of this dissertation (Chapters 4-7). The first segment, Chapter 4, closely examines one whole class literature discussion that was emblematic of the topics/issues and the ways Rita and students discussed these topics/issues during the unit (e.g., in terms of students asking questions, Rita facilitating inquiry discussions, Rita maintaining an emphasis on texts). This lesson also occurred about two weeks into what turned out to be a five-month unit, thus it provides a rough beginning point for the entire study. This chapter also highlights how Rita wrestled with her role during literature discussions – when she should enter to share her own ideas, summarize or synthesize student comments, etc. The second segment, Chapter 5, builds from the preceding chapter to examine two whole class discussions, roughly two weeks apart. The analytical focus is still with oral response in the whole class discussion context, but there is a shift to looking across whole class discussions as students respond to the same question Rita raised in each discussion. The third segment, Chapter 6, moves almost completely from whole class discussions to consider two different response contexts: a one-to-one conversation between a student and Rita and several written responses from students. This chapter also focuses on the provocative picture book, *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road,* one of the books Rita and I talked about most during the pre-unit planning sessions. In particular, Rita expressed more concerns and doubts about using this text than any other. The fourth segment, Chapter 7, covers the widest array of data, encompassing nearly two months of classroom work on inquiry projects and poetry. This chapter also foregrounds the students' creation

of a multimedia CD, an embodiment of a diverse range of literacy practices (writing and reading essays, editorials, and poetry, as well as writing and performing skits).

Given my goals to examine the critical literacy possibilities engendered in this classroom, data analysis across these four chapters enabled me to meet several goals. First, the data analysis considers a cross-section of student responses; there were 28 students in the class and these chapters highlight contributions from a range of these students. Second, the data analysis looks across distinct classroom organizational designs (e.g., whole class discussions, a one-to-one discussion between Rita and a student, and small group work). Third, the data analysis concerns distinct forms of response (oral, written, dramatic) as well as distinct genres of texts (full-length biography, picture books, poetry, and a multimedia CD). Finally, the data analysis explores key pedagogical and learning challenges and possibilities.

In sum, moving to these four segments was rooted in the goal to better understand the critical literacy practices the students and Rita engaged in during this five-month language arts unit. Once these four segments were discerned, I continued my work, writing analytic memos, uncovering patterns within and across these four segments, recording hunches, and identifying key themes or recurring motifs. I also documented intriguing exceptions and alternative understandings and sought disconfirming evidence to my findings. For example, my initial analyses illumined how the students successfully enacted a range of critical literacy practices through whole group discussions, journal writing and project work. I observed that I was documenting "what worked" during the unit, crafting, to some degree, untarnished success stories. There were many successes in the unit, as determined by Rita, the students, parents, the principal and me. Yet, some of

the difficulties, the challenges that the students and Rita experienced had receded into the background. This realization pushed me to return again to the data to re-see some of the nuanced challenges as well as name some enduring questions about the ways students engaged with the unit (e.g., Which students were not participating during discussions, did not write much in their journals?) This realization also helped me refocus analysis on Rita's work as a novice teacher, to reconsider the ways that some of Rita's students might have struggled during the unit (e.g., Were some students "lost" during whole class discussions? Were all students acquiring essential reading skills and strategies?) As a result, each of the middle chapters (4-7) considers at least one pedagogical challenge, especially through the lens of a novice teacher's experiences.

As my writing proceeded, I also recognized the need for an additional chapter. Throughout my analysis, a question kept tugging at me: How did students make sense of what happened during the unit? Chapter 8 explores this question. To examine how the students made sense of their experiences during this five-month exploration of slavery, freedom, cultural differences and societal inequities, I analyzed interviews that I conducted with 24 of the 28 students during the last few days of the school year. My interview protocol included four guiding questions:

1. What sticks out for you about this unit? What were the highlights for you as a student in this classroom?
2. What are your thoughts about the texts in the unit? Were these books appropriate for you and your 5th grade classmates?
3. How do you know what's true or not when you're reading?

4. What advice would you give to next year's group of 5th graders as they work on this unit?

Consistent with how they engaged with ideas throughout the unit, the students explored these interview questions in myriad ways during the interviews. Among their responses, I discerned three primary overlapping themes: 1. knowing with/in a community, 2. salience of socially important content, and 3. filling in learning gaps.

All this analytical work eventually led me to the four practices of freedom that frame this dissertation. Writing analytic memos and composing initial chapter drafts helped me look across the study as I sought big, powerful ideas and "key linkages" (Erickson, 1986) to better explain what I noticed in the data. My reading, as well as my continued conversations with Rita enabled me to discern four practices of freedom: *building community, making and deepening connections, cultivating critical perspectives and acting with compassion for social justice.* These practices of freedom help me organize and narrate what I learned from being in the classroom with the students and Rita.

Critical collaborative research

In order to conduct "praxis-oriented" research (Lather, 1986, 1991; Segall, 2002), I adopted a critical collaborative stance as a researcher. I focused on developing and sustaining my relationships with Rita and the students, and I sought to challenge Rita and the students by posing difficult questions in ways that would further support critical literacy enactments in the classroom. Rita and I have shared a commitment to work for social justice and to learn with and from each other. We have endeavored to help Rita's students as well as ourselves cultivate capacities for critically engaging with texts and the

world. Methodologically, my primary goal was to embody this critical collaborative stance.

CHAPTER FOUR

BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH DIALOGUE: POSING AND PURSUING QUESTIONS THROUGH WHOLE CLASS DISCUSSIONS

Aaron: Do we even know that the definition [of freedom] inside that [dictionary] is real? (3/1/01)

Alicia: Well, I'm asking for anyone who wants to respond. Is Harriet [Tubman] emotionally free? To think what she wants? To feel what she wants? (3/1/01)

Tina: Can someone be physically free but not really mentally, emotionally, or spiritually free? (3/1/01)

Excerpted from one whole class literature discussion, these student questions help frame the focus of this chapter: initiating and sustaining dialogue through the posing and pursuing of questions. Rita believed questions, especially authentic questions coming from students, were the necessary catalyst for creating dialogue in her classroom. With an up-close look at this one class discussion, which took place less than two weeks into this five-month unit, I examine the ways Rita and the students drew upon one question from a student – "Do we even know that the definition [of freedom] inside that [dictionary] is real?" – to cultivate a dialogic discussion and engage in the practice of freedom, *building community*.

Goals of chapter

This chapter begins by providing a backdrop for understanding dialogic discussions. I outline descriptions, goals and purposes of dialogic discussions (Burbules, 1993; Almasi, 1996; Shor & Freire, 1987) and consider how teachers have grappled with the challenges of sustaining dialogic literature discussions (Billings & Fitzgerald, 2002; Christoph & Nystrand, 2001; Mercer, 1995; Nystrand, 1997; Young, 1992). This includes

acknowledging the fundamental role transactional reader response theory (Rosenblatt, 1978) has played in providing a framework for understanding what happens during literature discussions. I then build upon this work to emphasize the ways teachers and students negotiate and share power to cultivate shared understandings through collaboration and inquiry (Edelsky, 1999a; Pradl, 1996).

After situating the chapter in relevant literature, I move into the classroom to examine what happened during this one literature discussion. This analysis is divided into four parts. Part 1 examines the content of the discussion, analyzing students' ideas and questions and how these ideas and questions directed the flow of the discussion. Part 2 looks at the ways or processes the students engaged with each other and with Rita. Part 3 examines Rita's moves during the discussion, including how she incorporated texts in the discussion. Part 4 considers the goals and challenges Rita anticipated during our planning sessions before the unit began. Taken together, these four parts provide evidence that this whole class literature discussion was a dialogic discussion.

The final section of this chapter explores how this analysis illumines the students and Rita engaging in the practice of freedom, *building community*. In this classroom, dialogue was integral to community building, and building this foundation of dialogue also set the stage for what was to come during the rest of the unit, as the ensuing chapters will illustrate.

Dialogic literature discussions

Literature-based discussions in classrooms can assume many forms: from monologic teacher-directed or "teacher-fronted" practices (Forman, McCormick & Donato, 1998), where teachers take on traditional authority roles and lead students toward

more predefined outcomes, to more student-focused approaches where students assume key leadership responsibilities in creating and developing meanings during discussions. However, much research has demonstrated that traditional teacher-directed, monologic practices remain the norm (Christoph & Nystrand, 2001; Mercer, 1995; Young, 1992). After completing their comprehensive study of one experienced English teacher's attempt to share some of her power with her students, Christoph & Nystrand (2001) conclude that monologic, teacher-dominated classrooms have staying power. And the reasons for this staying power are multiple: teachers often stick with familiar canonical texts (Applebee, 1989); districts often mandate the literature teachers must use; standardized tests emphasize discrete skills, strategies and bits of knowledge, rather than open-ended interpretations and responses; and many new teachers continue to be trained with a monologic framework. These are some structural forces that contribute to anti-dialogical practices in schools (Burbules, 1993) where "expository talk in contrived settings" dominates (Gee, 1990, p. 42).

Notwithstanding the dominance of monologic, teacher-dominated literature discussions, dialogic literature discussions remain possible. This type of discussion builds from particular understandings of dialogue, as Burbules points out:

> Dialogue is guided by a spirit of discovery, so that the typical tone of a dialogue is exploratory and interrogative. It involves a commitment to the process of communicative interchange itself, a willingness to "see things through" to some meaningful understandings or agreements among the participants. Furthermore, it manifests an attitude of reciprocity among the participants: an interest, respect,

and concern that they share for one another, even in the face of disagreements. (1993, pp. 7-8)

Implicit in this conception of dialogue (with descriptors like "open participation", "continuous and developmental", "a spirit of discovery" and "attitude of reciprocity") are teachers and students, as the participants, collaborating to construct meanings. Almasi calls this "the new view of discussion" because no longer are teachers the sole or primary bearers of textual meanings and in control of meaning-making processes (1996, p. 2). Rather than residing in texts or individual readers' minds, meanings are located within the "event" as participants engage with each other in a social context (Gee, 1992). Also implicit in Burbules' description of dialogue is an understanding that participants have meaningful content to discuss.

It is not difficult to trace the development of this "new view of discussion" to Louise Rosenblatt and transactional theories of reader response. In her attempts to challenge the prevailing perception that textual meanings only reside in texts, Rosenblatt (1938/1995; 1978) conceptualized response as a personal transaction between a reader and a text, maintaining the interdependence of both text and reader, holding neither determinate of meaning. These personal transactions then become part of a community of learners where the members of the community grapple with and develop new understandings (Pradl, 1996; Rosenblatt, 1999). Rooted in sociocultural theories of literacy learning (Vygotsky, 1978), which contend that "meanings and understandings are inseparable from the cultural and social contexts in which they occur" (Billings & Fitzgerald, 2002), students engage with texts and each other in "an environment of mutual care and concern" (Smagorinsky, 2001, p. 161).

Engaging in dialogic discussions has been found to improve student achievement (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991) by enhancing participants' learning across cognitive, social, and affective dimensions (Almasi, 1996), and by promoting deep understanding of texts, increasing higher level thinking and problem solving ability, and improving communication skills (Gambrell, 1996). Notwithstanding these benefits, cultivating dialogic discussions in classrooms remains a daunting challenge.

A core challenge: Reconfiguring the balance of power

Dialogic discussions require a particular understanding of the relationship between teachers and students. Typically this relationship is cast in binary opposition, teacher-centered vs. child-centered (Comber & Nixon, 1999), where *either* the teacher or the student(s) is in charge of leading the way. To dismantle this dichotomy, we need a conception of power that both honors students' voices, inquiries and the pivotal role they have in creating curriculum *and* acknowledges the essential role teachers play in this process (Edelsky, 1999a). Some ways teachers can support this configuration of shared power and responsibility is through not prepackaging curricula (Edelsky, 1999a; Skilton-Sylvester, 1999; Vasquez, 2001), stressing the importance of asking provocative, critical questions (e.g., Bigelow, 2001; Lewis, 1999, 2001; Sweeny, 1999) not "rushing either to interpretation or correction" (Pradl, 1996, p. 17), and scaffolding different levels of classroom talk while supporting students to develop critical linguistic tools (Comber, 1999; Luke & Freebody, 1997; Wallace, 2001). Put another way, teachers are active participants during literature discussions, provoking, facilitating, challenging and guiding students (Lewis, 1999, 2001; Sweeny, 1999). Teachers also offer explicit instruction when warranted, keeping in mind that teachers being explicit does not necessarily

presuppose a teacher-dominated pedagogy of transmission (Luke, 1996). Freire, a dialogue partner of Shor, similarly notes that teachers must be active but not domineering in supporting dialogue.

> I cannot leave the students by themselves because I am trying to be liberating educator. Laissez-faire! I cannot fall into laissez-faire. On the other hand, I cannot be authoritarian. I have to be radically democratic and responsible and directive. Not directive of the students but of the process, in which the students are with me. (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 46)

Though the teacher maintains a leadership role, Shor has argued that the process of dialogue remains open for exploration and discovery as all participants learn "on the job."

> In this situation, students and teachers can only learn how to negotiate by negotiating, on-the-job, in-process. We don't come to class with the discourse habits suitable for reconstituting power relations. We have to invent that discourse as we invent the process and, by doing so, reconstruct our social selves. (1996, p. 20)

There is a growing interest in how power is negotiated and shared between teachers and students, but research offering a comprehensive examination of how this takes place remains in need. Comber alludes to this point by arguing that we need to better understand the "discursive repertoires required for taking social action in particular places which reposition young people as researchers, linguistic detectives, speakers, writers, and designers" (1999, pp. 12-13). In other words, we need to better understand what Shor is calling "on-the-job" learning. Moving into the classroom where Rita and her

students worked to cultivate a dialogic literature discussion provides an opportunity to consider this "on the job" learning.

Considering one whole class literature discussion

In order to better understand how Rita and her students worked to create a dialogic classroom, I focus my analysis on the oral responses during one whole class literature discussion. I choose this one discussion for several reasons. First, this lesson occurred on March 1, roughly two weeks into what turned out to be a five-month unit; thus, it provides a rough beginning point for the unit. Second, Rita and I believed this was a breakthrough lesson during the unit. Students led parts of the discussion by asking and pursuing their own questions, which, after this discussion, became more the norm for the rest of the unit. Third, this lesson highlights how both the students and Rita negotiated the ways they shared responsibilities during literature discussions.

With plans to read and discuss a picture book, Rita began this March 1 lesson by asking students to reflect upon their current understandings of freedom. After several students shared their ideas, Aaron asked a critical question that shaped the direction of the class discussion for the next fifty minutes. Rita and the students did not get to the picture book that day, but they did get to other places. What follows is an account of this journey, an account rich with students asking and pursuing complex questions and coming to understand the idea of freedom in more nuanced ways. The students did not take this journey alone, of course. Rita played a pivotal role as collaborator, facilitator and critical guide.

Part 1: What happened during this discussion: Examining students' ideas

The analysis of students' ideas during this discussion is divided into three sections: asking and shaping a question, probing the topic, and continuing the inquiry. Each section and subsections correspond to a critical question or theme a student introduced, which the class then explored. The sections are organized chronologically to maintain the flow of the discussion. There were 252 turns in this one discussion, and I indicate when each speaker's contribution occurred by placing the number of the turn above each turn that I excerpted from the discussion. I also boldface parts of the transcript to alert readers of significant segments. The sections are organized chronologically according to the actual discussion, yet the questions and themes in each section overlap and intersect.

Asking and shaping a question.

'Can freedom be defined?': Launching the inquiry [Turns 1-56]

After several students shared some general ideas about what freedom meant for them, Aaron asked this question:

12

Aaron: Do you even know the real definition of what freedom is? Do we even know that the definition inside that [dictionary] is real?

Though considered a struggling reader of conventional print texts (he left class daily to work with a reading specialist), Aaron was known by his classmates and Rita to be a "good debater." He frequently raised provocative questions during whole class discussions and defended his arguments skillfully. With this question, Aaron wondered if

obtaining a definition of freedom was possible. Several conversational turns later, he explained his reasoning behind this question.

21

Aaron: The reason I am asking this question is because everybody, every person that has said something I am all hearing the same things almost. And all the things are the same – we already have that and we already can do that. And no one even, that's all I hear. And I just want to know what the real definition of freedom is.

With this emphasis on discerning "the real definition of freedom," the students then considered problems with dictionary definitions, how people have different opinions as well as different experiences of freedom, and factors that shape these different opinions and experiences. The first wave of responses to Aaron's question focused on the dictionary, with Neil problematizing any reliance on the dictionary as a definitive source of truth.

27

Neil: Ok, to answer Aaron's question, freedom is defined in the dictionary, but it doesn't have, but the dictionary doesn't have to mean that that is the only definition. Lots of people have different opinions. Just because Webster says that freedom means something that it could or could not be true because we all have our opinions. And like freedom is... actually I don't think any of us can really define it the best, in the way that we best could because we never really have had the point in our lives where we have been totally free yet.

In challenging the dictionary, Neil raised at least two other critical issues germane to this discussion: the role of opinions and the experience of freedom (i.e., "the point in our lives

where we have been totally free"). People have different opinions and freedom belies definition because he and his classmates had not experienced total freedom yet. A few students then explored why "lots of people have different opinions" as well as the potential consequences of these different opinions. Alicia began this line of inquiry, commenting:

30

Alicia: My opinion is that there is various definitions of freedom. It depends on who you are talking to. If you are talking to somebody who has less freedom than you it might mean something different for them than somebody with more freedom.

Alicia seemed to suggest that people's experiences shape their different opinions of freedom. People may not be, in Neil's words, "totally free yet," but some people have "less freedom" while others have "more freedom." Picking up on this idea, Anne articulated that these different experiences could be shaped by racial differences.

34

Anne: Well, like Aaron said something about like do we really have freedom or something like that. We do, but we don't have freedom because some kids get picked on all the time and **they get made fun of their color** and stuff like that, but... So, we do have... so that would not really be freedom because people tease you and stuff.

Another reason offered for why different opinions persist came from Tina who pointed out:

52

Tina: ... I think it does depend on what your **background** is and what you've been brought up to think what freedom is like, what your parents have told you and or your grandparents have told you and stuff. And so, it would be different for everybody. If you went around the whole class and said, "What do you think freedom is?" then you'll have about 28 different people saying 28 different things.

Aaron helped launch this discussion in Turn 12 with his question, 'Do we know the real definition of freedom?' By challenging any adherence to a dictionary as 'the' source of understanding and pointing to the role and impact of different opinions and different experiences, Aaron's classmates offered some initial ways to understand his question. Aaron, however, remained dissatisfied.

"Do we even have freedom?": Refining the inquiry, considering types of freedom [Turns 57-129]

After these initial responses to Aaron's question about whether freedom could be defined, Rita read the dictionary definition of freedom aloud [Turn 63]. The definition was comprised of four parts. 1. a condition or the condition of being free from restraints; 2. liberty from slavery or oppression; 3. the capacity to exercise choices; free will; the freedom to do whatever we want; 4. frankness or boldness; lack of reserve; ease or facility of movement. As Rita finished reading the definition, Aaron asked another question.

64
Aaron: All these, all these questions we are answering or we are talking about, they all come to one bunch, they are all tied into one thing. See that's why I keep asking.

65
Rita: What are they tied to?

66
Aaron: See all of what they've said, they already said, and I already said that I, we already have that. And we already know how to handle that. But, I just want to know **do we even have freedom or is it really true if we do have freedom. Or is it a lie?**

67
Rita: So now your question is taking on more shape. Now you're asking do we really have freedom?

68
Aaron: And if it's really true, if freedom does exist.

69
Rita: Do we really have freedom? These are excellent questions. Do we really have freedom? Please turn around this way, Dwayne. Control yourself.[9] And, do we really have freedom, and does freedom really exist? Is that what you asked? And does freedom, does it really exist? Ok. Does freedom really exist?

70
Aaron: Everybody's...

71
Rita: Ok. Wait a minute. Yes.

72
Aaron: Everybody's opinion is different so we don't even know what is true or not.

73
Rita: Ok, everyone's opinion is different. So we don't know what's true.

74
Aaron: That's why I asked does it exist.

In this exchange, Aaron asked a similar question to the one that launched this discussion [Turn 12]. Yet his question here [Turn 66] was different and Rita acknowledged that this question was "taking on more shape." This exchange between Aaron and Rita seems particularly significant. Aaron demonstrated his willingness to continue asking questions.

[9] Because this comment aptly highlights the contradictions of freedom, and the inherent dilemmas of students and teachers negotiating power and control, it remains one of the most enjoyable pieces of transcript for both Rita and me.

He synthesized his classmates' contributions, concluding "they all come to one bunch, they are all tied into one thing", and articulated that he was still wondering about this topic. In her response, Rita provided evidence to Aaron and his classmates that she was carefully attending to student questions and thinking. She also helped or reinforced to students that there was a progression or evolution to Aaron's question. In a complex discussion like this, where, from some students' perspectives, questions and ideas seem to be moving swiftly and in numerous directions, Rita slowed the conversation down, repeating Aaron's question [Turn 69], and she noted a shift in the content of the discussion. This provided all students with an opportunity to track the flow of ideas in the discussion.

With an emphasis on Aaron's question about whether he and his classmates "even have freedom" the next discussion segment is marked by students considering whether people could "have freedom." This line of inquiry was pursued, in part, through an emphasis on different types of freedom. After Alicia reiterated the earlier point she made about people having different definitions of freedom, Neil responded:

80

Neil: It depends on the type of freedom you are talking about, freedom of religion, freedom of speech...

Some discussion about freedom of speech ensued, spurred on by a question Rita asked: "Does freedom of speech mean you can say whatever you want whenever you want?" Several students, led by Neil, argued that freedom came with restraints, with the primary restraint being "violating somebody's else's rights." There was additional discussion about constitutional rights and an acknowledgement that "the people in power" created

laws and amendments to ensure people "don't get too far out of line." However, an emphasis on restraints and the rights of others had already entered this discussion. Mitch had pointed out earlier that, "there are consequences" to all actions, so nobody can be "really free" [Turn 44].

As with his initial question in Turn 12 – "Do you even know the real definition of what freedom is? Do we even know that the definition inside that [dictionary] is real?" – Aaron does not receive a clear, definitive answer to his question, "Do we even have freedom?" Neil then reiterated that obtaining an answer was not possible.

124

Neil: … Aaron is asking about if freedom is really real. We can't know because we haven't experienced it for ourselves.

Up to this point the discussion laid a foundation for inquiry. Beginning with a provocative question from Aaron, the students explored the idea of freedom in several ways, considering the idea of difference in terms of opinions, experiences, and backgrounds. They also discussed different types of freedom in terms of constitutional rights, and they argued that freedom belied definition because people had not experienced it yet. In the next section, the students and Rita deepened their inquiry.

Probing the topic.

"Does freedom exist?": Freedom as equality or difference [Turns 130-152]

Though Neil, in the previous section [Turn 124], challenged the idea that knowing whether people have freedom or whether freedom exists is possible, he did offer a way to understand this dilemma. After Aaron reiterated his question, "Does freedom really exist?" [Turn 116], Neil replied:

130

Neil: That question will remain unanswered until somebody discovers some way for everybody to be free in every single way. That means like everybody is equal, like no poverty, everybody is on the same living level, same payday. Until that happens…

In other words, economic equality was one lens to evaluate what experiencing freedom could look like (i.e., no longer will people be experiencing poverty). Two students, however, challenged this conception of freedom as equality.

134

Susan: It seems to be impossible to be absolutely truly free because if you're like equal, and I mean like really top equal, like you can only buy the same things at the same time and have the same amount of money, that wouldn't be free either because you wouldn't be able to do what you wanted. You'd have to buy the same things exactly. It wouldn't be fair if you, well it wouldn't be fair.

Shortly thereafter, another student, Mindy, echoed Susan's concerns.

148

Mindy: I was responding to what Susan, what Susan was talking about, how she said that, I'm actually responding to what Neil and Susan said, how Neil said, if you want to be free, everybody has to have the same…equal…to buy the same things and you can't do that. You wouldn't be free. You wouldn't be free to do what you wanted.

Because the students examined freedom through the lenses of difference and equity, and students openly disagreed with each other, this excerpt highlights how the students

probed the topic of freedom. Stressing the importance of differences as seen through consumer preferences, Susan and Mindy disagreed with Neil's conception of freedom as equality because equality translated into sameness, which was not "fair." Understanding freedom as equality would result in a loss of control over individual choices.

As the students explored Aaron's questions thus far in this discussion, they grappled with two conflicting conceptions of freedom: 1. freedom as doing what one wants to do (the first and third definitions Rita read aloud from the dictionary) and 2. freedom as acting with restraints or social consequences in mind. This first conception of freedom alludes to a Hobbesian state of nature where freedom is understood in totalizing or absolute terms. People can do what they want with little to no concern about consequences. This type of absolute freedom might be similarly understood as "negative freedom" (Greene, 1988) where whim and caprice govern individuals' choices and actions. Several students focused on this conception of freedom, sharing that freedom meant "you can do whatever you want" like "drive past the speed limit" and "you can do whatever you want without consequences."

However, the majority of the students' responses more directly addressed this second conception of freedom – freedom as acting with restraints or social consequences in mind. Students were quick to point out that absolute freedom was impractical and dangerous to the safety and well-being of society. Interestingly, one student, Tina, also turned the idea of absolute freedom on its end, pointing out that in a scenario where freedom is understood as being able to do anything one wants, "no one would do anything."

At this point, slightly more than halfway through the discussion, Rita shifted the discussion to the text, *Freedom Train: The story of Harriet Tubman*, asking students, "How might Harriet define freedom?" Because the students had been reading *Freedom Train* for several weeks, Rita hoped they would draw upon textual evidence to extend their inquiry into the questions Aaron raised. This happened, and the students pursued other unexpected paths of inquiry.

"Is Harriet emotionally free?": Different types of freedom [Turns 153-235]

Dwayne was the first to respond to Rita's question: "How would Harriet define freedom based on what you know so far about her?"

164

Dwayne: She would define it, she would say now that she's dead that she, that she is free but in a way she's not and in a way she is, that she died.

Although this idea of Harriet possibly being free "when she died" was taken up later in the discussion, after Dwayne's response, several students responded to Rita's question, offering responses about Harriet's idea of freedom equating with "making it north", "not getting whippings", and "not being in chains." Alicia then asked a key question:

179

Alicia: Well, I'm asking for anybody who wants to respond. Is Harriet emotionally free? To think what she wants, to feel what she wants?

Rita then asked Alicia if she had "an answer in her head" already, to which Alicia replied:

184

Alicia: Well, I don't really have an answer but... I ask that because everybody is talking about being physically free, to do what you want instead of being able to feel what you want. So I just wanted to know if anybody knows what she might think about being if she's emotionally free.

Students then responded to Alicia's question, offering ideas like, "If Harriet "weren't emotionally free, she wouldn't sing" and that she chose not "to smile at the master."

By introducing emotional freedom into the discussion and distinguishing it from physical freedom, Alicia helped direct the flow of the discussion in a significant way. Up to this point, the students had considered different rights in terms of laws and Constitutional amendments. Alicia opened up an inquiry path in terms of different types or states of being (i.e., physical and emotional).

Rita then asked if, in addition to physical and emotional freedom, there were other types of freedom that the class might want to consider. A student called out, "mental freedom" and the students considered the ways Harriet and other characters in *Freedom Train* might have been mentally free. With physical freedom, emotional freedom, and mental freedom now part of the discussion, Rita noted a conspicuous absence.

219

Rita: Yes. We talked about being mentally free, we talked about being emotionally free and physically free. Are there any other types of ways that we can characterize freedom? Any other types of ways? We've got mentally, emotionally, physically. What is missing here? What else did they really believe heavily in that you can use as evidence to support anything you might say?

Then after a pause, Rita said, "What about spiritually?" Several students responded, pointing out that slaves could be spiritually free "because in heaven they won't be working anymore" and "there's not going to be any whips or any chains." Although Rita named this type of freedom as spiritual freedom, it remains significant that the idea of spiritual freedom was suggested at least two times earlier in the discussion. Dwayne had posited that Harriet might have been free "when she died" [Turn 164] and Jason, even earlier, shared, "When people ask me if I am free... there are different types of ways to be free. Like you can be free from your mind or your church, or you can be free from slavery" [Turn 132]. Jason did not use the term "spiritual" yet did make a connection to church.

Now with these types of freedom on the table for discussion, Tina asked another complex question, encouraging her classmates to consider the relationships among these types of freedom.

235

Tina: Can someone be physically free but not really mentally, emotionally, or spiritually free?

Continuing the inquiry

Coda: *"I want to ask you something"*: A question as a conclusion?

In providing some closure to this discussion, Rita acknowledged the "awesome" work of the students and reiterated the importance of the questions posed by Aaron and Alicia. While Rita was doing this, Aaron said:

249

Aaron: I want to ask you something.

Rita did not respond to Aaron (the class was already several minutes late for lunch recess), and I do not know what question Aaron had in mind, yet the statement seemed a fitting conclusion to this discussion. Aaron helped launch the inquiry with his question: "Do you even know the real definition of what freedom is? Do we even know that the definition inside that [dictionary] is real?" and his statement here at the end indicated that other or similar questions (or perhaps the same question) remained.

Throughout the discussion, the students wrestled with generative content, posing and pursuing some provocative questions, e.g., "Can freedom be defined?", "Do we even have freedom?", "Is Harriet emotionally free?" and "Can someone be physically free but not really mentally, emotionally, or spiritually free?" Grounding their responses in their own experiences as well as the *Freedom Train* text, they explored topics about how different opinions and different experiences shape perspectives of freedom. They also considered how freedom can be understood as different types in terms of laws and legal rights as well as states of being (physical, emotional, mental, spiritual). Considering the content of students' ideas was essential in working toward understanding what transpired in this discussion. Equally significant was examining the process of the discussion – the ways the students responded to each other and Rita.

Part 2 – What happened during this discussion?: Considering the ways the students engaged in the process of dialogue

The students engaged in this discussion in several ways, and I consider three of these ways here: how they responded to each other, how they disagreed or shared conflicting viewpoints, and how they offered meta-analyses of the discussion. This yields insights into the ways students listened to each other. Then, drawing upon the three

"rules" of dialogue offered by Burbules (1993), this section concludes with some discussion of perhaps the most endemic challenge of dialogic discussions: supporting all students to participate.

Students responding to each other.

The discussion offered some striking evidence of students responding to each other rather than just Rita. For example, there were six instances where students explicitly referred to their classmates as they responded. These include:

> 34
>
> **Anne**: Well, like Aaron said something about like do we really have freedom or something like that. We do, but we don't have freedom because...
>
> 138
>
> **Tina**: ... And Desiree said that the only people who are free are the people who don't have families or houses or anything...
>
> 177
>
> **Darrin**: Like Alicia said, that she [Harriet Tubman] should be able to, she shouldn't always have to get whippings if she don't want to do what the master says.

These acknowledgements of classmates' ideas played a critical role in tracking the flow of the discussion. For example, in Turn 34, Anne was responding to Aaron's question from more than twenty turns ago [Turn 12]. Similarly, Tina [Turn 138] responded to a comment from Desiree nearly thirty turns earlier [Turn 110].

Students disagreeing or sharing conflicting viewpoints.

Similar evidence exists concerning the ways the students articulated opposing viewpoints. Again, the students displayed particular sensitivity and maturity here. In one example, Tina acknowledged several students and then pointed to how she disagreed with one student, Mitch.

52

Tina: I kind of agree with Alicia, Neil, Anne, and I mean I get what Mitch is saying, but I think it does depend on what your background is and what you've been brought up to think what freedom is like...

Tina recognized Mitch's contribution, yet made it clear that he had not addressed her point about the importance of one's background. In another example, building upon Susan's disagreement of Neil's conception of freedom as equality, Mindy said:

148

Mindy: I was responding to what Susan, what Susan was talking about, how she said that, I'm actually responding to what Neil and Susan said, how Neil said, if you want to be free, everybody has to have the same...equal...to buy the same things and you can't do that. You wouldn't be free.

In addition to these explicit disagreements with other students, students expressed other conflicting viewpoints throughout the discussion. Neil and Alicia responded to Aaron's questions by arguing that his questions belied answers and Susan challenged Neil's conception of freedom as equality.

Students offering a meta-analysis of the discussion.

Examining how students were making sense of the discussion is a third way to consider the process of students' talk. Three examples demonstrate students reflecting on the discussion and offering a meta-analysis of what the class had or had not discussed. In explaining his reasoning behind his initial question, "Do we even know that the definition inside that [dictionary] is real?" [Turn 12], Aaron pointed out that "every person that has said something I am all hearing the same things" and that this had been going on for two weeks "since the beginning of unit" [Turns 21 & 23]. In offering a commentary of what the class had been discussing for roughly two weeks, Aaron suggested that he and his classmates had not directly addressed questions about "real" definitions of freedom. Aaron also reiterated this concern a bit later in the discussion, after more than 50 conversational turns:

> 66
>
> **Aaron**: See all of what they've said, they already said, and I already said that. I, we already have that. And we already know how to handle that. But, I just want to know do we even have freedom or is it really true if we do have freedom. Or is it a lie?

Another example came from Alicia with her question, "Is Harriet emotionally free?" [Turn 179] and her rationale for asking this question, "I ask that because everybody is talking about being physically free, to do what you want instead of being able to feel what you want. So I just wanted to know if anybody knows what she might think about being if she's emotionally free" [Turn 184]. By positing that physical freedom had been the dominant emphasis thus far in the discussion, Alicia provided a commentary or

summary of what the class had already discussed. Normally this type of meta-analysis or synthesis is a teacher's domain, yet Alicia assumed that responsibility here.

Across these three sets of examples – responding to each other, sharing conflicting viewpoints, offering a meta-analysis of the discussion – were students listening to each other. They responded to and built explicitly from each other's contributions, seemingly holding ideas in their head at times for nearly thirty conversational turns. They also disagreed with each other, and two students offered direct commentaries of the discussion. These examples map onto what Burbules (1993) offers as three "rules" that characterize dialogue: 1. the rule of participation; 2. the rule of commitment; and 3. the rule of reciprocity. The first rule entails active involvement of all participants, the second emphasizes the flow and depth of engagement even with unclear or uncertain outcomes, and the third foregrounds mutual concern and respect. The above classroom excerpts exemplify the second and third rules: commitment and reciprocity. The students pursued the topic of freedom in multiple ways, engendering meanings and understandings related both to their questions and to the text *Freedom Train*. As they listened to each other, the students built upon each other's ideas and expressed conflicting viewpoints. However, as I now show, Burbules' first rule of dialogue, the rule of participation, is more complicated.

A closer look at participation

Perhaps the biggest challenge with creating dialogic discussions is supporting all or as many students as possible to participate. With his "rule of participation," Burbules argues that all students need to participate in a discussion, to have opportunities to try out new ideas and hear diverse perspectives. Most but not all of Rita's students, 20 of the 26

students present for this discussion, participated orally. Five students, Aaron, Neil, Dwayne, Tina and Alicia, in particular, took on leadership roles, forging pathways to pursue by raising key questions, introducing different perspectives, and challenging each other and their classmates. As further evidence of their active roles in this discussion, these five students took 87 of the 139 student turns during the discussion (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1

Number of turns each student took during discussion

Student	Turns in Discussion
Aaron	28
Neil	27
Tina	12
Dwayne	11
Alicia	9
Mitch	6
Anne	4
Darrin, Amy, Evan	3
Carl, Mindy, Desiree, Jason, Delvin	2
Teresa, Michael, Rick, Susan, Crissy	1
Peter, Vicky, Britney, Eduardo, Erica, Allen	0

The number of turns presented in Table 4.1, as well as the preceding analyses of what transpired during the class discussion substantiate the significance of these five students' contributions. Yet, what is there to say about the other students, especially students who participated only twice, once or not at all? Could their contributions also be significant? Taking a closer look at several students who took only 1 or 2 turns in the discussion helps explore these questions.

Jason took two turns in the discussion and both were pivotal contributions. He was the first student to introduce the ideas of mental and spiritual freedom. In Turn 132 he said, "When people ask me if I am free... there are different types of ways to be free.

Like you can be free from your mind or your church, or you can be free from slavery." And later in the discussion, Jason helped the class deepen their understanding of spiritual freedom [Turn 229]. He said, "Because in heaven they won't be working anymore, they won't have to... anymore."

Another student, Crissy, took only one turn during the discussion, yet it was an important contribution. When Rita was encouraging students to use concrete examples and evidence to support their responses, Crissy offered a key textual example of Harriet Tubman being emotionally free.

186

Crissy: I think Harriet could have been emotionally free because.... because if she actually weren't emotionally free, she wouldn't sing.

And Susan, who also took one turn in the conversation, significantly contributed to the discussion. She offered a powerful counterexample to Neil's conception of freedom as equality.

134

Susan: It seems to be impossible to be absolutely truly free because if you're like equal, and I mean like really top equal, like you can only buy the same things at the same time and have the same amount of money, that wouldn't be free either because you wouldn't be able to do what you wanted. You'd have to buy the same things exactly. It wouldn't be fair if you, well it wouldn't be fair.

Despite being minor contributors in terms of oral participation, Jason, Crissy, and Susan still shaped the flow and direction of the discussion, taking some critical turns in the conversation. But what about the six students who did not contribute orally during this

discussion? What can be said about their participation or involvement in the discussion? Were these students carefully listening to their classmates, viewing them as leaders? Or were they tuning out and viewing their classmates as discussion dominators or bullies? Unfortunately, like most teachers and researchers, I cannot offer definitive answers to these questions. However, I do address these questions in two ways. This was but one whole class discussion among many learning events during this literature-based language arts unit, and the ensuing chapters provide windows into other key learning events and the work of other students in the class. I also examine what students had to say about their experiences in the unit in Chapter 8. This includes their thoughts about the whole class discussions.

Summary of students' work – content and process.

The above analysis offers insights into the students' contributions during this one discussion: their critical questions and ideas as well as the ways they engaged with each other in the process of dialogue. This is, however, just part of the story. A necessary next step was considering what Rita enacted during this discussion and what she envisioned for literature discussions during this unit.

Part 3 - What happened during the discussion?: Considering teacher moves

With her primary goal to have students pose and pursue their own questions through dialogue, Rita made a host of moves in this discussion toward this goal. These moves can be understood in terms of how she valued and built from students' ideas, supported students to explain their thinking, and incorporated texts in the discussion. Each of these sets of moves sheds light on the challenges of sharing responsibility and power with students to create dialogic discussions.

Valuing and building from students' ideas.

Rita employed a number of strategies to express that she cared about her students' ideas. She frequently repeated or revoiced student responses to ensure the whole class heard each other. She also facilitated turn-taking by letting students know ahead of time the order in which they would be speaking. For example in Turn 26, Rita said, "Ok, let me tell you how this is going to go. We are going to have Neil respond, Alicia, Anne respond, Desiree, and then Mitch, Tina...did you have your hand up? And then Delvin – and we'll go from there." Rita also asked students to listen to their classmates and informed them that she was flexible with how much time the discussion might take. For example, early in the discussion she said, "I want to hear what everyone is saying and you should, too. So let's listen. We are not going to rush through this lesson" [Turn 26]. Similarly, Rita did not respond to students' questions with ready-made answers, even when a student, like Aaron below, might have wanted an answer.

112
Aaron: Well, what I have to say is...

113
Rita: Yes.

114
Aaron: Does that even, is that true?

115
Rita: Well, that's what we are trying to find out, aren't we? We are trying to answer that.

116
Aaron: So the first one we have to answer first is does freedom really exist?

117
Rita: You want me to say yes or no, right? Are you asking me for a yes or no answer?

118
Aaron: I'm asking for...

119
Neil: How can we know if freedom exists if we don't know what true freedom is?

Rather than providing answers to students' questions, Rita often asked students if they wanted to respond to one of their classmates' questions or ideas. This is not to suggest that Rita evaded students' questions. In fact, one of the moves she made was to help students more fully understand an idea or question raised by a student. For example, roughly 1/3 into the discussion, Rita noted that Aaron's initial question "Does anybody really know what freedom means?" [Turn 14], had evolved.

66
Aaron: ...But, I just want to know do we even have freedom or is it really true if we do have freedom. Or is it a lie?

67
Rita: So now your question is taking on more shape. Now you're asking do we really have freedom?

To further build upon students' ideas, Rita also elected to write notes to herself.

Supporting students to explain their thinking.

Because she valued students' ideas, Rita believed it important for students to explain the thinking behind their ideas or questions. At two critical moments in the discussion, after Aaron asked his initial question [Turn 12] and then when Alicia asked her question about emotional freedom [Turn 179], Rita asked both students why they asked their questions. This helped Aaron explain his perspective that the class had been "saying the same thing" about freedom since the unit began, and supported Alicia to distinguish between physical and emotional freedom, as the following excerpt demonstrates:

183
Rita: Is Harriet, hey, this brings on a whole other discussion. Is Harriet emotionally...Why do you ask that, Alicia? Do you have an answer in your head already or you just want to see what other people think?

184
Alicia: Well, I don't really have an answer but... I ask that because everybody is talking about being physically free, to do what you want instead of being able to feel what you want. So I just wanted to know if anybody knows what she might think about being if she's emotionally free.

At times, Rita followed up a student response with some additional questions. In one example, after Anne pointed out that some kids do not have freedom because they "get picked on" and that all kids have certain parental restrictions, the following exchange ensued:

35
Rita: Ok. What about my freedom? Can you answer that? Because you are saying what your definition is. Are you basing it on yourself? Could you give me a definition if you had to of what freedom is for me?

36
Anne: No.

37
Rita: Why?

38
Anne: Because I don't know what your limitations are, and I don't what you can do or you can't do or what your parents expect of you.

Incorporating texts into the discussion.

Perhaps the most overt and direct pedagogical move Rita made during this discussion was her use of two texts: a dictionary and the primary unit text, *Freedom Train: The story of Harriet Tubman* (Sterling, 1954). She read the dictionary definition aloud early in the discussion [Turn 63] which helped, at least to some degree, frame the class discussion around individual rights and responsibilities. She introduced *Freedom*

Train slightly more than halfway through the discussion and maintained an emphasis on this text for the duration of the discussion. With this focus, she supported and challenged students to draw upon textual evidence from *Freedom Train* in their responses – even when a student challenged Rita about this.

> 157
> **Rita**: … Here's what I'm asking. How would Harriet define freedom based on what you know so far about her? Based on her actions, based on her songs, based on what she said, based on everything that you can know about her or that you know about her so far, how would she define freedom?
>
> 158
> **Evan**: We don't know enough about her.
>
> 159
> **Rita**: If you were arguing this in a paper, you would not do well saying that. You need to say something based on what you already know. Of course, it is not going to be what maybe what she would say, but you are doing this based on evidence.

In fact, from the moment Rita introduced *Freedom Train* into the discussion [Turn 153] until the end, she explicitly asked students six times for text-based evidence to support their responses.

In sum, Rita supported this dialogic discussion in a number of ways. She valued students' ideas by repeating their responses, facilitating turn-taking, not providing her own answers, slowing the pace of the conversations, indicating critical moments in the discussion, and asking students to explain their reasoning. She also drew upon two texts (a dictionary and *Freedom Train*) to both support the general inquiry about whether freedom could be defined and to deepen the students' comprehension of *Freedom Train*. Rita was not a passive bystander in this discussion. Instead, she assumed an active role, "join[ing] this democratic conversation instead of dictatorially dominating it" (Pradl,

1996, p. 14). She collaborated with students in generating new, deeper and more nuanced understandings of freedom.

These pedagogical moves, however, were not free from certain challenges. Stepping back from this discussion and into the planning sessions before the unit began raises two key questions: What factors shaped Rita's thinking as she planned this unit? What challenges did she anticipate?

Part 4 - What happened during this discussion?: Stepping back and considering teacher planning

In January, before the unit began, Rita and I engaged in a number of conversations about her unit goals. At this point in the school year, Rita acknowledged that the students had begun to deepen the ways they discussed literature by drawing richer connections between texts and their own lives (a study of the book *A Wrinkle in Time* (L'Engle, 1976) preceded *Freedom Train*). However, Rita noticed that her students still struggled with asking questions. Consequently, supporting students to "wonder" and pose questions dominated Rita's planning goals. She shared, "I just want to put a poster on the board. You know, what are you wondering about? [because] I think that's where everything starts" (1/17/01). She also added:

> My goal is to teach them how to ask good questions. How to ask good questions and how to work to answer them. ...I mean, a good question can take you a long way. You can get so much from it and you can build on it. So that's my biggest goal. (1/17/01)

To support students to ask questions, Rita decided to incorporate an inquiry-based approach in the unit. She expressed excitement about the possibilities with this approach

and also voiced some apprehension. Though generally confident that students would eventually pose and pursue provocative questions, Rita shared some concerns that as a new teacher, she might not be prepared to facilitate these kinds of discussions.

A challenge for Rita as a novice teacher

Facilitating dialogic discussions presents problems for all teachers, even highly skilled, seasoned veterans. Encouraging students to ask and pursue questions, tracking the flow of ideas, and gauging student understanding are indeed endemic challenges. Though this chapter points to how Rita, as a first-year teacher, skillfully fostered a dialogic literature-based discussion, did she also experience challenges during the unit that might, in part, pertain to being a novice teacher? I suggest Rita's teaching helps raise at least one key issue to consider: control with whole group discussions.

Originally, Rita intended that small group discussion groups would be a central instructional format to support students as they engaged with texts in the unit. However, as the language arts unit proceeded, especially after the whole class discussion analyzed in this chapter (3/1/01), Rita structured many of the ensuing lessons with a whole class discussion format. This made pedagogical sense because the discussions were provocative and a number of students were participating. This pedagogical focus also reflected Rita's willingness to be flexible. Yet, Rita's allegiance to the whole class discussions also seemed to stem from other reasons. She enjoyed the whole class discussions because she found them intellectually stimulating. She also believed that this discussion format allowed her more control than small group discussions. With the whole group setting, she knew who was participating and who was not. She also could be a participant and leader during these discussions. Rita and I considered her choices to

foreground the whole class discussions (2/26/01 and 3/9/01), and she pointed out that it was often difficult to move from whole group to small groups because "their ideas are so great!" (3/9/01). Rita expressed that she did not want to "miss out" on some of her students' thinking (2/26/01). Although this was a laudable goal, the small group format, with the perceived possibilities that even more students could participate orally, was being, in part, lost. Rita found the whole group discussions provocative, and she was less sure about what was going on during small group discussions. As a result, choices to stick with whole group discussions might have caused some of her students to "miss out" on the possibilities for more dialogic opportunities with a small group.

Practice of freedom – Building community

> All depends upon a breaking free, a leap, and then a question. I would like to claim that this is how learning happens and that the educative task is to create situations in which the young are moved to *begin* to ask, in all the tones of voice there are, "Why?" (Greene, 1995, p. 6)

This discussion highlights the students and Rita working to cultivate a dialogic community, where the participants, through mutual concern and care, share responsibilities in creating ways of being that are consistent with goals of democratic engagement. With an emphasis on two key components of literacy development – speaking and listening – there were opportunities for risk-taking and genuine inquiry through the posing and pursuit of questions. This inquiry work was also rooted in rich, provocative content. Rita supported and challenged her students, yet the inquiry remained open-ended with no predefined, rigid outcomes in mind, thus inviting students to embrace

uncertainties and complexities. Community building was inseparable from cultivating dialogue.

Burbules argues that because dialogue is "directed toward discovery and new understanding, which stands to improve the knowledge, insight, or sensitivity of its participants" (1993, p. 8), it is fundamental to democracy. In this vein, he adds that dialogue, at its core, is about relationships:

> Dialogue is not something we *do* or *use*; it is a relation that we *enter into* – we can be caught up in it and sometimes carried away by it. Considering dialogue as a kind of relation (with one or more other people) emphasizes the aspects of dialogue that are beyond us, that we discover, that we are changed by. (p. xii)

The dialogic discussion in this chapter centered upon the relationships between Rita and her students, as they explored and enacted ways of sharing responsibilities and power. These ways of sharing and being, as Freire reminds us, can never be reduced to "just a matter of methods" because the real question is more profound: it is about "a different relationship to knowledge and to society" (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 35). One way to reconceptualize this relationship between knowledge and society is to see teachers and students as agents within a complex system. Moller argues a systems metaphor is key. She writes:

> [It] describes the potential power of discussions in which teachers and students trust themselves and each other to handle the complexity of literary, societal, and personal issues without any one party either dominating the process or relinquishing the responsibility to teach and learn. There need not be an either/or between teachers taking part and students having autonomous spaces for

response. They are interconnected parts of the complex adaptive system that is teaching and learning. (2002, p. 476)

In the next chapter, the students and Rita further explore ways to coexist in this system, as they cultivate their "relationship to knowledge and to society" through making connections across a range of texts and examining questions like: What counts as true when reading and responding to multiple texts? And, why are we reading all these books?

CHAPTER FIVE

'WHY ARE WE DOING THIS?': MAKING CONNECTIONS AND RAISING QUESTIONS WHILE READING MULTIPLE TEXTS

> This is a new area for me... this is very new for me. And including all of this literature is very new for me. I never, like when I did conflict resolution, I had all picture books. They were all a part of the lessons. Now, I have a chapter book or, which is the focus, but then I have, I'm going to be using several pieces of literature. I've never done that before. (Rita, pre-unit planning session, 1/31/01)

> I'm trying to figure out how do they [the picture books] play a part in helping to understand the questions that are being asked or giving you [the students] more questions to ask? So that's what I'm trying to do with them [the picture books]. And that's what's not so comfortable. (Rita, pre-unit planning session, 1/31/01)

When planning this literature-based language arts unit, Rita acknowledged she was taking some risks and moving in a space of discomfort. As a first-year teacher, Rita had never planned and taught a unit with a focal text and accompanying supplemental texts. As a teacher intern in a 3rd grade classroom the previous year, Rita planned and taught a literature-based unit with a conflict resolution theme. This unit included four picture books, each read and discussed before proceeding to the next book. As the above excerpts indicate, her unit planning the subsequent year, her first year as a teacher, entailed new challenges because the picture books were to be read concurrently with *Freedom Train: The story of Harriet Tubman* (Sterling, 1954), the focal unit text.

In addition to the "newness" of this approach, Rita elevated her risk level by adopting an inquiry-oriented approach for the unit. Rita was intentional about the ten picture books she selected to accompany *Freedom Train*, choosing these texts carefully to support students' inquiries in a range of ways. She had some specific connections among the texts that she wanted her students to explore, and she also remained open to unforeseen possibilities that would emerge from student interests and ideas. Rita,

however, was not only interested in pursuing these possibilities with her students. She was just as intrigued with how her students would make sense of the reasons why they were engaging with all these texts. In other words, she wanted her students to wrestle with the question: Why are we doing this? Why are we reading multiple texts?

Introduction

This chapter tells a story of what happened when Rita's group of 5th graders read and responded to multiple texts about slavery, freedom, and Harriet Tubman. This story is guided by two research questions:

> What happened when students engaged with the first picture book in the unit, *To Be A Drum*? (Coleman, 1998)
>
> How did students and Rita discuss the reasons or purposes for reading more than one text about Harriet Tubman and slavery?

With these questions in mind, this chapter is divided into four sections. The first section situates my ensuing analyses in the context of reader response theory, which I first outlined in Chapter 2. Building upon transactional theories of reader response, this chapter draws upon sociopolitical reader response perspectives and intertextuality as I frame how Rita and her students came to understand reading multiple texts. In the second section, I offer an overview of all ten picture books used during the unit, highlighting some of Rita's goals with these texts and briefly sketching what happened when the students engaged with these books. The third section more fully examines what happened when Rita and the students engaged with one of these texts, the first picture book in the unit, *To Be A Drum*, on Feb. 21. Here I show that despite Rita's goal that students make direct connections between this one picture book and *Freedom Train: The story of*

Harriet Tubman, the students first wanted and perhaps needed to wrestle with ideas in *To Be A Drum*. As a result, this section illumines how the students opened new paths of inquiry through engaging with another text.

The fourth section directly addresses how the students came to understand reasons for reading multiple texts. To do this, I enter two whole class discussions roughly two and a half weeks apart – Feb. 21 and March 12, as the students responded to the following question Rita posed: "Why might we read more than one story about a topic or person?"[10] Before introducing and reading the first picture book of the unit, *To Be A Drum* on Feb. 21, Rita raised this question with her students for the first time. On March 12, Rita returned to this question, engaging her students in a lengthier and more substantive discussion of this topic. By this point in the unit, students had read and discussed three picture books along with their continued reading and discussion of *Freedom Train*. This analysis demonstrates how students shifted their understandings of the reasons for reading multiple texts. There was a shift in emphasis from what readers "get" to what readers "do." This shift is characterized by three themes: 1. *reader as puzzle solver*, which emphasizes students complicating their conceptions of what readers "do"; 2. *reader as text and genre investigator*, which highlights the students exploring whether a biography is true, thus challenging prevailing conceptions of biography as a literary genre; and 3. *reader as potential author*, a perspective that foregrounds students' readiness to explore questions about how texts are authored and the legitimacy of an author's account.

[10] See Appendix C for how this chapter fits into the entire dissertation.

The fifth and final section contributes to my emerging practices of freedom framework, as I consider how Rita and her students *made and deepened connections* through reading and responding to multiple texts.

Sociopolitical response and intertextuality: Mapping the terrain

In the preceding chapter, transactional reader response perspectives (Rosenblatt, 1978) and theories of dialogic discussions (Burbules, 1993) served as conceptual lenses to help understand what transpired during whole class literature discussions in Rita's classroom. This chapter extends this conceptual framework. Whole class discussions and student responses remain my analytical focus, as I build upon transactional reader response and dialogue to include sociopolitical perspectives of reader response and intertextuality.

Sociopolitical response

Transactional theories of reader response, as outlined in the preceding chapter, are rooted in sociocultural perspectives of literacy learning (Moll, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978) as readers create meanings through engaging with texts and other readers in social contexts. Building on this conception of readers as active meaning-makers, sociopolitical response perspectives claim that readers' responses are never neutral; responses are always shaped by issues such as race, class, gender, religion, sexuality, etc. Responses are inherently political as readers, even young children, are viewed not only as active constructors of meanings, but as readers whose responses are always culturally and historically situated and embedded in differential relations of power (McLaren, 1999; Nodelman, 1996).

Because all responses to texts are never neutral, it also holds that texts themselves cannot be neutral. A primary task for readers, then, is to analyze how texts carry

representations of the world because these representations have implications for how gender, class, race, ethnicity, nationality, individuality, etc. are viewed and, in turn, constructed. In stressing the importance of examining how "texts work," Luke & Freebody contend:

> Critical literacy practices include an awareness of how, why, and in whose interests particular texts might work. To teach critical literacy thus encourages the development of alternative reading positions and practices for questioning and critiquing texts and their affiliated social formations and cultural assumptions. (1997, p. 218)

Luke & Freebody go on to argue that one way to cultivate this questioning is through juxtaposing texts, encouraging readers to read texts side-by-side to "generate difference, conflict, and debate" (1997, p. 218). This process can be understood as intertextual reading.

Intertextuality

Kristeva, a semiotician, introduced the term intertextuality and argued that all texts are created from parts of other texts. She writes, "any text is constructed of a mosaic of quotations...the absorption and transformation of another" (1980, p. 66). Thus, from a writing standpoint, all texts can be considered intertextual. From the perspective of what readers do, Hartman (1994) points out that intertextuality is one part of a "multifaceted construct of reading" as readers engage in "transposing texts into other texts, absorbing one text into another, and building a mosaic of intersecting texts" (p. 635).

Intertextuality can be examined in terms of the links individual readers make (e.g., Hartman, 1995) as well as the intertextual connections that occur across readers in a

given social context. Citing the work of Bloome and Egan-Robertson (1993), Franquiz writes:

> [they] have proposed an interactional perspective on intertextuality, arguing that juxtaposing texts is natural and occurs at many levels and in many ways. However, they contend that juxtaposition by an analyst does not automatically constitute intertextuality. Rather, they argue that the juxtaposition must be proposed, interactionally recognized, and the relationship between texts must be acknowledged and have social significance within a group. (1999, p. 31)

My use of the term "intertextuality" aligns with the way that Rita used the term with her students. Rita explained to the students that intertextuality was a way of reading and comparing texts to support meaning-making. In the context of this language arts unit, intertextuality was fostered through reading and responding to multiple texts about slavery, freedom and Harriet Tubman. Texts can be defined broadly as any organized networks of meanings (Derrida, 1976), a definition that exceeds conceptions of text as merely traditional print and includes non-print based texts such as conversations, the layout of a classroom or, even more broadly, the "architecture, rock formations, the stars in the sky, the wind, the ocean, emotion..." (Egan-Robertson in Wade & Moje, 2000, p. 610). However, my use of 'texts' in this chapter refers to the specific books Rita chose to read and discuss with her students. Consequently, I use the concept of intertextuality to refer to the connections Rita wanted her students to make between the primary unit text, *Freedom Train: The story of Harriet Tubman*, and the ten picture books she selected to read and discuss with her students.

Sociopolitical response and intertextuality help frame this chapter by pointing to the ways Rita and her 5th graders read and responded to multiple texts during the unit. With an emphasis on revealing the relationships among texts – seeing similarities and discerning differences – to better grasp how "texts work" (Luke & Freebody, 1997, p. 218), the students came to understand what readers "do" with multiple texts.

Reading multiple texts: The picture books and Rita's goals

The unit began on Feb. 12, and for the first week or so Rita and the students read and discussed the first several chapters of the primary text, *Freedom Train: The story of Harriet Tubman*. Feb. 21 marked the first lesson where Rita introduced and read another text, the picture book, *To Be A Drum*. In the ensuing weeks (Feb. 21 – March 29), Rita incorporated a total of ten picture books in the unit. Table 5.1 describes each of these books, when they were used during the unit, the intertextual connections to *Freedom Train* that Rita hoped to foster with each book, and a brief description of what happened in the classroom when students engaged with each text.

Table 5.1

Description of picture books and how they were used during the unit

Table 5.1 – Picture books read and discussed as a whole class during the unit

Date used	Picture book	Book description	Rita's intertextuality goals	What happened in class discussions
Feb 21	***To Be A Drum*** Evelyn Coleman w/ art by Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson (1998)	Describes how Africans were enslaved & brought to America, & how they perservered. Also emphasizes that current children, as long "as they hear the rhythm of the earth" (i.e., the drum beating), can be free.	Make explicit connections between this text & *Freedom Train* See that U.S. economy partially built by slave labor Compare Harriet Tubman to a beating drum	Discussed 'new' content - Africans enslaving other Africans, Who the "first people" on Earth were, and if the Garden of Eden was in Africa
March 7 & 8	***From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*** Julius Lester w/ paintings by Rod Brown (1998)	Graphic descriptions & haunting illustrations chronicle enslavement of Africans: including their capture in Africa & their brutal experiences in America. Also includes some ambiguities & challenges of their emancipation in mid-19th century.	Consider: what does courage look like? Compare courage of characters in this text with Harriet Tubman Consider different kinds of courage & fears Make connections between text & Harriet Tubman	Argued that book tells "real story of what happened" Illustrations show what happened (*Freedom Train* contains no illustrations) Strong emotional responses of students Spiritual connections – slave being hung reminded one student of Jesus on the cross
March 9	***Life Doesn't Frighten Me*** Maya Angelou w/ illustrations by Jean Michel Basquiat (1998)	As illustrations explore the starkness & complexities of children's fears, the text assumes a more defiant stance, repeating "Life doesn't frighten me at all."		Emphasis on courage, defiance, along with living with & using fears as a resource Concluded that Harriet Tubman had fears but that these fears could be an asset Connection to Galileo from science class (videotape the class viewed)
March 12	***Minty: A Story of Young Harriet Tubman*** Alan Schroeder w/ illustrations by J. Pickney (1996)	Story describes Harriet Tubman's life as a young girl & depicts the traits of courage, strength & persistence.	Compare details of Harriet's life in this text with details in *Freedom Train* Note similarities & differences Consider reasons why details are the same, similar, & different	Similarities discussed: Harriet's courage, intentions to run away & how she was whipped. Differences discussed: Harriet let muskrats free & had opportunity to escape with a horse in *Minty*.

March 15	***Aunt Harriet's Railroad in the Sky*** Faith Ringgold (1992)	Through the re-enactment of a slave's journey toward freedom, this fantasy tale depicts a young girl receiving a history lesson from Harriet Tubman.	(same as March 12)	Examined author's blending of fantasy & reality Briefly discussed similarities between past & present – one student arguing still a lot of problems for African Americans
March 26	***Harriet and the Promised Land*** Jacob Lawrence (1968)	Poem about Harriet Tubman that traces her life as a slave in Maryland to her work as a conductor on Underground Railroad.		Discussed obstacles while traveling on Underground Railroad Created map of the Underground Railroad with key landforms, bodies of water, & important landmarks
March 27	***Follow the Drinking Gourd*** Jeanette Winter (1988)	Story of one slave family who, after learning the song "Follow the Drinking Gourd", followed the Big Dipper & North Star to freedom.	Consider background info on each author & illustrator & how this might affect text	
March 27	***Journey to Freedom: A Story of the Underground Railroad*** Courtni C. Wright (1994)	A slave family escapes from a Kentucky plantation & follows the Underground Railroad to freedom.		
March 28	***A Place Called Freedom*** Scott R. Sanders (1997)	Set in 1832 Tennessee, this story describes a recently freed slave family's migration to Indiana.	Compare text & word choice Focus on context clues Explore idea of adversity having a color or race Revisit idea of risk-taking	Discussed the significance of naming the town 'Freedom' Considered price Harriet paid for freedom (e.g., being away from her family)
March 29	***Aunt Clara and the Freedom Quilt*** Deborah Hopkinson (1993)	A slave girl, Clara, pieces together scraps of cloth with information from other slaves to create a quilt that serves as a map to lead slaves north to freedom.	Consider relationship between individual & collective efforts to attain freedom.	Discussed whether Harriet attained freedom on her own Concluded that Harriet, like main character of book, received crucial help from others to escape & bring others north to freedom Discussed Harriet's resolve & commitment

These picture books fit into a family of texts exploring issues of freedom and slavery, yet there were differences in the way these ten books fit into this family. For example, as shown in the third column of Table 5.1, the books contained somewhat different content emphases. Two texts were historical accounts of slavery that began with Africans being enslaved in their homeland (*To Be A Drum* and *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*); three were biographies of Harriet Tubman (*Minty: A story of young Harriet Tubman*, *Aunt Harriet's Railroad in the Sky*, and *Harriet and the Promised Land*); four of the texts chronicled the experiences of slaves escaping via the Underground Railroad (*Follow the Drinking Gourd*, *Journey to Freedom: A story of the Underground Railroad*, *A Place Called Freedom*, and *Aunt Clara and the Freedom Quilt*); and one picture book was set in contemporary times and foregrounded issues only tangentially related to slavery, i.e., confronting fears (*Life Doesn't Frighten Me*).

The types of intertextual connections that Rita intended students to make between each picture book and *Freedom Train: The story of Harriet Tubman* also differed (see column 4). With the first text, *To Be A Drum*, Rita wanted students to compare the content of this story with a specific line from a character in *Freedom Train* in order to understand, in part, how Harriet Tubman could be compared to a beating drum. Two texts, *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road* and *Life Doesn't Frighten Me*, were chosen to encourage students to think about courage, comparing the courage of Harriet Tubman to other characters as well as to themselves as students. Three texts, *Minty: A story of young Harriet Tubman*, *Aunt Harriet's Railroad in the Sky*, and *Harriet and the Promised Land*, offered opportunities to juxtapose different biographical accounts of Harriet Tubman, thus raising questions about similarities and differences across texts and why authors may

have chosen to include different details. Four texts, *Follow the Drinking Gourd*, *Journey to Freedom: A story of the Underground Railroad*, *A Place Called Freedom*, and *Aunt Clara and the Freedom Quilt*, were selected to support students to consider more specific details about how slaves escaped via the Underground Railroad. In sum, Rita took these goals for intertextual connections into each class discussion and believed these goals would provide a foundation for the discussions. Yet, she retained an open, exploratory perspective with each text, leaving room for students to make other connections and raise additional questions of each text and across texts.

As shown in fifth column of Table 5.1, during the class discussions, the students engaged with the texts in multiple ways. With some texts, the students primarily focused on the content of the picture book. For example, with *To Be A Drum* they discussed who were the first people on Earth, and with *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*, they considered more specific details of how slaves were brutalized. During discussions of other picture books, students explicitly compared the text with *Freedom Train*, noting some similarities and differences in the ways the authors described events in Harriet Tubman's life. For example, when discussing *Minty: A story of young Harriet Tubman*, some similarities the students noticed included Harriet's intentions to run away and her courage in the face of being whipped by her master. The students also noted that details like Harriet letting muskrats free and having a horse to facilitate her escape only appeared in *Minty: A story of young Harriet Tubman*. With some texts, there was minimal class discussion. Three of the texts served primarily as resources as students created maps of the Underground Railroad, using the information from each text to refine their maps

(*Harriet and the Promised Land, Follow the Drinking Gourd,* and *Journey to Freedom: A story of the Underground Railroad*).

This provides an overview of the texts incorporated into the unit, when they were used, some of Rita's goals, and what happened when the students engaged with each text. My purpose in this chapter, however, is not to offer a comprehensive analysis of how the students read and responded to each of these texts. Rather, this chapter foregrounds how the students considered reasons for reading multiple texts and how these reasons shaped their perceptions of their responsibilities as readers. This requires an examination of when the students and Rita took a step back from the texts to consider *why* they were reading and responding to all these books. As a result, my analysis centers upon two whole class discussions when the students responded to a question Rita asked: "Why might we read more than one story about a topic or person?" The story that emerges from this analysis centers upon students moving from a stance that emphasizes what readers "get" from multiple texts to what readers need to "do" with multiple texts.

Because this shift from "getting" to "doing" is so central to this chapter, I believe it necessary to first consider a concrete example of students engaging in this "doing." I examine what happened during the class discussion when the first picture book was introduced in the unit. This closer look into what happened during one discussion sets the stage for when the students take a step back from analyses solely centered upon specific texts to contemplate why they were reading and responding to this collection of texts.

Raising questions, deepening content: Reading and responding to the picture book, *To Be A Drum*

As she introduced *To Be a Drum* on Feb. 21, Rita informed students that she wanted them to think carefully about something that Cudjoe (an older slave) said in *Freedom Train*. Picking up a copy of *Freedom Train* and pointing to page 31, Rita said "I want you to keep that in mind ... this statement here where he says, "America is more our country than it is the Whites." With this specific quote from Old Cudjoe in *Freedom Train*, Rita set the students' primary listening task as making or seeing relationships between *To Be A Drum* and *Freedom Train*. While reading the story, Rita paused several times, asked students what they noticed about the illustrations, and also elicited their responses about the significance of the drum metaphor. Some students pointed out what the drum may have signified or symbolized (e.g., African culture and heritage, hearts beating, and courage). While Rita read and after she concluded reading the picture book, *To Be A Drum*, several students raised questions about the story, inquiring into the content of this picture book and opening up paths of inquiry. I consider three of these examples from students.

Africans enslaving Africans?

While reading how the Africans were enslaved, Rita asked the students to describe their reactions to the illustrations. One student shared that the Africans were taken by force. Another student asked how this happened, to which another replied, "Tribal leaders might have sold them." The following whole class exchange then occurred between two African American boys.

Darrin: Did Africans really enslave other Africans?

Dwayne: That's wrong.

Rita verified this practice as true and shared how some African churches were currently apologizing for those practices.

Darrin's response suggests that this historical information might have been new to him. In *Freedom Train*, there is no mention of Africans selling other Africans into slavery, and the topic had not surfaced in the whole class discussions until this lesson with the reading of *To Be A Drum*. Interacting with this other text, *To Be A Drum,* as a result, helped spark conversation where Darrin and possibly other students could confront and assimilate information not heretofore part of their understandings of slavery. The students knew that slaves were brought to America from Africa against their will, yet some of the complicating factors embedded in this slave trade, including the idea of Africans selling other Africans, most likely were unknown to the students.

American or African soil?

Several minutes after Darrin's question, Rita reiterated her guiding questions for the lesson: "What does Old Cudjoe mean in *Freedom Train* when he says on page 31 that "America is more our country than it is the Whites. And how does this connect to the story *To be a Drum*?" With this move, Rita wanted students to explicitly compare the connections between the two texts. However, one student, Aaron, wanted clarification about something in *To Be A Drum*:

> **Aaron**: I don't get it when they [authors of *To Be A Drum*] say they [Africans] were the first people there.
>
> **Rita**: Ok, what do they mean when they say that they are the first people? What do they mean by that? That is a good question. Do they mean the first people in America?
>
> **Students**: No.

Rita: How many of you know about where the first people, according to scientific studies, were? Who were the first people found?

Aaron: Native Americans.

Alicia: Europeans.

Rita: Ok, we are not doing American history. Ok, where were the first people found? I don't know if I'm asking the question correctly.

Neil: From Asia… they came across the Bering Strait.

Rita: Ok, how many of you… I know why Aaron is asking the question. This book is not talking about the first people to be in America. This book is talking about the first people to be on Earth period. It is going back to the very beginning of time. And there's been research that says that the first people who walked on Earth were from the region now known as Africa, or at least some of the research.

Aaron's response most likely linked to the beginning of *To Be A Drum*, which reads, "Long before time, before hours and minutes and seconds, on the continent of Africa, the rhythm of the Earth beat for the first people." Like Darrin earlier, Aaron seemingly attempted to assimilate new information: "I don't get it when they [authors of *To Be A Drum*] say they [Africans] were the first people there." In other words, in response to Rita's guiding questions, "What does Old Cudjoe mean in *Freedom Train* when he says on page 31 that "America is more our country than it is the whites. And how does this connect to the story *To be a Drum*?", Aaron wanted to first clear up some confusion emanating from listening to Rita read *To Be A Drum*. Up to this point in the unit, their study of slavery had been situated solely on American soil. *To Be A Drum* signaled the first look into issues of slavery set outside the United States, in Africa.

<u>From African soil to the Garden of Eden</u>

Just moments after Aaron wondered who "the first people were," Crissy asked:

Does that mean that the Garden of Eden was in Africa?

This question extended Aaron's response about "who the first people were" and opened an inquiry into the relationship between *To Be A Drum* and The Bible. Crissy, making an intertextual link to the Bible, juxtaposed her emerging understandings of *To Be A Drum* with her knowledge and experiences with biblical texts, thus essentially creating a situation in which the two texts spoke to each other. In other words, being exposed to the text *To Be A Drum* encouraged Crissy as a reader to construct or inquire into meanings across texts, including texts outside the unit.

Summary: Making connections, exploring relationships - The Feb. 21 discussion

One of Rita's primary goals with using *To Be A Drum* was for the students to wrestle with a provocative statement made by a character in *Freedom Train*, Old Cudjoe, an older slave, who proclaimed that "This country is more ours than it is the whites." Rita made this intertextual connection when she was planning the unit, noting that *To Be A Drum*, with its illustrations and striking prose, provided some evidence of how the economy of the United States was built on the backs of slaves, as a result, lending some credence to Old Cudjoe's statement in *Freedom Train*. During a pre-unit planning session, Rita said:

> *To Be A Drum* kind of gives them even more of a picture of what he [Old Cudjoe] means. Over time, not just during the slavery period but over time, and so I just wanted them to look at more than one text with that. I want them to make a connection between what one author is trying to say and what another one is, is trying to say and it's like one's supporting the other. (1/31/01)

However, as demonstrated in the segments of transcribed classroom talk, the students reshaped this pedagogical goal by pursuing other questions and concerns (e.g., Africans

enslaving other Africans, who the author meant by "the first people", and if the garden of Eden was in Africa). These issues are not unrelated to Old Cudjoe's statement; nevertheless, the students did not make explicit connections between Old Cudjoe and *To Be A Drum* that Rita intended. One interpretation of this finding is that the text *To Be A Drum* merited discussion and analysis as an individual text before or possibly as a precursor to comparisons with *Freedom Train*.

These student responses can also be understood in terms of how they interpreted, assimilated, and questioned "new" information or content. Darrin asked if the practice of African leaders selling slaves "really" happened, Aaron questioned the content of the text, and Crissy inquired into the implications or consequences of new information (i.e., if Africans were first people, does that mean the Garden of Eden was in Africa?).

Another way of understanding the students' responses during this discussion is through the idea of *relationships*. The students grappled with understanding the interconnections or relationships among texts (*Freedom Train, To Be A Drum* and the Bible). Listening to Rita read *To Be A Drum* and discussing some of their questions and concerns enabled Darrin to wonder about the relationship between different groups of Africans (i.e., those who sell and those who are sold into slavery), Aaron to clarify confusion about the relationship between American and African contexts regarding slavery, and Crissy to explore the relationship between her understanding of the creation of the universe and humankind (i.e., her biblical understanding) with the information provided in another text, *To Be A Drum*.

With its different content, the text *To Be A Drum* engendered student questions and comments that extended their discussions of *Freedom Train*. This continued to occur

over the next few weeks as the students read and responded to several more picture books, each which offered to extend or fill in the gaps of *Freedom Train*. For example, the text *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*, with its graphic illustrations and haunting prose, provided much more explicit information than *Freedom Train* about how slaves were brutalized (I consider how the students responded to *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road* in the next chapter).

This initial analysis of what happened during one discussion of a picture book sets the stage for considering how the students came to understand reasons for reading multiple texts about a topic or person. This entailed the students and Rita stepping back from the individual texts and contemplating – why are we reading and responding to all these texts?

From what readers "get" to what readers "do": Considering reasons for reading multiple texts

Throughout the year, Rita often discussed with her students the purposes of particular learning activities. She believed these conversations developed the students' metacognitive awareness and capacities for reflection. One way she did this during the *Freedom Train* unit was by asking students why they were reading multiple texts. In discussing their ideas about this topic as a class, the students moved from an emphasis on what readers "get" to what readers "do."

<u>What readers "get" – Feb. 21</u>

On Feb. 21, before Rita introduced and read *To Be A Drum*, she began the lesson asking students, "Why might we read more than one story about a topic or person?" All of the students' responses highlighted how reading multiple texts could empower readers

by supporting them with "getting more information. This additional information could then yield "better understanding[s]" of *Freedom Train* by helping them "relate to the characters more." Reading multiple texts could also inform them of upcoming events in *Freedom Train*. No student responses went beyond this general focus on readers acquiring additional information.

What readers "do"

On March 12, two and a half weeks later, Rita re-introduced her question, "Why might we read more than one story about a topic or person?" By this time, Rita and the students had read and discussed three picture books, *To Be A Drum, From Slave Ship to Freedom Road,* and *Life Doesn't Frighten Me*, in addition to roughly half of *Freedom Train* (see Table 5.1).

After Rita asked this question, "Why might we read more than one story about a topic or person?" a 25 minute discussion ensued. In the following sections, I consider what happened during this discussion, outlining three interrelated themes to explain how the students explored responsibilities for readers who engaged with multiple texts. The first theme is *reader as puzzle solver* based on a metaphor suggested by one of Rita's students. The second theme is *reader as text and genre investigator*. This theme centers upon how some students wrestled with whether biographies are true. The third theme is *reader as potential author*. Here I examine the ways the students discussed who might be best suited to tell a story, especially a biography.

Before examining these themes, it is important to note that one of Rita's goals with this March 12 discussion was for her students to consider issues of authorship, that

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is, to explore how the different choices authors make can result in different versions of an event or experience. For example, Rita began the discussion stating:

Rita: As we are reading today, I want you to think about why it's important to read different versions of the story or other perspectives of the same story. We've read *Freedom Train*. How many of you have read different stories about Harriet Tubman? [most students raise hands] Ok. How many of you have heard of these three stories? This one is called *Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky*, and it's by Faith Ringgold. This one is called *Harriet and the Promised Land* by Jacob Lawrence. And then this one is called *Minty*. Here is what I am going to ask you to do. Here are my questions for you. Who is the author of *Freedom Train?*

Students [a few]: Linda ... Sterling.

Rita: I like raised hands. Thank you. Susan.

Susan: Dorothy Sterling.

Rita: Dorothy Sterling. Ok. And what I want to ask you is why would we want to read more than one version of Harriet's story? Why would we want to do that?

<u>Reader as puzzle solver.</u>

In response to Rita's question, 'Why would we want to read more than one version of Harriet's story?', Dwayne introduced a key metaphor.

Susan: Because this book might not list what other books would, so we learn more.

Rita: It may not list what other books might list. Ok. Yes.

Alicia: You can get different authors' perspectives on...[inaudible]

Rita: Ok. You get different authors' perspectives. Why is that important? But before we answer that, go ahead, Dwayne. What is your...

Dwayne: It is like a puzzle piece, like a puzzle. **Everything that you read is like a puzzle piece,** and you put all that together...and you find that you have all the stuff.

Rita: And every book you read, it kind of puts a picture together for you, which is a very insightful way to state, I mean to say what you just said. Very insightful. Ok, so now we are getting ready to look at different puzzle pieces. What might we get from these puzzle pieces? What happens if we read *Freedom Train* and nothing else?

After Susan pointed out that a book, in this case, *Freedom Train,* might not be able to tell a complete story because it "might not list what other books would," Alicia used the term "different perspectives" before Dwayne introduced the puzzle metaphor. This metaphor signified an emphasis on what readers *do* as active meaning-makers: they assemble puzzle pieces. In other words, reading more than one version of Harriet's story does not only help readers "get more information" about a topic (student responses from the Feb. 12 discussion), but also requires readers to assemble these other information sources, or puzzle pieces, to generate meanings and understandings. What might count as a puzzle piece was explored in the next part of the discussion.

In response to Rita's question, "What happens if we read *Freedom Train* and nothing else?" the following exchange occurred.

Tina: We would not know as much as we wanted to know.

Rita: Ok. We would not know as much stuff about Harriet Tubman. Amy.

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Amy: We would not know all the things that you could know about Harriet Tubman.

Rita: We wouldn't know all the things that you could know about Harriet Tubman. Let's keep digging. Yes.

Tina: Like in science, when that boy won't listen to Galileo because of what Alis, Alistof...or whatever said.

Rita: Aristotle.

Although the connotations and consequences of Dwayne's puzzle metaphor were not clear (e.g., does the metaphor imply that all the pieces have to fit, come together in some holistic or integrated way?), Tina's intertexutal connection to Galileo offered one way of further making sense of the metaphor; that is, what counted as puzzle pieces might not be easily contained into some finite set or category. In other words, considering connections to Galileo could support understandings of Harriet Tubman, slavery and freedom. In short, Tina's response extended Dwayne's puzzle metaphor, highlighting that readers can continue to generate puzzle pieces. Puzzle pieces lead to additional puzzle pieces, and it is up to readers, in Dwayne's words, to "put it all together."

In addition to conceptualizing and exploring the metaphor of reader as puzzle piece assembler, the students also used the *Freedom Train* text to investigate whether biographies were true.

Reader as text and genre investigator.

By this time in the unit and the school year, one student, Aaron had developed a reputation for asking challenging, if not unanswerable, questions (e.g., in Chapter 4, he asked, "Does anybody really know the definition of freedom?'). These questions often

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provoked much dialogue and debate. The March 12 discussion was no different, as he raised the issue of truth, or what counts as true with respect to the primary text in the unit, *Freedom Train.* This marked the first time 'truth' explicitly entered the discussion.

Aaron: Ok. I want to tell you what I was going to say, but everybody said, "Don't do it."[11] Ok. How do we know if all this inside of this book is true?

[overlapping talk]

Rita: Oh, excellent question. How, wait a minute, wait a minute, let me write this down. This is good thinking. How do we know, how do we know if all the information is true?

[overlapping talk]

Anne: Respond to your own question.

Rita: Somebody wants to respond to that?

Anne: Aaron wanted to.

Rita: We'll never get to the stories today, but that's Ok.

Student: Mrs. Riddle, let me go...[i.e., speak next]

Rita: I am going to call on popcorn fashion. Ok, Jason [pointing to 5 students around the room] 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Let's go like that. Ok, whoever I called on first, go ahead. What are you going to say to respond to Aaron?

Jason: [pointing to cover of *Freedom Train*] It says biography right here – Biography. [spelling the word] B - i – o – g – r – a – p – h – y.

Tina: But how do you know the person who wrote this...

Rita: And what does that insinuate to you, Jason?

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[11] Just minutes before, Aaron began but elected not to ask this question because he said that it "would take up too much time."

Jason: That when people write biographies, that mostly means they are writing as much information as they know about the person.

Aaron initiated a discussion about whether *Freedom Train* was true. Jason responded, adamantly suggesting that *Freedom Train* was true because it was a biography. Jason's response marked the first explicit mention of 'biography' in the discussion. Earlier in the lesson Rita asked, "Why would we read other versions or more than one version of a story about a person or any story for that matter?" but she did not use the term biography. When asked to explicate his initial response, Jason stated that biographies are written by people (i.e., they are authored). Jason equated biography with truth and perhaps may be hinting that "information that people know" about a person could count as truth. Understood more generally, for Jason, knowledge possibly equated with truth.

Continuing their focus on what might count as truth, Alicia and Neil brought the terms accuracy, proof and beliefs into the discussion.

Rita: Ok, ok. I take your point very well, and I'm writing it down. Who was next? Yes. Alicia, yes.

Alicia: Like some of it may be true because like...somebody who had this experience might have told somebody and [getting the information]. Then some of it might not be as accurate, though, because it might have changed like throughout people telling each other the story.

Tina: Yeah, like telephone.

Rita: So, you are saying some of it is accurate and some of it

Student: Inaccurate.

Rita: Probably isn't. Ok. Who was, Neil was next. Ok.

Neil: Well, it's like, it is a book. It says biography. I just, I believe that it is true. I just believe that it is true. I mean, you don't have to, you don't have to have proof to believe in something, like...

Dwayne: You ain't got to see it to believe it.

Neil: Like that Mars thing. Some people believe it and there may be no proof. But you don't need proof to believe something. You have all your opinions to yourself.

By pointing out that stories change over time, where parts of a story may be inaccurate, Alicia complicated the perspective that biography equated with truth. What's more, her choice of the word "telling" perhaps indicated a focus with the oral narrative quality of all stories, including biographies. Neil re-introduced the term biography into the discussion and pointed out he believed that the *Freedom Train* text was true. With his comment, "It says biography. I just, I believe that it is true", he rendered issues of biography and truth, at least with the book *Freedom Train*, a matter of belief or choice. In other words, a biography was true if he chose or believed it to be true.[12] Neil's position that the text is true because he believed it to be true differed from Jason's earlier response that the *Freedom Train* text was true *because* it is a biography. Jason may have been appealing to a standard where he has learned that biography equates with truth or, at the very least, is grounded in events that did happen. Neil's response, however, is different. He may have also been drawing on his understanding of this standard, but he did make a distinction between proof and beliefs and foregrounded the importance of individuals

[12] It is not clear whether Neil thought or chose to believe that other or all biographies are true, or if he made choices with each biography he reads.

having their own opinions. In other words, he focused on himself as a reader, rather than some standard about biography as a genre.

The above discussion excerpts also engender a host of questions. Was Alicia suggesting that total accuracy was not possible? Or that those who are closer to the actual event/experience can tell the true or truer story? And did Neil and other students perceive beliefs as separate from knowledge? I do not have answers to these questions. Yet, for my purposes here, the above excerpts do show students as text and genre investigators. In other words, considering why they were reading these texts not only encouraged the students to conceive reading as assembling disparate puzzle pieces, it also pointed to how they examined biographies.

Reader as potential author.

A third theme to describe the shift in student thinking from what readers "get" to what readers "do" when reading multiple texts centered upon the students discussing how texts are authored and the legitimacy of an author's account. Soon after Tina's response earlier in the discussion about Galileo, Rita re-introduced issues of authorship in the discussion, this time by inserting a personal example into the discussion.

> **Rita**: I like the way that you guys are relating reading several different pieces of literature to a puzzle and there's a reason why. Suppose that I was going to be the person to write a story on Harriet Tubman. What would be the difference between me writing the story, someone like maybe Mrs. Smith [teacher next door] writing the story on Harriet Tubman, or maybe somebody who actually went through the Underground Railroad writing the story? What is the difference between something like that?

Jason: Because maybe one person knows more about Harriet Tubman than the other person.

Rita: Ok, we talked about that. What else can we talk about? That's a good point. Darrin.

Darrin: The person on the Underground Railroad probably knows more because he has experienced it.

Rita: When you say, "know more" and you say, "experience," key words. Keep going.

Darrin: Because it could be like it could be based on a true story he wrote. Or when with Mrs. Smith we write we could look up a book and find a connection to help you write your story.

Darrin foregrounded the importance of personal experience and its link to knowledge and authority (e.g., who has the right to tell a particular story). Even though Darrin mentioned that writers, including he and his classmates, can benefit from "looking up" information, his response implied that personal experience would enable a better story to be told. Later in the discussion, Dwayne reiterated Darrin's point, stating:

Dwayne: ...like the last time we learned about different definitions of freedom...and we are all going to have different opinions and different points of view...they should have someone who was a slave write the definition because they may have more facts than the ones who didn't have slavery.

Dwayne appeared to argue that despite the many definitions of freedom, those whose freedom have been stripped away would be better authors or writers of their own experiences because they have "more facts." Put another way, for Dwayne, slavery

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existed and we can better learn about these experiences the closer we are to the slaves' accounts of these experiences.

Both Darrin and Dwayne highlighted the relationship between personal experience and the legitimacy of authorship. In the context of reading about slavery, slaves' accounts of their experiences are inherently better because they "know more" (Darrin) and have "more facts" (Dwayne).

Later in the discussion, the students and Rita focused their attention on how a biography is written. With *Freedom Train* as a text to ground the discussion, the following exchange occurred.

Dwayne: I know how Dorothy Sterling wrote that book. She used information from other books, like we gotta do. She went to the library or computer to get more information just like we have to do now.

Rita: Now suppose you are writing a biography of me [Rita then lists a bunch of facts about her life]

Dwayne: That's boring.

Student: It's just facts.

Rita: It's just a bunch of facts. How can you create a biography where you are using facts but you make it interesting?

Dwayne: You can go to that person and ask them questions.

Rita: What if you don't have that person around?

Dwayne: You use the computer.

Rita; Okay, Alicia.

Alicia: You think about what happened and try to think about what happened around it based on the information that you do have.

The focus here was with how authors construct biographies. Biographies are based on facts, but facts themselves cannot tell the story. Authors need to fill in gaps between the facts. One way of doing this, as Alicia pointed out, was to fill in stuff "around it" by "trying to think about what happened."

These excerpts illumine the third theme that marked a shift in student thinking about what readers can "do" when engaging with multiple texts. Darrin and Dwayne raised the issue of whether personal experience bolstered the legitimacy of an author's account, and Dwayne and Alicia considered how an author might construct a biography.

Summary

By grounding the discussion around Rita's guiding question, "Why might we read more than one story about a topic or person?", these three themes – *reader as puzzle solver, reader as text and genre investigator* and *reader as potential author* – illumine how the students inquired into reasons for reading multiple texts. They explored and wrestled with some complicated ideas, from considering a puzzle pieces metaphor, to raising questions about biography as a genre, to discussing how texts get authored and the legitimacy of an author's account. These themes help illustrate a shift from thinking of what readers "get" to what they can "do" with multiple texts. With a focus on the ways students considered how "texts work" (Luke & Freebody, 1997, p. 218), these themes also highlight the import of sociopolitical response. The students examined issues of authorship and came to understand that texts like biographies cannot be neutral or apolitical because they are told from particular perspectives.

Practice of freedom: Making and deepening connections

This chapter described students coming to understand reasons for reading multiple texts, as they engaged with individual texts, made connections across texts, and contemplated their purposes for reading. Beginning with some of their responses to the first picture book used in the unit, *To Be A Drum* on Feb. 21, demonstrated how their inquiry into issues of slavery and freedom was extended and deepened through the connections they were making as readers. The responses of Darrin, Aaron and Crissy about Africans enslaving other Africans, who the "first people" on Earth were, and the location of the Garden of Eden also foreshadowed the ways the class would refine their understandings of what readers "do" when they engage with multiple texts.

Dwayne's puzzle pieces metaphor, which signaled a shift from what readers "get" to what they "do", supports the argument that meaning-making responsibilities rest squarely with readers (Barthes, 1988; Kristeva, 1984; Scholes, 1975). Dwayne's metaphor is particularly apt because readers must work "to make choices and achieve coherence of meaning among many possibilities" (Harris, Trezise, Winser, 2002) as they move recursively "between the language of the work and a network of contexts which are not in the work but are essential for its realization" (Scholes, 1975, p. 147). Two examples of creating some "coherence of meaning" within a rich, if not infinite, network of contexts, include Crissy's intertextual link between *To Be A Drum* and The Bible and Tina's intertextual connection to Galileo. Both of these connections, though not in the original work or text, were used by these students to "achieve a coherence of meaning among many possibilities." It also bears noting that spiritual connections, as we saw in the previous chapter, were also salient for some students in this chapter.

A challenge for Rita as a novice teacher

This chapter began with examples of Rita discussing the challenges of teaching multiple texts. This chapter did not closely examine all the difficulties she experienced while teaching these texts, but here I consider one of these challenges: how the number of texts the students were reading and discussing might have overwhelmed some of them. Using multiple texts in a unit poses problems for all teachers, even experienced, highly proficient teachers. Yet because this was the first time Rita taught a unit with a focal text, *Freedom Train: The story of Harriet Tubman*, and a range of multiple texts, discerning whether or not students would be overwhelmed or "too confused" was especially challenging.

Although both Rita and I agreed that some degree of dissonance was healthy and desirable, some students apparently had difficulties managing connections across the texts. During the end of unit interviews, some students spoke to this issue, stating that they were at times "too confused" because of all the texts they were reading and attempting to remember. Strikingly, this response came from two students who were perhaps the most and least proficient conventional readers in the class, Neil and Teresa. Neil stated:

> ... in the process of us reading those stories [the picture books], I think a lot of kids lost their *Freedom Train* ideas so we couldn't really get back on track. I know I didn't. It was too hard. (6/6/01)

I am not sure what Neil meant by "*Freedom Train* ideas." Yet, I believe his comment raises some key questions. For example, did Neil and perhaps other students believe "*Freedom Train* ideas" (and ideas in the other texts) were a list of key facts about Harriet

Tubman's life? If so, Neil's comment seems to make sense. Hunting for and remembering facts remain a typical, if not the most common, reading strategy taught in schools, especially when reading "social studies" content. As a result, if students like Neil were equating "*Freedom Train* ideas" with facts, it probably would be difficult to remember lists of different facts across books.

Neil's comment also raises challenging questions for all teachers to consider. What "*Freedom Train* ideas" did Rita want the students to know or acquire? How did she communicate these goals to the students? Were these goals articulated clearly and consistently? In what ways might these goals have changed during the unit? And how did students interpret or understand these goals? These questions seem especially challenging for a novice teacher like Rita who was using multiple texts with a focal text for the first time.

<u>But what counts as comprehension? Another complex issue</u>

Near the end of the previous chapter, I raised and briefly addressed a complex question: What counts as participation during whole class dialogic discussions? This chapter similarly points to a complex question. What counts as reading comprehension? Is it developing understanding of one text, across texts, or with larger cross-cutting themes or concepts? Similar to the question about dialogic participation, questions about comprehension come with no easy answers. Moreover, this dissertation is not a study of reading comprehension. Nevertheless, the analysis in this chapter highlights that comprehension can, in part, be understood as meta-level knowledge. Considering why they were reading multiple texts, the students had opportunities to explore intertextuality as a meaning-making process or reading strategy. Put another way, students were

learning how to be readers and in doing so were responding to what Smagorinsky suggests is an important question: "How are readers enculturated to read?" (2001, p. 137). Enculturating her students to read critically was an explicit goal Rita had throughout the unit.

Preview of next chapter

Chapter 4 described how a dialogic discussion helped cultivate an inquiry-based classroom community rooted in mutual respect. This chapter, Chapter 5, highlighted a key component of how this community evolved. Through making and deepening connections across texts, the students explored a more metacognitive understanding of what they as readers "do" when engaging with multiple texts. The next chapter continues this story, considering the complexities of students' responses.

CHAPTER SIX

THE COMPLEXITIES OF RESPONSE: READING TESTIMONIALLY, ILLUMINING MULTIPLICITY

The search, however, never occurs in a vacuum. Freedom cannot be conceived apart from a matrix of social, economic, cultural, and psychological conditions. It is within the matrix that selves take shape or are created through choice of action in the changing situations of life. (Greene, 1988, p. 80)

Process of elimination exercise

It was an early December afternoon, roughly two months before the language arts unit began, and Rita was leading the students in what she termed a "process of elimination exercise." Designed to have her 5th graders imagine and insert themselves into the mid-19th century American South, Rita wanted her students to understand what group of people wielded the most political power during this time period. The activity began with all 28 students standing, and the students left standing when the activity concluded would have been the most politically powerful.

Rita began the activity. "If you are African American, please sit down." About a third of the students sat down. Rita added, "This includes anyone who is part African American, anyone with some African heritage." Another student sat down reluctantly. Rita pointed out that possessing any African blood often rendered one less than fully human. Latino/a and Native American students were the next group asked to sit down, and of sixteen students standing, two boys and four girls sat down. Rita reminded students that these groups held no power at this time. They were often the victims of discrimination, viewed and treated as savages. Women were next. Rita intoned, "If you are female, please sit down." Four European American girls, sat down. Although not considered sub-human like slaves, Rita explained that women held no voting rights and more often than not were economically dependent on men.

At this point, the five European American boys standing were celebrating their apparent 'victory.' Rita, however, stepped in with her final question. "If your family does not own a large amount of land and/or run or operate its own business, please sit down." With much reluctance and protest, all five boys sat down. Rita pointed out that these boys, all from low to middle socioeconomic backgrounds, would most likely have been farmers, possibly successful but not prosperous enough to garner much political power. The five boys sitting down

elicited cheers from the students who had already been 'eliminated.' This did not surprise Rita; the students, primarily the boys, were viewing the exercise as a competition, eager to be the victor in this contest.

Although the five boys' reactions and the cheers did not surprise Rita, something else did. As the boys sat down, one student, Desiree, an African American girl previously seated, stood up. Rita asked her why she stood up, and Desiree, the student from the most affluent background in the class, replied that her mother owns her own business, earns a lot of money, and works with major political leaders. Rita reminded Desiree that being African American would have rendered her a slave in the 19th century American South. Desiree eventually sat back down, amidst the calls to do so from her peers.

This opening vignette foreshadows the content of this chapter in several ways. It is emblematic of Rita's stance as a teacher and the type of activities she and her students engaged in throughout the year, but especially during the language arts unit on freedom and slavery. Exploring issues of race, class, and gender was part of a social justice perspective that Rita and her students worked to cultivate. This vignette also pivots on seeing students as part of these larger social groups, i.e., in terms of race, class, and gender. Rather than responding solely as individuals, each student identified with a group – as an African, European, Latino/a or Native American, as male or female, and from an upper or lower socioeconomic class. Moreover, in supporting students to identify with a social group, the vignette also highlights students recognizing the similarities and differences across groups. Each group of students was seated at the end, yet each group sat down at a different time and for different reasons. This vignette also highlights how Rita and the students moved between the past and present. Seeing connections between the past and the present was an explicit goal Rita held throughout the unit, and in this chapter we will see challenges embedded in this goal when the types of connections concern slavery.

With these challenges in mind, this vignette also prefigures the import of testimonial reading in Rita's classroom, a reader response perspective that emphasizes historical understanding through deep emotional engagement with texts. In addition, the vignette, especially the part when Desiree, an African American from a wealthy family, chose to stand back up near the end of the activity, also anticipates the complexities of students' responses in terms of how they understood connections between the past and present and how they negotiated the tensions between individual and collective social locations.

Goals of chapter

Drawing on theories of testimonial response (Boler, 1999; Felman & Laub, 1992; Simon & Eppert, 1997), this chapter explores the students' literature responses with their social locations in mind. Specifically, I consider the social location of race[13] to examine the overarching question:

- What challenges emerged for the students and Rita as they engaged with ideas of slavery and racism, especially when responding to provocative texts like *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*?

There are three primary reasons why taking a closer look at the students' response locations through the lens of race is necessary. First, there was significant racial diversity in Rita's classroom. Of the 28 students, there were 10 African American, 10 European American, 4 Latino/a, and 4 multiracial students. Second, the subject matter emphasis of the unit was unequivocally about race: slavery in the 19th century American South. Third, Rita believed that the classroom she shared with her students needed to be an open space

[13] Although my focus here is with race, I believe my analysis has implications for and raises questions about the impact of gender, class and other social locations.

where language exploration, critique, and inquiry about issues of equality and justice were the norm. Central to the cultivation of this space was a willingness to grapple with any controversial issues regarding race.

In order to consider the learning and curricular challenges and possibilities with students' racial locations in mind, I examine the responses of four students to challenging content dealing with slavery. I label these four responses "critical moments" for two main reasons. The first is that each moment brings to light key challenges and possibilities concerning the ways a teacher might facilitate response to literature. The second is that this chapter foregrounds the practice of freedom, *cultivating critical perspectives*. As a result, the four critical moments illumine this practice of freedom in action.

The first critical moment, "I feel guilty," focuses on Anne, a European American girl, and one conversation between Anne and Rita about Anne's guilt. This conversation took place after a particularly demanding whole class discussion (Feb. 22) less than two weeks into the five-month unit. The next three critical moments occurred roughly two weeks later and center upon students' responses to the picture book, *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*, a text that graphically depicts and describes the enslavement of Africans, from the often deadly voyage to America to their tortuous experiences as slaves in the American South. Rita and the students engaged with this book across two days (March 7 & 8), discussing the story during two whole class discussions and with the students writing journal entries each day based on Rita's writing prompts. Of the three student responses I consider here (critical moments #2, #3, #4), the first, "I am not white," centers upon a written response from Eduardo, a student who identified predominately as Latino. The next moment, "I have African American friends," is a journal entry written

by Mindy, a European American girl. The final moment, "I might be too emotional because how they beat Jesus on the cross," comes from Darrin, an African American boy, and his written and oral responses that explore connections between slaves and Jesus Christ. (These moments are situated in the context of the entire unit in Appendix D).

After considering the learning and curricular challenges these four critical moments illumine, this chapter concludes with revisiting testimonial response, the theoretical perspective that frames this chapter, and extending this framework to include perspectives within cultural studies, drawing upon the work of McCarthy (1998) and his concern with the dangers of oversimplifying or essentializing readers' response locations in terms of race. I then conclude by building upon these insights to consider the practice of freedom, *cultivating critical perspectives.* Similar to the two previous chapters, this practice of freedom can be understood as students engaging in a rich set of literacy practices while exploring provocative content. Unlike the two preceding chapters, which focused on whole class discussions, this chapter emphasizes a one-to-one conversation between Rita and a student as well as how students use writing to wrestle with these ideas.

A guiding framework: Testimonial response

In bringing theories of reader response to bear in my analyses, thus far in this dissertation I have emphasized transactional response (Rosenblatt, 1978) and the role of dialogue (Burbules, 1993) in Chapter 4 and sociopolitical response (Luke & Freebody, 1997) with Chapter 5. These perspectives acknowledge that where readers respond from, that is, their social locations is significant. Although social locations are never overly deterministic (e.g., all Native American women will not respond similarly to a particular

text) readers' responses are at least shaped by their social locations, influenced by readers' actual and perceived identities and affiliations as raced, classed and gendered beings. This chapter extends this conceptual framework of reader response to include testimonial response (Boler, 1999; Felman & Laub, 1992; Simon & Eppert, 1997).

Testimonial response aligns with goals of traditional reader response perspectives (Rosenblatt, 1978). Neither the role of the reader or the role of the text is privileged in the meaning-making process; instead, there is a reciprocal importance between both reader and text. Further, readers are believed to come to texts with personal experiences or "funds of knowledge" (Moll, 1994), as they engage with texts in and from particular sociohistorical contexts at particular points in time to create unique discourses and communities of meaning (Bakhtin, 1981; Fairclough, 1989, 1995; Gee, 1992). As a result, readers' responses are constantly moving "in between the questions of the text and the questions of the context" (Felman & Laub, 1992, p. xv) as multiple possible meanings are generated. With a more specific link to sociopolitical response, testimonial response involves critical self-reflection, "an active reading practice that involves challenging ... assumptions and world views" (Boler, 1999, p. 166). However, testimonial response does differ from transactional and sociopolitical response perspectives in at least one significant way: testimonial response posits that readers must "bear witness" to events in texts, typically texts of historical trauma involving war, genocide or slavery. Drawing on literary theory (Felman, 1992), psychoanalysis (Laub, 1992), and history (Simon & Eppert, 1997), this "bearing witness" comes with particular conceptions of historical inquiry, emotional engagement, and collective understandings in working towards social change.

Historical inquiry

Testimonial response requires historical sense-making, the willingness and ability of readers to see, hear and deeply connect events of the past to the present (Simon & Eppert, 1997). Felman and Laub articulate this point using the Holocaust as an example, a traumatic event they argue can be best understood:

> not as an event encapsulated in the past, but as a history which is essentially *not over*, a history whose repercussions are not simply omnipresent (whether consciously or not) in all our cultural activities, but whose traumatic consequences are still actively *evolving* in today's political, historical, cultural and artistic scene. (1992, p. xiv)

The enslavement and killing of millions of Africans in or en route to the United States represents an example analogous to the Holocaust.

Emotional investment

Testimonial response also invokes readers' emotional involvement with a text. Reading testimonially requires that readers enter into texts and forge relationships with the characters who share their stories or offer their testimonials. Readers often experience strong and possibly conflicting emotions as they develop empathy and also assume responsibility to act in ways that reduce the likelihood of similar historical traumas taking place. Readers are not "spectators," distant and passive. Instead, they are "witnesses," embodying a stance where they are not only bearing witness to events in a text but are also implicating themselves in those events and their readings of those events (Boler, 1999). Building on this point, Boler makes a distinction between "passive empathy," a reading stance that denies the existence of power relations, and "testimonial reading," a

stance that not only includes empathy but a reader's responsibility to be self-reflective. Bearing witness and responding testimonially are guiding principles of what Boler calls "critical emotional literacy" (p. 148). In this framework, emotions are a catalyst for critical understandings and a motivator for action.

Collective understandings

Boler points out that testimonial reading cannot be conceived "as isolated acts of individual response" but instead must embody "collective educational responsibility" (p. 164). In other words, readers bear individual responsibilities to actively engage with a text (e.g., to wrestle with the type of challenges an author like Julies Lester created with his text *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*) and to acknowledge and work to transform the racial injustices that still permeate the broader social environment.

In sum, testimonial response weaves historical understanding, especially a profound sense of the interconnectedness among past, present and future, and deep emotional engagement into an intricate web designed to cultivate individual and collective understandings within and across groups. As a result, readers incur serious responsibilities, as Simon and Eppert remind us:

> When memory and history are brought together in these aspirations, testimony imposes particular obligations on those called to receive it – obligations imbued with the exigencies of justice, compassion, and hope that define the horizon for a world yet to be realized. (1997, p. 177)

The following four critical moments highlight how students explored these particular "obligations," with each moment embodying challenges and possibilities regarding the "justice, compassion, and hope" Simon and Eppert describe.

Exploring challenges and possibilities

Critical moment #1 - "I feel guilty"

During the Feb. 21 whole class discussion, Rita and the students began to wrestle with a statement made by an older slave in their primary text, *Freedom Train*, who said: "This country is more ours than it is the whites." During the next day's discussion, Feb. 22, the class returned to this question, interpreting this statement as a claim that the immense material wealth acquired by many slave owners, and the economic prosperity of the South in general, was built on the backs of slaves. They also noted that European American slave owners viewing Africans as subhuman supported these economic interests and goals (i.e., it was easier to enslave others when viewing them as less than human).

Later in this Feb. 22 discussion, as Rita and the students continued their discussion of the roles of slaves and slave owners, Darrin, an African American boy, raised the question: "Why did the European Americans take the African Americans, and not the other way around?" After several students offered ideas (e.g., Europeans had the guns and ships, slavery had existed well before this time period), Aaron spoke to the whole class, stating, **"Anne is feeling uncomfortable about this."** Rita asked Anne if she wanted to share anything with the whole class, and Anne declined, shaking her head and looking down. Rita then said that if Anne wanted, she could talk to Rita about her thoughts and feelings.

After this Feb. 22 whole class discussion, Rita and Anne did talk. Without any prompt from Rita, Anne remained in the classroom after her classmates left for lunch recess. Anne said, "I feel guilty" and added, "What if my past ancestors did stuff like that

to slaves?"[14] Looking down with a reddened, flush face, Anne was noticeably upset. Rita replied that what Anne was feeling was okay because some issues in the unit were difficult and upsetting. Rita then posed several questions to Anne. First, she asked Anne if all the people of European descent living in America at the time were slave owners. As Anne looked down and shrugged her shoulders, Rita told her that the class would soon be learning about an important group of people who helped slaves: European Americans called Quakers. Rita also asked Anne a few questions about past to present connections. "Were you living at that time? And did you own slaves and treat them unfairly?" Still looking down, Anne shrugged her head no. Rita then asked, "Do you have or own slaves now?" Anne again shrugged her head no. Rita's next question was, "Well, do you have any African American friends?" Anne nodded yes. Rita continued, "Do you treat them the same as your European American friends?" Beginning to smile, Anne nodded yes. Rita then offered Anne a specific scenario to react to. "What if I was on the street and was getting beat by a group of White people because I am African American, what would you do?" Anne replied that she would do everything she could to help Rita. Rita then asked Anne how she was feeling, and she replied, "A little better." Rita told Anne that similar upsetting feelings might continue to come up during the unit as the class continued their inquiries into slavery and racism and that if Anne wanted to talk just with her at any point in the unit, Rita would welcome that opportunity.

Significance of critical moment #1 – Not guilty, not innocent

This critical moment is replete with learning challenges and possibilities. As an example of testimonial reading, Anne, drew upon her visceral response or what she

[14] I chose not to audio or video tape this conversation because of the sensitivity of the issues involved, but I was able to write some field notes during the conversation, and I talked with Rita extensively after her conversation with Anne.

termed feeling guilty, in bearing witness to one of the horrendous human crimes of the past, the enslavement of Africans. Anne made past to present connections and implicated herself in making sense of these historical events (i.e., considering what her "past ancestors" might have done). She located herself as a European American, recognizing that she was not a neutral reader, devoid of an identity shaped by sociocultural and historical circumstances. This moment also demonstrates Anne's willingness to share her feelings and beliefs of guilt with Rita. Anne elected not to share these during the whole class discussion, but instead chose the one-to-one format to further work through these issues.

Pedagogically, this critical moment highlights Rita's facilitation of a testimonial response. As part of establishing supportive spaces and the types of relationships with students where Anne was willing to talk with Rita about race, Rita validated Anne's feeling ("What you're feeling is okay."), and with a series of questions, provided an opportunity for Anne to examine her guilt. Rita did not want Anne or any other students to feel guilty, especially for atrocities committed more than 150 years ago ("Do you have or own slaves now?"). Yet, Rita also wanted Anne to inspect her own beliefs and practices. Asking Anne if she had African American friends and how she treated them, as well as what Anne would do if Rita were in trouble, Rita encouraged Anne to examine her own actions, thus implying Anne was responsible for these actions.

With testimonial reading, the goal for a reader is to "inhabit a more ambiguous sense of self not reduced to either guilt or innocence. In this process, one acknowledges profound interconnections with others, and how emotions, beliefs, and actions are collaboratively co-implicated" (Boler, 1999, p. 187). This is indeed complicated territory

for both teachers and students, as the excerpt with Rita and Anne suggests. Rita did not want Anne and other students to be burdened with guilt, yet, interestingly, she also did not want Anne and the rest of the class to feel or think they were innocent – the flip side of a guilt-innocence dichotomy. In other words, slavery in the South ended, but Anne, her classmates, and by implication, all readers, must continue to interrogate the impact and consequences of slavery still living with us today. Anne was not guilty for owning slaves, but she was responsible for acting in ways that were not racist.

In some ways, this critical moment concludes neatly, with Anne feeling better and smiling. Yet, it bears noting that the complicated issues embedded in Anne's testimonial response were not readily resolved. Rita and Anne did talk again several times during the unit about how Anne was negotiating her testimonial responses.

Critical moments #2, #3, and #4 – Responding to the picture book, *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*

Student responses to the text, *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*, comprise the next three critical moments. The first two moments are written responses, "I am not white" from Eduardo, a Latino, and "I have African American friends" from Mindy, a European American. The third, "I might be too emotional because how they beat Jesus on the cross," includes a written and an oral response from Darrin, an African American. To more fully situate these three critical moments, I begin with a review of *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*, a text that engenders testimonial reading. Since the time Rita used this text in the unit I have had the opportunity to examine it more carefully. Graphically describing and depicting the brutalities committed against African slaves, this book was perhaps the most evocative text in the unit.

From Slave Ship to Freedom Road – Invoking testimonial response

Because *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road* explicitly grapples with complex social problems and offers no unambiguous solutions to these problems, the book belongs to a family of texts called "brave and diverse" literature (Ballentine & Hill, 2000), "critical literature" (Houser, 1999), "social issues" books (Harste, et. al., 2000) or "risky stories" (Simon & Armitage-Simon, 1995). As a particularly "risky story," *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road* invokes testimonial reading. With its evocative content, readers are invited, if not compelled, to make past to present connections, engage emotionally with the text and illustrations, and consider collective understandings.

In the preface to *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*, the author, Julius Lester, shares how the process of composing and assembling the book evolved for him and Rod Brown, the illustrator, whose paintings accompany Lester's text.

> Even more surprising was the degree to which I found myself addressing you, the reader, begging, pleading, imploring you not to be passive, but to invest soul and imagine yourself into the images. Art and literature ask us to step out of our skins and put on the skins of others. Rod Brown and I ask of you what we asked of ourselves as we sought to come to terms with a historical experience whose legacy continues to affect us all.

As Lester suggests in the preface, engaging with the text, *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road,* requires an active, invested commitment from readers, a willingness to read testimonially and invoke particular ways of imagining – e.g., putting "on the skins of others." On the first double-page spread, Africans are thrown overboard from a slave ship en route to America as the opening text reads:

> They took the sick and the dead and dropped them into the sea like empty wine barrels. But wine barrels did not have beating hearts, crying eyes, and screaming mouths. (p. 6)

Lester's narrative and Brown's paintings continue to portray the barbaric treatment of enslaved Africans, depicting and describing them, in graphic detail, being bought and sold on an auction block and being beaten, whipped, and hung. The text also shows slaves working on plantations, reviving themselves in clandestine spiritual meetings, escaping via the Underground Railroad, fighting for the Union during the Civil War, and wrestling with the ambiguities of what receiving official emancipation might mean for them. With each turn of the page, Lester challenges readers to imagine themselves into the terrifying experiences of these slaves.

Lester heightens the demands and responsibilities placed upon his readers by creating three "Imagination Exercises." Explicitly naming his readers and implying particular subject positions, the first exercise is "For White people," the second is "For African Americans," and the third is "For Whites and Blacks." In Exercise One, Lester disturbs any comfort or complacency that White people may feel or perceive about slavery. White people, as an identifiable social group, must question this comfort or complicity through imagining the pain, hurt and terror of enslaved Africans and examining how this legacy of slavery functions in contemporary society. Part of Lester's text for this exercise reads:

> Imagine a rage so fierce it would scorch the earth, leaving behind only a giant cinder to circle the sun. You do not have to be black to be this angry. Your

ancestors need not have been Africans. You need only wonder: How would I feel if that happened to me? (p. 10)

In Imagination Exercise Two, African Americans are challenged to interrogate their shame, a shame (or an unwillingness to acknowledge and work through this shame) that works to deny the strength and dignity of their African ancestors and, as a result, possibly impedes their own progressive movement.

Imagination Exercise Three is for both "Whites and Blacks", requiring both groups to engage in "collective witnessing" (Boler, 1999) to imagine an underlying and unifying trait of their humanity – evil aggression. Lester writes:

> We may think that we would never whip someone until their flesh cried blood. But what if you would not be punished for doing it? What if your peers approved and deemed you honorable and good for beating someone? What then?
>
> Evil is as mesmerizing as a snake's eyes. Though difficult, we must imagine our capacity for evil.
>
> Unless and until we do, unseen shadows of hung men will blot the walls of our homes. (p. 22-23)

With this conception of Whites and Blacks as one collective, Lester is arguing that both groups are indeed in this together. In other words, it is only through committed, collaborative efforts that critical understandings can be nurtured across these two groups; and it is only through these kinds of efforts that race-based violence and oppression can be ameliorated.

From Slave Ship to Freedom Road suggests testimonial responses. Readers are invited to make past to present connections, engage emotionally with the text and

illustrations, and consider collective understandings. However, the next critical moment, one student's response to *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*, complicates understandings of testimonial response with this text in mind.

Critical moment #2 - "I am not white"

On March 7, the first day of the two-day exploration of *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*, Rita gave the students three writing prompts. One of these prompts, designed to support intertextual reading, was: 'How does reading *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road* help you understand *Freedom Train*?' Most student responses to this writing prompt (19 of 23 students) argued that *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*, both the written text and the illustrations, "showed more stuff" than *Freedom Train*, which, consequently, helped students "understand what really happened." Some students explicitly described the "more stuff" as the "actual punishment" of the slaves, e.g., "hanging them", which was "more violent" than in *Freedom Train*.

One student's response to this prompt, however, was qualitatively different. Eduardo, a student who usually identified as Latino (e.g., during the 'Process of elimination' activity at beginning of this chapter), wrote:

> I know slavery is something sick and horror and something bad for what the whites did. I am not white I am Irish, Indian and Latino.

Significance of critical moment #2 – Testimonial response to resistant reading

Unlike his classmates, in his response, Eduardo did not directly compare *Freedom Train* and *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*. Moreover, he was the only student who identified his racial location to any of the three writing prompts Rita administered that day. Eduardo also explicitly named "whites" as the perpetrators of the horrendous crimes,

and he distanced himself and his racial location from the Whites who committed these horrible acts. This distancing move can be understood as a critical reaction to the way Julius Lester, the author of *Slave Ship*, positioned Eduardo as a reader. Lester divides his readers into two groups: Whites and Blacks, but Eduardo, as a Latino, did not fit into either of these categories. Moreover, Eduardo's attempt to distance himself from Whites might have reflected his concerns that in a world where readers are either White or Black, his racial identity would be linked to the White slave owners.

This critical moment highlights an intriguing learning challenge and possibility – how all students engage with a text when that text explicitly excludes some of them. *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road* invoked a testimonial response from Eduardo; he explored connections between the past and present and considered the relationship between himself and the White slave owners. Yet, at least to some degree, Eduardo's testimonial response, and perhaps the responses of other classmates who fell outside the racial categories of White or Black, may have been obstructed. For Eduardo, *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road* seemingly engendered a more resistant reading stance – that is, he did not want to be positioned as White or linked to the atrocities committed by White slave owners ("I am not white."). This element of resistance along with the complexities of readers' racial backgrounds resurface across critical moments #3 and #4.

Illumining multiplicity

The final two critical moments, #3 and #4, occurred on March 8, the second day of the two-day exploration of *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*. Both of these moments stemmed from responses to the following writing prompt from Rita:

What emotions did you feel when hearing the story? How did the pictures affect you?

Because *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road* contains graphic and evocative prose along with haunting illustrations, Rita wanted students to have opportunities to reflect upon and better understand their emotional responses to the text. In their journal entries as well as during class discussions, the students explored some of these emotions. In response to the writing prompt, "What emotions did you feel when hearing the story? How did the pictures affect you?" all the students expressed that they either felt sad, bad, mad or angry, shocked, stunned or scared. Ten students indicated that they felt two or more of these emotions. For example, Amy wrote, "I felt sad because they were taking their clothes off. I felt mad because they were calling them a swear word. I was scared because I didn't know what else they might do." Like Amanda, almost all students used examples from *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road* to support the descriptions or explanations of their emotional response(s). Several students explicitly indicated that it was difficult to view the illustrations. Delvin wrote, "I felt I was going to cry because I was so sad. The pictures affected me by showing things I didn't want to see."

Critical moment #3 - "I have African American friends"

In her journal entry to the prompt, "What emotions did you feel when hearing the story? How did the pictures affect you?", Mindy, a European American girl, wrote:

> Well when I heard the story it gave me different feelings like when they hung that guy it kinda made me feel sad because **I have African American friends but I do not see a difference between us. We are just the same** and when they had the people on the boards in a row it kinda gave me a gross feeling because what

dripped down on them but I also had a sad feeling too because they should treat us the same.

Significance of critical moment #3 - What it means to be one White reader

By stating that she had "African American friends," Mindy implied that she was not African American, thus claiming some racial identity (even if it is through negation – that is, *not* being African American). She also used the collective pronouns "we" or "us" three times which mark intriguing past-present connections or understandings.

There are several ways of understanding Mindy's response. One is that she homogenized racial differences ("We are just the same"), situating slavery, as well as it legacy and impact in her life, squarely in the past. Another reading, and to me a more compelling one, is that Mindy, in her attempts to make sense of *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*, wrestled with the complexities of establishing her own social location(s) as a reader. Since making personal, authentic connections to events in texts was a goal throughout the unit, Mindy did have more in common with her African American friends than she had with slave owners from the past, in terms of interests, goals, ideas, values, etc. This understanding of Mindy's response helps clarify the ambiguous use of "us" in the last line of her response ("they should treat us the same"). Although it doesn't seem to follow from her preceding sentence, which alludes to how the slave owners forced slaves to urinate and defecate on each other, if Mindy aligned herself less with White slave owners than with her African American friends, this makes sense. This reading of Mindy's response makes further sense in light of the third imagination exercise in *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*, which encourages Whites and Blacks to see themselves as a collective as they acknowledge their mutual capacities for evil.

Critical moment #4 - "I might be too emotional because how they beat Jesus on the cross."

In his journal entry to the prompt, 'What emotions did you feel when hearing the story? How did the pictures affect you?', Darrin, an African American boy, wrote:

> I had several different emotions. I might be too emotional because how they beat Jesus on the cross.

This written response resonated with comments Darrin made earlier in the lesson during the whole class discussion. The following excerpt occurred near the beginning of the discussion, as the students responded to a prompt, an illustration from *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road* that Rita had taped to the chalkboard depicting a slave being hung. Rita asked students if they wanted her to take the picture down. Soon thereafter, Darrin shared:

> **Darrin**: Because ... I don't know... are we supposed to be talking about this in school? [inaudible] because like with Jesus...
>
> **Rita**: ... You said you don't know if we should say it in school. Say what in school?
>
> **Darrin**: That the rules say we can't use any religious stuff in school.
>
> **Rita**: Who says you can't?
>
> **Darrin**: The rules.

Darrin then talked more about feeling upset about what happened to Jesus and slaves. During this time Darrin had one of the two classroom copies of the book *Slave Ship* and was flipping the pages as he talked.

Darrin: that... that how in the Bible it says that Jesus got whupped, I mean beat with those cords they got. That made me not want to look at it [the illustrations in *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*] because it is stupid what they did.

Significance of critical Moment #4 – Critical emotional literacy and multiple response locations

In his response, Darrin shifted the focus from the two categories: Whites and Blacks. In his reference to Jesus Christ, he introduced religion into the discussion and linked his own personal experiences and knowledge, in this case his experience as a Christian being raised in a devout Christian family. This was not the first time Darrin or his classmates made religious references or connections in the unit. Religion, especially the strength, hope, and spiritual guidance many slaves found with religion, was at least a minor theme across the texts in the unit, and, as a result, made its way into the whole class discussions (e.g., in Chapter 3, spiritual freedom was one of the types of freedom discussed).

Darrin's response is significant for at least two additional reasons. Like Anne's response (critical moment #1), Darrin's testimonial response underscores the importance of what Boler calls "critical emotional literacy" (1999, p. 148). Darrin indicated that he had "several different emotions" and might be "too emotional because how they beat Jesus on the cross." And although these emotions can be conflicting and feel overwhelming, as Darrin's response suggests, critical emotional literacy builds from the premise that these emotions can cultivate rather than stymie critical understandings and help map out plans of action.

Darrin's response also speaks to the issue of multiple response locations. In other words, his emphasis on Jesus Christ did not mean he only or primarily responded to the writing prompt as a Christian. This would be essentializing or oversimplifying his response and nullifying his social location as an African American reader. Darrin, in fact, did speak from, or alluded to, his social location as African American during the unit, as the following transcript between Darrin and Dwayne (also African American) from an end of unit interview demonstrates. In response to a question about whether the content of the unit was appropriate for 5th graders, the two boys said:

Dwayne: People need to know how

Darrin: Because when you get in middle school

Dwayne: How we were treated. How, how

Darrin: Cuz like some kids

Dwayne: How people were treated.

Darrin: Don't get a chance to learn how we was treated. (6/5/01)

In addition to claiming a response location as an African American ("don't get a chance to learn how we was treated"), this excerpt also could be read as a critique of common school practices. Darrin and Dwayne seem to be suggesting that typically students do not significantly deal with the enslavement and inhumane treatment of Africans. Evidence of Darrin's multiple response locations, as a Christian and African American, might also be attributed to the provocative text and subject matter. *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road* is a complex, challenging text that engenders testimonial responses, which are not limited to a singular response location.

Revisiting testimonial response and response locations

Testimonial response – making deep connections between the past and present, acknowledging and understanding one's emotional engagement with a text, and seeing events with a collective, rather than individualist, orientation – helps illumine challenges embedded in the four critical moments above. From a student perspective, the provocative subject matter, slavery in 19th century America, explored in part through the confrontational text, *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*, left students wrestling with complicated past to present connections. And due to the evocative subject matter, the quality of these connections was imbued with the challenge of readers cultivating "critical emotional literacy" (Boler, 1999, p. 148). This can be highly difficult with texts like *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road* and topics such as slavery because these engender complex, often conflicting emotional layers for readers to sift through. Readers may need to grapple with a range of these internal conflicts as they strive to understand competing emotions like sadness, anger, guilt, and shame. For example, with Anne (critical moment #1) it was guilt, and with Darrin (critical moment #4), it was "several different emotions" which led him to think he "might be too emotional." This challenge was intensified because most students had never before interacted with a provocative text like *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*. Though challenging, like Boler (1999), I argue that these emotions were integral to the students' learning, offering them and their classmates opportunities to reflect and develop critical understandings and insights about themselves and their relationships with others, including those in history.

Turning to cultural studies

The findings in this chapter also point to the challenges of understanding readers' response locations. Theories of testimonial response foreground the import of deep,

historical connections, emotional involvement, and collective orientations, yet critical moments #3 and #4 point to the need for an even more complex understanding of reader response. To do this, I turn to work within cultural studies.

Pluralistic and dynamic response locations.

Cultural studies, drawing upon interdisciplinary links within anthropology, philosophy, literary studies, political science, sociology and history, encompasses a wide range of perspectives and influences, including critical social theory, feminist, gender, and critical race theories, poststructuralism, semiotics, and postcolonial studies. With the general goal of examining and understanding how meanings are produced and circulated, cultural studies operates from the premise that factors such as conflict, multiplicity, volatility, complexity and change govern these meanings and meaning-making processes. In his work within this multidisciplinary field of cultural studies, McCarthy (1998) has explored issues of race, opposing the prevailing practices of essentialism and reductionism regarding matters of race in education. With essentialism, social groups are treated as stable or homogenous entities, and with reductionism, the "sources" of racial inequalities are often attributed to a single variable or cause (McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993, p. xviii).

Findings from this chapter reveal the limitations of essentialist perspectives. With critical moment #3, "I have African American friends," Julius Lester, the author of *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*, positioned and challenged Mindy as a White reader, but Mindy still retained a say regarding from what social location she wished to respond. As a White reader, Mindy allied herself with her African American friends, rather than with

White slave owners, thus reclaiming her response location. McCarthy describes this process:

> Students are not simply stepping into pre-configured and solid identities such as African American, Jamaican, Italian, or Mexican, but are both re-inventing and questioning the very constructs of these imagined national and racial communities. (1998, p. 159)

Similarly, Darrin's response with critical moment #4 illustrates the import of a pluralistic and dynamic understanding of readers' social locations. Shifting the emphasis from Whites and Blacks found in *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*, Darrin drew upon religion and his identity as a Christian in his response. Again, McCarthy speaks to this issue, arguing that "race is a never an absolute structuring force, but is instead one variable in an immensely rich and complex human environment" (p. xii). Lightfoot also warns of the dangers of placing students into rigid "sociological categories of race, social class, ethnicity and family structure" (1978, p. 211).

Understanding that students respond from multiple social locations may seem intuitive or obvious – e.g., race, gender and class are visible (though perhaps to a lesser degree with class). Yet, the intriguing challenge is when certain texts, like *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*, position readers in essentializing ways – e.g., as either Black or White. Some readers, like Eduardo (critical moment #2) who do not fall into these categories might resist being positioned as Black or White. Other readers, like Mindy, might reclaim their response locations as White readers in opposition to a text like *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*. While other readers, like Darrin, might assume another or multiple response locations.

Pedagogical goals and challenges

Facilitating testimonial responses presents challenges for all teachers. Testimonial response requires the processing of complex emotions, a seemingly daunting task because readers may be compelled to "abandon an emotional place that he or she believed to be secure" (Robertson, 1997, p. 462) and enter a more unsettling or complicated emotional space. Similarly, since testimonial response is dialogical or communal "because it is within communal structures that...witnessing can be nurtured" (Simon & Eppert, 1997, p. 185), testimonial responses take place in a public space, the classroom. Engaging in testimonial responses, then, can be particularly intimidating because the expression and processing of emotions in classrooms is usually consigned to the private sphere (Boler, 1999).

One of Rita's primary goals with using *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road* was to help students navigate the affective terrain of their responses to deepen their understandings of slavery. Rita anticipated this challenge, pointing out during a planning session before the unit began that *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road* was "a real deep book" that would most likely necessitate students' engagement across several days. Rita believed students would need time, through class discussions and journal writing, to work through a range of feelings and raise questions about historical connections to the present. Budgeting time for this work would enable Rita to meet a key goal of not straying from complicated subject matter. She wanted to deeply engage and challenge her students and books like *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road* supported this goal.

Though deliberate about supporting students to delve deeply into issues of slavery, Rita recognized the potential complications of using a text like *From Slave Ship*

to Freedom Road. During a pre-unit planning session she asked me, "You think this is something dangerous to introduce to the kids?" (1/31/01). For me, this question anticipated challenges with facilitating testimonial response. Although all teachers need to wrestle with these challenges, new teachers seem especially vulnerable because testimonial response sits in stark contrast to prevailing practices in classrooms. Administrators, teaching colleagues and parents, as well as other community members might object to this pedagogical approach and a new untenured teacher might have little recourse in challenging this opposition.

Teachers, including novices, however, can work to manage these risks. Rita, for example, began the unit in February, well into the school year, when she had already developed relationships with both students and parents. Rita also gained the support of her principal before the unit began, meeting with her and providing a rationale of her unit goals. After witnessing Rita's work up to that point in the year, as well as the previous year when Rita was a teacher intern in the school, the principal said she trusted that Rita would make pedagogically sound choices with this unit.

Rita recognized the dangers of this provocative text, *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road,* and her own concerns with using it. In other words, Rita aimed to enact a "pedagogy of discomfort" (Boler, 1999) as she worked in this volatile space between openness (having students interact with provocative texts with little scaffolding) and control (limiting texts and perspectives to prevent a range of responses). Many complexities and ambiguities abound in this space, yet the space remains imbued with possibility, as Palmer aptly describes:

So a learning space must have features that help students deal with the dangers of an educational expedition: places to rest, places to find nourishment, even places to seek shelter when one feels overexposed.

But if that space is to take us somewhere, the space must also be charged. If students are to learn at the deepest levels, they must not feel so safe that they fall asleep: they need to feel the risks inherent in pursuing the deep things of the world or of the soul. (1998, p. 75)

Cultivating critical perspectives as a practice of freedom

The findings in this chapter, situated within theories of testimonial response and extended through perspectives within cultural studies, demonstrate the students and Rita enacting the practice of freedom, *cultivating critical perspectives*. With critical moment #1, "I feel guilty," Rita and Anne worked to occupy a middle space between guilt and innocence. Rita asked Anne a series of questions designed to help her move from her guilt to a more reflective and proactive space of examining her beliefs and practices and assuming responsibility for acting in anti-racist ways. Though this space may be more ambiguous, it invokes compassion and commitment to action because it nurtures "profound interconnections with others" (Boler, 1999, p. 187). I believe working towards this middle space between guilt and innocence entails a critical perspective primarily because this is not common practice. Critical moments #2, #3 and #4 also offer salient examples of this practice of freedom. With critical moment #2, Eduardo declaring "I am not white" offered evidence of a student, whether explicitly or not, reading against the black/white dichotomy of Julius Lester's text, *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road.* Similarly, Mindy, in critical moment #3, claimed her response location as a White reader

seemingly in opposition to the way the text *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road* positioned her. And Darrin, in making historical connections between Jesus Christ and slaves, offered a response he thought might be "against the rules."

Darrin: That the rules say we can't use any religious stuff in school.

Rita: Who says you can't?

Darrin: The rules.

Unlike the focus on whole class discussions with the preceding two chapters, the students used a one-to-one conversation and writing as critical literacy practices while exploring provocative content. These examples, especially the writing, highlight the different ways Rita encouraged responses from students.

Concluding thoughts and questions

Embedded in the vignette that opened this chapter were two questions: When and how might students identify their social locations? And, how can students talk about and come to understand difference(s) across race without essentializing difference(s)? The vignette prefigured the role and import of testimonial response as well as the dangers of oversimplifying or essentializing readers' response locations (i.e., Desiree standing back up near the end of the process of elimination exercise).

The four critical moments in this chapter enriched the storyline, providing poignant examples of young readers making past to present connections, engaging deeply with texts, considering collectivist orientations, and negotiating their response locations. This analysis also points to a host of questions. Some of these are more general questions that pertain to testimonial response, such as: Do only certain texts support testimonial responses? Can a testimonial response become a habit of mind, a general disposition, as

opposed to a response that occurs only under certain circumstances? What role does testimonial response have with what we might want children to know? These questions link to at least two additional big questions about students as readers. What is a reader's role in relation to history? And, what does one's current social location have to do with understanding this role?

There are also questions more immediately germane to this dissertation, such as: What did it mean for the students to understand slavery and racism? And, what did students do with these understandings? With an emphasis on the students' inquiry-based projects and study of poetry (the culminating parts of the unit), the next chapter grapples with these questions.

CHAPTER SEVEN

LEAVING A LEGACY: COMING TO KNOW ABOUT SOCIAL JUSTICE THROUGH INQUIRY PROJECTS AND POETRY

> I get furious when I think about child slavery going on around the world." (Jason, 6/5/01)
>
> We are wondering, did the cop kill him because he was black? Was it because of skin color or because he had a criminal record?... We have found that more African American men have been killed by white police officers....This research shows this seems to be racial problem. (Dwayne & Darrin, 6/5/01)
>
> I chose this poem because it is criticizing Native Americans, and I am Native American. (Crissy, 6/5/01)

These excerpts appear on a CD the students and Rita created as a way to document their language arts work during the last few months of the school year. As a multimedia product, the CD mirrored the diverse ways the students and Rita engaged in their study of freedom and slavery, especially from April through June. The CD, for example, included students performing skits, reading essays they wrote, and reciting poetry. With Rita encouraging them to "leave a legacy" for other students in the school, the CD contained student inquiry projects about freedom and slavery as well as poetry the students explored and created.

Although the CD includes both inquiry projects and poetry, this was not part of the initial plan. Originally, these two areas of study were conceived as separate. First, students were to conclude their study of *Freedom Train: The story of Harriet Tubman* and the range of texts used in the unit by completing a culminating activity: an inquiry-based final project. The students accomplished this goal. The first two excerpts above, from Jason and Dwayne and Darrin, highlight how these projects included past to present connections based on their study of slavery and an examination of social injustices (e.g.,

racial profiling and discrimination). A poetry unit was to follow these inquiry projects. However, due in part to scheduling and time constraints, students continued working on their inquiry projects after the study of poetry began. One result was that the study of poetry soon became immersed in issues of social justice, as the excerpt from Crissy above suggests. The students and Rita ended up reading, responding to and composing poems about social justice issues. In this way, an organic integration between the inquiry projects and the study of poetry emerged. The CD aimed to capture this integration, highlighting how the students employed a range of literacy practices to explore complex social justice issues.

This chapter is organized with the CD as a focal point. Because this CD included examples from the students' inquiry projects as well as their work with poetry, I first examine each of these areas independently. My primary goal is twofold: to examine the content of the CD, noting the issues and range of topics the students explored, and to consider how the students and Rita created the CD, highlighting the emergent, critical and collaborative qualities of this creative endeavor. This analysis illumines the practice of freedom, *acting with compassion for social justice.* As demonstrated by the CD, the students became more explicit producers of knowledge. This is a fundamental tenet of becoming more critically aware participants in a democracy, as Banks reminds us: "Students must not only be able to interrogate and reconstruct knowledge, but must also be able to produce knowledge themselves if they are to be effective citizens in the multicultural world of the 21st century" (Banks, 1995, p. 15).

The inquiry-based final projects

As the students concluded their reading and discussion of the primary text, *Freedom Train,* and the other texts Rita selected for the unit (10 picture books and 2 movies), the culminating activity was next. Consistent with Rita's principal goal throughout the unit – supporting students to ask and pursue their own questions – inquiry was Rita's guiding goal for this concluding activity. With Rita designing the activity so they could initiate topics of study, the students began their projects in late April and, mostly in pairs and small groups, revised their topics and types of projects over the next two weeks. For example, a large group of ten students working on creating a skit divided into three groups, a student switched her focus from child slavery to affirmative action, and a group revised their plan of writing and illustrating a children's book to researching and writing an essay about child slavery.

In completing their inquiry projects, the students pursued a range of topics and modes to represent their ideas. They examined historical and contemporary instantiations of slavery, censorship, racial profiling, and affirmative action through skits, plays, television news reports, editorials, essays, a collage, and two research studies based on their own survey data. What follows is a brief description of these projects.

- Three skits about freedom and slavery:
    1. skit set in past where slaves escape but some are caught and beaten. (Students end skit with link to contemporary instantiations of child slavery around the world).
    2. skit set in the present as two children discuss how they are being censored by their parents from watching a certain television show. (The show is not named).
    3. skit set in the present as two children discuss how a city-wide curfew is unfair to children and young adults.

- Newspaper report and editorial about how the African American teenager, Timothy Thomas, was killed by a White police officer in Cincinnati.

- Two essays/editorials about current cases of child slavery around the world.

- Comparative study of different depictions of slavery in a textbook, historical magazine, and children's literature.

- Collage of newspaper and magazine clippings dealing with slavery or freedom (e.g., product advertisements promising greater levels of freedom).

- Study of adult beliefs (teachers and parents) of affirmative action (based on survey created by a student).

- Study of parent and student beliefs about child slavery (based on survey created by a student).

The inquiry projects were diverse, grounded in students' concerns and interests, focused upon past to present connections and were rooted in issues of social justice. Students grappled with complex topics – child slavery, affirmative action, racial profiling – and enacted a set literacy practices, critically reading and creating a range of texts like reports, essays, and skits. Throughout the process, the students helped each other develop their inquiry ideas. For example, the catalyst for the child slavery emphasis was a student who brought in a newspaper article that described child slavery in Africa. Other newspaper articles brought in by students or Rita also shaped choices of other students (e.g., articles about riots in Cincinnati after Timothy Thomas, an African American, was killed). These were all goals Rita aimed to enact.

Pedagogical goals and challenges

Some key goals

During one discussion about her goals for the final projects (4/26/01), Rita and I developed project guidelines,[15] which Rita distributed to the students (see Appendix D to view these guidelines). These guidelines included four parts: reviewing your learning, choosing a topic, representing your learning, and leaving a legacy.

[15] During this discussion, I recorded our ideas on a laptop, which Rita then printed and distributed to her students.

By emphasizing "leaving a legacy" for future groups of students, Rita designed the project with hopes that students would see themselves as part of history, contributing to the intellectual and social development of the school into the distant future. With this profound goal in mind, the Final Project guidelines embodied four criteria aimed to govern the development and enactment of the students' inquiry projects: 1. building from experiences and passions of students; 2. making past to present connections; 3. maintaining an open and flexible working environment; and 4. creating authentic intellectual products.

First and foremost, Rita wanted students to pursue their "passions" as they inquired into an issue or topic related to slavery/freedom that was meaningful for them. Rita wanted students to reflect on their experiences during the unit, consider some of the most powerful, intriguing, confusing, etc. moments and build upon these. Second, Rita wanted students to wrestle with past to present to future connections. She believed that up to this point in the unit, the students had raised and began pursuing many provocative questions about the relationship between slavery in 19th century America and contemporary society, so the inquiry projects would enable students to both pull together and extend their learning. For example, during one whole class brainstorming session about the final projects, one student, Delvin, used the example of James Byrd, an African American man in Jasper, Texas, who was dragged to his death from the back of a truck driven by several White males, to challenge the idea that things are much better now for African Americans.[16] Rita discussed that one possible project or inquiry that Delvin or

[16] It bears noting that in this classroom, Delvin had several opportunities to pursue this issue. He brought up this example several times across the unit: once in December before the unit began, again in April as the inquiry projects were about to begin, and yet again during an end of unit interview in June. He was not

others could pursue was closely comparing and contrasting what many slaves experienced with what happened to James Byrd in Texas.

As a third criterion, connected to the goal of students pursuing their passions, Rita wanted to offer space for students to choose both the form and content of their projects. The potential range and diversity of project ideas was soon evident during a whole class brainstorming session when the students expressed their interests in working in small groups to write plays, stories, songs, and conduct research (e.g., survey all students in school about their views of slavery, survey students and adults about their views of affirmative action, and interview teachers and parents about their understandings of child slavery). They also discussed the possibility of designing a class web page to represent and share all the students' work (4/23/01).

The fourth criterion entailed creating authentic intellectual products. These products could be used to deepen their own understandings about freedom and slavery as they learned from each other's work. Students could also extend this learning to other audiences in the school and community. Rita said, "I want them to strengthen themselves and the community" because "I want them thinking about how they can make an impact on their world" (Planning session, 4/20/01). For Rita, "making an impact" equated with "taking action" and "leaving a legacy" as she explicitly asked students, "What legacy do you want to leave as a 5th grader in this school?" (see part four in Appendix D).

Several key challenges

These goals posed a number of pedagogical and learning challenges. Similar to the pedagogical challenges described in the three preceding chapters, the challenges

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given an answer early on; instead, moments continued to present themselves where he could again think through this complicated example.

examined in this chapter pertain to all inquiry-oriented teachers, even highly experienced teachers. However, these challenges seem especially difficult for a novice teacher like Rita who has never embarked on a pedagogical project like this.

Rita needed to support students as they selected and pursued diverse topics of inquiry and various modes of representation (e.g., skits, essays, survey research). For example, as students researched websites on the Internet (there were four Internet-ready computers in the classroom) and wrote reports or essays, Rita needed to assist them with analyzing and interpreting overwhelming amounts of information. Some of the students struggled with finding relevant websites and reading difficult text found on these websites.

Another challenge entailed helping students conduct empirical research. For example, one student wanted to conduct interviews with teachers and parents about their views of affirmative action. As a result, Rita needed to help this student first understand some key ideas about affirmative action – What is it? When and why was it created? – as well as support her to create interview questions, conduct the interviews, and interpret/analyze the results. A related challenge surfaced when two students wanted to do a textual analysis of several textbook accounts of slavery as well as a handful of magazines and newspaper articles about child slavery. This required that Rita help students find and select the resources, choose which were most appropriate to analyze, and devise a way to do the analysis and write up or present the findings. Several groups of students also wanted to write, direct and perform short plays or skits about connections between slavery and their own lives presented yet another challenge. Rita needed to help

these students negotiate group and individual roles and responsibilities for each step in this creative process as well as provide feedback on their writing and performances.

Two additional challenges persisted for much of the unit. The first, students switching inquiry topics, stemmed from Rita's goal that "students take ownership of their learning" (Planning session, 4/23/01). With the open-ended inquiry approach, Rita did not want to force students to stick to a topic if their "passions" were leading them elsewhere. For example, two students, who originally began writing and illustrating a children's book, decided after several extended work sessions that they preferred to do research on the Internet and write an essay about child slavery. Rita supported their shift in focus, yet believed these students would find it difficult to catch up to their classmates. Students modifying their projects linked to another persistent challenge: assessing students' work. When the creation of a CD (where the students would perform or talk about their individual or small group projects) became the most feasible way to make the class's learning public, Rita wondered how to effectively gauge student involvement and learning in terms of what amount of writing she should require, how to use different assessment criteria across various projects (e.g., essays and skits), and how both individuals and small groups could be accountable for their learning. Rita eventually devised ways to address these assessment challenges, employing informal assessment strategies (e.g., checklists and note-taking) as well as formal strategies (e.g., grades for completed projects). Yet, she remained concerned about whether she was adequately gauging some students' work.

Cutting across all these challenges were scheduling and time constraints. In general, inquiry-based approaches require significant blocks of time as students pose and

pursue meaningful questions and worthwhile topics, and this was clearly the case for the students and Rita. And similar to many other classrooms, the students also lost valuable work time on their final projects due to standardized tests. During April and May, students completed two rounds of standardized tests. The first was a national test that was administered over four days and the second were quarterly district-wide tests in both reading and math. As a result, when the poetry unit began in mid-May, many of the students had not completed their inquiry projects. Rita thought most students had done some creative and critical work, yet she needed to schedule time for final project work after the poetry unit began. This strategy enabled all but three students to have some completed project to share for the creation of the CD. Eventually the final project work of 16 students made it onto the CD. The other students elected to read poetry for the CD (their own poems or other poems they wished to read).

Again, it bears noting that although all inquiry-minded teachers must confront these challenges, Rita negotiated these challenges as a first-year teacher, as she wrestled with some complicated questions. For example, supporting students to pursue topics they selected and being flexible when they switch topics is challenging terrain to navigate. How much flexibility is appropriate? How much support can a teacher provide students? Which project ideas are too difficult to support? Although these challenges are never definitively solved, they seem more pronounced for novice teachers like Rita because she has never explored this territory before. She was learning much along the way with no available reference points from pervious experiences to evaluate her performance.

In sum, each student pursued an inquiry topic and created a product to share with classmates. The inquiry topics varied, yet each student's work aligned with the goals Rita

outlined in the Final Project Guidelines handout. The pedagogical goals and challenges were rooted in the emergent, organic qualities of the inquiry-based projects and were shaped further by a deepening commitment to issues of social justice, a commitment that intensified as the students and Rita read, responded to and composed their own poetry.

Reading, responding to, and composing poetry

> Critical awareness may be somehow enhanced, as new possibilities open for reflection. Poetry does not offer us empirical or documentary truth, but it enables us to "know" in unique ways. (Greene, 1988, p. 131)
>
> Poetry can break open locked chambers of possibility... (Adrienne Rich, as cited in Edelsky, 1999a, p. 13)
>
> That poem really changed my life. (Neil, student in Rita's class, 6/6/01)

In this section, I concentrate on the ways the students and Rita read, responded, created, and performed poetry. This analysis reveals how poetry became integrated with the final projects, as students wrestled with ideas and questions about freedom, slavery and American identity. Initially, the study of poetry was to take place after the students completed their inquiry projects. Yet, due to scheduling and time challenges, the students and Rita began their exploration of poetry before the inquiry project work concluded. As a result, poetry became integrated with the final projects. This story of integration can be understood as *natural*, an organic process as students and Rita began to see inquiry and social justice in everything they were doing in the classroom.

Telling the story this way would be an accurate account of what transpired. However, an additional story needs to be told. The students did not 'naturally' see poetry and issues of social justice as integrated. Instead, they began the poetry unit with particular beliefs about poetry, its uses and purposes. One student, Crissy, however, helped challenge these beliefs, provoking a shift from thinking of poetry as "expressing

feelings" that tend to be "sappy" to seeing the power and purposes of poetry as enabling conversations and understandings about complex topics such as what it means to be American.

In the ensuing sections, I first describe how the poetry unit was created, and I share results from the pre-unit poetry surveys. Next, I consider how issues of social justice were woven into the ways the students read, discussed and wrote poetry. I then describe how poetry was incorporated into the creation of the CD. Each part of this story reveals the students coming to know about the power and purposes of poetry.

Creating a poetry unit and assessing students' ideas about poetry

Rita read, discussed and wrote poetry with her students at different points in the year but believed that up until this time, the class had only skimmed the surface with poetry. With poetry as the genre that her school district suggested she teach during the last part of the school year, Rita was eager to explore poetry in greater depth before the year ended.

During one planning session (4/26/01), Rita and I discussed the need to assess students' ideas about poetry before the unit began. This assessment occurred in two ways. Rita administered an initial poetry survey and then led a whole class discussion after the students completed the survey. Eighteen students (9 boys and 9 girls) completed the survey.[17] The poetry survey, adapted from Apol & Harris (1999), was administered on May 15 and included eight writing prompts.

1. Poetry is...
2. When I think about poetry I think about...
3. I have written poems about...

[17] Though the unit began with 28 students in February, by May, two students were rarely in class due to medical and personal issues. Of the 8 students who did not complete the survey (8 out of the 26), three were absent and five never handed their surveys in.

4. Why do people write poems?
5. Do you have any favorite poets or poems?
6. What do you think it takes to be a poet?
7. Are you a poet? How would you know?
8. Any other ideas or things you want to share or are wondering about?

The surveys provided some initial information about the students' perceptions of poetry. The predominant theme across the surveys equated poetry with "expressing feelings." In response to the first prompt, most students (15 of 18) wrote that "poetry is..." about expressing one's feelings or "inner thoughts" and in response to the fourth writing prompt, "Why do people write poems?" all but one student included something about expressing feelings, writing things like "whether it's sad, or happy, mad or glad" or "to get things off their chest."

In terms of poetry topics, the students mentioned that they had written poems about school, friends, family, seasons, and pets. A few students listed poems about more abstract concepts like 'time', 'space', 'hurt' and 'freedom,' but none of their responses showed any explicit connections to broader social issues like slavery, racism, and other social inequities. Some students attended to the craft of poetry, several listing "rhyming" as what they think about poetry (prompt #2). One student shared that "being a poet" (prompt #6) required "being able to use metaphors, similes, [and] being very descriptive."

There were gender differences across the responses. Girls were more likely to have favorite poets or poems, with seven girls listing Shel Silverstein, Jack Prelutsky, or both, and one student listing Emily Dickinson. No boys listed a favorite poet. And in response to prompt #7, "Are you a poet?" seven girls saw themselves as poets, and none of the boys did. These gender differences seemed to coincide with the prevailing

perception across the surveys that poetry is primarily about "expressing feelings." The phrase "expressing feelings" could be linked to social justice causes and action – i.e., people are moved to action based on very strong feelings toward a particular cause or agenda. However, the phrase could also be cast and understood more pejoratively, being equated with weakness or with "being sappy." This was the case for most of the boys in the class.

Poetry is "sappy"

After the students completed the survey, Rita asked what the students were wondering about. In what became more common as the unit progressed, the students responded to each other during the discussion. Dwayne shared, "I'm wondering if poets have to be sad to write poems." Mitch responded that they don't, but that "poets need to be motivated or interested in what they are writing about." Soon thereafter, Tashima asked, "How do poets write? And what is the purpose of poetry?" Focusing on Tashima's second question, many students emphasized "the expression of feelings" or "the expression of thoughts and feelings."[18] For example, Mindy said, "Poetry can help people express feelings that may be difficult to do in person." Desiree echoed this sentiment, pointing out that poets "show how they feel with words on a piece of paper" (5/15/01).

Evan then said, "Poetry is kind of sappy." Rita asked Evan to explain and he replied, "Well, it's about expressing sappy stuff, feelings and stuff." Most boys nodded their heads in agreement. The next day during a partner conversation with Neil, Evan explained what he meant by "poetry is sappy." Evan commented that "poets just use flowery words for stuff." Neil echoed this by stating, "Sometimes it's just not necessary"

[18] 6 of the 7 students who responded to Tashima's question focused on feelings and other students were nodding their heads in agreement.

and Evan followed up with an example. "Yeh, it's like instead of writing "the breeze blew the grass" it would say something like "the gentle breeze blew the tall grass northward." This example, which roughly equated poetry with adjective or adverb use (i.e., gentle, tall, and northward), is based on Evan and Neil's conception that poets "use a lot of description." Evan and Neil were not readers or fans of poetry; they viewed poetry as flowery or sappy. Their perspectives, along with the views of some of their classmates, however, would soon change.

Moving toward social justice – one student leading the way

After the pre-unit surveys, Rita launched the unit by having students explore various poetry books and anthologies. The students perused older anthologies from the school library as well as collections Rita stored in her classroom, including works by Shel Silverstein, Jack Prelutsky, and Emily Dickinson. During this time, one student, Crissy brought to me the following poem and asked what the word "courtesy" meant:

The Buffalo
The buffalo, the buffalo
He had a horrid snuffle
And not a single Indian chief
Would lend the beast a hankerchief
Which shows how very very far
from courtesy these people are.[19]

I asked Crissy what she thought was going on in the poem and she said, "I think it's saying that the Indians aren't nice. They're mean." Crissy then shared the poem with Rita and Rita called me over to talk with both her and Crissy. Rita said, "This is about social justice." Crissy reiterated that the poem is saying Native Americans are "mean" and Rita pointed out, "The ending of the poem 'these people' really gets me" (5/17/01).

[19] I'm not sure if these are the correct line breaks or if this is the correct punctuation. I also do not know the name of the poet.

Rita then read the poem to the whole class and asked, "Why do people write poems?" In the ensuing discussion, several students (all girls) mentioned "expressing feelings." Rita then asked, "What questions do you have when hearing this poem?" Alicia responded, "Who wrote it?" and Crissy asked, "When was it written?" Rita read the poet's name and indicated, "The copyright says it was first published in 1905 and then it has been reprinted several times up until 1955." Evan said, "Well, it probably wasn't written by a Native American." One follow up question that Rita asked was, "If this were published in 2001, would it be different?" Neil responded, "Maybe but there are still problems. There is still hatred in the world" (5/17/01).

This exchange led by Crissy is significant for several reasons. It was the first instance of an explicit social justice or critical reading stance toward a poem, and it came from a student. By this point in the school year, the students had done this kind of reading with other texts (e.g., examining biography in Chapter 5), but this represented the first critical stance to poetry, as the students examined issues of authorship (e.g., "Well, it probably wasn't written by a Native American"). With this poem, Crissy also introduced an example about discrimination against Native Americans, a move beyond the class's emphasis on African Americans. This was an explicit goal Rita had for the final projects. Moreover, in the CD the students created, Crissy elected to read this poem and then explained her rationale for selecting it: "The reason I chose this poem is because it criticizes Native Americans, and I am Native American" (6/5/01). This exchange led by Crissy also elicited some discussion about past to present connections as Nate responded to Rita's question, "If this were published in 2001, would it be different?" by pointing out, "Maybe but there are still problems. There is still hatred in the world." The issue

about whether "things were better today" for African Americans (and other marginalized groups) surfaced throughout the unit.

Crissy helped generate key questions about race, identity, history and discrimination – topics the students and Rita would soon explore in greater depth.

"What does it mean to be American?": Reading and discussing social justice poetry

Responses to the poem "The Buffalo" compelled Rita to introduce poems that emphasized social justice issues. After the above discussion (5/17/01), Rita intoned, "I'm seeing social justice issues everywhere!" (5/17/01). The next day I brought in a collection of poems that I compiled, including "The Powwow at the End of the World" written by Sherman Alexie (1996), a few poems by Langston Hughes (1996), including "Harlem" and "Dreams," and several poems by Janet Wong (e.g., 1994). These poems offered explicit connections to social justice issues and broadened the content from issues focusing on African Americans to include issues affecting Native Americans and Asian Americans. Of all these poems, the most classroom time was dedicated to reading and responding to Janet Wong's poems, in particular her poem, "Bombs Bursting in Air." With this poem, students wrestled with issues of identity, discrimination, and what it means to be American through journal writing and class discussions. In so doing, they also challenged the stereotype that poetry is solely about "expressing feelings" that tend to be "sappy."

Responding to the poem, "Bombs Bursting in Air"

In Janet Wong's poem, "Bombs Bursting in Air," an Asian American woman[20] attends a baseball game with several presumably White men (called "big rowdy guys" in

[20] The gender of this character is not revealed in the poem, but most of Rita's students referred to this person as "she" seemingly because Janet Wong is a woman.

the poem) sitting nearby. While an Asian American man sings the national anthem, the White men make fun of the singer, issuing racist slurs about him being "a Jap" and not "American."

The students first responded to "Bombs Bursting in Air" in their journals (5/30/01). After reading the poem to the class, Rita posed an open-ended writing prompt, "What does the poem make you think or feel about?" Many of the students wrote that the "big rowdy guys" were "cruel," "mean," or "disgusting." Some students also indicated that these rowdy guys were unlawful. Eduardo wrote, "What the poem meant to me is that there is freedom with laws because the person singing the national anthem was Asian. So any body can sing it." Another student argued "the big rowdy guys" were incorrectly interpreting the national anthem. Mindy wrote, "What I feel about in this poem is that some people don't care about the national anthem or their cultures." Two students included references to Japan. Vicky wrote, "To me this poem means like it is about Japan. When they were in war against the Americans." And Carl wrote, "What is unfair about this poem is that the Japanese person did nothing to the guys and they were making fun of them! I think that the guys should give the Japanese person a chance to prove he's not a bad guy like the boy did! I think that once they found out about what he's really like they would change their minds!"

Other students also composed noteworthy responses, making connections to slavery, racism and interracial understanding. Britney linked the poem to slavery: "I think this poem means almost like slavery people laughing at other people just because of their color or what they are like Asian." Neil pointed out, "The poem means there is still racial discrimination in this world." Tashima wrote about the need for interracial understanding:

"I think it means that most people are just jealous about other people and that they need to learn how to get along with other people all kinds of people like blacks, white, mix people from all over the state." Another student, Susan, argued, "The poem Bombs Bursting in Air means that some people do make fun of other cultures and countries and that's not right." She also added a more general comment about the purposes or power of poetry. "Poetry could change someone's thinking by doing what a story might do, explain the situation. Maybe if people knew more about the situation they wouldn't do what they did now."

After their journal writing, students discussed their responses with the whole class. During this discussion, several students made connections to the movie *Pearl Harbor*, which eight students had seen the previous weekend. This led to some conversation about how the European Americans who forced Japanese Americans into internment camps exhibited similar racist attitudes as the "big rowdy guys" in Janet Wong's poem, "Bombs Bursting in Air." During this part of the discussion, the students and Rita shifted back and forth between the poem "Bombs Bursting in Air" and the movie "Pearl Harbor." For example, after Evan said, "I see racial discrimination in the poem," and Rita asked if anyone else had something to share, Alicia responded, "I would like to hear the perspective of the Japanese about this movie." Near the end of this discussion, Neil seemed to sum up a central theme by asking, "What does it mean to be American? Because the guys in the poem who are saying 'Jap' are not technically any more American than the author of the poem."

The student responses to "Bombs Bursting in Air", through journal writing and class discussions, showed how students were coming to further understand issues of

discrimination and American identity. Drawing upon a reference to popular culture, the movie, "Pearl Harbor," and historical understandings of Japanese internment, extended this line of inquiry.

Responding to the poems, "Speak Up" and "Noise"

By also foregrounding issues of language, race and power, two additional Janet Wong poems, "Speak Up" and "Noise," further stimulated the students' inquiries into their conceptions of what it might mean to be American. The poem, "Speak Up," is written for two voices: one voice is Korean American and the other voice is presumably European American. In the poem, the two characters discuss whether the Korean American can be identified as American. In a written response to this poem, Tina pointed out that no one is "really officially American." In her journal, she wrote:

> I can't handle people talking about other people especially if they are different. I like 'Speak Up' because at the end Janet says "Your family came from some where else" and the other person says "But I was born here". Janet says "So was I". It also says "But I'm American can't you see". No one is really official American. (5/31/01)

The poem, "Noise," also elicited strong responses from students and further shaped an understanding that defining who is an American is not so clear-cut. In "Noise," the narrator is of Chinese descent and resists racist name-calling (i.e., being called "Ching Chong Chinaman"). In his response to this poem, Aaron wrote, "They have no right to say that to that man and how would they like it if someone did that to them and see how that man felt" (5/31/01). In her journal, Crissy pointed out discerning American identity

is complicated because all Americans, just like the narrator of "Noise," have come from somewhere else at some time.

> One poem that really sticks out to me is "Noise." Because everyone that is born in America is American. But in another way everyone who is American is also something else. (5/31/01)

This emphasis on American identity more clearly established that issues of discrimination and racism not only affected African Americans. The Janet Wong poems shifted the focus toward Asian Americans and the Sherman Alexie poem, "The Powwow at the End of the World" pointed to a focus on Native Americans (building upon Crissy's critique of the poem "The Buffalo"). Through whole class discussions and writing in their journals, the students wrestled with complicated ideas of what being American means or might mean. The students' responses, through small and large group discussions and extensive journal writing, demonstrate their high level of engagement with these poems. Students grappled with the content of the poems, coming to understand that poetry can be more than "sappy." Poetry could provoke and challenge them as readers, even transforming their understandings of the world, as Neil suggested in an end of unit interview:

> That [the poem, "Bombs Bursting in Air"] really changed my life. I just read it once and it changed me so much because it's like I never really thought of that to see somebody who doesn't look American singing the National Anthem. Does it mean they're not American? I mean maybe their parents are from Asia, but they're born right in America. (6/6/01)

In addition to reading and responding to poems, the students also composed their own poetry, assembling their work in individual poetry books.

Creating their own poetry books

With the hectic end of school year rush, there was not as much time as Rita hoped for students to write their own poems and create their own poetry books. Despite the time constraints, 24 of the students created their own books with 4-10 poems (most wrote 4-5). The poetry book assignment was, for the most part, open-ended. Students could write as many poems as they wished, and Rita encouraged but did not require that they include a "Where I'm from" poem (based on an activity Rita and I led during one whole class session – see Christensen (2000) for a description of this activity) and a poem for two voices. Rita did require a title page, table of contents, and a dedication page. She also situated the poetry book assignment as part of the students "leaving a legacy" to future students in their school. Rita intended the poetry books to be stored in her classroom and the school library.

Exploring issues of social justice

Rita did not require students to write about social justice issues for their poetry collections, yet all but one student included a poem either entitled freedom, justice, or equality or they wrote about other social justice issues such as the Oklahoma City bombings, war in general, and choosing not to hate across racial differences. For example, in his poem about the Oklahoma City bombings, Aaron tackled the topic of Timothy McVeigh's execution:

> They stuck one needle
> for his muscle and
> another for moving and the other
> for dying

As the class continued their work with their inquiry projects and poetry, one student, Crissy, seemed to make especially deep connections between her own experiences and

broader social issues. One of the poems in Crissy's collection was entitled, "What about other people" in which she critiqued the policy of sending money to other countries when there were people in the United States who needed help. One of these groups were "people who have learning disabilities who most likely weren't going to go to college." In an end of unit interview, Crissy mentioned that both her father and brother had learning disabilities. These learning disabilities prevented her father from going to college. As a result, he worked several jobs to support the family. Crissy also feared that learning disabilities would prevent her brother from going to college and garnering the presumed economic and social benefits that college would provide.

In another poem entitled, "Government," Crissy explicitly addressed economic inequities in terms of taxes. The end of this poem read:

> because
> of taxes
> people
> living on
> the streets
> I
> tell you taxes aren't
> fair. I want justice.

Other students also explored issues through an economic lens. Allen wrote a poem for two voices entitled, "The Money Man":

> I'm rich!
>
> I'm poor.
>
> I live in a house!
>
> I live in bag of trash.
>
> I have a wife and kids!
>
> I have none.
>
> But we're alive!
> Good night!
>
> But we're alive!
>
> Good bye.

And Evan wrote a poem entitled, "More Equality":

Equality. We need
more Equality
equality in our
economy

In their poetry books, most students, in some way or another, expressed that prejudice was wrong and pointed to the need to either "get along with each other" or understand the similarities between different racial groups. Though many of these poems were relatively brief (4-6 lines), one student, Rick, wrote a lengthier poem about racism called, "Color skins":

It doesn't matter about
peoples races or their different
color faces. We're all the
same. Everybody is different, But
nobody is better than one and
another. Some say people are black
and some say people are white,
But does that give them a
reason to fight. Some say people
are dark like tree bark and some
say people are white. Are they
right? No their not. White like
the color paper. I write
on and black isn't the color of
tree bark and you shouldn't
see anyone like that, should
WE?

Another student, Neil, offered an opportunity for the students to critically reflect on their class pledge, a series of affirming statements and goals that the students created and recited each morning (e.g., "I am wonderfully made" and "I will listen and respect the ideas of others").

Class Pledge
The pledge of the class seems to
be important when most people are repeating
what is heard. But when the pledge

is over and everyone sits down the
pledge was just a bunch of words
that were lying around.

Students also wrote about friendship, pets, and family, yet it remains significant that all but one student chose to write about complex topics like the bombings in Oklahoma City, taxes, economic equality, and racism. These more explicit social justice themes aligned with the poems by Sherman Alexie, Langston Hughes and Janet Wong and the student responses to these poems. In this respect, the poetry unit became tightly integrated with the final project inquiry work and the creation of the CD.

Pedagogical insights

The poetry unit also offered Rita some valuable insights as a teacher. She knew many of her students enjoyed poetry, but she believed this enjoyment was limited to authors such as Shel Silverstein and Jack Prelutsky, poets who predominately engage readers with clever rhyme and humor. Though not disparaging of these poems, Rita found out that her students were willing and able to explore poetry that addressed more complex social and political issues. Encouraged by Crissy reading against the poem, "The Buffalo," Rita incorporated poems by Sherman Alexie, Langston Hughes, and Janet Wong. These poems did not rhyme, nor were they were humorous.

The ways Rita engaged her students with these poems speak to a key current issue in language arts teaching and learning. Bloome argues for the importance of moving from questions like "What does it mean?" or "What emotions or feelings does the poem evoke?" to questions like, "What social, political and cultural work does the poem do?" or "How does this poem transform the relationship of different groups of people to each other?" (2003, p. 13). Although Bloome's use of "poem" refers to Rosenblatt's (1978)

concept of "poem," the evocation from the exchange between a reader and a text, the more conventional use of "poem" (as a literary genre) also applies to Bloome's argument. In other words, in Rosenblatt's terms, "the poems" the students generated in their meaning-making processes with texts marked this movement to political and cultural concerns. The students came to understand that poetry could be a catalyst for engaging in social issues. And the "poems" (the literary texts of Janet Wong, Langston Hughes and Sherman Alexie), with their overt political and social content, also illumine this shift. Bloome further argues for the need to ask questions "about the relationship of meaning construction to social, civil, and economic justice" (p. 13). Rita and her group of 5th graders made this shift by building on their emotional responses to particular poems (this was often the first part of Rita's writing prompts) to considering the social and political consequences of the poems, in terms of what each poem meant and the consequences of these meanings in their own lives. They also took a pivotal next step: communicating some of their poetry to a larger audience.

Performing poetry – linking to the CD creation

Because the poetry unit became more integrated with the inquiry projects and a group of students were excited about particular poems, the students and Rita decided to include poetry on the CD. In the end, the CD included poetry contributions from eight students and Rita. (I describe these in the next section). Each of these poems and the reasons the students chose them embodied a social justice perspective. Evan, for example, chose to read the poem "White" as evidence to argue against using the terms 'White' and 'Black' to describe European American and African American people. Evan first made this argument during a whole class discussion of *Freedom Train: The Story of*

Harriet Tubman, pointing out that "No one is really the color white or black" (2/21/01). His selection of the poem, "White," for the CD helped him reassert this claim. It also bears noting that Evan was one of the students who had labeled poetry "flowery" and "sappy." Yet here he used a poem to support an argument about racial identity and classification, a substantive political argument. In an end of unit interview, Evan described his new understanding of poetry, stating that some poems were still sappy, but others were not. He shared, "You can have a sappy poem and a straight up poem," pointing out that the poems by Janet Wong, Langston Hughes and Sherman Alexie were "straight up" poems (6/6/01).

Putting the CD together

In late April, several days into the final project work, during one class discussion, Rita and the students brainstormed titles for the CD. Several of the students' ideas were: Let's take action; The next big war; The next event; Back then and slavery; Fifth graders take action; and Is slavery back? Then after one student shared "slavery is confusing", two students suggested the titles: Apathy vs. Empathy; and Slavery and the World's Confusion. Rita asked the students to vote on their favorite title (Fifth graders take action was selected), and each of these titles made their way onto a bulletin board outside the classroom, but the eventual title that appeared on the CD was "Exploring Freedom," a synthesis of these suggested titles.

During the final two weeks of the school year, the students prepared their work to be videotaped for the CD. The CD represented an integration of the inquiry project work related to the Freedom Train unit and work from the poetry unit. All 28 students contributed to the CD (this was essential to Rita) and the students, with my guidance, did

the bulk of the videotaping work – setting up the equipment, videotaping, and putting the equipment away at the conclusion of each videotaping session. After all the video was recorded, Rita and I, along with expert support of a technology guide at the university, put the CD together.

Throughout all the conversations about the creation of the CD, Rita reiterated the importance of students "leaving a legacy" for future students in the school. For example, after one of our conversations, she shared: "I want them to know that they can make a difference in the lives of others now. They don't have to wait until they get older" (5/31/01). Framing the CD in terms of leaving a legacy served multiple goals. One goal was establishing authentic audiences for the students to share their work. The CD enabled students to share their learning with each other. With each other as a primary audience, the students learned more about what their classmates created. In addition to creating a way for the students to share their learning with each other, the CD enabled students to present their work to other audiences, including students in other classes, teachers, administrators and other community members. In presenting their work, students came to see that documenting some of their experiences helped them become part of history itself. The CD, to be stored in the library as well as Rita's classroom, became an historical artifact, a documentary record of some of their learning during the second half of the school year. As a result, future students as well as teachers, administrators and others could discover some of the issues the students and Rita explored.

The CD had 8 sections: (See Appendix F for a printout of the CD's main page).

1. Slavery skit – Mindy, Erica, Britney, Aaron, Eduardo, Teresa
In this video clip, slaves escape then are caught and beaten. After the skit, the students addressed their audience and asked rhetorically, "Aren't you glad slavery is over?" They then pointed out that slavery still exists, citing facts they found on a government website.

2. Freedom skit – Neil, Susan, Amy, Desiree
This video clip, entitled "Expressions of Freedom" included two brief skits – both with contemporary settings. The first focused on a student not being able to watch television – and the question of who decides or should decide about this issue. The second skit concerned curfews placed on children and how this might be unfair. After their performances, the students said the skits were about civil disobedience and freedom.

3. Freedom dance – Delvin performed what he had labeled "a freedom dance."

4. Poetry – This section contained 7 parts.

- Evan reading a poem written by Mary O'Neil called "White." After reading the poem, Evan shared that he chose to read this poem to make the point that, "No one is really this [white] color."
- Rick reading a Langston Hughes' poem, "Dreams"
- Crissy reading the poem, "The Buffalo," and explaining her reason for reading this poem. "I chose this poem because it is criticizing Native Americans, and I am Native American."
- Michael and Allen reading Janet Wong's poem for two voices, "Speak Up"
- Mindy and Vicky reading their own poem for two voices entitled, "Freedom"
- Tashima reading her own poem entitled, "Freedom"
- Rita reading the Langston Hughes poem, "From Mother to Son"

5. Cinncinati riots
This clip showed Darrin and Dwayne assuming the roles of TV news reporters as they described what happened to Timothy Thomas, an African American teenager from Cincinnati, who was killed by a White police officer. Darrin and Dwayne included specific facts gleaned from several newspaper articles they found on the web (e.g., the number of African American men killed by White police officers in Cincinnati). After their report, Darrin and Dwayne offered their own views about the shooting. They pointed out that it wasn't right that Thomas was killed because he was unarmed. They argued:

> We are wondering, Did the cop kill him because he was black? Was it because of skin color or because he had a criminal record?... We have found that more African American men have been killed by White police officers....This research shows this seems to be racial problem.

6. Essays: Child slavery – This section had two parts.
In one clip, Mitch compared child slavery between the past and present, arguing that it should be abolished. Mitch also mentioned that he got some of his information from the website, Human Rights Watch. In the other clip, Jason argued that child slavery was "demonic" and "makes me furious" and mentioned his shock upon reading the website about child slavery entitled "A day in a life." He then shared that one solution to this problem was marching in Washington, D.C. like Martin Luther King.

7. Freedom at recess
In this clip, video images of the students during recess – playing basketball, holding hands in a circle and talking, walking to and from the playground – were put to a music excerpt from "Ella's song," performed by Sweet Honey and the Rock (1997). Rita used this song to launch the unit in February (the refrain in the song is "We who believe in freedom cannot rest...").

8. Putting it all together
The last clip offered a brief synopsis of the class's learning journey from February through June. The clip began with Alicia mentioning that she and the students learned to think of other types of freedom besides just physical freedom – i.e., emotional, spiritual and mental freedom. Neil then talked about whether freedom can really be obtained, arguing that it cannot because people have different ideas and opinions. Mitch argued that child slavery must end, supporting his argument with evidence he found out about young children working 15 hour days. Anne and Tina echoed this argument, pointing out that child slavery around the world must come to an end. Amy, Darrin, and Carl then ended the clip by saying, "Even though this is the end of this exploration, we hope it's the beginning for you." They also stressed the importance of "having more empathy and less apathy."

The CD represented how the students employed a range of literacy practices as they created inquiry projects and read, responded to, and composed poetry. Engaging in the final projects necessitated a broad array of literacy uses. Students drew upon a variety of information sources, books, picture books, newspapers, and multimedia websites, as they analyzed and interpreted these sources as readers conducting their inquiries. Students wrote, created, performed and filmed skits, wrote research reports and essays, and conducted survey research. All these projects required careful, critical reading, expository or dramatic writing, and speaking, as the projects were either filmed and/or shared with classmates. Engaging in poetry invoked similar literacy practices. The students responded to poems through talk in large and small group settings and through journal writing. Students also wrote their own poems, assembling individual poetry books, and all students read or performed a poem to their classmates. Eight students even chose to include their readings/performances of poems on the CD.

In some respects, the CD, as a multimedia project, served as a capstone of the students' work. With a multi-genre approach (reports, essays, editorials, skits, dance, poetry) the students used print, audio and video to document and represent their learning. These ways of engaging with and creating texts in examining issues of social justice also illumines the practice of freedom, *acting with compassion for social justice.*

Acting with compassion for social justice as a practice of freedom

Throughout the whole class discussions along with individual and small group work, the students and Rita learned with and from each other about complex topics like child slavery, racial profiling and race-based riots, affirmative action, and discrimination across ethnic groups. Their ways of engaging with each other were nurtured and sustained by mutual respect, compassion, and critical engagement, as they further developed ways to both honor and challenge one another.

For Rita, creating the CD enabled students to "leave a legacy" for future students, a legacy of the students' work as critical and compassionate problem solvers and activists. The students critically interrogated contemporary social problems like child slavery and racial profiling, and took action in several ways. They first informed their viewers of these conditions. The need for sharing this information or consciousness-raising regarding child slavery was further brought home when one student found out from her survey research that many of her respondents (adults) knew little about the extent of child slavery around the world. And the students did not solely want to share this information; they wanted their viewers to take action. The CD included editorials or essays about these inequitable conditions, persuading viewers to ameliorate or eliminate these problems. This push for explicit social change continued even after the students

created the CD and presented it to several audiences. On the last day of school, the students and Rita delayed their pizza party to finish crafting a letter to President Bush calling for him to help end the injustice of child slavery.

A missing piece

Across these past four chapters, we have witnessed a group of students and a teacher using literacy in enacting practices of freedom. Chapter 4 showed how dialogic discussions – students carefully and critically speaking and listening to one another – helped cultivate a classroom community rooted in mutual respect and critical engagement. Chapter 5, with an emphasis on reading and responding to multiple texts and also grounded in dialogic discussions, demonstrated how students made and deepened connections across texts. Chapter 6 highlighted how students and Rita developed critical perspectives. Along with a one-to-one conversation between a student and Rita, student writing was a pivotal literacy practice in this chapter as students responded to particularly challenging content and issues about slavery and their racial locations as readers. And this chapter, Chapter 7, highlighted how the students employed a range of literacy practices through an organic integration between inquiry projects and a study of poetry to explore complex social justice issues.

With my analyses across the previous four chapters, a key question remains. The students had numerous opportunities to engage with and develop practices of freedom. Yet, what sense did they make of their experiences when the unit concluded?

CHAPTER EIGHT

LOOKING BACK ACROSS THE UNIT: STUDENTS MAKING SENSE OF THEIR EXPERIENCE

> Literally, it'd be kinda weird to have like all White friends or all black friends. [You] might want to have some mix in there. And you could, with that, you could hear what more people have been through as Black or White. (Mitch, interview, 6/5/01)

The previous four chapters demonstrated how the students and Rita engaged in literacy as practices of freedom. Primarily through dialogue and inquiry, they created a vibrant learning community, made and deepened connections across texts and time periods, cultivated critical perspectives as readers, and acted with compassion and care in working for social justice. As embodiments of practices of freedom, each chapter described how the students and Rita opened up new territories or spaces for exploration. Questions about freedom (e.g., Does it exist? How should it be defined? And who gets to define it?) grounded Chapter 4, while considering issues of authorship and purposes for reading multiple texts charted the territory of Chapter 5. Chapter 6 centered upon the racial locations of readers, and Chapter 7 concerned how the students and Rita unlocked new inquiry spaces about issues of freedom and slavery through final projects and poetry.

Multiple data sets informed my findings and claims across these four chapters, highlighting the different paths students and Rita pursued in their explorations of freedom. These inquiry paths were charted and traversed through whole group discussions with Chapters 4 and 5, journal writing and a one-to-one teacher conference with Chapter 6, and whole group discussions, small group inquiry project work, various modes of writing (i.e., journal, essay, skits, poetry), and dramatic performance with Chapter 7. Throughout this dissertation, all 28 students in the class collectively shaped

my analyses and understandings as a researcher. Across the previous four chapters, the voices and ideas of some students were highlighted, either because they assumed key leadership roles among their peers (e.g., Aaron, Neil, Tina and Alicia with Chapter 4) or pointed to provocative teaching and research dilemmas (e.g., Anne, Eduardo, Mindy and Darrin with the issues of guilt and establishing racial locations as readers with Chapter 6).

This chapter explores yet another inquiry space: how the students made sense of what happened during their five-month exploration of slavery, freedom, cultural differences and societal inequities. I extend the data set to examine interviews I conducted with 24 of the 28 students during the last few days of the school year. This chapter brings the voices and ideas of almost all the students more explicitly into the overarching storyline of this dissertation.

Listening to students

My aim here is not to make definitive claims about what the students learned during this five-month period. Instead, I use findings from these interviews to respond again to the research questions that guided this entire dissertation.

- What happens when a group of racially and socioeconomically diverse 5th graders and a first-year teacher, who is committed to issues of social justice, read and respond to a set of texts during a literature-based language arts unit focusing on issues of freedom and slavery?
- How do two sets of factors shape these responses:
    - the inquiry-based perspective of the teacher, including her planning ideas, choices of texts, and in-class instructional moves, and

- the ways the students engage with each other and with their teacher through class discussions, journal writing, and project work?

As these questions suggest (along with my research questions and subquestions across chapters 4-7), my analysis has addressed the opportunities that the students and Rita created and cultivated for critically engaging with texts. This has led me to grapple with the inquiry paths that were charted and to explore how the students and Rita collectively engaged in these explorations. This chapter continues this line of analysis, bringing the voices and ideas of the students again to the center, as I delve into the questions: What sense did the students make of their experiences? What were the students' understandings of where some of their inquiry paths led them?

Setting up the interviews

I interviewed 24 students during the last few days of the school year (6/4/01-6/6/01) as the class finished the CD and their poetry books. Students completed the interviews either in pairs or in groups of three (there were 9 dyads and 2 triads) for two main reasons. The first was to support students to think with another student about their own experiences. Collaboration and dialogue were cornerstones throughout the unit, so I wanted the interviews to mirror this. The other reason concerned scheduling and time constraints. Because I envisioned lengthier interviews with sufficient space and time (20-30 minutes) for students to make sense of what transpired during the unit, conducting the interviews in pairs or in groups of three made this possible.

In April, I designed an initial interview protocol with an extensive and comprehensive set of questions (see Appendix G). I eventually boiled these down to four key questions that framed each interview:

1. What sticks out for you about this unit? What were the highlights for you as a student in this classroom?
2. What are your thoughts about the texts in the unit? Were these books appropriate for you and your 5th grade classmates?
3. How do you know what's true or not when you're reading?
4. What advice would you give to next year's group of 5th graders as they work on this unit?

The first question served as a general open-ended prompt. The second and third questions stemmed from two salient issues the students and Rita wrestled with throughout the unit: the role of texts that depict complex social issues like slavery and ways of understanding textual truths. The fourth question linked to Rita's goal of supporting students to "leave a legacy" to the school.

I asked some follow-up questions to these primary interview questions (e.g., if "class discussions" were a key highlight, I'd ask, "What about class discussions was important to you?" or "Was there a particular discussion that sticks out for you?"), but for the most part I did not stray far from these four initial questions. However, this does not mean that the students offered perfunctory responses, moving quickly through the questions. Instead, students brought up and discussed a range of topics in response to each interview question. This was most likely due to several factors: the interview questions were open-ended, students completed the interviews in pairs or groups of three, thus creating opportunities for dialogue, and as a mainstay in the classroom for the previous five months, I developed meaningful relationships with the students. As a result, students may have perceived there was little need to offer summaries of what happened

during the unit. I was there, so they might have felt it was not necessary to tell me what I already knew.

Consistent with how they engaged with ideas throughout the five-month exploration of slavery, freedom, cultural differences and societal inequities, the students explored various topics in myriad ways during the interviews. Among these topics, I discerned three primary themes: 1. knowing with/in a community, 2. salience of socially important content, and 3. filling in learning gaps. These themes are not mutually exclusive; they overlap and intersect in interesting ways. They also further illumine the four practices of freedom: *building community, making and deepening connections, cultivating critical perspectives,* and *acting with compassion for social justice.*

Knowing with/in community

In making sense of their experiences during the unit, all students referred to the vital contributions of their classmates, pointing to how they listened and learned with and from each other. This included understandings of dialogic discussions, how they came to examine and understand texts, and the perspective that this kind of learning takes time.

Nearly all students (20 of 24) cited the significance of the whole class and small group discussions, with one student (Evan) noting that group discussions "brought up more things than what the book was saying." Eleven students acknowledged the pivotal roles Aaron and Neil played in raising "big" questions and ideas that gave students "a lot to think about." Notably, seven students who stressed the significance of these discussions rarely spoke during them. Yet this did not seem to diminish the importance this part of the unit had for them, as two of these students revealed:

Michael: Those [the whole group discussions] were important because we talked about different things. And if you didn't know one thing, someone could help you.

Carl: Because some people would think of something that we never thought of thinking about.

In this brief excerpt, Michael and Carl pointed to the role and import of dialogue in the classroom learning community. People "help" each other and create knowledge together (i.e., "think of something that we never thought of thinking about").

Dialogic community also made its way into small book club group discussions. Though not a focus of this dissertation, the small group discussions became a more prominent part of classroom instructional time after the first few weeks of the unit. Allen, also an infrequent vocal participant during whole group discussions, noted the dialogic qualities of mutuality and collaboration, describing his interactions with one of his group mates.

Allen: Like if I said something better than Carl, then Carl starts thinking that I know more than him but that's not true because I can learn more things from him and he can learn more things from me.

In discussing aspects of knowing with/in their learning community, students also considered the appropriateness of texts and expressed the importance of juxtaposing texts. All the students enjoyed reading and discussing the primary text, *Freedom Train*, although two students, Evan and Mitch, believed the book more suitable for a younger audience because it "didn't show as much about what really happened." The text that did the best job of describing "what really happened" was *From Slave Ship to Freedom*

Road. Although 16 students discussed how this text was "difficult to read and look at" and upset them as readers, 22 of the 24 students deemed it appropriate for 5th graders. One student, Desiree, believed the text was "too upsetting" for 5th graders and should not be used while another student, Anne, remained undecided about its appropriateness. All other students, however, thought it appropriate, even though, as Alicia noted, "it was too horrible and too cruel to look at."

Because the students held that *From Slave to Freedom Road* depicted more of "what really happened," the book was deemed essential reading. Some students even argued that responding to texts like *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road* as well as other texts in the unit could curtail contemporary acts of racism or discrimination.

> **Mitch**: Probably like some kids might come in thinking that some people aren't as good as them and maybe after reading this unit, they'll think differently.
>
> **James**: They might think some people aren't as good as them?
>
> **Mitch**: Yeah. They're White and other people are Mexican maybe, and they might think oh, they're not cool. They're… and then reading this unit and seeing how slaves were treated and how they're treating their friends, then they might change their opinion on this person.

In other words, some students saw the potential for conversations and learning experiences that particular texts like *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road* might engender. This, in turn, could help cultivate a critical consciousness about past to present connections.

In response to my third interview question – How do you know what's true or not when you're reading? – most students (18 of 24) indicated that discerning textual truths

entailed a process of comparing different texts. While fifteen of these students emphasized comparisons across print texts, two students expressed that these comparisons could include books and movies, and one student mentioned books needed to be juxtaposed with relevant information gleaned from the Internet. Four students alluded to the importance of lived experience in shaping understandings of truth(s). For example, Dwayne noted, "if you get a person that's been there and lived the life and done all that, that will be true because they've been there. If it's based on something that has been wrote, you could not be sure." Another student, Aaron, linked the idea of experience to a family member, his grandmother: "I heard a lot of stuff from my Grandma and stuff from back then because I trust my Grandma, and she says she wasn't treated good back then and stuff." Similarly, Desiree responded, "because some things are put in books they say that it is true facts but some of them may be telling, may be telling, may not be true, may be different because some books aren't true because my Grandma told me."

Of the two remaining students, Vicky indicated that "talking to somebody" aided in the process of discerning textual truths, while Teresa seemed to be the lone student who entrusted the texts with the power to determine its truthfulness.

James: How do you determine whether a book is true or not?

Vicky: If you're reading a book, you have a conversation with someone else...

Teresa: And like on the back covers it says if it's true or if it's not.

James: Does that mean it's true? How do you know?

Teresa: You can check the Internet.

Despite her reference to the Internet, which represents an additional textual source to adjudicate truth claims, Teresa's initial response indicated that a book was true if the

cover claimed it was true. This perspective differed from the other 23 students who explicitly foregrounded the importance of comparisons across a number of texts, either printed texts, movies, or by "talking to somebody." For example, Michael set the comparison criterion at five books. Carl, however, doubted whether five was enough.

> **Michael**: If you read like five books and they say the same exact thing, then it [any single text] might be more true.
>
> **Carl**: Then you might read a couple more to see if it's the same, there still might be something different.

Students also noted another aspect of knowing with/in their learning community: patience. While offering advice for future 5th graders, Susan and Delvin accentuated this need for patience:

> **Susan**: Be patient.
>
> **Delvin**: Be patient and don't be mean to the teacher.
>
> **James**: What do you mean by "be patient?"
>
> **Susan**: It's gonna take a while for them to learn all this.

Other calls for patience were implied as students discussed the recursive nature of their inquiry-based work. At some point in the interviews, most students brought up some of the questions they wrestled with throughout the unit – e.g., Does freedom exist? Can it be defined? Can someone be free and not free? I often followed up these responses, asking: "Where did the class end up? Did you as a class come to any conclusions about these questions?" Most students indicated that no conclusions were reached, pointing to how they returned to the same big questions again and again without arriving at definitive answers. However, this was not to suggest learning was not taking place. For example,

Tina noted that there "was a lot of learning" going on because although some "of the questions turned out to be, stay the same, it had like a different meaning."

Salience of socially important content

Throughout the interviews, the students shared how they wrestled with provocative ideas and "big questions" during the unit, questions like: Does freedom exist? Can someone by free and not free at the same time? How do we know what's true when we are reading? In noting the significance of these ideas and questions, the students discussed historical content about slavery and Harriet Tubman, contemporary conditions of child slavery and racial injustices, and their own personal experiences.

Many students discussed how they learned a great deal about slavery and Harriet Tubman. Most noted how the picture book *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road* (a few students mentioned the movie, *Race to Freedom* (McBrearty, 1994) opened up content areas previously unexamined, helping them explore "some of what really happened back then." Two students, Jason and Aaron, contrasted these learning opportunities with previous school experiences studying slavery.

> **Aaron**: ...they should have told us this [experiences of slaves] much more sooner because we should know anything we want to know about slavery. We should know what happens, what do they do, so we should have been exposed to this before you're even in fifth grade. That's what I think.
>
> **James**: What had you known about slavery before the unit began? Do you remember?
>
> **Aaron**: Well because we did some of this last year but we did it on Martin Luther King though. We did the riots, the boycotting, and all that stuff and what he did.

Jason: Yup, we did that too.

Aaron: That's all we learned last year about slavery but we didn't learn about nothing when they're in slavery.

Jason: I think we just learned when they got out.

In addition to grappling with historical content presented in more direct if not provocative ways, the students also discussed contemporary conditions of slavery. This was a critical learning experience for the students. At some point in their interviews, 22 of the 24 students mentioned how surprised they were to learn that slavery still existed. Several students cited what they learned from their own research reports or essays about current instantiations of child slavery around the world.

Other students also explored explicit past to present connections, wrestling with what and how much has changed for African Americans. Delvin discussed an apparent contradiction, pointing out that "things have changed for African Americans but they really haven't." Delvin first argued this the previous December, during a whole class discussion before the unit began. He reiterated this point several times during the unit and again during the end of unit interview. He often supported his argument by citing how three European American men killed James Byrd, an African American man living in Texas. For example, during the end of unit interview, Delvin pointed out:

> In this country, shoot, you have that killing in Texas. That dude he ain't even do nothing and he just asked for a ride home and those dudes gonna drag him and kill him.

In addition to Delvin, other students explicitly addressed this issue during the interviews. Mitch noted: "That some, it hasn't changed that much. It's, well, it's changed a lot but

there's still people who really hate people with a different skin color." And Alicia added: "I think things haven't changed it's just that it's started to be in different forms and getting worse maybe, but better in a way."

In addition to Delvin discussing what happened to James Byrd, other students described current events. Evan brought in Timothy McVeigh (whose execution coincided with the unit) and Darrin and Dwayne discussed how Timothy Thomas, an unarmed African American teenager, was killed by a European American police officer. Evan and Mitch also discussed this issue, raising questions about the police's abuse of power.

Evan: Why should they [police officers] have a right to kill somebody just right away and then not get any consequences for it?

Mitch: Well, there was something, something on the news that they might go to court.

Evan: They [police officers] get away with more things than citizens do...

Engaging in socially meaningful content included students grappling with a range of personal experiences. More than half the students drew upon personal experiences around issues of equity in their responses, including references to family, events in the classroom and on the playground, and previous school experiences. Desiree talked about how her grandmother had influenced her ideas about textual truths. She said, "some books aren't true because my Grandma told me." Crissy talked at length about her father and brother, citing them as evidence that inequities are systemic and reproductive. She discussed how both her father and brother suffered the consequences of being labeled as learning disabled. These consequences include her father working several jobs and not being

home with the rest of the family as much as he'd like and her younger brother being labeled and tracked in school. Crissy explained:

> **Crissy**: Now when my little brother gets older he has a big learning disability he's already got suspended twice because he doesn't think before he says something because he needs to be on Ritalin. We don't have enough money to get him on Ritalin. We don't have enough money to get him on Ritalin.
>
> **Tina**: Doesn't your dad have the what's it called? The hospital care stuff?
>
> **Crissy**: No, my brother doesn't. I do. Because he has to go through this certain thing to get into it (insurance coverage) because my dad didn't have enough to pay.... But anyway we're gonna get him on that but he has a different thing, a different medical thing, that don't pay for Ritalin. They won't pay for it. So we have to be on our welfare but see he can't ... be on Ritalin so he's already got suspended twice because he's too hyper. He's threatened somebody two times because he just doesn't learn not to do it because he has a learning disability. Now see when he gets older we're not gonna have enough money to send him to college and he won't be able to get a good job so he's not going to have enough to eat for his family.

Several students cited experiences from interactions in class or on the school playground. Neil discussed how he and his classmates had difficulty getting along before the unit began. "Our classroom really was not working together. We had no unity. A lot of us really didn't get along with each other, didn't like each other." Evan talked about how discrimination contributed to the class not getting along, citing a racist remark he heard from a classmate. "Somebody in our classroom said one day when we were playing

basketball, I hate niggers." Jason and Aaron ended up talking about discrimination that Jason experienced in a previous school.

> **Jason**: there's still slavery going on right now and people don't know...well some people do know it but
>
> **Aaron**: You don't know. We could have teachers at this school who could be racists or don't like Black kids, but they still have to teach them.
>
> **Jason**: There is because I went to...
>
> **James**: How do you know.
>
> **Jason**: I do, I know.
>
> **James**: Would you know that a teacher was...
>
> **Jason**: Yes, because my mom sent me to a school [where] they were so strict... and it was like I was in second grade and it was like maybe six months in school I could go to recess and the rest of the month I couldn't go to recess at all whatsoever. Because I would ask them for help and they wouldn't give me it.

Two additional noteworthy responses about personal experiences came from Rick and Mitch, both European American students. Rick referred to an example from his neighborhood.

> I have heard about White males... I have seen movies about White males killing black people. ... I have heard about that and racists and all that because when we moved from our old house there were racists living there and last time at Halloween they had a cross out there and they was burning it and they had a whole bunch of Confederate flags hanging up... I just don't think it's right.

Mitch recalled a provocative hypothetical situation Rita posed to all the students earlier in the unit, weaving his personal experiences of a movie into his response.

> Sometimes when I watch movies about Blacks, or Whites shooting Blacks or hurting them or treating them bad, I think that, oh, my gosh, I don't know how my ancestors, how, how can they do this? But then Mrs.... [Rita] brought up the point, like if you were paid or praised actually to kill a Black, then would you do it? And you can say no now, but if you're really put in that situation, would you say that? Would you say no still?

"Would you do it?" is a complicated question. It fosters hypothetical reasoning across time and place as well as historical empathy, encouraging Mitch and his classmates to slip on the shoes of others, in this case White slave owners. Mitch's response also reflects a central goal Rita had for the unit (explored in greater detail in Chapter 6): wanting students to not feel guilty for past atrocities they did not commit, yet simultaneously encouraging them to bear responsibilities for ensuring similar injustices no longer take place.

Filling in gaps

The students also discussed what they perceived as either missing pieces or necessary extensions to the unit. They offered Rita advice and also discussed challenges they experienced during the unit.

Although all the student responses during the interviews could be read as implied advice for Rita as a teacher, seven students explicitly offered Rita suggestions to improve the unit. Four students wanted more opportunities for writing. Two of these students, Teresa and Erica, rarely spoke during whole class or small group discussions, yet often

composed comprehensive responses to writing prompts from Rita. As an interview pair, Tina and Crissy offered advice about both content and process. They believed additional topics like money, taxes, the role of the government, and teasing needed to be part of the unit content. Crissy suggested a freedom experiment where "in the classroom for one day only everybody [would] have freedom and be able to do whatever they want." Crissy also proposed that one way to improve class discussions would be to create "three big groups having discussions and then have like one person from each group tell everyone what they talked about."

In their interview, Michael, Carl and Allen, all infrequent vocal participants during whole class discussions, also offered several pedagogical suggestions. Michael thought the class should read two chapter books in addition to the picture books. He also proposed comparison studies between Harriet Tubman, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcom X. Allen also recommended having more books in the unit as well as additional opportunities for writing. Carl echoed the suggestion for more books, called for more discussions, and added that Rita should begin the unit "at the beginning of they year and do stuff like that all year long."

As these examples highlight, students wanted to read and write more and extend their inquiries into additional areas. No student indicated a preference for scaling back the unit. This is not to suggest, however, that students did not perceive or experience any challenges.

The two most prominent challenges the students described were following the complicated flow of class discussions and grappling with difficult content, such as racism and discrimination. Nearly one-third of students (7 of 24) noted that some discussions,

whole class and small group discussions, were challenging to follow. Darrin noted, "a lot of people disagree during the discussions," which for him may have exacerbated these challenges. Interestingly, two of these students, Neil and Teresa, expressed similar concerns about the discussions, yet participated during these discussions in radically different ways. Neil was a highly successful reader and perhaps the most vocal participant during both whole class and small group discussions. Teresa was a struggling reader who worked daily with the reading specialist and rarely spoke during whole class or small group discussions. Sharing his concern about discussions, Neil said:

> Our discussions got too hard and some of them got so complicated that we had five or six subjects floating around. I remember one time I said, "Well, slavery was wrong and freedom can be obtained if you try hard enough" and like the whole group said "What are you talking about? We're not on that subject anymore." I was totally and completely lost.

Teresa attributed some challenges to the sheer number of books in the unit. These challenges were exacerbated because she was reading additional books in her work with the reading specialist.

> It got confusing. While we were doing that, we were reading about slavery in Ms. Smith's [reading specialist] room too, so we got mixed up.

Though he did not work with the reading specialist, Neil expressed a similar concern with reading multiple texts throughout the unit. He pointed out that reading all the picture books while reading *Freedom Train: The story of Harriet Tubman* "got confusing at times." He preferred, instead, to stick with *Freedom Train* without breaking it up so much.

> ... some of the people didn't get *Freedom Train* so her (Rita's) purpose was "well if we read some short stories (picture books) or more stories than maybe some kids will get ideas." Those stories turned into other discussions and more and more and it kept on going and all these questions would build up on this one book. On this one short story and in the process of us reading those stories I think a lot of kids lost their *Freedom Train* ideas so we couldn't really get back on track. I know I didn't. It was too hard.

Another set of challenges dealt with the content of the unit, wrestling with difficult issues. As previous sections in this chapter illustrate, perhaps the most complicated set of issues involved moving between the past and present toward understanding racial differences and discrimination. Discussing this topic, Mitch, a European American, and Evan, an African American, named what they perceived as one potential danger in the unit, discrimination against European Americans.

> **Evan**: If they see a picture of what European Americans did to Africans, then they might not really like European Americans anymore
>
> **James**: Oh, I see what you mean.
>
> **Evan**: Because they see what their ancestors did.
>
> **James**: Okay.
>
> **Evan**: So they might form discriminations
>
> **Mitch**: They might
>
> **Evan**: Against European Americans. And that's exactly what we don't want throughout this unit. I think.

These students recognized that viewing all European Americans as racist was neither accurate nor helpful.

Moving to critical relational literacies

Rooted in the ways Rita supported them to engage with provocative ideas and questions, the three themes – knowing with/in a community, wrestling with socially significant content, and filling in learning gaps – help account for how students made sense of their experiences during this five-month unit. These themes are intimately entwined with the four practices of freedom: *building community, making and deepening connections, cultivating critical perspectives* and *acting with compassion for social justice*. Students discussed the importance of building their learning community through dialogue and examining texts. They extended their understandings of the life and work of Harriet Tubman and took away deeper understandings of slavery in the 18th century American South, in terms of how European Americans enslaved Africans and how slaves were "really" treated. They also left the class with the knowledge that slavery, with an emphasis on child slavery, still existed. Moreover, socially significant content was not divorced from current events or from students' lived experiences. Students drew upon current events and their own experiences, exploring past to present connections and cultivating critical perspectives to amplify their understandings of how racial injustices persist. They also offered Rita advice and described some of their challenges regarding the complexities of whole class discussions and reading multiple texts.

Moreover, as was the case throughout the unit, some students used the interview as an opportunity to open new paths of inquiry, to pose and pursue their own inquiry questions. Evan and Mitch explored whether the Bible was true, concluding that some

parts were not; Aaron asked Jason, the son of a Baptist minister, "How do you know there even is a God?"; and Tina and Crissy engaged in a lengthy discussion about economic injustices, impugning government policy that leaves some people homeless.

These examples further highlight the benefits of students having time to talk through their ideas, to engage in dialogical relationships in order to create knowledge. This is foundational to practices of freedom. In the next and concluding chapter, I examine these four practices of freedom more closely, pointing out how they can be further understood as ***critical relational literacies.*** This leads me to consider implications of this study for both K-12 classrooms and teacher education.

CHATPER NINE

PRACTICES OF FREEDOM AS CRITICAL RELATIONAL LITERACIES

This dissertation began with "untapped possibility in mind" (Greene, 1988, p. xii). Building from my collaborative relationship with Rita, I designed and completed a study that considered some of the possibilities that Rita envisioned and enacted. I also examined what a group of 5th graders did with these possibilities. Across the middle chapters of this dissertation (chapters 4-7), I demonstrated how the students and Rita engaged in critical literacy practices as they explored provocative content through dialogue and inquiry. In my analyses, I discerned four guiding concepts, what I call practices of freedom, to explain the critical literacy work in this classroom: *building community, making and deepening connections, cultivating critical perspectives* and *acting with compassion for social justice.*

In this concluding chapter, I pull these four concepts more tightly together with an overarching frame: relationships. The idea of relationships was integral to each aspect of this study, yet I develop it here to stress its significance and to suggest a re-seeing of the practices of freedom as relational. This leads me to sketch implications for K-12 classroom practices and teacher education, as I consider how children, teachers, and researchers can embody and enact critical relational literacies. In taking on this task, I acknowledge the limitations of the findings in this dissertation. I also point to provocative future areas of inquiry.

Surfacing the significance of relationships

Critical literacy cannot be easily defined because "there is no generic critical literacy, in theory or in practice" (Comber & Simpson, 2001, p. x). Nonetheless, some

scholars have worked to propose sets of critical literacy guiding principles or propositions (Comber, 2001; Edelsky, 1999; McLaren, 1999). In an attempt to distill the central tenets of Freire's work, McLaren (1999) outlines six principles of a Freirean critical literacy. This set of principles focuses on students as active knowledge producers, critics and social transformers. McLaren writes:

> ... students bring experiences to bear on the world in active constructions and reconstructions... [examining] how myths of dominant discourses marginalize them.. but also learn[ing] that these myths can be transcended through transformative action. (p. 51)

In considering possibilities for "new makings" of reality and new ways of "being," these principles portray students as collectively engaged in the struggle for social and economic justice "with all voices being heard" (p. 51).

Edelsky (1999) and Comber (2001) frame their principles more explicitly in terms of classroom practices. Edelsky nominates six classroom characteristics in her framework for "critical whole language practice." These characteristics build from whole language principles – i.e., teachers ground curricula in students' lives, ensure classrooms remain safe places for students, and rarely emphasize decontextualized literacy exercises. These characteristics also foreground perspectives that are critical, "pro-justice" and "activist" (p. 29). Comber (2001) offers seven "core dynamic principles and repertoires" of "critical literacies as principled practice" (p. 276). In addition to foregrounding the importance of students and teachers "engaging with local realities," at the heart of these principles is examining issues of power, namely through textual analysis and critique. Learners engage in "researching and analyzing language-power relationships, practices, and

effects" as well as "(re)designing texts with political and social intent and real-world use" (p. 276).

The significance of relationships is embedded in these sets of ideas (Comber, 2001; Edelsky, 1999; McLaren, 1999). Teachers and students exist and work in relationship as knowledge creators and producers to critically engage with texts and social justice issues. This collaborative work (i.e., joint inquiry and involvement in critical literacy issues and practices) is also supported when classrooms are "safe places" (Edelsky, 1999, p. 26) where "all voices are being heard" (McLaren, 1999, p. 51). However, these sets of guiding principles are not framed explicitly in terms of relationships. Using this dissertation as a launching point, I explore the idea of casting critical literacy as a web of relationships, reframing the practices of freedom as *critical relational literacies.*

Practices of freedom as relational

I began this dissertation understanding critical literacy in two ways: as a set of socially situated practices and as a particular way of responding to texts. The four practices of freedom - *building community, making and deepening connections, cultivating critical perspectives* and *acting with compassion for social justice* – emerged in the course of analyzing the data and crafting this dissertation. These guiding concepts helped name the work the students and Rita accomplished during a five-month inquiry-based language arts unit. Now, as I look across the entire study, I see how the four practices of freedom cohere into an overarching framework. Each practice of freedom, at its core, is about relationships. *Building community* is about relationships among readers in a classroom, including relationships between students and between students and their

teacher. *Making and deepening connections* focuses upon relationships between readers and texts. Two sets of relationships inform the practice of freedom, *cultivating critical perspectives*. The first concerns the ways readers see relationships between the past and present, and the second is the way individual readers explore relationships between themselves, in terms of sociohistorical locations, and texts. *Acting with compassion for social justice* points to the relationships students have with people outside of the classroom.

Building community

With an emphasis on dialogic discussions, the students and Rita worked to create a space where critical inquiry and mutual respect governed their relationships. Inquiry-based projects (Beach & Myers, 2001; Berghoff, Harste, Hoonan & Egawa, 2000) were integral to the process of relationship building, as the students, with the support of Rita, pursued intellectually rich and socially complex topics of interest to them. Collaboration was critical, as Michael and Carl clarified during the end of unit interview:

> **Michael**: Those [the whole group discussions] were important because we talked about different things. And if you didn't know one thing, someone could help you.
>
> **Carl**: Because some people would think of something that we never thought of thinking about.

Community building also entailed reconfiguring the relationship between teacher and students, moving from traditional roles of teacher as sole authority and knowledge dispenser and students as captive and passive recipients to teacher as critical guide and facilitator and students as active, critical inquirers.

Relationships in this classroom were established and developed through dialogue and inquiry. These ways of teaching and learning framed all aspects of the language arts unit. Wells describes dialogic inquiry as a process of knowledge creation, where "the intentional activity of individuals who, as members of a community, make use of and produce representations in the collaborative attempt to better understand and transform their shared world" (1999, p. 76). In other words, in working on socially complex content, the students and Rita were working on their relationships.

Making and deepening connections

The second practice of freedom, *making and deepening connections*, concerns the relationships readers have with and across texts. For example, as Chapter 5 demonstrated, the students grappled with understanding the interconnections or relationships among texts (*Freedom Train, To Be A Drum* and the Bible). Listening to Rita read *To Be A Drum* and discussing some of their questions and concerns enabled Darrin to wonder about the relationship between different groups of Africans (i.e., those who sell and those who are sold into slavery), Aaron to clarify confusion about the relationship between American and African contexts regarding slavery, and Crissy to explore the relationship between her understanding of the creation of the universe and humankind (i.e., her biblical understanding) with the information provided in another text, *To Be A Drum*.

Cultivating critical perspectives

Similar to *making and deepening connections*, the students and Rita *cultivated critical perspectives* by examining "how texts work" (Luke & Freebody, 1997) and exploring relationships among texts. In this dissertation, this practice of freedom

suggested two sets of relationships: 1. readers seeing relationships between the past and the present, and 2. readers exploring their relationships with individual texts.

The unit began as a study of slavery in the 19th century American South, yet connections to the present, especially with the inquiry projects (Chapter 7) were essential. The students developed relationships with the past and, more specifically, with people in the past. Throughout the unit, Rita supported students with this movement between the past and present, as the following excerpt highlights:

> **Rita**: Where did Harriet sleep the first night [when she made it to the North]?
>
> **Students**: On the ground.
>
> **Rita**: How many of you would like to sleep on Main Avenue tonight?
>
> **Students:** No.
>
> **Rita**: Why wouldn't you, Vicky?
>
> **Vicky**: Too many bugs.
>
> **Aaron**: A stranger could come and take you away.
>
> **Rita**: Yes, a stranger could take you south again.
>
> **Tina**: I wouldn't want to sleep outside with no blanket. Harriet didn't have any blanket. I wouldn't. No way. (4/17/01)

In developing critical perspectives, students were also encouraged to explore the relationships between their own response locations (especially racial locations) and particular texts. In general, the content in the unit pushed for these explorations, yet the text *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road* was particularly provocative, as Chapter 6 demonstrated. This text positioned readers as either Black or White, and some students seemingly resisted this positioning. Eduardo claimed "I am not white," Mindy suggested

that she had more in common with her African American friends, and Darrin responded to the text with a biblical connection to Jesus Christ. Testimonial reading also supported this goal, positing that "bearing witness" to events in particular texts requires that readers enter into texts, forge relationships with people or characters who are sharing their stories or testimonials, and resolve to act in ways to curtail future injustices.

Acting with compassion for social justice

The practice of freedom, *acting with compassion for social justice*, embodies the relationship building emphases of the other practices of freedom. However, this practice of freedom also extends the previous practices of freedom by foregrounding another relationship: the relationship students had with people outside of the classroom. In creating their CD (which was stored in the classroom and school library) and presenting it to several audiences, the students communicated compassionate messages about socially complex or "important ideas" (Bomer & Bomer, 2001) to other readers/citizens. They informed their viewers and audience members of contemporary injustices (e.g., child slavery, racial profiling), evoking their viewers' compassion and encouraging them to act in ways that work to eliminate these injustices. This demonstrated how students explicitly saw themselves in relationships with others in the world.

Summary

Barton and Hamilton contend "literacy practices are more usefully understood as existing in the relations between people, within groups and communities, rather than as a set of properties residing in individuals" (2000, p. 8). The practices of freedom point to an understanding of critical literacy as relational, as "existing in the relations between people, within groups and communities." Refashioning the practices of freedom as

relational also illumines implications of this dissertation for K-12 classroom practices and teacher education. These implications focus on foundational beliefs about young children as learners, critical literacy possibilities within existing curricular guidelines, and suggestions for scaffolding the learning needs of novice critical literacy teachers.

Implications

K-12 classroom implications

This study suggests several implications for K-12 classrooms. One implication involves a particular conceptualization of students. This study showed what could happen when classroom life is rooted in the core belief that students, even young children, are capable of high level, meaningful inquiry. Rita's pedagogical choices built from this premise. She believed her 5th graders could pose and pursue questions and construct meanings (individually and collectively) from their experiences with texts and with each other. Comber calls this critical literacy approach "child-centered," arguing that we cannot:

> ... treat young people as infants, but with respect and admiration. It is child-centered in the sense that it assumes young people's complex, productive, and analytical capacities for engagement with what really matters, rather than minimizing or restricting them to what is usually considered appropriate for children. (1999, p. 7)

As this dissertation demonstrates, these meaning-making experiences can also be enhanced in a racially and economically diverse setting. Rather than viewing diversity as a problem to be rectified or as a series of holidays to be celebrated, diversity can be an asset, a rich "resource for individual and collective growth" (Dyson, 1997, p. 6).

A related implication of this study is that exploring socially complex content – slavery, freedom, and racism – can open generative paths of inquiry. And not only is it possible to pursue these topics with students, but students can view these experiences as essential to their learning, as the end of unit interviews in the previous chapter suggested (e.g., "People need to know how we were treated" – Darrin, 6/5/01. And, "We should have been exposed to this before you're even in fifth grade"- Aaron, 6/5/01). This is not to suggest inquiry explorations into socially complex content are risk-free. For example, some children may be burdened with guilt and not sure how to understand their responses to a text like *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road.* Another risk is that a teacher can feel pressure from administrators or parents who oppose this pedagogical approach. Although there is no way to eliminate these risks, this dissertation considered how teachers might work to effectively manage them. For example, Rita and I talked through some potential challenges with using *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road* (i.e., the emotional complexity) before the unit began, and while teaching the unit Rita developed ways to confront these challenges (e.g., extended journal writing for students to explore their emotional responses and inviting students to talk with her one-to-one). Rita also began teaching this unit in February after she developed relationships with the students and parents.

Another key implication of this study is that inquiry-based approaches require significant amounts of time. Teachers need time for planning and reflecting and students need time to pose and pursue questions. Rita explained that she chose not to "rush through" the unit; she provided students with ample time and support to grapple with the unit content and to conduct their inquiries. Rita's guiding goals were grounded in dialogue, discourse and deep examination and exploration of socially complex ideas

through reading, writing, speaking, listening and viewing. All teachers privilege certain instructional ideas, and this dissertation offers some understanding of what happened when Rita privileged an inquiry-oriented critical literacy perspective.

A related implication of this study is that critical literacy goals can be woven into an existing curricular framework, such as a district-wide mandated curriculum. Rita was required to teach biography and poetry as her language arts literature content, as well as a host of literacy skills and strategies, yet there was some flexibility with how she could fulfill these curricular requirements. She could have, for example, taught poetry solely as forms to memorize (haiku, cinquain, acrostic) and shared funny or silly poems that amused her students. Instead, Rita taught poetry as a literary genre that offers unique possibilities to explore big ideas and issues. In reading and responding to poems, the students not only discussed complex topics (e.g., racial discrimination and what it means to be American), they, when given the freedom and support to write their own poetry, also wrote poems exploring similarly complex ideas.

Teacher education implications

This study points to implications in three overlapping areas of teacher education: university coursework, field experiences, and teacher induction. Each of these areas raises questions about what teachers, especially novice teachers, might need to know in order to enact critical literacy perspectives or practices of freedom in their classrooms.

In terms of coursework, it bears noting that Rita thrived when course instructors in her teacher education program enacted inquiry-oriented approaches. She expressed that several of her instructors challenged her to think critically and to grapple with some core challenging questions. In her first teacher education course, Rita and her classmates

wrestled with the question "What is knowledge?" for the whole semester. During this course, Rita also examined companion questions, such as "What knowledge is of most worth?" and "Whose knowledge is of most worth?" For Rita, grappling with these questions early on in her preservice teacher education program provided a foundation for her other coursework and field experiences, as she further developed critical understandings of knowledge and, in particular, what counted as knowledge in school. Put another way, her experiences in these courses helped Rita see herself as an active meaning-maker pursuing engaging questions.

This is not to suggest that all teacher candidates would develop critical dispositions if courses in teacher education emphasized inquiries into fundamental questions about epistemology. Numerous factors shape preservice teacher learning. Nonetheless, by developing her capacities for questioning and critique with respect to her own learning, Rita's experiences do point to the transformative potential of preservice teacher education. Segall addresses this issue:

> Without interrogating the relationship between what prospective teachers learn and how they come to learn it, indeed, without implicating the two, teacher education has little transformative impact on student teachers' existing understandings of teaching and learning. (2002, p. 157)

A related implication for teacher education coursework concerns the use of critical literacy videocases. For example, teacher educators could use the video clips and other artifacts from this inquiry-based language arts unit that Rita enacted with her 5th graders to engage preservice and inservice teachers in discussions about critical literacy. With the primary goal to provoke dialogue and inquiry (rather than offer prescriptions),

these materials could offer insights into how critical literacies were negotiated in one classroom. With these materials (and other resources) teacher educators could foreground the challenges embedded in critical literacy teaching and learning. This dissertation pointed to several of these challenges: facilitating dialogic discussions (Chapter 4), teaching with multiple texts (Chapter 5), teaching especially complex or "risky" content (Chapter 6), facilitating inquiry projects and teaching poetry with a social justice perspective (Chapter 7). Although these materials could support all teachers interested in grappling with these challenges, the materials could also specifically address Rita's experiences as a novice teacher.

Although inquiry-oriented coursework and carefully constructed videocases can support preservice teachers[21] to engage with critical literacy ideas, a host of risks remain when prospective teachers work with these ideas in schools as they complete their field experiences en route to being teachers in their own classrooms. Seemingly the biggest risks are associated with teaching a provocative text like *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*, which poses particular challenges for both teachers and students. Parents and administrators might challenge a teacher's choice to use this picture book, arguing it is outside of the curriculum and might be too upsetting for children. If granted permission to use it, a teacher needs to then be able to facilitate and scaffold potentially complex emotional responses (e.g., anger, sadness and guilt), ensuring that students are not too overwhelmed. Although I believe Rita managed these risks effectively, helping her students deepen their understandings of slavery and freedom, it bears noting that not all teachers are as skilled as Rita in this area. Moreover, despite possible insights gleaned

[21] Although I frame implications in this chapter mainly with preservice and beginning teachers in mind, I believe the implications apply to all teachers, especially teachers having little experience with critical literacy ideas.

from Rita's work with *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*, teaching a text like this, especially for novice teachers, remains undeniably risky.

As a result, one key implication for critical literacy field experiences is the need to emphasize critical literacy work that does not entail such daunting risks. Sustaining dialogic discussions (Chapter 4), teaching with multiple texts (Chapter 5) and facilitating inquiry projects and a study of poetry (Chapter 7), represent areas less risky or volatile than using a text like *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road* (Chapter 6). This is not to suggest that these other areas are devoid of risks. Dialogue, intertextuality and inquiry, for example, pose formidable challenges for both novice and experienced teachers.

What seems most helpful is to offer teachers, preservice and inservice, a range of opportunities to experiment with critical literacy ideas in classrooms. These possibilities might be situated on a continuum from simple and immediate to complex and comprehensive. For example, teachers could view this dissertation as a comprehensive story of Rita's work across a five-month period to then envision their own critical literacy teaching with this holistic picture in mind. However, teachers could also consider and experiment with specific pedagogical practices that Rita enacted. For example, teachers might teach a lesson by juxtaposing two texts about a particular topic or person. They might then lead a class discussion about similarities and differences across the texts and foreground issues of authorship and multiple perspectives, possibly asking questions about power (e.g., Whose interests are served by this text? Whose are not?). A more immediate potential benefit of this type of approach is that the teachers (as well as the students in the class) could come to understand the kinds of conversations that are

possible in classrooms. These understandings could then build and connect to conceptualizing and enacting larger, comprehensive units of study.

Creating a range of critical literacy opportunities for novice (and experienced) teachers to consider and experiment with points to additional implications of this study for teacher education and ongoing mentoring. Although there is greater recognition that sustained induction support for teachers is needed, most new teachers continue to have limited experiences with mentors. For example, Rita was assigned an official mentor, another teacher in her school, yet the two rarely had opportunities to talk. This dissertation demonstrates what an extended collaboration between a novice teacher and a university course instructor/mentor could mean for the teacher, university course instructor, and most importantly, a group of 5th graders. As a result, a key implication of this study is that sustained co-inquiry can be a catalyst for creative, critical work in classrooms.

Cutting across implications for both coursework and teacher induction is a stance to support new teachers to pursue challenging areas and to take risks. Fundamentally, this entails collaborative or relational work between teacher educators and novice teachers. Maxine Greene suggests how important this work is.

> ... a teacher in search of his/her own freedom may be the only kind of teacher who can arouse young persons to go in search of their own. ... children who have been provoked to reach beyond themselves, to wonder, to imagine, to pose their own questions are the ones most likely to learn to learn. (1988, p. 14)

Limitations of study

This dissertation developed from a collaborative inquiry into social justice teaching and learning to focus on the critical literacy possibilities envisioned and explored in one 5th grade classroom. As with all research, this study has limitations. To begin, my collaborative commitment to Rita grounded my analyses in what was important to both of us. Another researcher (even one with a collaborative stance) would have most likely named and pursued other analytic emphases. In other words, I have endeavored to capture some of what transpired during a five-month inquiry, yet I have told one story (or several stories within an overarching story) of many possible stories. What accounts did I not tell? What stories did I not privilege? I did not focus intensively on individual students, developing individual or small group case studies. This approach might have enabled me to consider how one student, Teresa, a struggling reader, experienced the unit. I might have found out how, when, or whether or not she was even more confused or overwhelmed during the unit than she acknowledged during the end of unit interview. Moreover, my data collection of classroom interactions did not begin in late August when the school year began. As a result, I did not systematically investigate the students' experiences leading up to the language arts unit in February. Nor did I interview students before the unit began to consider their thoughts about inquiry, critical perspectives, slavery, freedom, etc.

As a researcher, I could have also focused more specifically on Rita's experiences as a novice teacher. What was it like for her to be a first-year teacher who elected to enact a critical literacy approach when there were no other teachers in the building engaging in similar work? Also, this dissertation only focused on language arts teaching and learning, but language arts was but one of the subjects Rita taught each day. Due to her intensive

commitment to language arts, how did she have time and energy to plan, teach, assess and reflect with respect to the other subject areas?

Future areas of inquiry

My work in this dissertation has left with me with many questions, pointing to the need for additional research. One area I am especially interested in concerns the content and skills students acquire in critical literacy classrooms. What counts as subject matter content in critical literacy classrooms? What are the relationships of different content emphases across disciplines? This also points to the need for research in the area of assessment. How might critical literacy learning be assessed? How might students use and develop understandings of essential critical literacy content, skills and strategies (e.g., fostering dialogic discussions, examining authors' assumptions, questioning textual claims of truth, etc.) to perform well on a range of assessment approaches? In what ways do or can traditional assessments (e.g., standardized tests) reflect inquiry-based, critical literacy approaches?

Another potential area of inquiry concerns ways language arts can be integrated with social studies and other subject areas. For example, how might teachers, preservice and inservice, envision and enact critical interdisciplinary units of study with their students? What does a critical literacy perspective look like in science? How might students learn to question truth claims in math? A related area of potential inquiry focuses more on critical literacy possibilities with preservice teachers. How might preservice teachers engage with video clips and other artifacts from this language arts unit? What are their understandings of critical literacy before and after engaging with these and other artifacts?

Concluding thoughts

As Gallego, Hollingsworth and Whitenack point out, "relational knowing" is integral to substantive, transformative educational reform.

> ...productive and lasting educational reform requires not only attention to standards, but resources and structures to establish critical relationships which enable educators to learn about themselves as they learn with others, thereby creating the opportunity for the understanding and development of different perspectives. (2001, p. 241)

Seeing the practices of freedom through the lens of relationships or "relational knowing" speaks to this vision of educational reform. The students, Rita and I collectively learned with and from each other as we explored socially complex content, coming to understand ideas of freedom, slavery, racism and cultural differences in more nuanced ways.

The practices of freedom and the lens of relationships offer a conceptual framework for understanding what happened in this classroom, yet the aim of this dissertation is not to offer prescriptions for critical literacy practices. Instead, I hope this dissertation engenders acts of imagination. As Clandinin and Connelly suggest, my primary goal is the "educative linking of life, literature, and teaching" where rather than work for generalizations and "prescribe general applications and uses," I instead intend to create "texts that, when well done, offer readers a place to imagine their own uses and applications" (2000, p. 42).

Imagining uses and exploring possibilities reflect the ways we as educators can understand, envision and enact our own practices of freedom.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

List of participants

Teacher	Rita	African American
Researcher	James	European American

Students

African American (10)	**European American** (10)
Delvin	Donald
Dwayne	Anne
Darrin	Amy
Neil	Susan
Jason	Rick
Desiree	Carl
Tashima	Alicia
Erica	Mindy
Allen	Michael
Evan	Mitch

Latina (4)	**Multiracial** (4)
Teresa	Aaron (African Am, Latino, Native Am)
Britney	Crissy (European Am, Native Am)
Tina	Eduardo (Latino, Native Am)
Vicky	Joe (European Am, Latino)

APPENDIX B

Timeline and description of major procedures

Year	Month	Major Procedures
2000	July-Aug	Met with Rita 4 times to reflect on her internship experiences and to brainstorm possibilities for teaching language arts units. Composed field notes during and after meetings.
	Sept-Dec	Met with Rita 11 times to primarily discuss language arts teaching and learning challenges in her classroom. Audiotaped four of these meetings. Visited classroom, was introduced to students, familiarized myself with students and classroom routines. Participated in small group literature discussions several times.
2001	Jan-Feb	Met with Rita 14 times to plan unit based on book, *Freedom Train: The story of Harriet Tubman*. All meetings were videotaped. Continued classroom observations during language arts instruction.
	Feb-April	Videotaped 21 language arts classroom sessions. Emphasis on whole group discussions of *Freedom Train* and the 10 picture books. Also composed field notes with focus on my conversations with Rita.
	April-June	Videotaped 8 language arts classroom sessions. Emphasis on whole group discussions of inquiry projects and poetry and small group inquiry project work. Observed class interactions and composed field notes. Participated in small group discussions or work sessions.
	June	Collected student work – journals, quizzes, poetry anthologies, inquiry projects, and the "Exploring freedom" CD. Interviewed 24 of 28 students in pairs or groups of three about their experiences during the unit. All interviews were audiotaped.

APPENDIX C

Timeline of Chapter content

Chapter 4
3/1/01

---------- **Chapter 5** ----------
| |
2/21/01 3/12/01

2/22/01 3/7/01 – 3/8/01
| |
---------- **Chapter 6** ----------
Critical moment #1 Anne "guilt"

Critical moments #2, #3, #4

Chapter 7
4/23/01 – 6/6/01

APPENDIX D

Final project guidelines

Final Project – *Freedom Train*

For the past few weeks we have been talking about issues of slavery and freedom. We have read and discussed the book, *Freedom Train* (along with other stories), listened to songs, and watched the movie, *Race to Freedom*. Now you are going to have the opportunity to both pull together *and* extend your learning.

You have already generated an AMAZING list of possible topics for your final projects! Some of you are eager to write stories, plays, or songs. Others want to conduct interviews with other students in the school or elders in the community about their ideas of freedom and slavery. One student mentioned designing a program to help other students learn about these important topics. And at least one student is interested in creating a web page to explore issues of freedom. You are such a talented group of students!

Creating a final project like this is a lot of fun and is very challenging. So to help you as you create your projects, here is a list of guidelines.

Final Project Guidelines

1. **Reviewing your learning**
- What touched or intrigued you the most during this unit? Was there a certain part of *Freedom Train* that moved you? Or maybe another one of the books? Was it a song? Or maybe the movie?
- Think about WHY this particular aspect of the unit was so important to you.
- Now think about a way to build on this interest.

2. **Choosing a topic**
- Think about a way to explore your topic by connecting it what is going on somewhere in the world today.
- In other words, what do you want to learn more about? (we have talked about some different possibilities)
- The only requirement is that your topic connect to issues of freedom, slavery or another related topic.

3. **Representing your learning**
- Create a way to represent your learning. This could be a research inquiry about how slavery still exists in some parts of the world, a study of important historical and contemporary leaders, a study of some songs that deal with freedom, a web page that you create, a children's book that you write and illustrate, a report based on interviews or surveys that you create, a play that you write, etc.

- You may work in partners or small groups for these projects if you wish. You can also work primarily on your own if you wish.

4. Leaving a legacy – taking action

- This project is an opportunity to learn more about yourself and the world *and* to think about how you can make a contribution to the world.
- What legacy do you want to leave as a 5th grader in this school?

APPENDIX E

Interview protocol – Initial ideas

4.23.01

Purposes: What do I want to learn about?

- How students experienced the unit
- What counted as learning for them – re: freedom, reading, writing, discussion, biography, history, literature, facts/fiction, multiple perspectives, truth(s)
- What they are now wondering about

Protocol

- What stands out for you about this unit?
- What have you learned about freedom/slavery/limitations during the unit?
- What part of your work during the unit do you think best represented your learning?

Texts & Authorship

- What are some of your thoughts about the book, *Freedom Train*, a biography of Harriet Tubman?
- What did you learn about biographies?
- What about the other books in the unit?
- Are some of these stories more historical, accurate, true, reliable, etc.? Why?
- How do you learn about the past?
- What counts as facts? How do you know these are facts?
- How do you know what to believe in a story or book is true or real? (Anthony's comment)
- Did you have a favorite book (or part of book) in the unit? Why?
- What do you think the books had in common? How were they different?
- What did they include or exclude?
- What did they rely on when writing these stories? Resources, sources, etc.

Freedom & Slavery

- Why did the predominately white slaveholders enslave Africans?
- Where else have you learned about slavery or racism? (movies, television…)
- Are there similarities and differences between slavery in the mid-19th century and what is going on in the world today?
- What about in your own lives?
- Have the problems of the past been solved today?
- What evidence can you provide to support your answer?
- What does it mean for students in the class to have different interpretations or ideas about freedom?
- Can everyone agree on a definition of freedom?

Reactions to texts/discussions

- Were you surprised by any of the stories in the unit?
- Were you upset with any of the stories read or discussed in class?
- Do you think it is important and/or necessary to see and read all these books?

Connections to their own lives

Book club

- What are the purposes for Book Club?
- What are your favorite aspects of book club?
- What are students' and the teacher's role in book club?
- How did you share your thinking and learning?
- What are your learning preferences? (oral, written, visual, etc.)

If you were going to teach a unit on Harriet Tubman or freedom to 3rd graders, what do you think would be the most important things to talk about?

Guiding questions:

- What are the purposes of reading literature?
- What are the purposes of reading biographies?
- What are the purposes of reading about history?
- Do they see past as a social construction rather than a literal representation?
- What does it mean to be a reader in Ruth's classroom?
- What are the purposes of Language Arts?

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