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CRITICAL LITERACY: A VIEW FROM A CLASSROOM

By

Rachel Lander

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ABSTRACT

CRITICAL LITERACY: A VIEW FROM A CLASSROOM

By

Rachel Lander

The purpose of this study is to illuminate what happens when a Language Arts teacher tries to "teach by keeping one foot inside the system and one foot outside." This stance requires delicate balance. For, as Freire (1985) stated:

> I have been trying to think and teach by keeping one foot inside the system and the other foot outside. Of course, I cannot be totally outside the system if the system continues to exist. I have to be in it. Naturally, this generates a certain ambiguity and this ambiguity is often risky. That's why many people keep both their feet squarely inside the system. I know people who sometimes slowly try to place their right foot outside, but they are immediately overcome by fear. They see other people who have stepped outside the system and are punished (p. 178).

In order to study critical literacy on a daily basis I researched a teacher who maintained this fragile dance. My dissertation research focused on Elizabeth Darcy during the 2001-2002 school year. Ms. Darcy taught Language Arts to middle school students at a large, urban school district on the East Coast. In particular, I focused on Ms. Darcy's second and third period classes, a two-hour Language Arts block. During this Language Arts block Ms. Darcy taught 20 students from a wide variety of backgrounds.

This dissertation demonstrates how Ms. Darcy blended together traditional conceptions of Language Arts with critical literacy practices, as she kept one foot inside and one foot [almost] outside of the system. She worked to prepare

students for success within the current configurations of schooling and society and also guided them to question assumptions and injustices in their surroundings. Ms. Darcy taught grammar and standard English; her students also wrote protest poems and debated society's definition of family. It is this unique blend of literacy education, and its purposes and consequences that I sought to capture and examine.

Analyses of Ms. Darcy's teaching practice illustrated that there were times when she critically engaged the system, finding space for critical content and pedagogy. There were times too though that she was inside the system, without critically engaging it. This study led me to re-envision critical literacy in shades of gray, rather than an all-or-nothing endeavor. Specifically, this teaching practice existed in the spaces between critical and more traditional approaches to literacy. This dissertation's intent is not to critique what Elizabeth Darcy could have done better to reach the goals of critical literacy nor was its purpose to reveal how Ms. Darcy's intentions or articulations differed from her practice. Instead, my main focus has been to show that critical literacy in classrooms is messier than it is often conceptualized and described.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY AND LITERATURE

In 1995, Cissy Lacks, a veteran high school English teacher in St. Louis,

Missouri, attempted to reach her predominantly African American students by

reading a provocative play by August Wilson, a Black playwright. The play,

"Fences," focuses on an African American family and emphasizes the challenges

and confusion they faced in America during the 1960s. After studying the text,

Ms. Lacks asked her students to write scenes about things real and important to

them. The often apathetic students wrote passionately and willingly. They wrote

about topics relevant in their lives, including gangs, drugs, and teenage

pregnancy. Like the playwright, many students used emotive language, including

profanity, in their writings. In addition to the written texts, Ms. Lacks videotaped

plays students spun from their work.

Ms. Lacks' style differed from conventional teaching methods. One former

student wrote that "by the time I met Ms. Lacks, I was a square peg, most of my

other teachers spent their time trying to cram me and everyone else into the rigid

holes they'd carved for us. Lacks didn't turn her back on students like me"

(Terhune, 1995, p. 10). Ms. Lacks expanded the traditional notion of literacy in

school and engaged in activities associated with critical literacy. In order to reach

her students she drew on their worlds outside of school. She asked students to

bring in their life experiences, not to glorify the challenges in their lives or to

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shock a larger audience with their trials and tribulations, but instead to help them read their own texts more critically and ultimately to help them be different in the process. The practice of critically reading one's own world can lead to transformation. By illuminating their positions in local and global contexts, examining the origins of societal structures, and investigating their own lives as raced, classed, and gendered (Greene, 1988), readers can gain insights into who they are, how they got to be this way, and what consequences are created by their identities and actions. This type of reading can inspire students to take "control over the direction of [their] lives," (Fehring & Green, 2001, p. 10), to make decisions about who they want to be and who they no longer want to be, and ultimately to recreate both themselves and the contexts around them (Giroux, 1988).

Yet, Ms. Lacks' attempts to infuse her "square pegs" with literacy, rather than "cramming them into rigid holes" had disastrous results. Cissy Lacks was fired. After viewing the videotaped plays which included scenes where gang members cursed and shot at each other, where a girl was in prison and her sister was hooked on crack, and where a group of young men smoked pot and talked about sex, the district fired Lacks for failing to "establish reasonable standards of decorum and reasonable standards of appropriate behavior" (Little, 1995, pg. 1). Ms. Lacks was fired for teaching literacy in the way she believed, in a way that ran against what the institution deemed appropriate or accepted.

Ms. Lacks' teaching fits in with the philosophy of critical literacy where the curriculum is drawn from student's lives and the students investigate their social realities; these subject matters are not always welcomed in the institution of

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schools. Freire (1985) speaks about the complexity of teaching critical literacy within the institution of schools:

> I have been trying to think and teach by keeping one foot inside the system and the other foot outside. Of course, I cannot be totally outside the system if the system continues to exist. I have to be in it. Naturally, this generates a certain ambiguity and this ambiguity is often risky. That's why many people keep both their feet squarely inside the system. I know people who sometimes slowly try to place their right foot outside, but they are immediately overcome by fear. They see other people who have stepped outside the system and are punished (p. 178).

The case of Cissy Lacks illustrates the struggle Freire speaks about regarding teaching within the system. Critical literacy teachers, especially those in K-12 public schools, exist within a system that can be antithetical to their goals and daily practices. They can not move entirely "outside the system" and must therefore navigate their way, "keeping one foot inside the system and the other foot outside." As Freire noted, this position is risky. Ms. Lacks ultimately "stepped outside the system and [was] punished."

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to illuminate what happens when a Language Arts teacher tries to "teach by keeping one foot inside the system and one foot outside." This stance requires delicate balance. For, as Freire (1985) stated, public school teachers inescapably exist within the bounds of the institutions in which they work while critical literacy ideals often fall outside of these boundaries, as we see above in the case of Ms. Lacks.

In order to study critical literacy on a daily basis I researched a teacher who, like Cissy Lacks, tried to maintain this fragile dance. My dissertation

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research focused on Elizabeth Darcy during the 2001-2002 school year. Ms. Darcy taught Language Arts to middle school students at North Central Public School District[1], a large, urban school district on the East Coast. In particular, I focused on Ms. Darcy's second and third period classes, a two-hour Language Arts block. During this Language Arts block Ms. Darcy taught 20 students from a wide variety of backgrounds. This dissertation demonstrates how Ms. Darcy blended together traditional conceptions of Language Arts with critical literacy practices, and she kept one foot inside and one foot [almost] outside of the system. She worked to prepare students for success within the current configurations of schooling and society and also guided them to question assumptions and injustices in their surroundings. Ms. Darcy taught grammar and standard English; her students also wrote protest poems and debated society's definition of family. It is this unique blend of literacy education, and its purposes and consequences that I sought to capture and examine.

In concrete ways, Elizabeth Darcy was reminded of the risks of straying outside the lines, even just a little. For example, she was warned by a colleague about her decision to include books in her classroom library that were not on the approved district book list (interview, 4/23/02). Even Ms. Darcy's students recognized that the topics raised in critical literacy classrooms can be dangerous in schools. In an interview about Ms. Darcy's teaching practice, Tonya stated: "Some people don't want to start something at the school. And parents might complain. And the teacher might get in trouble" (interview, 5/16/02).

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[1] All names, including the teacher, students, school, and district are pseudonyms.

Critical literacy teachers, like Ms. Darcy, include issues such as race, class and power and rely on students bringing in their home lives. These topics can end up "starting something at the school." Topics that are seen as necessary in critical literacy are often avoided in most school districts, including North Central Public School District, in which Ms. Darcy worked. Elizabeth Darcy's goals for her students' literacy education were not always consistent with the goals of the institution in which she works. As Ms. Darcy planned for, taught, and reflected upon her daily teaching, she blended the expectations of the institution in which she worked with critical literacy ideals. In this study, I set out to investigate what critical literacy looked like on a daily basis within the context of one classroom and what this blending of expectations made possible for students.

Research Questions

In order to meet the aims of this study, I began with the following research questions:

- What happens in this critical literacy classroom?
- What possibilities are created within this context, curriculum and instruction?
- How do moments of practice in this particular setting connect to the broader theories underlying critical literacy?
- What are students' attitudes toward literacy in this classroom?
- How do different types of texts and assignments influence ways students respond to texts?
- How does the teacher make decisions and what does the teacher learn?

Chapter Overview

In Chapter One, I introduce the literature, theories, and goals underlying this dissertation. In the first section, I establish the foundation of the study and state what I set out to do. By articulating the definitions and purposes of critical literacy, I make a case for the significance of this study as it was conceived. I conclude this section with a discussion about the term "Discourse," a concept that plays an important role throughout the dissertation. In the second section, I delve into what I came to understand as I stepped into the research site. My experiences led me to revisit what I set out to do and to rethink components of critical literacy. Through this process, I am able to present a more complex look at the aims, questions, and significance of my research. At the end of the section, I provide an overview of the dissertation.

Purposes and Definitions of Critical Literacy

"First, there is empowering education, which leads to powerful literacy, the kind of literacy that leads to positions of power and authority. Second, there is domesticating education, which leads to functional literacy, literacy that makes a person productive and dependable, but not troublesome." (Finn, 1999, p. ix)

Too often urban schools provide the majority of students with the opportunity to become functionally, not powerfully, literate (Anyon, 1981; Rose, 1989). Powerful literacy is defined as being able to interpret, critically analyze, and create texts[2] in a variety of contexts (Luke, 1991), to make connections between the word and the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987) and specifically one's own world. The lack of opportunity to become powerfully literate is one reason

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[2] Texts include multiple forms of representation: traditional written texts (books, magazines, poems, standardized tests) as well as other forms (pictures, paintings, songs, film, hypermedia).

that urban students are less likely to access positions of economic and political power in our society (MacLeod, 1995). Further, many students, because of disconnects between home and school Discourses (Gee, 1992) or because of active resistance (Kohl, 1994), don't achieve functional literacy either.

Literacy education in the United States is at a critical juncture. Literacy instruction, especially for urban students, is a central concern for policymakers, educational researchers, teacher educators and teachers. In order for urban students to benefit from this national attention in ways that will help them become powerfully, not just functionally, literate, and in order for literacy education to help urban students access positions of economic and political power, the conversation about literacy instruction must include more than concerns about decoding words and answering comprehension questions. The discussion must also focus on ways literacy can help students analyze their surroundings, create solutions to pressing problems, and see themselves as change agents. Critical literacy offers such opportunities.

Advocates of critical literacy argue for issues of power and justice to play a more pivotal role in discussions about, and in the teaching of, literacy. Critical literacy is based on the interconnected relationship between reading the word and the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987). It involves exploring the political nature of texts and of literacy itself. Through literacy instruction, students and teachers question the taken-for-granted aspects of their lives and society, see themselves as creative actors, and take action against injustices (Lankshear, 1997; Luke et. al., 2001). Critical literacy engages power as both restrictive (power over) and enabling (power to). It addresses the need to explore how texts and the

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meanings they make possible are produced, circulated, legitimated (or not) and consumed. In the process, the focus is on how symbolic systems make the world both possible and intelligible, how they maintain and help reformulate social relations. Critical literacy, with its insistent focus on issues of power and justice, offers great possibilities for creating powerful literacy instruction (Dudley-Marling & Fine, 1997; Edelsky, 1996, 1999; Purcell- Gates & Waterman, 2000; Willinsky, 1990). While critical literacy has potential for all students, it offers particular promise in urban schools, where students are often alienated from traditional literacy education leading to negative consequences (Barrera, 1992; Rose, 1989).

Critical literacy advocates define reading as understanding the words on the page *and* examining political and cultural assumptions underlying texts (McLaren, 1999). A reader is not defined as someone who can decode and make sense of printed words, but as someone who is aware of underlying assumptions in the text, ways in which texts are constructed, and how such constructions position readers (Lankshear, 1997). In critical literacy, the goal of literacy is to "critique ... issues which surround us as we live, learn, and work - to help understand, comment on and ultimately control the direction of our lives" (Fehring & Green, 2001, p. 10).

Lankshear (1997) makes a helpful distinction between narrow and wide components of critical literacy classrooms, both which are part of critical literacy classrooms. A narrow sense of critical reading includes responding to particular texts while a wider sense involves interrogating reading itself. Within a narrow sense, teachers and students might read and interpret multiple interpretations of

the story of Cinderella. In a wider sense, a teacher might work with students to analyze the story and question the relationship between literacy and socio-economic status in the world.

Luke (1995) built a four-tiered model of the elements of reading to operationalize critical literacy in K-12 classrooms. The first two tiers, coding competence (how do I crack the code?) and semantic competence (what does this mean?) comprise much of what happens in typical Language Arts classrooms. Luke argues that pragmatic competence (what do I do with this, here and now?) and critical competence (what is the text trying to do to me? in whose interest?) are also "essential components of everyday life in social institutions" (95) and should be included in students' literacy education. He includes two crucial qualifications in his design: "each element is necessary but not sufficient for critical literacy …. [and] this is not a developmental sequence or cycle or taxonomy" (110).

Luke's (1995) description of "critical competence" is useful because it offers an in-depth look at how critical literacy might take place in a classroom. Luke advocates for "the development of a meta-language for talking about how texts code cultural ideologies, and how they position readers in subtle and often quite exploitative ways" (109). He aims for teachers to help students recognize that texts are not neutral, dead entities but instead "actively construct and represent the world" (107). All texts, some more obviously and overtly than others, position readers to think in certain ways about themselves, the past, or the present world around them. Critical literacy asks teachers to make explicit and open for discussion or dispute the "techniques by which texts and discourses

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construct and position human subjects and social reality" (107). Another way to learn about teaching practice is to look closely at a few critical teachers' practices. Freire outlines phases he used to teach illiterate adults in Brazil to read (Freire, 1996). He begins with preparatory phases. First, the teacher researches the students' vocabulary and lives. Then, he or she selects generative words from their vocabulary containing phonemic richness and the potential for fervent discussions and prepares artifacts for generative themes. During class time the teacher and the students work with the generative words and themes, de-coding them and engaging in dialogue interdependently.

In recent years, a number of Australian educators have written extensively about critical literacy in the classroom. For example, Fehring and Green's (2001) specific classroom goals include: analyzing multiple readings, challenging taken-for granted or dominant readings, examining the construction of texts, exposing gaps and silences of reading, and constructing social critical readings of the texts and culture. They also detail how they reach these goals as follows: comparing multiple texts to one another, adding or deleting parts of the text to challenge the apparent unity, constructing different endings/beginnings, asking questions to the author, and asking students to compare what they are thinking and feeling during reading.

Critical teachers make it a priority to include a wide variety of voices in the classroom which influences the texts chosen for reading. Texts are drawn from multiple Discourses. In addition, especially in recent years, a wide variety of texts, not just written ones, are read (Fehring & Green, 2001). For example, students may "read" advertisements, neighborhoods, photographs, or city maps.

These texts are often drawn from popular culture (Wilson, 2001). These texts are looked at through a critical lens, and issues of race, class, culture, and justice are consistently considered. In addition, teachers work to increase students' commitment to social justice and to strengthen their belief that things can change and individuals (such as themselves) can make a difference (Shannon, 1992).

Willinsky (2001) adds an important contribution to critical literacy. Willinsky describes the project of critical literacy as "helping students analyze how certain institutional uses of language fail them, as it excludes and diminishes the lives of some ... [and also] aimed at enabling students to use this critical awareness of how language works to seek redress and remedy" (7). In other words, Willinsky's view propels forward the work of critical literacy. He continues, "we need to find ways of beginning with the young the very rereading and rewriting of the world that falls to each generation. This is our privilege and responsibility as teachers who are, after all, working directly on the future" (9).

Teachers and Students: Subjects and Objects

In order to facilitate this "rereading and rewriting" critical literacy has implications for the roles of teachers and students in the classroom. Proponents of this view want teachers to be transformative intellectuals (Giroux, 1997), people who recognize inequality in society and in schooling and hold as their primary goal to work for social change and help their students become critical activists (Finn, 1999). Teachers are listeners who learn about their students' lives and who enter into dialogue with their students in order to learn with and from them.

Students in such classrooms are not passive recipients who learn what their teacher transmits. Instead, students assume the role of knowing Subjects alongside an educator who is also a knowing Subject (Freire & Macedo, 1987). The relationship between the teacher and the student becomes dialogic in nature. Students participating in the classrooms as Subjects rather than as objects are a key aspect of critical literacy. Subjects act, create, and make decisions; objects are acted upon, are known, and have decisions made for them. This conception of students as Subjects is rare in many classrooms where teachers do the majority of the talking, make many of the decisions, and control most of the learning opportunities.

Curriculum: Critically Reading Texts

Critical literacy is ultimately aimed at engaging students in the process of learning. It focuses on explicitly articulating and expressing voice and creating opportunities for students to author their experience and surroundings. Critical literacy advocates think this authoring must happen in relation to the multiplicity and politics involved in identity, voice and meaning (Comber, 1999; Giroux, 1987; Lensmire, 1994; Luke, 1995, 2000). A critical literacy classroom engages students in a process of reading and writing, of "talking back" (Christensen, 2000) and establishing an environment where the cultural and social aspects of texts are consistently considered.

In this critical context, individuals' comprehensions of texts are constantly compared with others' interpretations (Gee, 2000). Freire (1985) suggests that if one could not (and did not) juxtapose one's specific reading with other readings,

then one, in reality, had no significant reading. Meaning in a text comes not just from the text itself but also from the reader and the context in which it is read (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998). When several people read the same text they each comprehend it in a slightly different way. In other words, reading is a negotiation between the reader and the text. It is based not only on what the author is trying to say but also on the positions (the experiences, history, gender etc.) of the readers and the lenses that they bring with them to that particular reading, including the time and place of the reading. Education in a critical literacy class does not merely focus on finding *the* meaning in the text but also helps students consider who they are as readers and why they read a text in a particular way. Rather than being an add-on to the regular curriculum or an "'ideology critique' divorced from everyday life" (Luke, 1995) critical reading is an essential part of education. "Judgments about what to buy, what to comply with, when to argue back, whether to get angry or hold your peace, how to argue back in speech and writing, are key moves and moments in the politics of everyday life" and these are precisely the types of thinking critical literacy teachers include in their teaching practices (Luke, 1995, p. 112).

A critical literacy curriculum is based on students' experiences and lived realities (Giroux, 1987). Critical literacy proponents encourage teachers to build curriculum from students' languages, neighborhoods, beliefs and interests. This does not mean catering to students' desires but rather critically engaging them. Students and teachers use a critical lens to look at the issues and topics raised. Critical literacy teachers encourage students to bring their lives and interests into

the classroom - and to look at these lives and interests as raced, classed, and gendered.

Discourse and discourse

The concept of Discourse plays a central role in this dissertation and its conception of critical literacy. James Gee uses the term Discourse with a capital D to describe and discuss social practices. According to Gee (1992), each socio-culturally defined group of people (for example, African-American, upper class, Doctor, dancer, woman) has its own Discourse. The term Discourse encompasses a wide variety of thoughts and actions, "involving ways of talking, acting, interacting, valuing, and believing." More specifically, a Discourse includes "words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes" (107).

Gee (2001) differentiates between Discourse and discourse. While Discourse (with a capital D) is the broad combination of "saying-(writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing," discourse (with a lower case d) is the smaller "connected stretches of language that make sense" (526). Discourse encompasses discourse, where Discourse means ways of participating in communities; discourse describes the pieces of communication, of language, that people use. The term discourse describes the building blocks - the "speech acts" - that make up a Discourse.

Each person's identity simultaneously includes membership and identification with a variety of associations or groups, such as a teacher, parent, American, educational researcher. Each association has a unique Discourse

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associated with that group, including values, beliefs, knowledge, and ways of talking and acting. Therefore, each person has a wide variety of Discourses. When students enter school, they already have a set of home Discourses, what Gee terms primary Discourses. Students' primary Discourses are tied to their culture - class, race, religion, language, and so on. No student's primary Discourse is exactly congruent to the Discourse used in school. Discourse is a fluid term; therefore it alters flexibly from school to school, depending on the specific contexts the school is located in and the people inhabiting it. However, as schools themselves have certain consistencies (Cuban, 1984) so too does the Discourse in schools. While there might be differences between Discourses in schools, there is often a shared Discourse of schooling which permeates and often dominates the various Discourses *in* schools. No student's home Discourse is exactly congruent to the Discourse used in school. I, as others have, (Christensen, 2000; Gee, 1992), argue in Chapter Three that some students' primary Discourses are more closely connected to the standard Discourse valued most in school.

If we think of Discourse as an identity kit (Gee, 1992), a school Discourse or kit includes the ways students communicate and express themselves orally and in writing, the ways they read, write, speak and listen in school. Specifically, the literacy-practices-identity-kit includes ways of taking turns, telling stories, responding to books, organizing writing, etc. Throughout this dissertation, I investigate ways Ms. Darcy and her school district expected students to participate in literacy practices.

While Discourses do not have inherent value, they carry different amounts of power and weight in society and in classrooms. For example, the Discourse associated with school includes a wide variety of specific social practices, including raising hands, sitting in a chair, and speaking and writing in standard English. As Delpit (1992) reminds us, learning the standard Discourse enables students to learn the "culture of power," which leads to academic success and provides entry into important institutions in society. This dissertation focuses on the standard Discourse taught in schools and its connections to issues of culture, power and society. It raises questions about the possibilities and constraints embedded in teaching the school Discourse.

Significance of the Study

In significant ways, the issues embedded in critical literacy are part of the educational landscape. Theoretical discussions about critical literacy appear regularly in the literature, many schools of education require prospective teachers to take a course about issues of equity and multiculturalism, and organizations for teachers committed to social justice exist nationwide. However, detailed accounts of critical literacy practices are scarce (Damico, 2003; Feiman-Nemser & Remillard, 1996; Gore, 1998; Michell, 1999). McLaren (1999) acknowledges that "few accounts are provided as to how teachers are to move from critical thought to critical practice" (52). Michell (1999) wrote that "much of the expanding body of literature on critical literacy and critical pedagogies is densely theoretical or only deals with teaching … in the abstract … rich portrayals are necessary to 'flesh out' the theory – to make concrete what the theoretical

literature has been attempting to promote in the abstract" (55). Further, accounts about new teachers committed to critical literacy practices are even rarer (Damico, 2003). In the next few paragraphs, I map out bodies of work about critical literacy in order to show what is included in the literature, what is missing, and what this study hopes to add.

Literature exists to persuade educators about the need for critical literacy by describing how current schooling practices are oppressive and reproductive of society's inequities (Apple, 1990; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Edelsky, 1999; Halsley et al., 1997). Other texts outline what critical literacy is and provide nuanced discussions about the definitions and complexities of the theories underlying a critical education (Fehring & Green, 2001; Giroux, 1987; Luke et. al, 2001; McLaren, 1998, 1999). Of course, these pieces play an important role and are valuable for educators to read and understand. However, in addition teachers and researchers also need multiple pictures of what does and does not happen when these ideas are put into practice, specifically considering how critical literacy might work and might not work as it engages with the realities of schooling. This study intends to add such a picture of critical literacy within the realities of one classroom.

There are some published accounts of critical literacy practice in the educational literature. These come in several forms. First, there are edited collections that detail teachers implementing critical literacy in the classroom (Allen, 1999; Edelsky, 1999). However, these essays usually focus on one unit or even one lesson. They rarely dig into what it takes to engage in critical literacy on a day to day basis over several months. In addition, these pieces often focus

on what eventually worked rather than describing lasting failures or enduring compromises that were made. These accounts tend to show the finished product without including in-depth discussion or description of the ongoing, underlying work that took place along the way. It is this daily work that we must investigate in order to learn more about the complexities and intricacies of critical literacy.

In addition to these descriptive accounts of critical literacy, there are also more extensive pieces about specific teachers. Linda Christensen has emerged as a powerful example of a critical literacy teacher. She regularly publishes articles in teacher journals and has written several books. She is an inspirational educator and writer; however, similar to the accounts above, her work rarely addresses ongoing failures or compromises. She doesn't extensively question or challenge the theory. In addition, she is a veteran teacher who doesn't give us much insight into the experiences of new teachers who are trying to implement critical literacy for the first time and who have to simultaneously struggle with an array of beginner issues, such as how to put a unit together, whether or not to allow students bathroom passes, or how to assess students.

There are also recent popularized stories of dynamic literacy teachers. These teachers might not use the term critical literacy, but they connect with their students in powerful ways around literacy. Although these few texts are not research-based in the traditional definition, they are important to mention because their romanticized accounts have reached a wide audience and are influential in portraying an image of teaching, even for teachers. Two examples of these teachers' accounts are Erin Gruwell's (1999) *The Freedom Writers Diary* and LouAnne Johnson's (1995) *Dangerous Minds* - turned into a movie starring

Michelle Pfeifer. While these stories are motivating and entertaining, they are highly individualized and very celebrated accounts of teaching. These pieces focus specifically on the particular personalities and circumstances of an individual teacher and do not offer much in terms of a larger context. It will require a great deal of change for substantially more educators to implement critical literacy in their classrooms, and these accounts, while inspirational, are not the most systematic ways to inform such a movement. Further, these stories follow a common story plot; the main character experiences extreme challenges but then eventually finds success. Again, this approach does not delve into the ongoing challenges embedded in the work of critical teachers. Even Freire, to a certain extent, although with consistent nuanced and brilliant arguments, focused much of his writing on what works to successfully reach students. Ellsworth (1989) and Shor (1996) provide in depth examinations into what happened when they implemented critical pedagogies into their classroom, including the challenges they faced. However, these texts each describe college contexts which differ substantially from K-12 classrooms.

As I have stated, we do not need to produce more distilled bullet points of what critical literacy must look like or celebratory descriptions of how critical literacy works best. I am instead arguing that we need multiple, ongoing and in depth pictures of what critical literacy teaching practices look like. Further, these pictures must include examinations of connections and disconnections between these practices and critical literacy theories. We must speak back to the theory by investigating and troubling practice, and relating it to theory. In this study, I provide pictures of critical literacy in action in order to re-examine existing

theories in critical literacy and raise questions about critical literacy in classrooms. Such accounts are necessary both for the theory and the practice. For in order to move theories further, theories underpinning critical literacy must be informed by what is learned in specific teaching practices. And in order to truly be able to develop what it takes to make this work in real contexts, we need to see more of how and why it does and doesn't work. In order for critical literacy to enable a productive and generative body of literature and scholarship, it must also include pieces written about knowledge produced in particular classrooms.

In this dissertation I provide a study over a longer period of time of a practice, including the daily realities of teaching, the compromises and challenges of working in our educational system. In this way, I complexify the theory and practice of critical literacy and what might be learned from them. As a teacher educator and avid critical literacy believer, I want teacher education to be informed by critical literacy. It is not enough though to grasp the theories behind critical literacy or to consider the need for it in our current system. We must also be informed by the complicated realities of what teachers face as they work to implement and work through the implementation of these ideas. Obviously, the ideal situation for implementing critical literacy is not present in our current schools. Those factors create a reality that Elizabeth Darcy, and other teachers, must work within as they teach. In particular, as prospective teachers are learning about these ideas in teacher preparation programs, we must learn from the ways new teachers implement critical literacy as they begin their teaching practices. What will they experience when they step into their classroom? What

will constrain them? What compromises and challenges will they face? What rewards will they reap? Who will benefit and at what cost?

In this dissertation, Elizabeth Darcy's teaching practice provides a complex picture of what happened when a new teacher implemented critical literacy in her classroom. In her second year of teaching during this study, Elizabeth was beginning to develop her teaching persona. Her own views and beliefs about the purposes of education and the role of critical literacy play a pivotal role in her teaching practice and in this study. I provide a brief introduction to Ms. Darcy and her teaching philosophies here; a more detailed description follows in Chapter Three. Ms. Darcy's commitment to critical literacy grew out of her own upbringing and her experiences during and after college, including her time in the Peace Corps. She entered teaching in her late 20's and had a fairly rocky first year as she worked to put together her curriculum and as she struggled with discipline. After reviewing her teacher preparation materials, reading new educational books, and thinking hard about her teaching practice over the summer, Ms. Darcy was on much firmer ground in her second year. She described the difficulties she faced and the ways she worked through them below (interview 7/8/03):

> The biggest difficulty was wading through. There are so many ways to teach, and there are so many things they throw at a new teacher and they say, do this and do that -- the district, the principal, the language arts dept. head, the professional development, and other teachers. And they're all well-meaning and you're trying so hard to soak it all up. The best thing was for me was to sit down after my 1st year and really come up with the backbone and of course I keep meddling with that. I had to learn to really listen to myself and think about what I wanted to see my classroom look like. It is a combination of who I am as a person and what I learned [in my teacher preparation program] and North Central public school district.

"The backbone" Ms. Darcy came up with and the way it played out with the students drove her classroom. Throughout this dissertation, I detail "the backbone" of Ms. Darcy's teaching practice, narrate an account of how her ideals took shape and form in room C132, and ultimately describe an intricate picture of teaching and learning, and learning resulting from it.

This story includes a variety of scenes: an orderly classroom with a strict teacher; students protesting against racial profiling and discrimination; 8th graders sitting at their desk silently copying from the overhead projector; youth actively discussing and debating society's deeply held assumptions and injustices; Ms. Darcy firmly disciplining students; and a teacher who one student wrote "makes me get thinking." Detailed pictures, like the ones presented in this study, will help teacher educators and prospective and practicing teachers think about the possibilities involved in critical literacy, what will constrain them, and how one teacher navigates these possibilities and constraints. Ms. Darcy kept one foot inside the system as the other foot moved outside.

The Study Revisited

Although I set out to investigate the daily life of a teacher in a public school classroom, it wasn't until I was actually out there in the field, that I realized what this would mean and that I wasn't really ready for that. It was messier than I was prepared for; even though I knew the classroom would not be a pristine island, in many ways I still approached it that way. As I look back, I realize that I expected to see a nice, neat picture of critical literacy with all of its components in order. In

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addition, I was also filled with romantic images of critical literacy in action. I was subconsciously looking for: students making protest posters and preparing a demonstration on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial; the class singing "We Shall Overcome" sitting in a circle; chants and tears, speeches and songs; young teenagers marching into the classroom, talking excitedly about how they were in the process of changing the world.

Instead, when I walked into Elizabeth Darcy's 8th grade classroom at Elk Middle School, I saw desks and chairs pushed together in rows. Students read novels and answered comprehension questions. They wrote stories, completed grammar exercises, and learned about parts of speech. Ms. Darcy asked questions about vocabulary in poems and students raised their hands and answered. In other words, it looked like school, and I found myself wondering where the critical literacy was. However, as I watched the students and teacher working throughout the school year, as I listened to their poetry and looked closely at the assignments, I realized that in the midst of what looked like "regular" reading and writing practices, critical work was brewing in the cracks. There were spaces and places for students to draw on their own lives, to question assumptions in society, to voice the need for change, and to imagine alternatives in their local and national communities. In fact, the classroom was full of such work. This work was incorporated into or hidden behind "real school."

This disconnect between my own vision and the classroom's reality was surprising and confusing and sent me back to revisit several components of my study. In particular, I reflected on where my own vision of critical literacy had

come from and reviewed the critical literacy literature and my dissertation proposal.

Reflecting on my Own Beliefs about Critical Literacy

As I reflect on my own vision of critical literacy I realize that for me, teaching has always been about "social change," although the meaning of that term continues to develop. The roots of critical literacy connect to ideals I have believed all of my life - that injustice permeates our society and that it is each person's responsibility to actively work to make the world a better place. Further, before I knew the term critical literacy, I held many of its beliefs about teaching: that schools often reproduce society's inequities, that education is inevitably political, and that teachers have the potential to be among society's greatest change agents. When I was introduced to the work of Paolo Freire and the field of critical literacy in a master's class during my third year of teaching in an urban middle school in Arizona, it was love at first sight. From my first reading of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970), I wholeheartedly believed that when teachers and students genuinely engaged in critical dialogue about the world around them, when each student's knowledge was valued, and when reading and writing took on real meaning for the participants, the learning in that context was revolutionary. At that time in my career, I left my position as a middle school teacher and entered doctoral study full time. Looking back, I realize that as I left the classroom and studied critical literacy in a traditional academic setting, my understanding of the theories of critical literacy developed outside of an actual context of practice. I fervently studied *about* critical literacy but I did not

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consistently engage *in* critical literacy as a teacher or student. I see now that I had developed a removed, romantic, academic sense of critical literacy that did not speak to what I was seeing in Ms. Darcy's classroom.

Reflecting on Critical Literacy Literature and My Dissertation Proposal

In my dissertation proposal, I thoughtfully and thoroughly outlined principles of critical literacy. In the proposal (and in my mind), the principles fit into nice, orderly sections that would form a powerful and organized classroom practice. Not surprisingly, as I moved from my quiet, orderly cubicle at Michigan State University to the messy, complicated world of middle school classroom life, my neatly outlined conception proved to be unsophisticated. Though I logically knew better, in many ways I envisioned the classroom as a blank slate where radical ideas would be manifested beautifully and uncomplicatedly. Instead, as my dissertation work proves, classrooms are cacophonies of multiple, often conflicting, historical, cultural, individual and institutional influences.

Though I spent countless hours myself in classrooms, as a student, teacher, field instructor and educational consultant, I found myself perplexed by the strength and number of forces muddling critical teaching. I scrambled back to the plethora of articles I had poured through to write my dissertation proposal and found that in addition to my own reasoning, a number of others contributed to my overly orderly picture. While many of the articles, specifically about critical literacy, used complex language, complicated theoretical ideas, and in depth discussions, very few of them left me, as a reader, with feelings about how relentlessly critical literacy is contested on a daily basis, how exhaustive the

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process is, and how difficult its practices are at every turn. For example, in the first half of his book, *Life in Schools,* McLaren (1998) writes about his teaching experience; the reader is left exhausted, depleted and at times hopeless. The diary-like writing style builds visual images that evoke emotions. In particular, we can see Buddy, "one of the more colorful characters" who is allowed to "float" around the school and even more importantly we can feel the teacher as he is "unnerve[ed] to see Buddy pause at [his] doorway" (43). However, in the second half of the book, when McLaren describes critical pedagogy, the style and feel is very different. Rather than the diary style, the section is organized into main ideas and key terms. Though McLaren complexly describes critical pedagogy in dynamic terms, as a reader I was left with a neat, categorized picture of possibility.

This multifaceted, yet relatively orderly trend permeates much of the literature I read. Earlier in this chapter, I noted the lack of in depth articles focused on specific critical practices but the dearth hit me in a new way as I came home from days in my research site to reread articles and books. I found the importance of context repeatedly mentioned but the actual effects of contexts noticeably absent; though many authors assert that educational practices are context-dependent, not many studies examine how specific contexts influence critical enactments. At the same time, I had collected everything I could find with actual classroom descriptions of critical classrooms. Rereading these pieces, I found mostly neatly packaged pieces with conflicts resolved, successes attained and nicely reached (and closed) conclusions. Upon asking about this tendency in a particular critical teaching journal, one of the editors, Linda Christensen, told

me that it was not true that everything had to be solved, "Some authors write about what they would have done differently" (2003). But I realized this response was not enough. The kind of reflection I am arguing for does not entail merely realizing that particular decisions or actions were right or wrong, but instead involves examining the myriad of decisions and actions that aren't so clear-cut, the unsolvable dilemmas and inevitable compromises.

Limitations in the medium of writing, especially in standard and traditional formats, offer part of the explanation for the rarity of fluidity and disorderliness. Clearly illustrated points, linear logic, neatly organized sections and scientifically proven conclusions close off feelings of, and spaces for, messiness. Even complications are usually analyzed neatly and written about in an organized fashion. That is the (traditional) purpose, in many ways, of systematically researching a site, to make sense of the messiness. Although I will work to represent the inevitable messiness in the context I studied, there are many reasons that this dissertation will simplify and neaten the complications more than I would like. This traditional, linear format is what I think is expected of this work and what I myself expect it to look like in the end. The models of research, including dissertations, that I have read follow this format and it has thus become for me what a dissertation is, and more broadly mirrors how I (have been taught to) think about, classify, and organize information.

Further, the dissertation takes shape as a result of the caution I have of taking too many risks. This fear stems partly from past experiences when I was criticized for altering the expected format of research studies and it also comes from imagined fear of what the consequences of taking risks might be. My

conformity results from a variety of negative reactions to more alternative work, responses that have come from others as well as from me. I remember a professor and classmates' laughter and jokes about the inclusion of a new category of research involving dance at the annual AERA conference. When Denzin (1997) suggests alternative formats such as performance texts to present research findings, I am influenced by my own discomfort at moving too far out of the lines. A traditionally organized dissertation comes from my desire to be scholarly and years in schools that have shaped what I consider scholarly. It is the result of wanting to fit into a profession I respect and also arises out of concern that because the profession itself is not considered the most academic, it is even more important to keep things looking traditionally academic. I take comfort in hiding in what is expected and I worry that creating something different would necessitate making the work exponentially better - and I wonder if I have the energy, ability and creativity to pull it off. Overall, on a negative note, this traditional format prevails from a lack of imagination; on a positive note, it exists because it is a good way to organize a long, in-depth research study.

Revisiting the Research Questions

My experiences in the research site led me to review the research study as I had laid it out in my dissertation proposal. In particular, the research questions took on new meaning for me as I researched. I still set out to study a critical literacy classroom in action but I spread my lens wider to include the influence of outside forces, such as school culture, students' expectations, and societal norms on the teaching practice. Of course, I initially acknowledged that these factors

were a consideration but I truly recognized their significance as the study ensued. As I show using italics below, my research questions expanded to:

- What happens in this critical literacy classroom *that is positioned in the midst of more traditional expectations?*
- What possibilities are created within this context, curriculum and instruction *and what constraints and compromises complicate these possibilities?*
- How do moments of practice in this particular setting connect to the broader theories underlying critical literacy *and where are there disconnects between what I see and the theory?*
- What are students' attitudes toward literacy in this classroom *and how do their attitudes relate to critical and more traditional literacy practices?*
- How do different types of texts and assignments influence ways students respond to texts *and how do these different ways influence critical possibilities?*
- How does the teacher make decisions and what does the teacher learn *and how are these decisions influenced by the culture of her school, her students' expectations and her own multi-faceted expectations?*

Adding Shades of Gray

As the research study progressed, my observations and examination altered my own lenses as a researcher and as an educator. The study itself actually changed my view of critical literacy. Therefore, as I describe and analyze critical literacy in this context, I am writing from a perspective that is evolving from the one I started with in my original dissertation proposal. Ultimately, this dissertation is the story of Elizabeth Darcy's teaching practice during the 2001-2002 school year. It is simultaneously my own story of my growing and developing theories about critical literacy. Drawing on feminist methodologies, I recognize that while rigorous and professional, research is an inherently personal endeavor that is influenced by who we are (Hollingsworth,

1994). At the same time, research also influences who we are becoming (Behar & Gordon, 1995). As a researcher, I recognize the "importance of self and collective interpretations, but [also] deeply understand that these interpretations are always in a state of becoming" (Carson & Sumara, 1997, p. xviii). Throughout the dissertation – as is typical to research studies – I attempt to add productively to the educational field by analyzing data and drawing conclusions. In addition though, I also attempt to further the conversation about critical literacy by illuminating the ways my own thoughts and actions were altered and furthered, particularly returning to this internal conversation in Chapter Eight. As I detail in this section, I learned to theorize critical literacy in shades of gray, rather than extremes of black and white. And as I further describe in Chapter Eight, what this new outlook did *not* change was my commitment to and belief in critical literacy as a powerful and important philosophy of literacy education.

As I looked at what happened in this classroom I realized the potency of Freire's (1985) words: "I cannot be totally outside the system if the system continues to exist. I have to be in it." The system often pushes against the aims and practices of critical literacy. Concrete manifestations of the current system reach into every classroom of a school, the way smoke from a fire seeps through cracks and spaces, no matter how tightly you close the door. If a teacher necessarily exists within this system, then some systematic realities – such as standardized testing, administrative hierarchies, district curricular expectations, typical school accommodations like student and teacher desks – operate as part of any critical practice a teacher aims to provide.

Conceptualizations of critical literacy in the literature do not position it outside of the system, but instead consider it as an approach to critically engage the system (Giroux, 1987; McLaren, 1999). As I demonstrate throughout this dissertation, in my research of Elizabeth Darcy's classroom there were times when she critically engaged the system, finding space for critical content and pedagogy. There were times too though that she was inside the system, without critically engaging it. This study led me to re-envision critical literacy in shades of gray, rather than an all-or-nothing endeavor. Although there are breakdowns of various components of critical literacy, as I detailed earlier in the chapter (Luke, 1995), conceptions of classrooms as somewhere between traditional teaching and critical literacy are not prevalent in critical literacy literature. Therefore, I looked to the field of multicultural education to further inform my research. In addition to including heuristics that detail such stages or phases, multicultural education is particularly useful because it is closely connected to critical literacy. Multicultural education is essentially about providing a quality education for all students and helping students become critical and productive members of a democratic society (Nieto, 2000). It disputes the notion that decisions about education are politically neutral and directly challenges racism, classism, and other forms of discrimination. Critical literacy can be viewed as part of multicultural education. They share the same ultimate goals for students and society: to create positive social change by giving all students the tools they will need to succeed within and transform their immediate and broader contexts (Sleeter & Grant, 1994).

Several prominent figures in multicultural education delineate the gray areas between a traditional approach to education and a more liberatory, just or inclusive approach. For example, Sleeter and Grant (1994) "ask how schooling could work differently to favor diverse groups more equally" and share "five different approaches to what multicultural education could mean" (vi). While the authors advocate the final approach, education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist, they detail several other possibilities. This extensive discussion of teaching practices that, while not perfect, do work toward a more equitable education speaks to Ms. Darcy's teaching practice. Further, sharing five different approaches complexifies the way multicultural education might look. By evaluating and describing a variety of multicultural approaches, the authors accept and at the same time explain the consequences of each approach. They consider how the realities of classroom life shape multicultural education as they offer in-depth analysis of what various practices do and don't make possible in terms of equity and social change.

It is particularly helpful to look at two of the approaches Sleeter and Grant describe. The first, "Teaching the Exceptional and the Culturally Different," aims to "help fit people into the existing social structures and culture" (42). Delpit (2001) argues that students "need access to dominant discourses to have access to economic power" (552) and critiques well-intentioned teachers who choose not to include the seemingly superficial components of language (such as grammar) in their teaching practices. As I demonstrate throughout this dissertation, Ms. Darcy took seriously her responsibility to help her students succeed in school and society and this led her to include components that looked rather traditional.

Ms. Darcy's commitment to her students also led her to "make relevant students' experiential background, fill in gaps in basic skills and knowledge, teach content in language students can understand [and] build on students' learning styles" (Sleeter & Grant, 1994, p. 211). While these beliefs and practices do not fully adhere to the education the authors see as the ideal, they do have a place within multicultural and equitable education. Ms. Darcy's practice also fits with the authors' ideal approach, "Multicultural Education and Social Reconstructionist." This dissertation will show multiple examples of Ms. Darcy "organizing content around social issues, ... analy[zing] alternative viewpoints [and] teaching social action skills" (211).

Nieto (2002) provides another helpful model as she too thinks about different levels of multicultural education. For Nieto, characteristics of multicultural education include tolerance, acceptance, respect and ultimately affirmation, solidarity and critique. Again, although Nieto aims toward this ultimate education, she details a variety of stages. Her description helps the reader analyze the benefits and costs of decisions teachers and schools make. Like the above model, Ms. Darcy's practice contains pieces of different phases. Acting at the tolerance level, Ms. Darcy's students "begin to question the status quo." Like the acceptance stage, "lifestyles and values of groups other than the dominant ones are acknowledged in some content." Finally, in accordance with the respect level, "students take part in community activities that reflect their social concerns" (342-343).

Critical literacy educators can learn from the ways multicultural education is conceptualized and described. Traditional aspects of Language Arts are part

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of critical literacy classrooms in our current school system. While we can and should critique problematic components of critical literacy practices we also need to learn from the possibilities created. This dissertation explores how traditional and critical approaches relate and coexist in one critical literacy classroom. What is described and analyzed here is critical literacy in this context. This dissertation's intent is not to critique what Elizabeth Darcy could have done better to reach the goals of critical literacy, although there were times when this was at the forefront of my mind as an observer/researcher which may implicitly or explicitly influence this document. There also may be times when the reader may bring this stance to bear on the text. This is also *not* a study revealing how Ms. Darcy's intentions or articulations differed from her practice, as I discuss in depth when I describe Elizabeth in Chapter Three. Instead, the main focus of this study is that critical literacy is messier (not more complex) than it is often described in the literature and was conceptualized by me at the beginning of the study.

In this dissertation, I research how and why critical literacy took the form that it did in this particular classroom, analyzing both the origins of the ideals and practices as well as how teaching and learning were shaped in action. I also investigate the ways and reasons this manifestation of critical literacy worked in this context. In the end, I discuss both why it was powerful and also limited. By concentrating on how critical literacy is mediated by one teacher in a classroom on a daily basis, this study adds to the field by analyzing the gray areas between traditional and critical ideals. Throughout the dissertation, I show the different shades of gray that made up this practice. In the final chapter, I return to this construct in order to ultimately consider how this study can inform thinking about

critical literacy in other classrooms and schools, including classrooms in colleges of education.

Overview of the Dissertation

In the pages that follow, I take the reader inside Elizabeth Darcy's classroom. Chapter Two details my research methodology, examining the theory underlying the study itself, and describing the methods of data collection and analysis. Chapters Three through Six analyze specific aspects of Ms. Darcy's teaching practice, each providing scenes from this classroom during the 2001-2002 school year. In each of those three chapters, I evoke the traditional and critical forces at work to show how the two philosophies consistently coexisted and what and who was produced as a result. Specifically, Chapter Three introduces the research context and participants and focuses on the district curriculum, Chapter Four analyzes poetry lessons, Chapter Five describes a unit about the novel *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1997), and Chapter Six investigates grammar lessons and protest poems. In Chapter Seven I take a broader look at the data and examine the different forces that influenced the lessons and units. Finally, Chapter Eight discusses what this study can offer to the educational landscape.

Taken together, these chapters tell the story of two philosophies, one critical and one more traditional, working together in one classroom, each playing a significant role in teaching and learning. Ultimately, is this a traditional classroom with critical tendencies or a critical classroom with traditional constraints? I intend to show that it is both. As I interpret what happened in this

classroom and reflect on the possibilities and consequences of this enactment, I aim to add to the literature rich, inspirational, problematic vignettes of practice, and to pose important questions about critical literacy in our current educational system. I intend to show ways critical literacy is possible, powerful, challenging, difficult and productive. I focus on how critical literacy and institutional norms relate in complicated ways, constraining, limiting, compromising, and complimenting each other. By exploring how one teacher works within the system to do this kind of work, I illuminate dilemmas and potentials in enacting powerful literacy education.

Critical literacy teachers embark on a highly challenging project; critical teaching practices often conflict with district curriculum, norms and histories of schooling, students' expectations, and the culture of the school building. Still, Ms. Elizabeth Darcy takes on this project. Unlike romanticized accounts that position teachers as superheroes or martyrs, Elizabeth does her job without much grandeur or flash. Unlike glorified images of teachers in popular culture Ms. Darcy does not spend thousands of her own dollars on her classroom, she does not arrange meetings with Steven Spielberg or bring her students on the Oprah Winfrey show. She does not train for marathons with her students, and she does not come to class in army gear or take students to expensive dinners.[3] Instead, she walks in every day to do her job that she views as a "privilege and responsibility [to work] directly on the future" (Willinsky, 2001, p. 9). This is why, in my mind, she is a hero and the kind of hero from whom we need to learn.

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[3] These are feats accomplished respectively by Erin Gruwell, Teach for America corps member Kimberly Lasher, and LouAnne Johnson.

Chapter Two

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

How one studies can not be separated from what one studies, ultimately from the story told. Consequently, there is another story brewing under the surface of this dissertation. In addition to studying Ms. Darcy's teaching practice and investigating ways my own views of critical literacy changed, this is also a story of a novice researcher trying to research in critical ways. Like Ms. Darcy, I am also trying to keep "one foot inside the system and another foot outside." Writing this dissertation is entrenched in traditional academic structures. At the same time it attempts to infuse a critical research methodology that is at least somewhat outside of the mainstream. Throughout this chapter and the rest of the dissertation, I make an effort to highlight my attempt to do critical research, the possibilities and constraints embedded in this methodology, and the particular experiences I go through as a novice researcher.

The foreground of my attempt to do critical research involves the creation and acknowledgement of links between the what, how and why of my study. These links are not focused on in standard research study organization. Research studies generally begin with a description of the study and a discussion of its significance. The next section usually includes an explanation of the research methods employed. In this typical organization, the *what* and the *why* of the study are separated from the *how*. In actuality, though, these characteristics

are tightly connected. What the researcher is studying, why she is studying it, and how she studies it are (and should be) inextricably interwoven, at least if one wishes to move beyond methods and into the realm of methodology. The what, why, and how, inevitably impact one another and ultimately relate as they influence the study's interpretations and conclusions.

Though I attempt to bring together the what, why and how of this study, I too discuss what I am studying and the significance of my study in Chapter One, followed by a description of the methodology in Chapter Two. Why don't I organize the dissertation differently? What does it accomplish to make this point without changing the structure? This structure is ingrained, not only in the other research studies I have read, but in how I conceive of a research study. It is a helpful divide that breaks down the massive and laborious task of writing a dissertation. I could simply combine these sections in Chapter One but it would not change anything if I stilled discussed them separately. Too, there is something very satisfying about beginning a brand new chapter, typing out the new title. Therefore, though I do organizationally separate the what, why and how, I attempt to create connections here in this chapter and throughout my work.

The what and why of this study stem from critical ideas about literacy, education, and social change. The critical definitions of literacy, text, and meaning that shape the focus of this research also guide the way I study literacy, read and write texts, and define meaning as I collect and analyze data and textualize the dissertation. This study is guided by ethnographic theories and techniques; this methodology is well suited to match critical notions and purposes (Street, 2001; Szwed, 2001).

In this chapter, I investigate how critical definitions of text and authorship shape the text I am creating and my authoring of it. As such, this methodology chapter goes beyond detailing my data collection and data analysis methods. "Any study is always more than the sum of its methods. What gives it meaning and direction is not its methods but its methodology - the theories and pedagogies it assumed and utilizes for (and during) the process of conducting that research," (Segall, 2002, p. 28). In this chapter, I describe the methods and methodologies and detail the relationship between them; I also discuss how they influenced how my data was collected, analyzed and textualized.

Methodology is sometimes viewed as the most straight forward and least personal portion of the dissertation. In my writing group, when I reported that I was working on my methodology chapter, another member commented that this would be an easier task because it didn't take the same type of investment the data chapters take. She explained, "You are just reporting other ideas there rather than creating your own ideas" (Dixon, 2004). I disagree, however, with my writing group colleague. Reporting how I went about conducting this study, or telling this story, is indeed like crafting a story itself. Barbara Kingsolver describes the methods she used for writing her novel, *Poisonwood Bible* (1998), about a missionary family in the Congo. She read a number of research books about the history of the place and took "several research trips into Western and Central Africa and kept detailed journals on sounds, smells, textures, tastes." She also drew from her own childhood experience living "in a small village in central Congo [and the] strong sensory memories of playing with village children and exploring the jungle." She concludes the explanation by declaring, "This is

what it means to be a novelist. You have to be madly in love with the details."
[www.kingsolver.com]

To write a good research study, a researcher similarly needs to be extremely enmeshed in, if not "madly in love with," the details of the context. Kingsolver gathered facts about her story's context, and then ultimately created her characters and invented the plot. Ms. Elizabeth Darcy and her students all exist, albeit by pseudonym, but research studies too are crafted from a variety of sources. With that in mind, this dissertation is a story. While it may not be fiction, its fictive-like nature results from it being made, even if it is not made up (White, 1973). I vigilantly collected and analyzed data to learn about the context I was studying. I did not invent the characters or the happenings solely from my imagination. However, my background, interpretations and viewpoint no doubt influenced (in ways that I do and do not – indeed, cannot – know) every note I took, every audio-tape I transcribed, and every word I ultimately write. What I am suggesting then is that this chapter is the story of the methodology I used to construct this particular version (one of many) of what happened during the spring semester of the 2001-2002 school year in room C132 at Elks Middle School.

I propose a question, then, to guide this text. What do you see as you read? A very visual reader myself, I often automatically picture what I am reading. If you try to imagine what you read over the next pages, what will the main characters look like? What do you see when I describe Ms. Darcy, when I write about Andre's work or report from Marquita's interview? These pictures in your mind, and the meaning you draw from this work, come from the events that

happened, the telling of the events, as well as (and as much as) from the interpretation you bring to your reading. It is the relationship between what happened, how I describe what happened, and how you read what happened that creates meaning. My words are shaped by what caught my (already conditioned) eye in the classroom, how I interpreted the teacher's and students' words and actions, and the decisions I made in organizing and writing this work. Researchers often disappear from the context when they write up their study; in this story of my methodology, I hope to make myself more present in the picture. In addition, I aim to keep myself in the picture throughout the dissertation by making my own subjectivities visible in the authoring of this story. (Clifford, 1988; Tyler, 1986)

I detail an influential moment for me as a researcher to concretize the conception of three authors creating meaning of text. In a graduate school course, we discussed Annette Lareau's (1989) *Home Advantage: Social Class and Parental Intervention in Elementary Education* and I was struck by Lareau's initial description of two central subjects in her study. Lareau wrote that Mrs. Morris "was dressed in jeans and a velour top, with heavy blue eye shadow and bright red spots of blusher on her cheeks. Her nervous smile revealed crooked teeth" (40). She described Mrs. Simpson as "dressed impeccably in a red and white silk blouse with a bow and dark slacks" and her house as "immaculate and spacious" (65). Questions I raised in class about these descriptions in class were met with two main replies; "she is just reporting what she saw" and "her observations aren't that essential to the main points she makes." While I recognize the reasoning behind those responses, I ultimately see it differently.

That is the way Lareau saw those women, but she made conscious and unconscious choices about her descriptions. There were a multitude of different ways she could have described the women. Yet her own lenses noticed and focused on particular aspects. Certain things cannot be said precisely because of what is said (Britzman, 1997). Importantly, too, my background influenced how I read and wrote about the two women in her study. This meaning, then, was created by the women themselves, how Lareau interpreted those women and how I read it. While Lareau's overall point was not what these women looked like, these descriptions influenced me as a reader/author and shaped what her study meant (to me).

Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I intend to show how our access to what happened is inevitably subjective and created in the telling and reading of the story (Kincheloe, 1997). I connect how the theories that guided my research led to the methods I used. I begin by giving an overview of critical ethnography, the methodology that guides this research. In the next section, I narrate the story of the research study. I organize the account chronologically, beginning when I found the site and gained consent, continuing as I collected data, and ending with the period of time I analyzed the data and ultimately wrote the dissertation. These divides are misleading, though, because I was writing my dissertation from the moment I walked into the classroom (and even before this as my previous experiences influenced my observations and interpretations) and I was analyzing my data each day as I decided (both consciously and unconsciously) what to

write down, how to record what I was seeing, what to focus on, what to ask and what to ignore.

Introduction to Critical Ethnography

Ethnography historically conjures up images of anthropologists embarking on long journeys to foreign lands and creating extensive accounts of other cultures' ways of life. In those terms, this study is not an ethnography. I did not live in the context I was studying (although it did feel like that at times), and while I was there for a relatively substantial period of time compared to some other qualitative studies, I did not study this context for several years. However, ethnographic theories and techniques underlie this study and this dissertation can best be described as an ethnography. In particular, it is a critical ethnography, which draws on postmodern, feminist, and poststructural theories.

Like most ethnographies, the design of the study was open and flexible because I was looking for what was happening rather than testing a predetermined hypothesis (McMillan-Schumacher, 1984). My own role in the study was that of participant-observer, as I related to and interacted with the participants in the study as I collected data (ibid). The data I collected was unstructured so that I could follow emerging patterns and actions (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994). Ethnography is especially well suited to explore the nature of a particular social context (Spindler & Spindler, 1987). I was essentially interested in the meaning that the participants in the classroom gave to their positions and surroundings (Geertz, 1973).

I wanted to draw on a research methodology that would help me create an iterative relationship between the literature and theories I was reading and the realities and practices I was seeing in the classroom. In ethnographic studies, the researcher "looks at the people [in the context], then looks back at the books, and then looks again at the people" (Malinowsky, 1948, p. 10). This type of study calls for researchers to gain in depth and various types of data while in the site and to intensely examine this data multiple times in order to write an account about it (Lareau & Shultz, 1996). This study was driven by ethnographic research methods in order to explore the nature and context of the classroom and examine not only what was occurring but also how and why actions were taking place.

In particular, I drew on critical views of ethnography, which is particularly well suited for studies about literacy. Szwed (2001) contends that critical ethnography is best suited for studies that question what literacy is and how it plays out in particular contexts. Street (2001) also advocates for ethnographic studies of literacy, clarifying that "when ethnographic method is applied to contemporary anthropological theory, emphasizing ideological and power processes and dynamic rather than static models, it can be ... sensitive to social context" (442). Critical ethnography moves away from the assumption "that qualified, competent observers [can] with objectivity, clarity, and precision report on their own observations of the social world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 12). The crisis of representation and legitimation and emerging postmodern ideas about knowledge and reality question many aspects of traditional ethnography. Critical ethnographers take issue with traditional researchers' proclaimed ability

to be disinterested observers, to claim authority, and to produce a valid text. Instead, they implicate and situate themselves in their own research.

Throughout this dissertation, I attempt to disturb the text itself, to show how my participation in the classroom affected what happened there and to reveal how the research site is represented through my own lenses and interpretations. Specially, I comment on places where I might have influenced the classroom practice. I also make visible ways my own particular identities shaped both how I was perceived and what I perceived, calling attention to the fact that my interpretations are only of many possibilities. In addition, I asked Ms. Darcy to read and comment on the text, to express her ideas, questions and thoughts about the events themselves and/or my writing about them. I shared this option with Ms. Darcy at the beginning of the study and we revisited the idea as I started writing (on paper) the account. Ms. Darcy was interested in taking part in the presentation of the research in this way; at the same time, she has a full life and is limited in the amount of time and energy she had to put into this project. Taking into account Ms. Darcy's very busy schedule, we decided I would share with her the entire document but she would carefully read and comment on the main data chapters. Ms. Darcy was most curious about the data chapters because she wanted to see her classroom through my lens(es) and I was particularly interested in including her perspective on these events and on my description and analysis of them. After completing Chapters Four through Six, I gave them to Ms. Darcy and asked her to add comments. I have included these comments in italics throughout the chapters. I do not add my own commentary because the purpose is to share her voice with the audience, without my

meddling. A final way I attempt to disturb the text is by showing my own transformation throughout this research study, demonstrating how I participated as a changing force, rather than a fixed, unified researcher. While I attempt to keep problems of representation visible, there are also multiple ways I impacted the research setting, data collection and analysis in ways that I will never know.

The Research Story

Part One: Finding the Site and Gaining Consent (October - December 2001)

"Just because you are leaving this school does not mean you are abandoning the struggle for social justice," my Dad advised me on my cell phone as I walked through the dark city night. Those words resonated strongly and stirred up both sadness and relief in my chest. Until he articulated my concern, I did not realize how much my current job was also connected to my identity and life's work. I did have a lot riding on it. I would be back in an inner city classroom teaching again, in a newly created school, using the knowledge I had learned in my doctoral program, and I would also be collecting data for my dissertation. The situation had seemed perfect: I would be doing critical literacy and also researching it. However, the problems of the school overshadowed its original promise. After it became clear that regardless of my attempts to improve the school, the troubles were only getting worse, and I decided to leave my job.

It was the fall of 2001 and the mood of the country, following September 11, added to my sense of discouragement and desperation. Practically speaking, I needed a new site for my study and a new source of livelihood. Emotionally I desired to be part of a movement for social change. After deciding to alter my

research proposal and to study another teacher rather than my own practice, and having only recently moved to this region of the country, I identified and contacted possible sources and asked them for recommendations of teachers who might fit into my study. Upon receiving a number of possible names, I contacted potential teachers. Ms. Elizabeth Darcy was recommended to me by one of her former professors because she had shown interest in the ideas of critical literacy in her preservice education.

After observing and interviewing several possible teachers, I chose to set my study in Elizabeth's classroom. My initial discussions with Ms. Darcy were exciting as she told me about how she was drawn to Paolo Freire and when she described the connections she saw between social justice and education. During my initial observation, her classroom struck me as a dynamic environment; her students were reading a short story and seemed genuinely engaged as they shared their ideas. I also chose to study Ms. Darcy because her classroom matched what I was looking for – she taught Language Arts in a diverse middle school classroom in an inner city school. In addition, I wanted to work with someone who would have the time to invest in the study. During our initial contacts, Elizabeth returned my calls and e-mails promptly and made time to meet and discuss the study. Finally, unlike some of the other nearby school districts, the district was reported to have a relatively easy consent process and Elizabeth thought her principal would be supportive of the study.

With a sense of relief and possibility, the research project began in December of 2001 as I worked through the consent process. My initial descriptions of the project reveal insights into the nature of the study. Because

my study largely hinged on what was happening, what arose as interesting and important, I struggled to explain the dissertation's focus. At the time, Ms. Darcy seemed comfortable with the fluctuating nature of the study. Looking back, though, I think the fluid study design initially caused friction in the research context. Upon meeting with the school principal, I composed a short list of critical literacy components to concretize the study. The principal, a doctoral graduate of another Midwestern school, began the meeting with friendly university rivalry. Although she was not that interested in delving into the substance or details of the study, she did raise an important concern: would Elizabeth be too overwhelmed with the time and imposition of the study? In that meeting, Elizabeth quickly said she was ready to invest the time and didn't think it would be a problem at all. However as the study began, the implications of the study were more of a struggle than I think either of us anticipated.

When explaining the study to the 8th grade students, they didn't seem to really understand what I would be doing there or why I would be there and the more I explained the more confused they looked. The basic tenor of the conversation was, "You're going to be here every day? Looking at us? What in the world for?" At the same time, though, they all seemed willing to participate and I received consent from every student except two: one who left the class after a few weeks and another who came nearly at the end of the school year. Looking back now I see a theme of the dissertation occurring in my first discussion with the students. While I thought I could describe Ms. Darcy's teaching as exceptionally unique and one a researcher would of course want to look at, students viewed it simply as their 2nd and 3rd period class.

I had considerable difficulty describing the study to other teachers at Elizabeth's school. After meeting several of Elizabeth's colleagues who asked what the study was about, I wrote in my field notes (2/4/02):

> This question [what am I studying?] will continue to plague the study in certain ways at least until it is more clearly defined. In the teacher's lounge today, I answered, "Connections and disconnections between students' lives outside of the classroom and inside of the classroom." Elizabeth said "we are looking for connecting the practical to the academic."

This ambiguity during the beginning stage speaks to the inductive nature of the study; even my working definitions of critical literacy and the essence of the study were created and constructed in process.

Part Two: Entering the Site / Early Data Collection (January - February 2002)

On a cold and early morning in January 2002, I drove to Elks Middle School excited and thankful. I was really happy to have found Ms. Darcy and to have an opportunity to put my dissertation back on track. I did not have an exact idea of what the study would be like but I felt okay with that ambiguity. From the beginning of our relationship, I knew it was going to be great to work with Elizabeth. While I did not realize it that first morning, though, there were several issues that had to be navigated at the beginning of the semester and the process was not as smooth as I had anticipated.

One discrepancy between my original ideas about the study and the way the study materialized surrounded my role in the classroom. I entered the study planning to be more of a participant-observer in the classroom but turned out to be more of an observer-participant. I initially hoped to take more of an active

role, one espoused in critical ethnography, by adding critical ideas into the instruction itself (Lather, 1987; Segall, 2002). However, I quickly realized that Ms. Darcy relied on a strong sense of order in the classroom and my active presence disrupted the environment. Sharing a classroom with another teacher is often problematic and my relaxed (and slightly chaotic) teaching style clashed with Ms. Darcy's firm tone. I reflected on this general tension in my field notes (2/10/02):

> I want to be a help to Elizabeth but I am afraid the ways I may try to help might be more of a burden for her than a help … Even taking up space in the classroom seems like a bit of a burden within her well-organized room … I thought that we would be sharing and talking more.

I also commented on a specific time we seemed to clash during a lesson. The students were brainstorming in groups about speeches they were planning. I moved to join a group of students and while we were having a lively discussion another group of students turned their seats to join in with us as well. A few minutes into the group work, Elizabeth stopped the class and asked everyone to go back to their seats. She told them they were being too loud and should continue working alone. I reflected:

> Again today Elizabeth and I clashed. Our styles are very different. But as much as I want to participate I need to remember first that this is *her* classroom. I may have to stay behind my desk more (field notes, 2/12/02).

In fact, the desk I sat at became a literal and figurative barrier. I began staying behind the desk the majority of the time and while I continued to interact frequently with the students sitting right around the desk I interacted less with the whole class. As time went on, Elizabeth and I connected more and I do think she enjoyed having me in the classroom. However, it was less for me to push and

prod her teaching and more for having a pleasurable person sitting there in the classroom. For example, I wrote:

> Alfredo made another outrageous comment today that was hysterical (about the Brownies and Girl Scouts) and I caught Elizabeth's eye just as she settled the class down. She came over to me afterwards and told me it was nice having someone there who gets it. I think this small incident helped break the ice (field notes, 2/19/02).

Elizabeth also shared a significant incident in her personal life and I noted:

> Elizabeth and I had a good talk today about [this issue in her personal life.] It helped me understand her frame of mind and made me feel closer to her. I also am working at showing her more respect and I think it is already making things a little better (field notes, 2/21/02).

This was not the relationship I imagined. I thought I would be actively involved in the classroom, asking and answering students' questions and participating in classroom activities. Ultimately, I decided though that "as much as I want to participate I need[ed] to remember first that this is her classroom" and it seemed my place in it was best behind my desk. Similarly, I was less involved with Elizabeth's planning for the class. I initially planned on looking over lesson plans and helping Ms. Darcy rethink her intentions. However, although Elizabeth was very accessible, she rarely shared her plans ahead of time and feedback did not seem to be what she was looking for when she did share her plans. Her planning style was more independent.

While my role was more observer than participant in the class, I did try to work toward praxis (Lather, 1986). Praxis involves researchers "consciously us[ing] ... research to help participants understand and change their situations" (263). In particular, I worked toward praxis in interviews because the nature of an interview lends itself to opportunities for people to reflect on what they did and

why they acted or thought a certain way. As a critical ethnographer, I tried to use the interviews as an opportunity for critical reflection. Specifically, in student interviews, I often followed up on themes they broached in class. I attempted to push students to reexamine their own positions, think about the consequences of individual actions, and consider other possible alternatives. In interviews with Ms. Darcy I consciously tried to help her rethink some of the decisions she made in class. I focused on helping her articulate, reconsider, and see alternatives in some of the challenges she was facing teaching critical literacy in a less-than-welcoming environment. Another way I worked toward praxis involved the textualization of the research study. As I described earlier, I asked Ms. Darcy to read, and also to reflect and remark on my representation of her classroom. Through asking Elizabeth to take on this role, I intended to give her an opportunity to revisit her teaching practice, read over and comment on another person's analysis of the events, and ultimately contemplate what happened, her own actions, and the possibilities and consequences created.

Another tension I contended with at the beginning of the research project involved my purpose in doing the study or the possible consequences of my work. I entered the study believing that researchers are not disinterested outsiders merely writing down what we see. I knew that I was analyzing the data as I was writing rather than simply recording what was going on and already inevitably, both consciously and unconsciously, making decisions about how to tell the story or what story to tell. For even the most diligent note-taker only collects a certain amount of information and as I took those notes I immediately and inescapably interpreted, even created, what took place (Britzman, 1995;

Denzin, 1995; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Flinders & Eisner 1994; Van Man, 1988). As I was "taking notes" I was not merely recording events that were already established and waiting for me to objectively write them down. Events were occurring in the research site but I was constructing my own perspective and version of them as I was writing them down.

Would my work report an amazing account of critical literacy, would it show how the school system did not allow critical literacy to prosper? These questions were looming in my mind as I worked to make sense of what was going on around me. Numerous previous experiences influenced my thought process. Throughout my years in graduate school, as I wrote about what I wanted to study, I was warned, or felt warned, that it was not scholarly to write a piece merely celebrating what was happening in a particular classroom practice. At the same time, I was disturbed by Cohen's (1990) article that documents a teacher's diligent but relatively unsuccessful attempt to implement math reform. Although my comps discussion group read the article and understood the fault to be the school system itself, I saw it as an eloquent and sophisticated, and maybe even important piece that violated the work of a teacher.

I never felt apolitical as a researcher, and by implicating myself in the research I took on responsibility for what I would say. I never felt beholden to tell a "feel good" story, and the ultimate consequences did not overwhelmingly drive the work but they were at the surface of my mind, especially in the beginning. As I began the research process, I was painfully aware of the implications of what I was seeing and the story I was telling. For there is not a plain truth to be told, and every "telling is constrained, partial and determined by the discourses and

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histories that prefigure, even as they might promise, representation" (Britzman, 1997, p. 232).

This issue of purpose is closely connected to the issues of power in a research study. There is a certain benefit that I will receive if I finish this dissertation. It potentially helps me gain more power in our society. As the official author, I have the power to report what happened in the classroom. I am interpreting the students' and teacher's thoughts and actions. Though I have used a number of data sources to make these interpretations, I am ultimately the final voice. McLaren (1997) asks researchers to "recognize the arrogance of speaking for others" (174). One way I have tried to do this is by asking Elizabeth to add her own commentary within this dissertation. The power of research also potentially plays a positive role. As Ms. Darcy and I conversed after class, she told me that, "having you in the classroom creates this feeling in the classroom that we are here to do something, to be something bigger than just a classroom" (interview, 2/21/02). In a school building and system where the doors are usually closed and teachers often work individually in isolation, there are many ways in which teaching is a very singular and private act. The research process has the potential to make it more public. An audience can bring to an event the sense of enhanced worth and value. This research project brought to Ms. Darcy's teaching practice an audience, which includes me, the writer, and also the expected audience of those who would eventually read about her teaching.

Up to this point, I have discussed how my data collection was influenced by my awareness of my own implication in the study and my position of power. My data collection was also influenced by my own lenses as "it is never possible

for researchers to view the world from God's knee, to know with certainty that one's perceptions and understandings mirror a pristine version of reality" (Flinders & Eisner, 1994, p. 353). Although events certainly happen, there is no external view and no way to see them or report on them without being influenced by one's own subjectivities. Rather than believing "that if research is done properly, if the researcher represents himself well and stands on a point, then the researcher's biases can be mastered and fear of misrepresentation can be assuaged" (Britzman, 1997, p. 35), critical ethnographers believe that a researcher's history, experiences, and identities (gender, ethnicity, etc.) shape everything he or she sees and doesn't see. "Inevitably, what researchers attend to and the questions they ask are a reflection of what they take to be important," and of who they are (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

As I collected my data then, I collected it from my own view point. It is valuable therefore to consider who I am and how my own view point(s) has been constructed. While I can not trace back and connect every observation and interpretation it can be helpful to briefly discus my own lenses. It is important to keep in mind too that my lenses were not consistent and unified. Rather than unitary authors, researchers are duplicitous selves; identity is fluid and muddled. Authors' multiple selves surface at various times throughout the research project; these selves each bring something different and possibly disconnected to the work. (Denzin, 1998)

There were ways in which my various identities and lenses shaped both my participation - and relationships - in the classroom and also my interpretations of the events that occurred. My own race and class (white, upper middle class)

played significant roles in how I was viewed and how I viewed. In both of these constructs, I resembled and connected to Ms. Darcy more than to the students. In fact, several times throughout the school year, some of the students in Ms. Darcy's first period class (who were often in the room when I arrived) asked if Ms. Darcy and I were sisters although I do not think we look anything alike. These pieces of my identity made me similar to Ms. Darcy and identified me with her in my own mind as well. Although many of our life experiences were actually quite dissimilar, we ultimately related relatively easily. Further, our shared gender allowed us to easily discuss many stereotypically feminine topics, such as love, cooking, exercising and spirituality. My dissimilarities with the students meant that while I developed what I consider good relationships with many of them, they were not built on cultural references or certain shared background. While I was interested in viewing and having them view their own lives as raced and classed (such as examining the racial profiling they faced in their personal lives or the class discrimination in society), I observed them from the role of an outsider, one who recorded -- and was interested in -- their experiences, but who would never share in the same way.

Another important component of my identity that influenced the study was my duality as a teacher and researcher. There were times when I related to the students or Ms. Darcy in teacher mode, revising a piece of writing or reviewing a new seating chart. There were other times when I was much more of a researcher (although there are certainly not clear boundaries between the two -- either in my role in the classroom or in general) wanting to take apart a past event with a student or with Elizabeth. In my teacher moments I more thoroughly

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remembered the fast and overwhelming pace of teaching and may have been more accepting of what, on other days, in my more removed, reflective researcher mode, seemed like missed opportunities to engage with the class or individuals in critical work.

As I mentioned earlier, though this section does specifically focus on the "data collection period" in actuality I was already writing this text. "There is a rather persistent conviction that the problems of ethnography are merely those of access, intimacy, sharp ears and eyes, good habits of recording and so forth. It is not a straightforward matter, however, because a culture or cultural practice is as much created by the writing as it determines the writing itself" (Van Man, 1988, p. 6). What I wrote down was shaped in two ways; it was shaped by both what I noticed and also how I interpreted what I saw.

Part 3: Collecting Data throughout the Semester (February - June 2002)

Though the issues raised above obviously permeate the entire study, they did not play such a central role, at least in my mind, as I continued on with my data collection. After the discussion Ms. Darcy and I shared about the stressful event in her personal life (field notes 2/21/02) and once I was in the classroom regularly (and behind the desk more), I co-existed in the class with greater ease. In addition, I developed more data collection routines and gained comfort researching. This comfort was positive in that the data collection was more enjoyable for me and less of a burden for Ms. Darcy. It was also negative as some important issues about subjectivity, representation, and power were not as

present in my thinking and led me to miss (or ignore) certain important questions and struggles that arise from dissonance.

The data for this dissertation was collected during the second semester of the 2001-2002 school year. At this time, Elizabeth Darcy was in her second year of teaching. In the middle of the semester, I stepped back from the classroom, wrote an analytic memo recording my sense-making up to that point, and went back to Michigan State for a meeting with my dissertation committee. This experience allowed me to obtain feedback about the research and helped me see the site through different lenses.

Table 1: Summary of Data Collected

Event	Type of Data	Dates Collected or Duration
Daily class sessions	Detailed field notes	3-4 times per week from January - June
Teaching and learning activities	Copies of teacher's lesson plans	Most class period from January - June
The students' work	Copies of students' daily class work	Most class periods from January - June
Selected class lessons (critical discussions)	Audiotape	10 class periods
Interviews with students	Audiotape	4 group interviews with every student 3 interviews with each of 7 focus students
Interviews with teacher	Audiotape	15 interviews

From January through June 2002, I observed the class three or four days a week. Each day that I was there, I recorded/constructed detailed field notes. I also

collected the teacher's lesson plans and student work from the majority of the lessons throughout the entire semester.

In addition, since I was particularly interested in critical literacy, I wanted to be able to thoroughly analyze critical events in the classroom; therefore, I audio-taped selected lesson, ones where I anticipated sustained critical literacy discussions or events might occur. Ms. Darcy usually gave me an outline of what she would be teaching during the following week along with more in depth lesson plans, including questions she would be asking or materials she would be sharing with the students. From these outlines and lesson plans, along with the conversations I had with her, I chose specific lessons to audiotape. I wanted to record students engaging with critical ideas and so my first criteria for audiotaping was that students would be talking a significant amount during the lessons. I was collecting all of their written work and would therefore have copies of their written engagement with critical ideas; the point of audiotaping lessons was also to record their oral engagement. As an example, I focused on class discussions, Socratic Seminars, and other student-led activities, such as debates or poetry readings. A second criteria I applied to decide what to audiotape concerned the content of the lessons. Here, I chose lessons based on whether or not critical content was going to be the focus. Specifically, I looked for lessons where students would analyze the past, present or future of their own surroundings, the larger society, or broader global contexts. In particular, I identified lessons where students would delve into issues of race, class, justice or power.

In addition to audiotaping selected class sessions, I also conducted interviews with Ms. Darcy and her students in order to follow up on important

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classroom events and themes I noticed during data collection. The interviews were intended to provide opportunities for conversation, rather than simply question and response. By having multiple interviews with the same subjects, I attempted to form relationships that would create back-and-forth sharing of ideas (Carspecken, 1996). I wanted to use the interviews for praxis and also to attain more information about a variety of topics. The interviews gave me a chance to check in the with the students and with Ms. Darcy about how I was interpreting actions and events in the classroom and also created space for them to bring up what they thought was important in the teaching and learning process.

The majority of my student interviews occurred during the lunch period. The Language Arts class was spread over two class periods, one immediately before and the other directly following the lunch period. This configuration gave me relatively easy access to students, but it also meant that there were time constraints that caused both the student and me to shove bites of food in between questions and responses. My first round of interviews with the students consisted of group interviews, and gave me a chance to include nearly every student in the classroom. These were semi-structured interviews; students responded to my questions - including prepared questions and also follow-up questions depending on their responses. In these interviews, I asked the group of students to create a visual representation of the different components of the class and to answer some basic questions about the substance of the class and its similarities to and differences from other classes. Then, I asked each student to put in writing anything they would alter from the group's visual representation of the class. After the first round of group interviews, I chose seven focus

students and conducted three more rounds of interviews (descriptions of focus students, and how I chose them, follow in Chapter Three). The interviews with my focus students were loosely structured; I prepared questions to bring to the interview but mostly wanted students to critically reflect on an experience in class or in their life or on a piece of their writing. To engage in this type of reflection, I often moved away from my prepared questions and responded to the direction of the particular conversation. Each of these interviews lasted thirty to forty minutes.

One of the very fortunate aspects of this study was the access I had to Elizabeth both during and after the 2001-2002 school year. We talked most days before, in between and/or after class. There were times when these discussions were very brief and other times when they were lengthier. If I had a particular inquiry about the day's events, particular students, or past or future lessons, I asked her pointed questions. Other times, we reflected together about the students' learning or her future plans. If I anticipated a noteworthy discussion, I turned the tape recorder on and taped our conversations. Sometimes, important comments occurred when I wasn't expecting them and hadn't turned on the tape recorder; I recorded these conversation in my field notes immediately following (and sometimes even during) our discussions.

In total, I recorded fifteen interviews with Ms. Darcy, ranging from 30 minutes to more than 2 hours. Seven of these interviews took place outside of school and lasted between one and two hours. Eight of the interviews occurred during the lunch period between classes or during Elizabeth's preparation period, lasting between thirty minutes and one hour. The interviews with Ms. Darcy were

also loosely structured. I usually asked a few of the pointed questions I prepared but also responded to the direction of the conversation as I wanted to engage Elizabeth in critical conversations about her teaching and thinking. One interview focused on Elizabeth's background and entry into teaching. Three occurred after the school year was over and were used to follow up on emerging/constructed themes and to give Ms. Darcy an opportunity to reflect on the school year and research process.

Part 4: Analyzing Data and Textualizing the Report (June 2002 - Spring 2004)

Analyzing data and textualizing the report began the moment I walked into the classroom but became more formal in the months following the study. I managed to transcribe my very last tape the day before I had my first child, Dagan, on July 9, 2002. This event forced me to take a break from the data. When I managed to get enough sleep to think coherently and get back to work on my dissertation, my data analysis post-data-collection period got into full swing. In this section, I first focus on data analysis and then discuss the process I followed to textualize the account.

Data analysis was an iterative process as I moved reflexively between reading and re-reading my data set, constantly shifting between different parts of the data, literature, emerging theories, and new ideas and questions. I analyzed my data inductively and allowed things to unfold differently from the way I had expected. By collecting numerous types of data (including field notes, interviews, lesson plans, student work, class lessons) over a period of time (six months), I was able to triangulate (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). In this way, many of the

larger themes of the classroom and the study were revisited multiple times in various ways. For example, I was able to compare Elizabeth's plans for and actual teaching, a variety of statements she made at different points, and responses students had in class, in interviews and in their written work. These comparisons helped me to paint a more representative picture of the teaching and learning.

In particular, I used a two-step process of coding my data. First, I read through my entire data set to get a sense of the themes and constructs permeating my data. During this process I organized the large amount of data and began to make sense of it by labeling noteworthy and reoccurring aspects, responses, and ideas. Here, I began coding my data to note what type of data it was (interview, written work, etc.), who was involved or responding (teacher, focus student, other students), and when it was collected. I also created initial codes by using my research questions. To do this, I labeled pieces of data with the corresponding number of the research question they spoke to. For example, when students talked about their attitudes toward various components of the classroom, I labeled the data with a number 4 to correspond to my original research question, "What are students' attitudes toward literacy in this classroom?" In addition, during this time, based on my experience in the data site and my early looks at the data, I recognized that I also needed to create further categories and codes. Specifically, I added categories in order to organize and code the traditional teaching in the classroom and the different types of authority taken on by Ms. Darcy and students.

After this initial review, I started on the second step of analyzing my data by going back through my data in thorough detail. I further broke down my general categorical codes (such as the research question addressed) to specify the different responses and ideas in the data about that research question. My codes emerged from my experiences within the context of the classroom and my analysis of the study, through observing the classroom, through writing analytic memos and by (re)reviewing the data. There were times when I read my data chronologically, other times during this process when I pulled out all of one type of teaching, such as poetry, and further times when I read everything concerning one focus student, such as Andre. As I began to decide on specific aspects to explore in the dissertation (such as issues of authority) I poured back through the data once more to look for data that involved this particular theme, further examples, and disconfirming evidence.

In addition to intensely focusing on the data itself, I also moved back and forth between theory and practice to expand my understandings of both the data I collected and the literature I read. In the midst of analyzing my data, I was also rereading books and articles that played a seminal role in guiding my study originally (such as Christensen, 2000; Edelsky, 1996; Freire, 1996; Gee, 1992; McLaren, 1998). I interpreted these texts in new ways as I considered how they spoke to and with my data. I also searched for and read pieces that became important as my work progressed (for example Greene, 200; Nieto, 2000; Sleeter & Grant, 1994; Willinsky, 2001). These texts brought important additional voices and perspectives to my study, raising and answering questions that furthered my analysis.

As I analyzed the data, I did not discover, but rather constructed, patterns, categories, and central issues. Just as my own experiences and identities shaped the data I collected, it also informed the ways I interpreted and organized the data. I was making sense of the context as I analyzed it, and my own sense-making became the representation (Denzin, 1995; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Flinders & Eisner 1994). Like many ethnographers, I also used interviews to access information. Though the interviews did give me insights into the students' and teacher's thoughts, their words only offered stories or particular versions about what they did and what they thought. Not only were the subjects' words influenced by a complex set of factors, but also my own lenses determined how I heard their words. Denzin (1995) recalls the words of Willie Nelson, "I hear the sound of your voice in my mind, and I hear what I want to hear" (p. 9). The students' and teacher's words were filtered through my own desires, identities (gender, class etc.) and experiences. In addition, the meaning of subjects' words were determined by the particular context in which it was told, including the time it was told, who (among our multiple selves) was doing the telling and who was asking the questions. The particular context between the interviewer and the interviewee created the meanings, therefore a new context was also created each time I listened to the interviews or read the transcriptions. The tape recordings and transcriptions are not capturing what was said because "the moment is forever gone. Each reading of the transcribed text is a contact with 'what has ceased to exist' ... The 'original' voices, and the intentions behind their voices can never be recovered, only recorded, or heard ... These retellings become ... new versions of the previously heard [and recorded] voice" (Denzin,

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1995, pp. 319-320). A final important point about data analysis is that "the object of study always exceeds its analytic circumscription" (Marcus, 1994). What we see can not be neatly categorized. No matter how intricate the categories and codes, they are manufactured analytical organizers that can not fully capture the setting studied. The points don not simply emerge into concrete piles, themes and ruptures. We actively make decisions about how to organize and categorize the data. Different researchers would organize the same data differently. For social contexts are messy; and ultimately as a particular researcher makes sense of the data certain pieces emerge as the most important while others are left out. These choices are partially dependent upon the lenses we bring to the data analysis.

Though I recognized the limitations inevitable in textualizing the account, I still necessarily organized the dissertation around certain themes and into specific chapters. As is usual especially in qualitative studies, this process went through several different revisions. Initially, I considered writing the study chronologically to follow the ebbs and flows of the school year. However, as I looked through the data I found that various themes reemerged and the rhythm did not necessarily continue to build in an organized fashion. Instead, I found major themes recurring over and over and taking over the forefront of my mind. This does not necessarily mean that these were the major events of the school year but rather they were the main issues and experiences that drew my attention in an attempt to describe and analyze what was happening in this classroom. As I will explain further below, I decided to organize the chapters in order to represent the different components of Ms. Darcy's teaching. This led me to a

data chapter about poetry (Chapter Four), another about the novel The Outsiders (Chapter Five) and a third chapter focusing on grammar lessons, protest poems, and the I-Search paper writing assignment (Chapter Six). Within each of these chapters, organized around content, major themes of the study emerge. In Chapter Four, I focus on the possibilities and limitations of critical literacy work in the classroom, Chapter Five describes and questions the nature of authority in a critical literacy classroom, and Chapter Six analyzes the blending of traditional and critical teaching in room C132.

One of the most important decisions that I made in textualizing the account was deciding to represent Ms. Darcy's teaching practice more generally, rather than only focusing on critical components of her practice. I did this because during all stages of the study I was continually struck by the different pieces of her practice. There were times when the lessons were clearly critical, focusing solely on speaking out against injustice for example. There were also other times when the instruction looked very traditional, such as during mini-lessons where Ms. Darcy taught discrete grammar skills. And then there was the majority of the time when Elizabeth taught the traditional Discourse (such as the way to have a debate or write an essay) *and* embedded critical content into those structures. This blending became of primary importance in the study. As I introduced in Chapter One and will further discuss in the conclusion, this dissertation focuses on the shades of gray in critical literacy practices.

Therefore, I wanted my research to include the different components that made up Ms. Darcy's overall teaching practice. My initial step was to identify these components, which I did in several ways. First, I went back over students'

responses during my group interviews regarding the components of Ms. Darcy's class. During the group interviews, when I asked the groups to describe what happened in the class, each group came up with the same main aspects: writing (some groups called it writing workshop), reading novels, Socratic seminar (or class discussions), handbook (this is the notebook they keep their mini-lessons notes in) or mini-lessons, and poetry. I also looked back over Ms. Darcy's response when I asked her the same question: writing workshop - including grammar mini-lessons, reading novels, reading out loud, class discussions, poetry, and the I-Search paper. In addition, I used my field notes to categorize the different aspects of Ms. Darcy's practice.

Below, I have provided a chart, titled "Components of Ms. Darcy's Teaching Practice." I intend for the chart to serve two purposes. First, I aim for it to provide a general overview of Ms. Darcy's teaching to allow the reader a broader sense of what occurred throughout the semester. To this end, I broke the chart down into: grammar, novels, poetry, and writing. I separated the grammar activities from the writing workshop because they were distinct both in my mind as well as in the students' and in this way they were also connected to the parts of speech unit. In addition, I put the I-Search paper in the writing section because, although it was a main chunk of instructional time, it followed the same general characteristics of other writing assignments. I did not include reading out loud because the students did not mention it, it did not happen as often as the other sections, and I did not think it significantly added to the study. In addition, I embedded the Socratic seminars into the Novels section because they always took place within that context. The chart lists the main topics on the

left and then further details about the lessons on the right. I have also included approximate lengths of time, configured by the records I kept of what happened each day (even those days I was not there), through my observation notes, Ms. Darcy's lesson plans and my informal interviews with Ms. Darcy.

Table 2: Components of Ms. Darcy's Teaching Practice

Topic	Details Approximate Length of Time (bolded)4
Grammar	Mini-Lessons (for example: synonyms, antonyms, homonyms, prefixes and suffixes) **once or twice a week throughout the semester** Parts of Speech Presentations **3 weeks**
Novels	The Outsiders (activities included: pre-reading questions, comprehension questions, vocabulary, Socratic Seminars, debate, final essay) **6 weeks** The Diary of Anne Frank (activities included: author study, historical research, comprehension questions and quizzes, Socratic Seminars, vocabulary, final essay) **5 weeks**
Poetry	Warm-Ups **Daily** Protest Poem (reading activist poetry, writing protest poems, extending it to a neighborhood improvement project) **2 weeks** Poetry Unit

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4 Ms. Darcy taught two periods per day. Also, many activities occurred on the same day. The lengths of time presented here are approximations designed to provide the reader with a sense of Ms. Darcy's teaching practice.

	(Where I'm From, Thirteen Ways, I Wish poems, Haikus) 3 weeks
Writing	I-Search Research Paper 6 weeks Special Events (Peace Week, National Peace Corps Day, Earth Day, Mother's Day, Martin Luther King's Birthday) Total: 3 weeks Other writing pieces (essays about heroes, short stories) Total: 4 weeks

My second purpose for the chart is to place the lessons I focus on in this dissertation into the larger context of Ms. Darcy's teaching practice overall. As I decided on the data to include or exclude, I made choices in an attempt to represent the range of Ms. Darcy's teaching practice. As I explained above, I decided to analyze Ms. Darcy's teaching practice more generally, rather than focusing only on critical components of her practice, in order to make conclusions about what this critical practice looked like overall, and how it included both critical and traditional aspects of education. I wanted to include each component of her curriculum. Therefore, I included data and analysis about poetry, novels, grammar and writing. Specifically, in Chapter Four, I chose to focus on the lessons "Where I'm From" and "Thirteen Ways" because they were similar to the other lessons during the poetry unit and they allowed me to focus in on one student, Andre, who played a role in other parts of the dissertation as well. In this way, in a sense Andre became more of a character in the dissertation, providing depth to the story. In Chapter Five, I chose to write about *The Outsiders* instead

of *The Diary of Anne Frank,* which had very similar activities, because of the amount of data collected, particularly interview data. Since *The Outsiders* unit fell earlier in the school year, I had richer interview data, with both the students and with Elizabeth, focusing specifically on the lessons and student work surrounding the novel. The *Anne Frank* unit took place at the same time as the I-Search paper and the end of the year final portfolio activities and these events often consumed the interview time. Finally, in Chapter Six, I chose a typical mini-lesson and focused on the I-Search writing assignment because it was the biggest writing assignment and contained the type of blending of traditional and critical teaching typical of other writing assignments throughout the school year.

Below, I have also presented a chronological look at Ms. Darcy's curriculum to provide a sense of the lessons and units over the course of the semester. Organized in this way, we see that critical components of Ms. Darcy's teaching practice were incorporated throughout the year, rather than only during certain isolated periods. Ms. Darcy did not place these events solely at the end of the school year; instead she included them throughout the semester in different ways. For example, the critical "special events" I noted in Table 2 and describe further in Chapter Seven, corresponded to the dates on the calendar in which they occurred. Other critical components explored throughout the dissertation, such as critical Socratic Seminars and poetry assignments, took place in the midst of poetry units and class novels detailed below in Table 3. Just as the critical components occurred throughout the semester, more traditional components happened similarly. Though Ms. Darcy planned a specific unit to focus on part of speech, grammar lessons are sprinkled throughout the semester.

The table below delineates the mixture of traditional and critical components that occurred side by side throughout Ms. Darcy's teaching practice.

Table 3: Chronology of Ms. Darcy's Teaching Practice

January	Hero Essays (final drafts) Protest Poems Grammar Mini-Lessons
February	Martin Luther King's Birthday: I Have a Dream Speech Peace Week Activity Grammar Mini-Lessons Short Stories (final drafts) Outsiders Novel (begins)
March	Outsiders Novel (continued) Grammar Mini-Lessons
April	Poetry Unit Parts of Speech Preparation and Presentations Earth Day Activity
May	I-Search Research Paper begins Grammar Mini-Lessons Mother's Day Activity The Diary of Anne Frank begins
June	The Diary of Anne Frank (continued) I-Search Research paper (final drafts) End of the Year Activities o (remember-me poems, portfolio reading)

In addition to covering the different components of Ms. Darcy's teaching practice, I also wanted to cover the range of traditional and critical activities that occurred in the classroom, especially as this became a main theme of the dissertation overall. I wanted to include the more traditional aspects of the teaching practice, the more critical parts and the lessons that blended these approaches - which took place the majority of the time. Therefore, I included the grammar lessons and the protest poem together in one chapter and organized the two other data chapters around lessons that blended traditional and critical approaches.

Throughout my data analysis, I thoroughly studied the data in order to construct a representative account of my observations and recordings, while also considering ways my work could make a valuable contribution to the field. As I moved to formally textualize the account, I worked to convey this site and its potential importance to a wider audience. In order to express the texture and specifics of the students, teacher, and classroom I wrote thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973), using particular details, salient quotations and evocative reporting and drawing on a large amount and wide variety of data. By delving into and including data, I attempted to allow readers to experience the context as they read and interpreted the dissertation.

As I included data in the text, though, I altered its meaning. Language itself, the way words are put together, creates the meanings embedded within the words. For example, as I took certain phrases a participant expressed in an interview and put them together with my analysis or with other participants' words, the statements took on different connotations. In addition, I also think that pseudonyms, in addition to protecting participants' identities, also change them. As I wrote initial drafts of the account, I used the teacher and students' real names and then went back and changed them to the pseudonyms. At least for me, the participants took on slightly different identities as they moved from being people in the study to people studied.

Throughout this chapter, I have discussed the impossibility of accessing objective truth. However, even if I had such an objective account, I would not be able to objectively communicate it to an audience. For I would have to rely on language to provide a clear, uncontested method for communication when "all

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language is multiaccentual, meaning that it can be both spoken and heard, written and read in ways that reflect different meanings and different relationships to [different people], social groups and power formations" (Kincheloe, 1997, p. 62). My words could not travel untouched to the reader's minds. The linguistic turn contests the possibility of a unitary, cohesive account. "The ethnographic promise of a holistic account is betrayed by the slippage born from the partiality of language – of what cannot be said precisely because of what is said, and of the impossible difference within what is said, what is intended, what is signified, what is repressed, what is taken, and what remains" (Britzman, 1995, p. 230).

I hope that by using critical ethnography as my methodology I am able to create an evocative and dynamic account. Critical ethnographers aim "to keep things in process, to disrupt, to keep the systems in play, to ... continuously demystify the realities we create, to fight the tendency for our categories to congeal" (Lather, 1991, p. 156). Through this process, I intend to tell one particular version of what happened in this critical literacy classroom. By calling into question how this version is influenced by its telling and teller, I aim to paint a representative picture. I have employed a few techniques in order to "keep things in process."

In addition, critical ethnographers attempt to show "how language is inextricably bound to the social and the ideological" (Lather, 1991, p. 154). Many structures in our society, including science, often end up disconnecting language from its social and ideological influences, and presenting words and knowledge as neutral. I hope to be part of a research movement that highlights the problematic and contested nature of the worlds studied in order to create "a

social criticism that can intervene in the relationship of information economies, nation-state politics, and technologies of mass communication, especially in terms of the empirical sciences" (Clough, 1998, p. 136).

Chapter Three

SETTING THE STAGE: LANGUAGE ARTS IN ROOM 132

In this chapter, I begin to delve into the context in which Elizabeth Darcy worked and to examine her teaching practice. By describing the context surrounding her classroom, including the school district and school building, I start painting a picture of room 132 and I set the stage for a close study of the teaching and learning in room C132. In the beginning of the chapter, I introduce North Central Public School District and Elk School. Then I move inside room C132 to present the students and teacher that engage in the teaching and learning throughout the school year. These descriptions lay the foundation for the closer investigation into specific lessons that will follow. The characteristics of the school district, school, teacher and students, and the ways these characteristics interact, ultimately shape her practice. This dissertation focuses on how these factors shape a practice where traditional and critical notions of literacy coexist.

In the second part of the chapter, I continue looking at the context surrounding room C132 using different lenses. Specifically, by investigating several documents provided by North Central Public School District that inform teachers about what should be taught and how it should be taught, I analyze the culture surrounding the classroom. While in Chapter One, I compared a critical literacy perspective to a more traditional one on a more general level, in this

chapter I begin to critically analyze specific District guidelines. The traditional conception of Language Arts influenced Elizabeth Darcy's practice both in tangible ways, such as through the resources with which she was provided, and in intangible ways, such as through the messages she received from her school and District. Ms. Darcy both aligned herself with the District's expectations and also pushed against its current. Throughout the chapter, I continue to build a picture of Elizabeth Darcy's blending of critical literacy with more traditional conceptions of Language Arts, and I investigate the roots and theories behind these approaches as they relate to literacy education.

The Context

North Central Public School District

Elks Middle School is one of over thirty middle schools in one of the largest school districts in the United States. The school has been in operation for more than forty years and has seventh and eighth graders. The district has a wide variety of students, many considered poor or at-risk. "Factors related to poverty and race continue to impact heavily on student performance, with the poorest performing schools having a demonstratively higher percent of both African-American students and students participating in free and reduced-priced meals program" (www.ncps.com). Elks Middle School is situated in the middle of the school district, geographically, academically, and economically. The school has about nine hundred students from approximately eighty different counties, with the majority being students of color, speaking forty five different languages.

Elks Middle School

I turned off the freeway exit and down the street to Elks Middle School. The neighborhood was quite varied, with run-down houses and bigger houses fixed up, old looking buildings and newer ones. I pulled into the parking lot and entered the school. The school looked like a typical very large middle school. Bold signs were posted on the front door to inform all visitors to report directly to the main office. In addition, a camera running continuously was installed above the front door. The school seemed like a rather confusing maze, consisting mostly of very long hallways with beige tiles and brick white walls. The large cafeteria appeared immediately on the left, with rows and rows of white tables and filled with the smell of school lunches. Three secretaries with unusually pleasant demeanors worked the front office. They gave me my daily visitor's pass as I headed to Ms. Darcy's classroom.

Overall, especially compared to other large urban schools I have worked in and visited, the school ran relatively smoothly, especially in the building's long hallways. Students lined up against the walls before they entered each classroom and they walked down the halls to lunch or assemblies in fairly quiet lines. I very rarely observed any loud student disruptions in the hallways. At the same time, teachers' raised voices were a regular occurrence in these hallways. As I peeked into classrooms as I walked to Ms. Darcy's room each day, students were usually seated in rows of desks as teachers lectured from the front of the classroom. Often I did observe students' misbehavior in the classroom and teachers quite often yelled at students in their rooms. There did not seem to be a administration intervention in individual teacher's classrooms. As Ms.

Darcy stated, "As long as you pretty much follow along with the program, you are basically left alone" (interview, 3/1/02). It seemed as if the school and school district administration set the wheels in motion and then left everything alone to turn. The school set the schedule, gave teachers several district documents for curriculum and behavior[5], and then basically got out of the way in the day to day workings. There were rarely school assemblies or field trips. Day in and day out students filed in and out of individual classrooms one after the other.

The organization of the school consisted of teams of teachers, with each team occupying one hallway. Ms. Darcy was on the C team. Each team had two Language Arts teachers (students took a 2-hour Language Arts block) and one teacher from each of the other subject areas, so Ms. Darcy worked with another Language Arts teacher, as well as a social studies, science, and math teacher. These teachers shared a common group of students.

Table 4: Sample Student Schedule

Time	Class
8:30-8:45	Homeroom
8:45 - 9:45	Math
9:45-10:45	Language Arts
10:45 - 11:15	Lunch
11:15 - 12:15	Language Arts
12:15 - 1:15	Science
1:15 - 2:15	Social Studies
2:15 - 3:15	Physical Education

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[5] discussed at length further in this chapter

The teams had a common planning period and held weekly meetings each Monday. Each team had a leader who ran the weekly meetings and served as a liaison others could go to with any problems. Ms. Darcy had pleasant but not particularly close relationships with the rest of her team. She often ate lunch in the teacher's lounge and chatted with the other teachers, although she also commented that "they complain and don't necessarily do anything about it" and that "there aren't many conversations about other things I'm interested in outside of school" (interview, 2/21/02). She clashed occasionally with the veteran Language Arts teacher who was very focused on the standardized tests and wanted the whole team to focus on these tests more often. Ms. Darcy did not find the team meetings very useful and she did not feel she had much in common pedagogically with the rest of the team. There were times, though, when she sought support from the team about particular problematic students or parents. Specifically, when Ms. Darcy was challenged by a parent about a student's grade, the team leader was very supportive in helping Ms. Darcy make a list of student assignments and quiz grades to show the parent and administration.

Room C132

Overall, room C132 seemed to mostly exist on an island. Other teachers rarely entered Ms. Darcy's classroom and while she generally had friendly relationships with other teachers, she did not collaborate with her colleagues. Student discipline problems were handled in the classroom; Ms. Darcy had a "bad hair day" desk in the back of the classroom for disruptive students. Involving both instructional and discipline issues, the principal "is not very present in the

room, for better and not" (interview, 6/24/03). Ms. Darcy was expected to "basically follow the curriculum" (ibid) and keep order in the classroom. Rather than relying on aspects *inside* of the school, she taught drawing mostly on resources *outside* of the school: books she read in her teacher preparation program, ideas from her past experiences or current life interests

For instance, after her first year of teaching, Ms. Darcy read and fell in love with Nancy Atwell's (1998) book *In the Middle*. One thing I noticed when I walked into Elizabeth's classroom was that it looked like a page out of the book. Laminated signs hung from the ceiling marking a student conference area, a classroom library, students' portfolios, and a supply corner with various types of papers, pencils, magazines, and newspapers. Students' writing was portrayed throughout the room along with multiple inspirational quotes and colorful posters about writing. The rules for writing workshop were posted. Ms. Darcy's own personal bookshelf was filled with multicultural poetry books, books about teaching for social justice. A picture of her favorite activist, Thic Nhat Hahn was posted on her chalkboard. The desks were grouped together and arranged in rows facing the overhead projector and chalk board.

The Teacher: Elizabeth Darcy

While this study investigates a broader landscape, including the interrelationships between the students, the school building, the school district and the community, Elizabeth Darcy is at the heart of this dissertation. This study focused on Elizabeth's second and third period Language Arts block. Of course, this existed within her entire school day. As the chart below shows, during the

2001-2002 school year, Elizabeth taught two two-hour Language Arts blocks along with an additional one-hour inclusion reading course for special education students.

Table 5: Ms. Darcy's schedule

Time	Class
8:30-8:45	Homeroom
8:45 - 9:45	Inclusion Reading
9:45-10:45	Language Arts B
10:45 - 11:15	Lunch
11:15 - 12:15	Language Arts B
12:15 - 1:15	Preparation Period
1:15 - 2:15	Language Arts C
2:15 - 3:15	Language Arts C

In order to understand the analysis presented in this dissertation, it is essential to know Elizabeth Darcy as a person and as a teacher. I begin by describing Elizabeth's background, to give insight into the multiple aspects of her identity and to show how her own experiences influence her as a teacher. Elizabeth Darcy grew up in a small town in the Midwest. Her family was Mennonite and she was raised in an insular community. She is a white woman who grew up in a working class environment. Several factors during her upbringing later influenced her commitments to critical literacy as a teacher. First, a hurtful rumor about her that circulated in her tight-nit community ultimately shaped her as an independent thinker and convinced her of the importance of being able to think outside of your own small world. She carried this belief into

her teaching; pushing her students to think outside the walls of their own contexts - a vital tenet in critical literacy - played a central role in her classroom. As she described:

> There was this rumor about me where I grew up and I was very isolated and very alone and didn't like it but turned it around so I prided myself on being very independent. I was able to go to Chicago after I graduated and I stayed on my own and made a courageous decision and I think someone who had an easier upbringing maybe wouldn't have even entertained. Being out on my own has given me the space to make my own opinions about things. And teaching has really made me want to share that with others (interview, 4/23/02).

For Elizabeth, the act of thinking on your own was not something taken for granted but something she realized through difficult struggle. It was a priority for her teaching practice to share the liberating power of this ability with her students.

A second way her background influenced her teaching practice in critical ways was through her own economic experiences. She explained (interview, 4/23/02) that her commitment to critical literacy "was tied to class but in a very personal way. Both of my parents came from working class, and so we didn't have a lot of money. I remember it being a source of shame for us, and thinking about it very personally and not abstractly. If someone had been there to say let's examine classism or different or conflicting messages then maybe it would have given a little space around the invading feeling that adolescents feel. I like to think that you can help them understand things." Again, Ms. Darcy wanted to make it different for her students, to "give them a little space" to examine issues like classism so it wouldn't be such a "source of shame."

A third negative experience in her own schooling also contributed to Ms. Darcy's critical practices as a teacher. She recalled, "When I was in middle

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school I felt really stupid and I got bad grades. I remember reading Romeo and Juliet and never being asked to compare myself to Romeo or Juliet, and never being asked to bridge my life with some problem out there, and never someone having faith in your problems." These memories vowed her to teach differently and led her to believe: "That is what I think it is all about, if you can get the students to believe that their problems are worth writing and talking about, then you can teach them any skill. If you get them on board with their lives, you have to get their whole lives interested, they are able to talk about their dreams for the future and they learn some skills. It is really just about what they want for the world (interview, 4/23/02). This belief is the core of critical literacy; education is "really just about what they want for the world."

Elizabeth's teaching practice and commitment to critical literacy continued to form after high school, as she moved away to attend college and to experience the larger world. After living in a big city and converting to Budhism, she joined the Peace Corps and spent several years in Africa. Upon returning to the United States, she entered a special program for former Peace Corps volunteers. Through a partnership between a university and a school district, Elizabeth received tuition reimbursement toward a master's degree in Secondary Education in English by committing to teach in this district for at least three years.

During graduate school, Elizabeth was formally introduced to critical literacy ideas. She recalled:

> It started with Freire, I liked [his ideas] so much because he links empowerment to education and links not just education but education filtered through and tailored to the learner. It is so practical and makes a lot of sense to me, and has an activism aspect that I like without being something separate from your life. I can be a teacher and fulfill an activist

role while being an ordinary teacher ...I remember hearing on the radio about how CEO's salaries is widening from their lowest paid workers and the gap is widening rather than equalizing. Many social issues, the rich are getting richer and the poor staying poorer seems to be pretty accurate right now. The power structure seems pretty intact. Teaching helps me be an activist in daily ways. For change to occur, it happens in small ways. My teaching for me is part of my way of bringing about social change (interview, 4/23/02).

As Elizabeth described, her teaching and activism were connected for her in her personal and professional lives, "Teaching help[ed] [her] be an activist in daily ways ... teaching for me is part of my way of bringing about social change."

Though Elizabeth Darcy was an activist, she was not a radical. The following example illustrates her go-with-the-flow personality. I wrote these field notes after Elizabeth and I went swimming together at the JCC after an interview.

Something Elizabeth said really hit me today at the JCC pool of all places. There were several signs about the need to take a shower before entering the pool. Elizabeth and I both talked about how we hated to shower, even to rinse off, in the cold showers, and how we didn't see its real value. However, she proceeded into the showers while I headed straight out to the pool. She smiled at me and said that when they only had one sign there, she often didn't shower, but now that there were three signs, she figured they were serious about showering and decided to follow their rule (field notes, 6/5/02).

While this anecdote about showering in the locker room is not earth shattering, it does show Elizabeth's relatively acquiescent nature. She described the way this anecdote connects to her critical literacy teaching.

I'm not the type of person that is going to take on critical literacy as this battering ram to go against the traditional teaching method (interview, 7/15/03).

Elizabeth's commitment to critical literacy was strong but it was not in her nature to consistently push against the conformist expectations of teachers.

Ms. Darcy's teaching practice during the 2001-2002 school year was shaped by her myriad of experiences, characteristics, and beliefs. It was also affected by the fact that it was her second year of teaching. She was still a new teacher, although she was beginning to develop a strong and clear sense of the type of teacher she wanted to be. She was strongly influenced by what she learned and experienced during her first year of teaching. As she explained, "I was surprised at how out of control [the students] could be. I didn't know what my role was, what I needed to establish and when I could let them go and I have learned a lot about that" (interview, 6/5/02). As I further explain in Chapter Five, during this school year, Ms. Darcy was figuring out what type of authority she wanted to pose in the classroom. Though she was only in her second year of teaching and still very much developing who she was as a teacher, she had a clear vision of her (critical literacy) teaching practice in this context. In her own words, she described her goals as a teacher as wanting to help her students "actively construct meaning through oral and written means in a context of social change [and to] be able to synthesize and analyze materials within a context of broader societal roles, ... to maneuver in the world that exists, and to work to make changes in their communities" (interview, 2/22/02).

Elizabeth Darcy's practice can be more fully understood in comparison to Cissy Lacks, the teacher I described in the first chapter of the dissertation. I asked Ms. Darcy what she thought of Ms. Lack's story and she replied, "I don't know if [Cissy Lacks] edited the scripts the students wrote but I would if I were doing something similar. I do have students write from their experience a lot and I would have it filtered through me in terms of what was appropriate and

inappropriate for the classroom." This response reveals Elizabeth's stance in terms of "keeping one foot in the system and another foot outside." While she often moved outside of the system in terms of the questions she encouraged students to ask and answer, she also had clear lines she did not cross. Specifically, I asked Ms. Darcy about her beliefs about using standard English. She replied, "I think it depends on the assignment. There would be times when it would be very academic, standard English and there would be times when it wouldn't. I would want the end product of the year [for students] to be able to fluctuate in and out of those worlds based on their own will" (interview, 2/22/02).

Finally, I asked Ms. Darcy how to describe her own position in terms of traditional and critical teaching. Her words paint a clear picture that runs throughout her teaching and this dissertation.

> Critical literacy fits very beautifully within an academic setting ... The point of education is not to just think critically of society but be empowered by knowledge throughout the culture. Not knowledge of just the dominant or just the oppressed but both. Learning the standard is very much part of critical literacy for me. Learning to negotiate within the society that exists is a very necessary part. But that is also not all or enough. It is also about seeing flaws in what exists and seeing beyond that to create who you are in this world and to create changes around you (interview, 7/8/03).

In a sense, Ms. Darcy wanted her students to be able to keep "one foot in the system and the other foot outside." In this dissertation, I show the ways Ms. Darcy prioritized "learning the standard" and the ways she helped her students "see the flaws in what exists and ... see beyond." I analyze what this teaching practice made possible and also what it constrained for students in "creating who they are in this world and creating changes around them." I believe that Ms. Darcy, though still developing her teaching persona, had established a clear

sense of what she wanted her critical literacy teaching practice to be and ultimately put these ideals into practice. In other words, her blending of critical literacy and traditional aspects of teaching was not a failure to truly implement critical literacy but instead an enactment of the critical literacy teaching that made sense to her.

While it is my interpretation that Ms. Darcy successfully operationalized her beliefs about critical literacy teaching, there are also other possible interpretations. In particular, one main reason I came to this conclusion was actually because of a lack of data revealing contradictions between what she did and what she stated she wanted to do or wished she had done. During my numerous informal and formal interviews with Ms. Darcy, she continuously painted a consistent picture between what she believed was right and set out to do and what happened in the classroom. For example, at the end of the school year, I asked Ms. Darcy if she struggled between the different pressures on her teaching, either internal or external. She responded (6/5/02):

> At this point, I feel very comfortable. The traditional curriculum is very valuable and this critical literacy is very valuable, it is much more of a blending. I think the struggle comes when you initially take that leap of trying it because it is a lot of work to figure out what works and what is not helpful for the students. I do still continue to try to find ways to better empower the students through a combination of traditional teaching methods and critical literacy but I feel very comfortable with that.

Between her first and second year of teaching, Ms. Darcy put a lot of work into figuring out the type of teaching practice she wanted to have. As I interpret the above response and others like it, during her second year of teaching she was implementing th' "blending;" of course still adding to what she was doing, but

basically putting into practice her ideals. However, there are other possible interpretations. Maybe Ms. Darcy did not reveal contradictions between what she wanted to do and did or reveal tensions inherent in the decision she made because it was not in her nature to think that way. Or, this type of thinking may have been unproductive and unsettling for her as a teacher, especially a new teacher, who had to make countless decisions in the midst of every school day. She may not have wanted to delve into uncertainties or doubts that may create quicksand rather than firm ground to stand on. She may have consciously or unconsciously avoided types of thinking that she might perceive as moving her backwards instead of forwards, or place her in a weaker rather than stronger position. In fact, she may have used the interviews to justify what she was doing in order to feel more at peace. It is also possible that the nature of our relationship led to the absence of contradictions and underlying struggles. Ms. Darcy and I formed a collegial relationship and this may have caused me not to push her into this type of thinking or it may have led her to believe that my questions were never challenging, but rather requests for more or deeper information.

The Students

Ms. Darcy's students came from a wide variety of backgrounds. There were 20 students total, all 13-14 years old, with 13 boys and 7 girls. Nine students came from families that lived in the United States for at least three generations; all of these students were African American. The remaining students were from first or second generation immigrant families from a variety of

countries including: Nicaragua, Jamaica, El Salvador, Trinidad, Puerto Rico, Panama, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Vietnam, and Afghanistan. This class was a regular level class, none of the students were labeled as gifted nor were they in special education.

Table 6: Student Information

Name	Ethnicity	Gender
Calvin	African American	M
Alfredo	Nicaragua	M
Chris	African American	M
Juan	Mexico	M
Deon	African American	M
Kiara	Jamaica	F
Luis	El Salvador	M
Jenetha	African American	F
Nhat	Vietnamese	M
Zalmai	Afghanistan	M
Thadeus	African American	M
Alexia	El Salvador	F
Leroy	African American	M
Andre	African American	M
Darryl	Trinidad	M
Tyrrell	Puerto Rico	M
Tonya	Panama	F
Crystal	African American	F
Trisha	Dominican Republic	F
Marquita	African American	F

Focus Students

While Elizabeth's class was comprised of 20 students, I chose 7 of them to be focus students (bolded below) in order to conduct more in-depth interviews. I chose a range of students to include the diversity (race, ethnicity, and gender) in the classroom. Ms. Darcy helped me to also include a range in terms of students' grades in the course, although I did not include any students whose grades were

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below average because these grades resulted from poor attendance which would limit both their participation in the class as well as my ability to interview them. In addition, based upon my first month of observations, I took into consideration how actively the students participated in the class discussions and I chose students who both actively participated as well as students who were relatively quiet during class discussions.

Table 7: Focus Student Information

Name	Ethnicity	Gender	Grade in the course	Participation Level
Alexia	El Salvadorian	Female	Above average	Average
Andre	African American	Male	Average	Average
Crystal	African American	Female	Average	Average
Juan	Mexican	Male	Average	Quiet
Marquita	African American	Female	Above average	Active
Nhat	Vietnamese	Male	Average	Quiet
Tonya	Panamanian	Female	Average	Active

Marquita, an African American student, was at the top of the class academically. She received A's each quarter and on most of her assignments. As Ms. Darcy stated, "You can always count on Marquita to have the right answers" (interview, 2/21/02). Her participation level during class discussions was high. Observing her poise and involvement in the classroom, she seemed to be a confident and solid student and young woman. Underneath this appearance, however, Marquita had "negative feelings and problems with her family ... My parents, they hold me back. Last year because my sister had a baby

and she ran away and my mom always wanted me to take care of the baby. They hold me back" (interview 4/11/02). Marquita, though, had a strong inner desire to graduate from high school and attend college. Like many other students in the classroom, Marquita thought the grammar mini-lessons were one of the most important parts of the classroom in order to prepare her for her future. At the same time, she enjoyed and actively participated in the more critical literacy components of the class.

Alexia shared many similarities with Marquita. She too shone in her work in the classroom and was an avid reader and talented writer. She did not consider her academic success inherent as she wrote, "people think I'm smart but really I just study hard." Like Marquita, Alexia also thought learning the school Discourse was very important for her future plans. She too enjoyed critical lessons and poured her ideas into writing assignment but was much quieter during class discussions. Alexia also divulged negative feelings about her family. "I live with my Mom and I don't really talk to her ... I guess I just don't want to be like her, just do nothing and have a bunch of kids." When Alexia's mother was 15 years old, she "ran away from El Salvador with an American guy and had [Alexia]." (interview, 4/12/02)

Andre was a complex and dynamic African American young man. He had a pleasant and quiet demeanor and wrote eloquent poetry. Andre had great respect for his mother who "raised me by herself without the help of my father and pushes me to do the right things in my life," including working hard in school (interview, 4/22/02). School was not that interesting though to Andre and he did not always give his work his best effort, as he aimed, "to get C's." There were

times when his work was outstanding, such as in several poetry assignments and on his I-Search research paper. But there were also times when he quietly resisted doing his work though he never caused loud behavior disruptions. He considered Ms. Darcy "a good teacher, strict, so people do what they are supposed to, for the most part" (interview, 4/22/02).

Juan and Nhat shared similar stories. They were both quiet students who did their work consistently and received average grades. They both moved to the United States when they were young from other countries, Juan from Mexico and Nhat from Vietnam. Their parents pushed them to do well in school and they thought they were learning what they needed to know in Ms. Darcy's class. Though they had positive feelings towards critical literacy discussions and assignments, neither of them engaged that deeply in these lessons.

Tonya and Crystal were both keen observers and always had a lot to say about what they thought of the class. Both young women had average reading and writing skills as well as grades. Tonya participated a great deal during class discussions; Crystal was quieter and put her ideas more often into writing. They both indicated that the class encouraged them to do a lot of writing even outside of the class. Tonya, originally from Panama, had a "mom and dad watching over [her] shoulder and encouraging [her]" (interview, 4/25/02). Crystal's mom was "a good mom, but she is very busy" (interview, 4/26) and Crystal was living with her aunt at the time.

By focusing on the students in Ms. Darcy's class, as well as the other participants in the classroom, school and district, I've laid the groundwork for my investigation of how these different players ultimately related in the daily

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moments of teaching and learning. In the next section, I continue to set up the story of the interaction between critical and traditional conceptions of Language Arts. Specifically, by critically analyzing the traditional notions implicit in District Standards and Guidelines, I continue to set up the story of Ms. Darcy's practice.

Language Arts in North Central Public School District

A Traditional Approach

North Central Public School District's Language Arts Guide (2000) states that, "Language Arts is composed of those processes and content areas relevant to successful living" (p. 2). The District's purposes for education follow a long pattern in American educational history of connecting education to societal success. From its inception, public education has been tied to the American Dream. In the late 1830's, the reformer Horace Mann proposed a system of free, universal education for all [white] children. Under his plan public schools, primarily funded by taxes, began to educate students regardless of religion or social class. In order to sell his ideas, Mann had to convince wealthy landowners to support universal education. He assured the landowners that the Common Schools, which would teach a common curriculum covering basic literacy, arithmetic skills and democratic values, would alleviate much-feared political instability and societal upheaval because children would gain the knowledge they would need to be productive democratic citizens. Some historians view Horace Mann's efforts as an attempt to promote truer equality through universal education while others claim his intentions were to evade insurgency while continuing a stratified economic system. Regardless of one's interpretation of

Mann's intentions, his efforts and ideas set into place a connection, at least rhetorically, between universal education and equality, a notion that continues today. (Cohen & Neufeld, 1981)

According to the Common School movement, equality could be realized only by teaching all students a common curriculum. In this way, all students would have access to the same knowledge and skills, and therefore would have an equal chance to succeed in society. The current educational policy and reform resembles Mann's original notion: if students learn from the same basic curriculum, they will have an equal opportunity in society. For example, one popular reformer, E.D. Hirsch, bases his current reforms on the same notion of common (core) knowledge and even uses Mann's original words to sell his ideas (Hirsch, 1996). Further, policy-makers, educators and academics have worked and continue to work fervently to create national, state, and regional standards for every school subject and grade level. School district officials ardently align school curriculum and textbooks to meet these standards. These standards are conceived to make sure all students learn what they need to be successful in school and in society. In addition to demanding a common curriculum, the new policies also require standardized assessments to make sure each school's students are reaching these standards.

North Central Public School District "promotes student achievement in alignment with school system and state standards" (AWS, 2000, p. 4). These standards provide a common set of skills and knowledge for all students to know and have: "These content standards ... enable administrators to know that there is a degree of uniformity despite regional differences across the state" (Standards,

2000, p. 3). The District adheres to the national accountability approach. North Central requires quarterly grade-level assessments, state standardized tests, and a mandatory high-school graduation exam. Thus, North Central Public School District's primary purpose for education, typical (at least in rhetoric) of many United States' school districts, is to enable all students to be successful in school and in our current society (Language Arts Guide, 2000).

A Closer Look: What's in the District Curriculum?

In this section, I analyze the knowledge and skills the North Central Public School District encouraged its teachers to teach in order for students to be successful. Specifically, my analysis centers around two documents the District provided to guide teachers' instruction. In order to analyze these documents (as well as the AWS text further in the chapter) I treated these texts as data and coded them. I decided to use the documents given to teachers as one way of considering the expectations of the school district for Language Arts classes. To code these documents, I first read through them all a few times to get a feel for the tone and contents. At that time, I noted anything that related to my original research questions, labeling these sections with the corresponding number of the research question. During this initial read, I also coded anything that explicitly described the purpose of education or literacy. After surveying the complete set of documents, I moved on to examine each document in further depth. At that point, I noted more specifically *what* or *how* they were instructing teachers to teach. For example, I looked at their statements about the language students should use in their writing and the types of interpretations they should make when

they were reading. I attempted to paint a rather comprehensive picture of the type of reading and writing instruction advocated by the district as indicated in these documents. I focused on these statements in order to look for consistency throughout the entire document. I also looked throughout the district documents, as well as further reviewing district-purchased textbooks and district-provided grading rubrics, in order to find consistency and discrepancies in the districts' messages about Language Arts education. Ultimately, as you will read in this chapter, I compared the notions in these documents to ideas in the critical literacy literature.

The first document I analyzed, *Standards for Instructional Content in Language Arts* (2000) was created and distributed by the state and adopted by the District. This document breaks Language Arts down into six sections: Reading, Writing, Literature, Language, Listening and Speaking. Under each section, the document lists specific content standards such as comprehending and evaluating literature, comparing texts, revising and evaluating writing, and acquiring vocabulary. These standards are delineated further to define what students should know and be able to do by the end of specific grade levels. The second document, the Language Arts Guide (2000) was created by the North Central Public School District. Its purpose is to detail what teachers should teach in a Language Arts class. To this end, the Language Arts Guide provides unit concepts, lesson plan ideas, and assessments for each month of the school year. The Standards, as well as the District's other guiding documents, are similar to those found throughout the country and address a number of important and sensible goals according to a variety of audiences.

There is a commitment to diversity throughout the documents as evidenced by the following examples. First, the Standards introduction states:

> Works for study in the English classroom should be of significant merit, reflect many literary traditions and should be drawn from diverse writing styles and points of view that reflect the concerns of both genders and wide range of ethnicities and cultures. (p. 4)

Also, the Introduction to the Language section of the *Standards* states: "A language evolves as it is influenced by changes in society ... Language enables people to preserve historical and cultural traditions." Furthermore, the District textbooks include multicultural pieces such as "Once Upon a Time When We Were Colored," "from Harriet Tubman: Conductor of the Underground Railroad," and the poetry of Langston Hughes.

However, I will demonstrate that this commitment to diversity does not influence the standards teachers are guided by nor the ways students are assessed. For example, though the *Standards* state that language is formed from multiple cultural traditions, it only recommends for study words with Greek, Latin, and Anglo-Saxon roots. The explicit and implicit messages throughout the Districts' documents do not match the inclusive rhetoric in the texts. As I detail in this section, though multicultural stories are read and written about, the standards and assessments guiding and judging students' comprehension of these texts and students' responses to these texts remain mono-cultural.

Specifically, I argue that what the North Central Public School District *thinks* teachers should teach is based on a particular Discourse (Gee, 1992), which most closely reflects one culture: white, middle-class (Gee, 2001, 1992; Heath, 2001, 1983; Michaels, 1984). This Discourse includes specific ways of

speaking, comprehending and organizing texts, and participating in conversations; these ways of reading, writing and speaking are considered standard in our society (Christensen, 2000). By looking closely at the District's documents, I demonstrate how this District promotes the teaching of this one standard non-inclusive Discourse in their Language Arts classes.

First, throughout the District's guiding documents, there is a clear message that this particular Discourses' dialect (Christensen, 2000), standard English, is the language to be taught and used in a Language Arts class. For instance, the Language Section of the *Standards* contains Standard 4: Comprehension and Application of Standard English Language Conventions. The following goals appear under this standard:

1. Identify and use standard English language conventions correctly to communicate clearly, including: sentence structure, punctuation, grammar, and usage.
2. Use language fluently and appropriately for a variety of contexts (academic, everyday settings).

On every assessment rubric I found, while looking through multiple guides and texts, students' writing was judged by the rules and conventions of standard English. Specifically, multiple rubrics specified that students' writing was to be evaluated according to "uniform impression of correctness: correct usage, punctuation, spelling, capitalization ... subject/verb agreement ... correct pronoun usage ... clear sentence structure and correct use of language conventions" (Language Arts Guide, 2000, p. 97). At times stated and at times implied, "correctness" was always judged according to the rules of standard English.

Also, interestingly, though the Standard 4 refers to "a variety of contexts," *one* way of communicating, standard English, governs *all* contexts.

Throughout the *Standards* and Language Arts Guide, numerous implicit examples revealed that Language Arts in this District embraced standard ways of reading and writing. Specifically, the expectations for how students should organize texts, express ideas and tell stories comply with the standard Discourse. The Standards require that by the end of grade 8, students should know and be able to: "create an organizing structure," "use logic of ideas" and "relate a clear, coherent event" (Standards, 2000, pp. 18-20). Teachers were provided with rubrics that define what it means to logically organize a paper and to write clearly. Accordingly, students' writing should "present a sequence of related events in chronological order ... [with] beginning, middle and ending (Language Arts Guide, 2000, p. 453), be "linear and not off-topic [and] support main ideas with facts and details (93)." These specificities of how a text should be organized are closely associated with a white, middle class way of writing and speaking (Gee, 2001, 1992; Heath, 2001, 1983).

The *Standard's* Reading section directs students to comprehend texts according to the same structures they are judged by in their own writing. For example, when judging an author's writing, students are asked to "evaluate the clarity and internal consistency of the text's organizational structure" (Standards, 2000, p.12). In addition, according to the *Standards*, as students read non-fiction texts, they should "assess the adequacy, accuracy, and appropriateness of an author's details to support claims and assertion" (ibid). As readers, the students are again guided by the rules of the standard Discourse.

In addition to presenting a mono-cultural style of reading and writing, the Guide promotes a singular way of comprehending texts and presents texts as neutral objects. A reader's goal is to extract "central ideas from the texts" and "clarify main ideas" (Standards, 2000, p.12). These expectancies are based on the idea that agreed-upon main ideas exist in texts. Though the District directs teachers to teach four reading stances (Language Arts Guide, 2000, p. 349) - global, interpretation, personal, critical - the District and state assessment exams, as well as those in the textbook, judge students by whether or not they correctly answer generic comprehension questions about the text's main ideas. The *Standards* guide the students to "recognize *instances* of propaganda and persuasive technique ...not[e] *instances* of bias and stereotypes" (Standards, 2000, p.12) and "differentiate between evidence and opinion" (24). These standards imply that texts contain distinct instances of bias and propaganda, rather than following the assumption that bias permeates all texts. If it is possible and desirable to differentiate between evidence and opinion, the assumption is that there is a clear line between the two.

Implementing the Curriculum: How Should Teachers Teach?

The school district provides an additional guide, *All Will Succeed* (AWS). AWS delineates specific roles for teachers and students. The document is intended "as a planning guide and instructional decision-making tool for use by all staff members" (AWS, 2000. p. 3). For my purposes here, I will focus specifically on the Guide's ideas about learning (preparing for and delivering instruction) and classroom management. Ms. Darcy, along with all new teachers, attended

professional development sessions to discuss the AWS Guide. During one of these sessions, she received a handout that highlighted a quote by Harry Wong; "Objectives are what a student must achieve [in order] to accomplish what the teacher states is to be learned, comprehended or mastered." This quote highlights two of the Guide's guiding principles. The first is that the teacher makes the majority of the decisions in the learning process. The second is that good instruction follows a specific pattern: the teacher sets the objectives and the students learn those objectives.

Throughout the history of public schools, and according to the AWS Guide, the teacher is positioned as the one who knows the important knowledge in advance, she makes decisions for herself and the students, and she controls the actions in the classroom. The teacher's role is to decide on the activities the students will engage in day after day, give the students directions and information, and discipline the students. The language throughout the Guide is teacher-centered; for example, even in the way the sentences are written, the teacher is the one doing the actions: "the teacher prepares, the teacher has an objective, the teacher models, the teacher uses, the teacher begins, the teacher explains, the teacher presents" (AWS, 2000. p. 12). The AWS Guide organizes planning and instruction around two set structures. First, for each lesson and unit, teachers are guided to follow a set format:

> Plan a warm-up for 3-5 minutes to focus student attention.
> Develop long-range and daily lesson plans with clear objectives and specific learning objectives.
> Select appropriate learning indicators from curriculum guides.
> Identify desired results.
> Determine acceptable evidence.
> Plan acceptable experiences and instruction.

Again, in this structure, we see that the teacher is the one leading all of the actions. Also, this Guide is to be used, regardless of the content of the unit, implying that a generic structure can and should inform each context. The second structure guided daily class time. To plan an effective lesson, teachers should use the following format (AWS, 2000, p. 18).

Focus students' attention/ Warm up
Objective stated
Introductory activities/ Developmental activities
Guided practice
Independent practice
Assessment
Closure

This structure includes typical lesson plan components. It carries with it specific assumptions about teaching and learning: objectives should be stated up front, students learn by first being guided through instruction and then practicing on their own, and the information students will learn should be decided before instruction begins. In fact, according to both of AWS's structures, the teachers should identify what the students will know at the end of the lesson before the lesson begins.

According to the AWS Guide, "The classroom is organized and student behavior is managed so as to result in the maximum amount of time for students to engage in productive learning experiences" (AWS, 2000. p. 9). The wording of this sentence reveals the emphasis on the teacher - student behavior *is managed.* AWS centers on the responsibilities and actions of the teacher. The Guide does include a few instances for students to participate in classroom management. For example, the Guide advises teachers to ask students to help

make the classroom rules. However, even in this instance, the Guide still instructs teachers to control this rule-making activity by monitoring the students, facilitating their participation, and making final decisions about the outcomes.

Throughout, the AWS Guide emphasizes that "the effective teacher manages and organizes classroom activities" (AWS, 2000. p. 8). It is clear that the teacher must remain in charge of order and discipline. This section also consistently focuses on the teacher as the one doing the action in the classroom: "the teacher groups students, the teacher articulates outcomes, the teacher maintains on-task behavior, the teacher focuses and monitors students, the teacher recognizes and reinforces ... student behavior" (pp. 8-9). The underlying idea repeatedly stated in the Guide is that the teacher's responsibility includes controlling students' behavior and keeping the classroom orderly.

The focus on the teacher and the emphasis on classroom management make sense. The audience for the Guide is teachers and the District wants to emphasize the classroom as a productive environment. By outlining the assumptions embedded in the Guide about the specific ways the District suggests teachers create this environment, I showed that consistently throughout the Guide, the teacher is active while the students are passive: the teacher manages the students. In addition, the teacher makes the majority of the decisions about the lessons – so prescribed because it ensures students will have the best learning opportunities.

Language Arts in Critical Literacy

A Different Approach

While the wide variety of critical literacy advocates may not agree on much, it is safe to say that they would all agree that critical literacy's conceptions of a Language Arts class would be very different from those espoused by North Central Public School District. While no exact recipes for critical literacy exist (McLaren, 1999), and though there are discrepancies among its advocates, in this section I respond to North Central Public School District's guiding documents by drawing from critical literacy literature (including Freire,1996, 1987; Lankshear, 1997; Luke et. al. 2001; McLaren, 1999; Willinsky, 2001). These ideas differ from North Central Public School District's ideas in terms of the curriculum taught, the purposes for teaching, and the positions teachers and students take on in the classroom.

Curriculum: What Should We Teach?

First, critical literacy differs from the traditional curriculum's emphasis on teaching the standard Discourse. Instead, critical literacy recognizes and encourages a variety of Discourses within a Language Arts class. Critical literacy teachers include a diverse array of languages and dialects. Christensen (2000), a critical literacy teacher, illustrates ways authors, such as Zora Neale Hurston, blends home language with Standard English and encourages her students to write in this multi-Discourse style. "Bringing students' languages, ancestors, saying from their homes into the classroom validates their languages, cultures,

and history as topics worthy of study. It says they count; their language is part of a history that most textbooks ignore, or worse, label as incorrect" (Christensen, 2000, p.109). Critical literacy emphasizes the importance of valuing students' cultures, especially those outside of the mainstream that may be unintentionally devalued by a traditional cannon.

Though the Discourse espoused by the North Central Public School District is taught in critical literacy classrooms (Christensen, 2000; McLaren,1999), it is also investigated as an object of study. For example, in critical literacy classrooms students ask who benefits from standard English's pervasiveness, trace its history and current use in society, and study how their home Discourses differ from the school Discourse. Also, teachers help students make connections between their home and school Discourses, ponder the consequences of knowing both a primary and secondary Discourse, and value multiple Discourses. (Edelsky, 1999; Fecho, 2000; Willinsky, 2001)

Another main difference revolves around what is meant by interpreting a text. In critical literacy, interpreting a text is not, should not be, and ultimately cannot be separated from the social and political contexts in which the text is read and written; reading the word and the world are intricately connected and texts are "pregnant" with meanings (Freire, 1985). In critical literacy, decoding and comprehending are not distinct steps and comprehension takes on a different meaning than espoused by the North Central Public School District. Reading (and writing) are defined as understanding (and expressing) the embedded code which requires analyzing the historical roots, assumptions and hidden contexts of power underlying the codes (Freire, 1996, 1987).

These differences in interpretation manifest themselves when students search for the main idea of a text. Much of North Central's curriculum for teaching reading is built around teaching students how to find *the* main idea. Critical literacy instruction focuses more on unearthing the complexities in texts than on distilling them to find a single main idea. According to critical literacy theorists, the main ideas of a text depend on the reader's perspective and experience. Thus, meaning-making is considered a negotiation between the reader and the text. Meaning does not reside in the text nor does it reside in the reader; instead, meaning depends upon the interaction between the reader and the text. This interaction, then, is influenced by a wide variety of factors. It depends upon the authorial invitations for the reader -how the author invites the reader into the text and how she expresses her ideas - and how this style corresponds to the particular reader. Meaning also is determined by the interaction between the reader and the text (Rosenblatt, 1978). These lenses are shaped by a myriad of factors including the reader's own history, culture, language, and experience. The standard notion of interpreting a text, the one included in North Central's curriculum, does not adhere to critical literacy's core definition of reading: reading is politicizing the text. Reading ultimately is understanding the inherent partiality, rather than the generalizabilty, of all meanings and texts (Lankshear, 1997; Luke et. al. 2001; McLaren, 1999; Willinsky, 2001).

Purpose: Why Should We Teach?

According to critical literacy, "the act of reading ... requires a political and social transformation" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 54). Critical literacy's main purpose for education differs from North Central Public School's; the main purpose is not to teach Language Arts so students can succeed in our current educational system and society. Rather, the purpose for teaching Language Arts is to help students change their approach to life and change society. More specifically, as people gain literacy, they gain a more powerful way of viewing life and society, so the goal is to have them recognize assumptions and inequity, see how things can be different, and see themselves as creative actors capable of creating change. The primary aim in critical literacy is not to teach students to be literate in the school Discourse so they can do well on standardized tests or go to Ivy League colleges (i.e. to find success in the current structures of society). This aim, which North Central Public School District shares with a large number of educational institutions, may very well be intended to lead to *future* change by allowing diverse students access to powerful institutions previously denied to them. Critical literacy, though, wants to use literacy education to change students' relationship with school and society *now*.

Further, whereas public education in our country and in North Central Public School District calls for the curriculum to be the same for all economic classes, believing that the commonality insures all students have the same opportunities, critical literacy calls for each specific context to determine the curriculum in that setting. While national policies focus especially on making sure poorer students meet the common standards, critical literacy educators believe poorer students need some different knowledge and skills in order to create

change (Finn, 1999; Shor, 1992). For example, poorer students need to contend with their own internalized oppression in terms of wealth and status. Traditional Language Arts curricula operate on the underlying belief that students are poor because they can not read [well]; therefore by teaching them to read, they will be able to access more economic wealth. On the contrary, a critical literacy philosophy believes that people can not read [well] because they are poor and [consciously or unconsciously] denied access to certain powerful aspects of society, including powerful literacy education (Freire, 1985). Therefore, education is not simply a matter of teaching poor students to read better; it is investigating why particular groups do and do not have wealth and power. It is imagining and working toward a society where all citizens equally share power and resources (Christensen, 2000; Finn, 1999; Shor, 1992).

There is one final important distinction between critical literacy's and the School District's purposes for education. North Central focuses on the *individual* gaining the necessary knowledge and skills. Groups of students may work together but the overall goal is for each person to gain the specific information and skills. The purpose is for each individual to get what he needs to have a chance to succeed in school and society. In critical literacy, the object for education is geared toward a more collective notion. The interaction between the students is as important as any individual piece of knowledge. In addition, change is possible only by groups of people working together. Therefore, the focus for instruction moves from the individual attainment to the group interaction.

Teachers and Students

While the teacher-directed approach and the emphasis on structure included in North Central's curriculum are typical in most schools and logical in today's climate, they are in conflict with core principles of critical literacy. Critical literacy rejects the teacher-directed approach because this approach views teaching as a two-part process for the teacher. First, the teacher takes on a cognitive role as she decides on the knowledge to be learned, organizes it, and thinks about it. Second, she takes on a narrative role as she delivers it to the students. The goal of the teacher in this configuration is to pass on the knowledge she already knows to the students. As Freire (1997) argues, "Education is suffering from narrative sickness" (p. 52). "Narrative sickness," which Freire saw as the central problem in the educational system, contaminates the learning environment by taking the students out of the cognitive part of education.

According to critical literacy, teacher-directed education is negative both for teachers and students. In this design, teachers are not fully engaged either creatively or intellectually in the classroom as they "narrate" information they have already processed and organized. This approach is also hurtful for students. For when teaching plans are "instigated, ended, shaped, paced, topicalized, assessed, … by someone other than the reader - the event positions the reader as an Object" (Edelsky, 1996, p.97). When students are expected primarily to listen to the teacher, follow directions, and take in information, they are ultimately merely spectators in the learning process. Their thinking and actions are controlled by someone else (or at least this is the goal) and "to

alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into Objects" (Freire, 1997, p. 66). Positioning students as Objects reinforces passive participation rather than encourages the type of active engagement necessary for change.

Instead, in critical literacy classrooms, teachers are positioned as learners, entering into dialogue with their students in order to learn with and from them. In this way, the teacher does not know everything she wants to teach her students before class begins. "Through dialogue the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers" (Freire, 1997, p. 61). The teacher learns along with the students as together they create and re-create knowledge. Importantly, rather than learning the facts first and then narrating them to students, the teacher is always cognitive, always re-learning and re-forming reflections.

Students are positioned as Subjects and are posed with problems that are connected to their lives; they are challenged to actively participate in thinking about the problems posed. Through a process of inquiry, students grapple with issues and create knowledge. The critical literacy curriculum "takes [students'] historicity as the starting point" (Freire, 1997, p. 65). Teachers plan curriculum considering their particular students and context. Teachers guide students to critical thought and help students see what the world has made them, recognizing both what they want to continue being and what they do not want to be any longer (Giroux, 1988). Knowledge is not simply transferred, but instead consists of students actively participating in the learning process. The relations are dialogical in nature where multiple and diverse perspectives are juxtaposed in

conversations between equally knowing subjects (Gee, 2000). At times, teachers and students work together to create unit themes about justice, equity, and race or research together students' vocabulary and experiences (Fecho, 2000). Contrary to the School District's approach, the knowledge to be learned and the direction to be followed is not laid out or completely known in advance.

Conclusion

As my dissertation sets out to show, Ms. Darcy's teaching practice existed between the traditional conception of Language Arts evident in these district documents and a critical conception of literacy that analyzes all texts and their connections to race, justice and power. This chapter established the wide discrepancies between North Central Public School District's conception and critical literacy's conception of a Language Arts class. Of course, the official District documents and educational theories only begin to tell the story. Throughout my work, I highlight how these traditional notions did not just exist in the district documents, but in Ms. Darcy's, students' and society's ideas about teaching and learning as well. Such texts and ideas are filtered through teachers, as they work to craft their beliefs and create their instruction, and through students, as they participate in the learning process. At the same times, I show how the teacher and students also created and engaged in inspirational critical work.

To further understand how these two conceptions of Language Arts influenced Elizabeth Darcy's teaching, we need to step inside her classroom. One concrete visual illustration of her classroom's combination of critical literacy

and more traditional school literacy existed on her bookshelf, situated behind her desk. June Jordan's (1995) *Poetry for the People* stood next to the North Central Public School District's Curriculum Guide; Paolo Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* leaned against the State Standardized Test Guide; Enid Lee's (1985) *Letters to Marcia* and Linda Christensen's (2000) *Reading, Writing and Rising Up* sandwiched the state English Language Arts Scope and Sequence. These texts literally coexisted on her bookshelf as the curriculum and pedagogies they express coexisted in Elizabeth Darcy's teaching practice. Ms. Darcy succinctly described the mixture of critical literacy and traditional literacy that made up her teaching practice:

> The traditional curriculum is very valuable and the critical literacy is very valuable, it is a blending. I think the struggle comes when you initially take that leap of trying critical literacy because it is a lot of work to figure out what works and what is not helpful for the students. I continue to try to find ways to better empower the students through a combination of traditional teaching methods and critical literacy (interview, 6/24/03).

Throughout my dissertation, I paint a picture of this "combination of traditional teaching methods and critical literacy."

Chapter Four

POETRY AS POLITICAL ACTION

Poetry is a political action undertaken for the sake of information, the faith, the exorcism, and the lyrical invention, that telling the truth makes possible. Poetry means taking control of the language of your life. Good poems can interdict a suicide, rescue a love affair, and build a revolution in which speaking and listening to somebody becomes the first and last purpose to every social encounter. (Jordan, 1995, p. 3)

Elizabeth Darcy underlined this passage in June Jordan's (1995) *Poetry for the People*. It captures her beliefs about the power and importance of poetry. Poetry was a major component of Elizabeth Darcy's teaching practice. Each day, as the students entered C132, a poem illuminated by the overhead projector literally welcomed them. Their daily warm-up activity was always poem based; Ms. Darcy asked students to read the poem and focus on the poets' word choice, the topic of the piece, or the poem's structure. Elizabeth also incorporated poetry lessons throughout the school year. In this chapter, I focus on Elizabeth's teaching of two poems, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" (Thirteen Ways) by Wallace Stevens, and "Where I'm From" by George Ella Lyon.[6] This first data chapter examines a major component of Ms. Darcy's teaching practice: poetry. The purpose of the chapter is to provide a look inside the classroom walls and to examine the ways her practice moved into the realms of critical literacy while remaining within the bounds of traditional instruction. In particular, after

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[6] Please see Appendix A for copies of these two poems.

describing several poetry lessons, I detail critical literacy components that existed within these lessons and also show the limitations on this critical work. This chapter begins to paint the shades of gray I described in Chapter One. Ms. Darcy's teaching practice, as illustrated through analysis of poetry lessons, existed between the conceptions and pedagogies of traditional and critical literacy. Through this analysis, we begin to see what her teaching practice made possible for students.

The Poems: "Thirteen Ways" and "Where I'm From"

"Thirteen Ways" is considered a classic American poem. In it, the poet Wallace Stevens describes a multitude of ways to see a blackbird. He looks at a blackbird as "a small part of a pantomime," as a math problem, and as a very tiny detail in a much larger world. He expresses numerous images of the blackbird to illustrate the multiple ways an object can be viewed. "Where I'm From" is also a descriptive poem. In this autobiographical text, George Lyons depicts her own background and upbringing, illuminating a variety of components of her life.[7]

Ms. Darcy chose "Thirteen Ways" as a model because she "was drawn to the different ways of looking at a certain thing as a way to free up the editor in a writer's mind and just let the more creative part of the mind come forth" (interview, 7/15/03). Below are excerpts written from my field notes describing the "Thirteen Ways" lesson.

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[7] Author and educator Linda Christensen included "Where I'm From" and a corresponding lesson plan in her book, *Reading, Writing, and Rising Up.* The lesson plan is widely used. It was featured on the Lehrer News hour, taught by a teacher at the Maya Angelou Charter School classroom and is part of Dr. Cheryl Rosaen's TE 401 class.

Ms. Darcy put a transparency with "Thirteen Ways" on the overhead. She told the students they were going to copy the poet's style of describing one object in many different ways. The students read Stevens' poem, stumbling over several of the words. She reread several of the stanzas (2, 3, 12, 13) and explained how Stevens was seeing the blackbird in different ways. Ms. Darcy explained how there are so many different ways to view and describe things. Writing, especially poetry, gives writers the chance to express these differences. Out of her brown canvas bag, she pulled an orange, a grapefruit and a pen. The students chose one of these three items to think and write about as Stevens had. The room was quiet as Ms. Darcy circled the room and stopped at students' desks that weren't writing or had a question. When a student had a good idea (Freddy described the grapefruit as a globe) she read it out to the whole class. The students seemed to all be working and everyone had a poem completed after about 15 minutes.

Jenetha shared her poem out loud:
The grape fruit is:
A big yellow ball in a shape of an overgrown orange
The grape fruit is:
A bright yellow piece fallen from the sun
The grape fruit is:
A giant lemon bright and yellow
The grape fruit is:
As round as a bouncing ball
The grape fruit is:
A sad piece of my soul that only looks happy.

After several students read their pieces out loud, Ms. Darcy asked the students to again emulate Steven's process of writing; this time, she asked them each to choose an item from their everyday lives to write about in their poems. During this part of the lesson, there was a wider variety of reactions to the assignment. More students seemed stuck and had a hard time getting to work, as Nhat, Calvin and Alfredo did not have anything on their paper after more than five minutes. Ms. Darcy told them to look around or ask another student for ideas and after a few more minutes they were writing. On the other hand, Crystal, Andre and Tonya laughed out loud as they worked together. Ms. Darcy gave students almost thirty minutes to complete their drafts. Once they finished, she encouraged them to read each other's and give feedback and she also read and commented on several students' work. She circled the room to make sure all students had finished at least one poem about their own object. Then students moved their desks into a circle. Each student went around and read his or her poem, with Ms. Darcy commenting. When Tonya read her poem describing her teachers several students laughed. When Chavez read his poem about hair weaves, the majority of the students and Ms.

Darcy laughed and several students called for him to read it again, which he did.

Ms. Darcy also began the "Where I'm From" by putting George Lyon's poem on the overhead. She then passed out two student example poems, written in response to Lyon's poem, published in Christensen's book (2002), "Reading, Writing, and Rising Up." The students seemed to like the two student example poems; almost half of the class raised their hand to read out loud. The class read the poem out loud twice so all volunteers would have a turn. These student examples included vivid imagery, with phrases such as "swing sets … rusted metal mounted in dirt used by many kids, well broken in," and "courageous people who paved a way for me." Before asking students to write their own "Where I'm From" poems, Ms. Darcy's scaffolded their writing by having them take note of various components of Lyon's poem and the student examples. The students underlined and shared numerous topics written about in the examples, such as items found in the poets' neighborhoods, family foods, names of relatives, and painful memories.

Then, Ms. Darcy gave the students time to brainstorm lists of these topics in their own lives. All of the students wrote easily, as Ms. Darcy circled the classroom she did not stop at any desks to prod students to get writing. After working on the lists, Ms. Darcy gave students the rest of the class period, about thirty five minutes, to compose drafts of their own "Where I'm From" poems. As I looked around the room, I noted how all of the students seemed to be working the entire time. The room was quiet as students worked independently. Ms. Darcy worked with a few students as they read parts out loud to her, but did not have to

prod any student to begin or keep working. Every student turned in a draft at the end of class and Ms. Darcy commented on each student's paper. During the next class period, the students again moved their desks into a circle and read all or at least a part of their poems. This was a very lively sharing. A few students looked embarrassed, asking if they had to read, looking down and reading quietly. But the majority of the students read their entire poems out loud and several even stood up at their desks. After almost every student's reading, one or two other students commented on a part of the poem, without being prompted by Ms. Darcy to respond. (field notes, 4/3/02)

During these lessons, the entire class worked consistently without much intervention from Ms. Darcy. Other than pushing a few students to start their own poems following "Thirteen Ways" the students worked for chunks of time on their own. During both sharing times of these poems, the majority of the students were engaged as they read and listened to each other's poems, especially during selected "Thirteen Ways" poems and all of the "Where I'm From" poems. The students engaged in critical literacy in different ways. All students listened and responded to a variety of Discourses within the poems, students' examples, and classmates' work, issues I will go into in more detail later in this chapter. They all engaged in seeing objects in multiple ways. They all became authors for an audience of their peers. Many students, in their work, especially during the "Thirteen Ways" lesson, remained in mainstream typical school Discourse. They wrote about pens or fruit. A few students moved outside of this Discourse and used this opportunity to bring their own lives, often left out of the classroom, into the classroom. They all seemed to enjoy this diversity, especially in Andre'

poem. The nature of "Where I'm From" invited details about students' lives, and since most of Ms. Darcy's students are not from mainstream homes, more primary Discourses were brought in to this work.

Critical Literacy Components

These lessons exemplify Ms. Darcy's pedagogy. They combine the multiple goals she aimed to work toward in the class, and demonstrate how she embedded her instruction with the critical literacy ideals she believed in. For example, as she stated (interview, 7/8/03), "there would be times when it would be very academic, standard English and there would be times when it wouldn't." These lessons, as poetry easily affords, allowed the students to write outside of the standard Discourse. It also worked to "get [students] on board with their lives." Ms. Darcy believed that "you have to get their whole lives interested, they are able to talk about their dreams for the future and they learn some skills." As Ms. Darcy developed and created her teaching stance, she integrated critical literacy into the lessons.

In particular, in this section, I go into more depth about the critical literacy components in these lessons. Specifically, I discuss how these lessons connected to students' lives, welcomed diverse topics and language, and encouraged multiple interpretations of texts. In the next section, I discuss how the critical literacy existed within traditional boundaries.

Connecting to Students' Lives

When I asked Ms. Darcy what she hoped to accomplish when she chose to teach "Where I'm From" and "Thirteen Ways," she said that "poetry is often presented as very vaulted and prestigious and I try to encourage a more down to earth relationship with poetry and my students" (interview, 6/5/02). Elizabeth crafted lessons based on poems that were not "vaulted," distant or removed but instead were connected to students' lives. In each of the assignments, students reached inside themselves to write, drawing from what they knew, what they saw around them, and what they experienced. Connecting literacy to students' lives is an important component of literacy instruction, particularly for adolescent learners (Alverman, 2000). Students are able to find personal connections to interest them as they use and expand their reading and writing repertoire. Creating linkages across situations also helps students organize and apply prior knowledge while building toward future learning (ibid). As Christensen (2000) argues, "finding space for student's lives to become part of the curriculum" (19) is essential to critical literacy. By connecting their own lives to the curriculum in school, students see themselves as part of this official knowledge as well as part of the learning process itself (Shor, 1992). Through this avenue of instruction, students can begin to engage in "action and reflection upon their world" (Freire, 1997, p. 60). Ultimately, active involvement in literacy and a dynamic stance toward learning can move students to use literacy for authentic purposes, to identify themselves positively as literate, and ultimately to strive for "emergence of critical consciousness and critical intervention in reality" (ibid).

When the student examples were shared along with Lyon's poem, students became highly engaged hearing about items familiar to them. While reading one example, written by Oretha Storey, about "doo-rags ... soul food ... and fried chicken" the students laughed out loud, energetically volunteered to read stanzas of the poem aloud, and asked Ms. Darcy if they could reread the poems several times (field notes, 4/3/02). Ms. Darcy's students' poems mirrored many of the same items Storey wrote about in her piece.

After reading about such familiar items, students then wrote poems based on *their* homes, backgrounds, families and lives. The students' poems painted vibrant images of their lives, rarely exposed in school. The reader saw the "yellow perennials and cherry blossoms in front of [Leroy's] apartment building, and the dark green furniture in the living room," heard the "TV blasting all day on BET" in Tonya's house, smelled the "jerk chicken, baked potatoes and soul-food Sundays" in Kiara's house, and felt the "enduring love that loves [Andre] unconditionally."

Students were also asked to reach into their own lives during the "Thirteen Ways" lesson. After writing about objects Ms. Darcy brought in, students were encouraged to choose an object from their everyday life. Ms. Darcy "wanted to see what they pick, what's important to them and what surrounds them" (interview, 6/5/02). While many of the topics in the district curriculum were drawn from generic topics that students may or may not be familiar with, here in these lessons students were connected to literacy in ways that related to their lives. Students wrote about a wide variety of topics, many which were not typical to mainstream textbooks and curriculum. For example, Andre and Marquita both

wrote about hair weaves, Jenetha wrote about bandanas and Luis wrote about a religious symbol. In both of these lessons, students connected reading and writing texts to the texts of their own lives.

Diverse Topics and Language

Ms. Darcy included multiple topics and Discourses into these lessons. This multiplicity was apparent in both the topics and the styles students read and wrote about in the lessons. In comparison to the District's lesson about autobiography, in which students work on using pronouns "correctly" and write a narrative chronologically (Language Arts Guide, 2000. p. 57), students read examples and used language in ways which veered from this traditional, mainstream format. Ms. Darcy brought in models that included multiple Discourses and non-mainstream topics. In the example responses to "Where I'm From," the poems included phrases like "get it girl and shake it to the ground," and the phrase, "I am from Kunta Kinte's strength, Harriet Tubman's escapes, Phyllis Wheatley's poems, and Sojourner Truth's faith." Ms. Darcy told her students she wanted them to "hear the voices of those around them and put into writing what it sounds like around you," (4/3/02), thereby welcoming the multiple Discourses students were hearing in their homes and communities.

The students in room C132 were not from the mainstream [i.e. white, middle class] homes where standard English is predominantly spoken; Elizabeth's assignment allowed a wide variety of voices into the classroom. The students' language and topics moved outside of what is associated with white, standard America to include the phrases "Girl you know I just playin' with you"

and objects like "ghetto streets, " "doo-rags," and "soul-food." The students' responses did not simply contain non-mainstream phrases; they moved into terrain that can be construed as controversial, and in the extreme case of Cissy Lack's students, described in Chapter One, be seen as "unreasonable." This is a risk that all critical teachers face; when the doors are opened for students to write about their own lives, there is no guarantee that they will stick to topics viewed as reasonable or appropriate. Further, because Ms. Darcy's students' lives were not the ones reflected in mainstream texts, it is even more likely students' responses were apt to move outside of the realm of standard, safe, non-controversial topics. For example, Chris wrote:

> I am from the agony and pain of the ones whose minds was diluted by the many drugs that surrounded them ... I am from the 40 which you drunken people lift up and gulp down like soda.

These phrases reflected Chris's life; the items discussed are not included in any of the textbooks or materials sponsored by the District and could be construed as controversial.

Ms. Darcy included the "Where I'm Poem" assignment because she thought it was important for students to bring into her curriculum aspects the school curriculum often omits. In her words, the "Where I'm From" lesson:

> allowed them to talk about things that other teaches probably haven't asked them to speak about, where they're really from, including the good and not so good parts. It allows the whole child to come into the room and to feel spoken to and heard ... I want the whole child to feel valued because without that they're not fully present" (interview, 7/8/03).

This notion of being "fully present" was necessary for students to be critical Subjects (Freire, 1997) in the classroom.

Similar to the space opened up for students' diverse expressions in the "Where I'm From" lesson, in response to "Thirteen Ways to See a Blackbird," Ms. Darcy asked the students to write about objects in their lives. Some students stayed within comfortable, mainstream terrain; Nhat wrote about the fruit in his kitchen and Tonya described her teachers. Again, though, because Ms. Darcy's students were not from mainstream households, many of them based their poems on non-standard items that do not appear in school or state sponsored materials. For example, Andre wrote about a hair weave, an item little known or worn in white America, and his piece is written in his home Discourse, which is not the standard Discourse.

> I saw this girl with a rack of weave.
> So much you of thought that a bald horse was standing cold shivering.
> the things you can do with it:
> you missing a shoe string? Weave comes in handy.
> you forgot to floss? Weave comes in handy.
> you lost your rubber band? Weave comes in handy.
> If you lost your belt, Weave comes in handy.
> You have a charm but no necklace? Weave comes in handy.

This poem reflects Andre's language style. In addition to being about an item rooted in Black culture, it includes phrases such as "rack of weave," "you of thought," and contains a rhythmic, song-like style. Andre participation in school in general and in Ms. Darcy's class in particular was inconsistent. On the one hand, he had great respect for his mother and wanted to live up to her expectations about his school work. On the other hand though Andre often wasn't that interested in working hard in class and only worked for C's. He wanted to do well ideally but didn't always want to put the work in on a day to day

basis. However, there were several times during Ms. Darcy's class that he was passionately involved in his work. In several different writing assignments, Andre' work flourished. During other lessons though, such as in a class debate, he did not do his work. Though it did not happen all of the time, Ms. Darcy successfully engaged Andre to use literacy passionately.

Though Ms. Darcy expected students to choose items from their own lives, she was surprised by some of their choices, including Andre's:

> When Andre read his poem, I remember having one of these a-ha moments, omigosh maybe to him this is an everyday object. That he even wrote about hair weaves, it cracked me up. He wrote about it with so much enthusiasm and energy that it was great to see him get into this poem. It shocked me because coming from a white culture it was an unusual thing to write about and it was a glimpse into an African-American growing up culture, this is as usual for African Americans as brushes and curling irons … It's very common to hear the girls in class talk about their weekends and getting their weaves done, it's a part of their culture (interview, 7/15/03).

Rather than fearing the unknown, Elizabeth welcomed the way this assignment engaged Andre. She commented on his "enthusiasm and energy" and declared that "it was great to see him get into this poem." Ms. Darcy's positioned herself as a learner in the classroom as she opened up to learning about the students' "growing up culture" which was different from her own. In critical literacy, teachers learn along with their students and from their students. Elizabeth recognized her own cultural bounds as she stated that "coming from a white culture it was an unusual thing to write about." She recognized that hair weaves are "as usual for African Americans as brushes and curling irons" were for her in her white growing up culture. In this assignment, Ms. Darcy allowed multiple Discourses to permeate the classroom and to exist on the same ground as the

standard Discourse which is oftentimes welcomed exclusively in school. In room C132, Andre's poem was not only accepted, it was celebrated. As Andre read his poem, the students and Ms. Darcy responded with joy and laughter, and asked him to read it several times (field notes, 4/8/02). Literacy, in these two lessons, moved into critical literacy terrain as it was truly connected to students' lives and moved outside of the mono-cultural topics and language the district guidelines exclusively contain.

Interpretation as Multiple and Contradictory

During these lessons, Ms. Darcy purposely encouraged her students to interpret and create texts in dynamic and differing ways because she believed that texts and identities "all contain these multitudes" and she saw her classroom as a place for students to express these complexities. When we reflected upon this assignment, Elizabeth expressed her commitment to encouraging this multiple approach:

> To be able to commit to writing, that you contain all these contradictions, is a really powerful affirmation of who you are. I knew that a lot of the students would compose some very painfully contradictory pieces of work because I know a little about where they're living and for me the contradictions were an important piece about the model that we can be all these things. We can hear shouting and find moments of peace. We can say shut-up and love, they're not all a straight line (interview, 7/15/03).

This multiple way of seeing and writing was contrary to her district curriculum and assessments that perpetuated a more singular version of meaning. In Elizabeth's classroom, students were encouraged to interpret texts and express themselves in multiple, and at times even contradictory, ways.

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First, when teaching "Thirteen Ways to See a Blackbird" Ms. Darcy repeatedly pointed out the multiple ways the poet viewed a blackbird and instructed students to "see" or "read" their own items from as many different perspectives as possible. One of Ms. Darcy's goals for this lesson was "having their minds circle around an object rather than putting a spotlight on it, move away from one explanation of an object" (interview, 6/5/02). Typical comprehension questions, found on many standardized tests, often ask students to take this "spotlight" approach but here Elizabeth encouraged a different standpoint.

As the students worked to make sense of Steven's poems, Ms. Darcy explained that by concentrating intensely on an object, the writer and reader experienced alternative, even unusual ways of seeing things. Elizabeth guided students through a process of emulating this type of thinking as they wrote about an orange and a grapefruit. After brainstorming a variety of ways to look at the object, she moved around the classroom, encouraging students to add more ideas, prodding them to move outside of the "normal" main ways of thinking about the object, and repeatedly asking them to concentrate harder and write more. She stopped the class several times to share a particularly creative way to look at fruit and also asked students to share their examples, enthusiastically praising each new way a student wrote about the object. She purposely prolonged this part of the lesson so that students would think creatively (field notes, 4/5/02). Throughout this lesson, she kept a light attitude, laughing often and showing her delight by expressing joyful expressions. These teaching moves pushed her students to think about everyday items in multiple ways.

Similarly, Ms. Darcy wanted students to look at their own lives in multiple ways in the lesson surrounding the poem "Where I'm From." In this lesson, Elizabeth wanted to give students an opportunity to express the contradictory nature of autobiography. As Ms. Darcy explained,

> the model contained contradictions, it got to the nitty gritty, it's not write me a poem about all the good things in your life or all the things normally allowable in English class, but it was a poem about where you're really from (interview, 6/5/02).

In a narrower view of literacy, contradictions are often suppressed to impart a clear, clean main idea. When reading the poem, Ms. Darcy focused specifically on one line in the poem about sayings the poet heard growing up: "perk up and pipe down." Expressing the idea that many people receive opposing messages from their homes, she encouraged students to express the inconsistencies in their lives. Emphasizing this point, she repeated the idea that this lesson was a place to write about both good and bad components, and noted that both can exist together in the same place or person (field notes, 4/3/02). Students embraced this space for exploring contradictions. Below, I bolded the contradictions evident in the work by Alexia, Chris, Trisha and Kiara.

Alexia began her poem by representing the range inside her family, in terms of skin color, beliefs, and family members

> I am from **dark** skin to **light** skin,
> **Struggles** in the past to the **dreams** I see in the future,
> **fights** to **hugs**.
> I am from a **father** I never knew and **grandparents** who gave me their love.

Chris's poem is full of descriptive, conflicting images: first he described a depressing scene with rocks and scrapes and then brought the reader into a heavenly and hopeful scene.

> I am from the rocks which bring you down and scrape your knees never allowing you to get up and the heavens which is parted every morning by the burning bright sun.
> I am from the words which cut you down through your heart such as "shut-ups" and the helpful sayings such as "do your homework."

Trisha and Kiara both explicitly describe the different parts of their neighborhoods, from the cursing to the silence and the trees and flowers to the fistfights and arguments.

> I'm from the cursing, and screaming I hear out my window. And I am from the pure silence I hear sometimes.
> I am from the trees with beautiful flowers, playgrounds, and bees in front of my house. I am from the fistfights and arguments that happen almost every day and night.

These multiple examples demonstrate students' willingness and desire to express contradictions in their lives. The students' personal expressions were also a testament to the environment of trust Ms. Darcy successfully created in the classroom. Middle schools are often treacherous backdrops for cruel and humiliating jokes, put-downs, and actions. Students are not always willing to share their private lives with their teachers and their classmates. The culture in room C132 made it possible for students to genuinely and openly respond as Ms. Darcy's asked them to share "Where I'm From." Students shared personal feelings and events as they drew on both the good and bad from their lives.

As our current educational climate and Ms. Darcy's school district attempted to direct students in this "straight line," Elizabeth Darcy instead encouraged her students to circle around. This lesson is in some ways subversive, because it is not aligned with the direction her district wants her to prioritize, but it is also just good teaching.

Critical Literacy Blossoming Within Traditional Boundaries

As I illustrate above, significant critical literacy components appeared in the lessons surrounding "Where I'm From" and "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird." However, this criticality was constricted with boundaries. For example, for the most part these lessons remained teacher-centered and students and teachers stayed in traditional roles rather than pushing into critical terrain. Though students did actively participate in the lessons and at times - in particular, when reading their poems aloud when they even took the floor - by and large Ms. Darcy controlled the lessons. Ms. Darcy decided on the poems the class would read, chose the ways the poems and assignments would be addressed, and designed the formats for students' responses. During each lesson, she instructed students as they underlined various components of the poems and closely monitored their progress as they wrote their responses.

Ms. Darcy made decisions about how to plan and teach these lessons in order to create productive possibilities for student learning, yet the large amount of teacher control might have also worked to eliminate some opportunities for students: "If the print-user is being controlled in her print-use - if someone else decides what literacy event will occur, how it will begin, what it will be about, when it will end, and so on - then the print-user is positioned as an Object" (Edelsky, 1996, p. 99). While these lessons created spaces for students to act as Subjects, the overall classroom space was ultimately controlled by the teacher, bringing the world in but avoiding its implications. While it is the norm for teachers to control classroom lessons, critical literacy depends on teachers finding alternatives to teacher-centered instruction. While Ms. Darcy was

successful in doing this in many ways, she also relied on traditional roles of authority. As a result, this combination had mixed consequences in her teaching practice that will be addressed further in the next chapter.

Critical Examination

I turn now to the students' examination of the critical topics they raised during these lessons, and I will examine ways this critical examination occurred within limits in these lessons. Students' "Where I'm From" poems included references to race, such as Alexia's line "I am from dark skin to light skin." In addition, Marquita's lines showed an awareness of her own identity in relation to others.

> Now this place I call the ghetto,
> where all stray dogs choose to roam,
> it may not be your first choice,
> but to me this is the place I call home.

First, Marquita chose to own, "*I* call," the politically charged word "ghetto." Then she acknowledged an unnamed other - "it may not be *your* first choice" and expressed her own loyalty: "but to *me* this is the place *I* call *home.*" Marquita was a very intelligent student and one who seemed to have a keen sense of critical issues such as race and class; as she exhibited in this poem she was aware of her neighborhood and identity in relation to a larger society. I think Marquita might have benefited from being pushed further in terms of her own expressions here and other's reactions to them.

However, though students raised critical issues in their writing, they were not explicitly addressed during the lesson. As a class, students did not question,

compare or problematize their "Where I'm From" poems. They did not collectively think about themes running through their poems, nor did they analyze why things were the way that they were, how they got to be that way, or how they might be different. While critical components existed in these lesson, such as including students' home discourses and students' out-of-school identities, they did not really get into troubling their realities. In the lesson, individual students did not engage in critical analysis of their texts; for example, Alexia did not address the implications of skin color and Marquita did not explicate the difference between "I" and "you" in her piece. Nor did the entire class examine the violent elements included in so many of their poems.

Elizabeth: I would say the main reason why I stopped where I did with this lesson is because to write the poems themselves was a monumental act of self-discovery for many of these children, a construction of their own voice, and I feared that to push them to question why they held the constructs they do, and where that may come from and the forces that shape them, may be construed by a 8th grader as an attempt to deconstruct the confidence I had just worked to build up. Some of the students may have regarded such an attempt on my part as dangerous and confusing, which is altogether true, but they may back off from further honest writing assignments if they were afraid or not trusting me.

Similar to the limitations of critical discussion in "Where I'm From," the students did not engage in troubling their environments in their responses to "Thirteen Ways." Though students wrote about non-mainstream topics, such as hair weaves and soul food, they did not push into truly disruptive terrain. The examples Elizabeth brought in for students to write about after reading Stevens'

poem – an orange, a grapefruit, and a pen – set a non-contentious tone. While these items, like all items, could be looked at critically, they are not normally associated with anything critical or divisive, compared to, for example, an anti-war rally banner or a gay rights sticker (items which Elizabeth has in her home.)

Elizabeth: I feel rather strongly about keeping my own political opinions out of the classroom, which is the reason why I chose to keep my own items at home. I wouldn't bring in a pro-war banner or a pro-Bush/Cheney sticker. Similarly, I choose to allow students to make up their own minds and not influence them with my own views.

In an interview with Ms. Darcy, I commented on students' use of their own lives outside of school in their writing and asked her to describe the environment she was trying to set in her classroom and in the "Thirteen Ways" lesson in particular. She answered:

> It's a nice contradiction; creating this comfort zone with boundaries. You're still in an academic setting. Bring who you are and bring your playfulness but keep the vulgar side out, that's not why you're here. It's almost like that would be a waste of time (interview, 6/24/03).

But where is the space between "academic" and "vulgar?" The boundaries Ms. Darcy attempted to create might have worked to keep out important pieces of the students' lives that could have made her classroom a more critical space. The lesson missed an opportunity to critically question the definition of mainstream in our society. For example, when Andre wrote about hair weaves, Ms. Darcy had an "aha moment," but she did not use this as an opening to think with the class about what counts in the curriculum and in society as mainstream. Nor did the

class consider the consequences of being counted or not counted as mainstream.

I asked Ms. Darcy about her choice not to include further critical questioning in these two poetry lessons. Elizabeth provided an insightful and complex look into what kept her from pushing these lessons even further in a critical direction. First, she described the "obvious pressures by the principal, vice-principal or parents [that inhibit critical teaching]." One particular incident that occurred early on in the school year further explained Elizabeth's answer. Upon overhearing a group of students negatively condemning homosexuality, Ms. Darcy told these students that not everyone thought that way and homosexuality was accepted by many people. In response to this informal conversation, one of the student's parents called Ms. Darcy and voiced a complaint against her position and actions. Ms. Darcy listened to the parent's objection and that was as far as this particular parent took his complaint.

However, this incident demonstrated the possibility of parental dissatisfaction when a teacher discussed risky topics, and critical literacy often increases conversations around such topics. As Tonya put it in Chapter One, "parents might complain. And the teacher might get in trouble" (interview, 5/16/200). Tonya recognized the context surrounding the classroom and its place amidst the web of administrators and parents. *Elizabeth: When working in public schools, there is a certain push to keep all curriculum comfortably neutral. I do feel pressure to stick to curriculum that is "endorsed" in our school district and believe anything outside of its parameters runs the risk of adding danger to one's professional career. If challenged, critical literacy can seem radical and,*

therefore, is not always the highest priority in guiding my public-school curriculum.

Ms. Darcy had reason to believe that she would not receive full support from her administration if a complaint were filed by a parent. Though her principal was actually unusually supportive, she was also incredibly busy and fairly inaccessible. The assistant principal usually dealt with issues between parents and teachers. For example, when Ms. Darcy faced a parent complaint, this one about a student's grade, Ms. Darcy was not adequately supported by the assistant principal. First, Elizabeth sought the assistant principal's support after the way the parent complained made her uncomfortable, but the administrator failed to respond to several attempts Ms. Darcy made to discuss the issue. Then, when the parent came to school to complain, Elizabeth was pulled from her classroom to meet with the parent with no prior warning. She was left alone in the assistant principal's office with the parent who screamed at her without allowing space for discussion. After this episode, the assistant principal did not provide any support for Ms. Darcy. All teachers risk parental dissatisfaction, and the risk can even be higher for teachers who raise the risky topics often associated with critical literacy. Instead of believing she would have the support she needed, Ms. Darcy was given the message that when faced with criticism, she would stand alone. Further, a strong possibility existed that the assistant principal might not support critical literacy instruction in the classroom.

Ms. Darcy also brought up another factor that kept her from pushing critical examination further in her classroom:

One reason I keep from including it [critical examination] in the discussion is trying to keep in mind their age and maturity level and what they think about these issues and how well I'll be able to bring these questions across to them in a way that will be understandable to them and not just confusing. There are a lot of issues going on and one is their maturity level, whether they can really digest it or not is something I question (interview, 7/15/03).

Students' age and maturity level were a legitimate concern. In fact, many teachers and critics question the appropriateness of having critical literacy discussions with younger students. While Elizabeth was open to bringing up critical topics and questions with her students, it was logical for her to wonder "how well I'll be able to bring these questions across to them." Also, what models did she have of teachers successfully engaging in critical literacy examination with their students? Though her teacher education program mentioned critical literacy, she was not exposed to actual teachers attempting this work, let alone doing it successfully. Further, examining issues of race and class is incredibly difficult and Elizabeth has not participated in professional development that teaches one how to put critical literacy into practice. She has not had the chance to practice working with these issues, nor has she had mentors or colleagues to learn from about teaching critically. Critical literacy instruction requires support, experience and practice that Elizabeth has not been privy to.

Elizabeth raised a final risk she might incur by pushing things further in a critical direction - the risk of losing the students' trust. She began raising this concern by declaring that "the greater risk is worrying that [the students] would feel I'm criticizing them because then they would start to separate us. Because I'm already different from them in so many ways." Elizabeth worried that asking critical literacy questions might "start to separate us." Elizabeth had many

differences from her students; most notably she was the only white person in the room, a reality noticed by her students. When I asked Alexia about why she thought Ms. Darcy included issues of race in a discussion in class about the novel they were reading, she answered it was "probably because she's white and most of the people in the class aren't white."

Elizabeth was very protective of her relationship with her students and wanted to stay as connected as she could, despite their differences. She did not want to put that relationship in danger by asking invasive questions. She explains:

> The greatest problem for me is the chance of them hearing these questions from me and thinking, Ms. Darcy thinks we deserve something better which translates into what we come from is bad. I think that is a logical jump for 13 year olds. I may be wrong but that's what I get from their looks when I start asking those questions, why did you ask us to write about these things only to start questioning them. For me, them trusting that I care about all the pieces of them is very important and sometimes I think those kinds of question can come off to them as a criticism and that makes me hesitate because I don't want them thinking I'm telling them that they're surroundings are bad (interview, 7/15/03).

Elizabeth had created an amazing trust in her classroom. This was evident in the depth and intimacy of the experiences and ideas students shared in their writing. Trust in any relationship, especially between teacher and student, is fragile and Ms. Darcy did not want to jeopardize it. While she raised critical questions about other topics in her classroom, she did not want to take the chance of appearing judgmental of students' most personal expressions. She did not want students to wonder, "why did you ask us to write about these things only to start questioning them" and then conclude that Ms. Darcy judged their lives negatively. While the ideas and expressions raised in these lessons might have posed the greatest

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opportunity for critical transformation, because they were so closely connected to students, they also carried a risk. It was a risk Elizabeth was not willing to take.

Conclusion

Although Elizabeth was clear about the reasons she held back from engaging further in critical examination, she did add:

> It's been difficult for me to figure out a way for them to be critical of their environment without it coming from me. Maybe it's just that I need to push it a little further to show it's not the person but structures imposed on the person but I don't know, it's a leap I'm not sure I want to make (interview, 7/15/03).

In these statements, Elizabeth pondered the possibility of critically investigating students' poetry further. During this study, she was only in her second year of teaching. At this early juncture in her career, she clearly was not expected to have her teaching repertoire all figured out and established. Unfortunately, though, neither the culture of her school nor the District's professional development program seem likely to provide further critical development. Since she already had completed a master's degree, it is doubtful she will gain more critical literacy education in university courses. Of course, her career will be influenced by other avenues as well, but she will continue to receive pressure to teach more traditionally. Ms. Darcy raised valid risks involved in teaching critically. The questions and issues she brought up need to be reflected upon and discussed, by new teachers as well as more experienced ones. Sadly, it is safe to assume that Ms. Darcy's career, in its current projectory, is unlikely to provide time to reflect on these concerns, colleagues to work through them with, or mentors to learn from about these issues. Without the time, resources and

attention critical literacy educators need, it will be very difficult for Elizabeth to "push it a little further." *Elizabeth: This is related to my previous comment about the lack of critical literacy elements within the existing public school curriculum. I'm sure I would have been able to extend and further develop many of the critical literacy elements within my own room if I had been more supported by similar practices conducted by other teachers and an encouragement for such objectives by local administration. Some staff development or school-funded conferences would be invaluable to a personal sense of support and motivation.*

Without the more explicit and deeper critical analysis, these lessons at first glance seemed powerful to me but also lacking. However, as I talked to the students about their poems, as I reflected on the classroom environment during these lessons and as I talked to Ms. Darcy about her own motivations, I began to see them differently. The students were incredibly proud of their "Where I'm From" poems. Every student handed in a poem on time. Further, all but two students rewrote them a third time incorporating Ms. Darcy's final feedback before putting them in their portfolios even though they did not need to for their grades. When I asked both Tonya and Crystal at the end of the year to read me a piece they felt more proud of in their portfolios, they chose their "Where I'm From" pieces. At the end of our interview, as the other students came back from class, Crystal took her portfolio and read her poem to the student sitting next to her.

While the students did not head out of the classroom to chant protests down the hallway, my field notes detail how magical these days were in the classroom. Andre was center stage in the classroom reading about a topic that is

almost never spoken of in schools. Andre whole self was invited in that day and that in itself is revolutionary. The other students too benefited from seeing Andre this way and from hearing his passionate creation about a topic many of them were familiar with in their lives outside of school. In both of these lessons, space was created in the classroom for students to use literacy to connect their lives outside of school and their lives inside of school. As the students read their "Where I'm From" poems the trust Ms. Darcy protected was evident in the lines they chose to share as they stood in front of what can be a rather hostile or alienating audience.

In particular, this issue of trust became more complicated for me through this analysis. There is both a positive and negative side of pushing and digging, no matter what the intentions are. For me, I was able to see the critical literacy in these lessons differently. As I build toward a broader vision of critical literacy, drawing in shades of gray, these lessons and my continued analysis of them, draw complex pictures between traditional Language Arts and critical literacy. These lessons fall in between a more black and white conception and they illustrate complicated reasons for why they contain the positions they do on this spectrum.

Chapter Five

THE OUTSIDERS DEBATE AND SOCRATIC SEMINAR:

MATTERS OF AUTHORITY AND FREEDOM

Fundamentally, critical literacy aims to engage students as Subjects in their own learning. Students take on the role of Subjects when they act in the classroom rather than when they are acted upon, when they are invested in and make decisions about their own learning, and when they are free to express themselves as powerful communicators and humans (Freire, 1997). But creating opportunities for students to act as Subjects in our educational system is complex and problematic. Often the system's inertia places students in the role of objects, both in terms of being acted upon and being viewed as passive receptacles to be filled with knowledge and information. Similarly, the educational system expects teachers to use their authority to control students' actions and thoughts, as teachers often decide who gets a bathroom pass and who does not, where students sit, how students will learn subject matter and how successfully they have learned it. Freire writes that "authority must be on the side of freedom, not against it" (Freire, 1997, p. 61) and this sounds compelling; but what does this mean in a United States public school classroom context? When teachers try to use their authority to be on the side of freedom or to use their power to create emancipatory educational experiences, as Elizabeth hoped to do, they enter

intricate and uncertain relationships with their students, administrators and parents.

This chapter explores the question, "What is the role of authority in the critical literacy classroom?" In the 1984 movie about Nadia Comaneci's life, a scene occurs between her coach and his wife after Nadia tries to make a comeback but fails to keep her weight down. Her coach's wife says, "You never taught her to diet, you took away her food." In other words, at her peak Nadia was the ideal finished product but she had not learned to get there on her own. The "finished product" for critical literacy teachers includes students becoming Subjects in the world: able to "critique ... issues which surround [them] as [they] live, learn, and work - to help understand, comment on and ultimately control the direction of [their] lives" (Fehring & Green, 2001, p. 10). Getting to this point is incredibly complicated. Ideally, it would be best for students to act in the classroom as we would want them to act in society - in terms of sharing power and gaining a voice as decision-makers or members of a democracy. But is this goal feasible in this classroom - in any classroom?

Engaging students as Subjects necessitates a certain amount of freedom for students. At the same time, "the teacher's authority is not set in opposition to the child's 'freedom,' but seen as a set of relations that can be acknowledged, as grounded in teachers' and students' evolving (and various) connections to each other, the curriculum, and the classroom and societal setting" (Maher, 1999). In this chapter, I focus on the roles a teacher takes in this "set of relations." Specifically, drawing on Shor's ideas in his novel, *When Students Have Power: Negotiating Authority in a Critical Pedagogy* (1996), I have created three

delineations of teacher authority in order to investigate Ms. Darcy's positioning in this classroom. While I define and discuss these delineations as separate entities for the means of advancing a productive discussion, the boundaries between these conceptions are fluid and they are not mutually exclusive in actuality.

First, I discuss *teacher as authority*. This is the authority that institutionally (and often practically) makes the teacher "legitimate ... someone who knows something worth learning, who knows how to teach what [students] need to know, who knows how to listen to students and how to be fair with grades and assignments, and who can maintain order" (Shor, 1996, p. 20). In general, this is the role of the teacher doing her job. The teacher as authority acts in the best interest of the students as she (along with others above her in the hierarchy) makes the majority of decisions about what to teach and how to teach or scaffold the knowledge. Also, the teacher as authority monitors students' behavior in order to keep everyone on task.

Next, I examine the role of *teacher as author*, where the teacher creates opportunities that move the positioning from "the teacher-of-the students and the students-of-the teacher [to become] ... teacher-student and students-teachers (Freire, 1997, p. 61). Here, students are engaged in the learning process - making major decisions about what to learn, how to learn, and how to monitor/control themselves. Teachers are

> "*moving with* instead of pushing ... *being part of* instead ... of *being ... in charge* of. [It is] thus a transformative 'apparatus of power,' as Foucault might have called it, a means to overcome unilateral authority by democratizing power relations and a means to critically   study   subject

matter ... [which is] a critical study of knowledge, power, and society (Shor, 1996, pp. 154-155).

Maxine Greene's (2000) defines this role in terms of freedom: "creat[ing] situations alive with activity and reflection, encouraging the play of imagination, encouraging inventiveness, opening up alternative possibilities" (11). In other words, the teacher authors experiences filled with "imagination," "inventiveness," and "alternative possibilities."

Finally, I consider *teacher as authoritarian*, which goes beyond teacher as authority; an authoritarian acts upon students in ways that puts them in positions as "silenced spectators" (Shor, 1996, p. 18). In this role, teachers [often unintentionally] alienate students from their own education by treating them as blank receptacles to be filled (Freire, 1997), by detaching who they are from the subject matter, or by harshly controlling students' behavior and environments. As I conclude the definitions of these three roles, I reiterate the fluid nature of these demarcations in practice; reality often flows between these roles.

Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I focus on Ms. Darcy's teaching of novel *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton (1997) in order to examine matters of authority and freedom in room C132. Specifically, I analyze a debate and a Socratic Seminar, examining the decision-making process of how the lessons were organized, the structure of the lessons in terms of students' participation, and the ways students' actions were monitored. I investigate Ms. Darcy as the authority figure during these lessons within the context of critical literacy to achieve further insights about the role of

authority in critical literacy classrooms. I organize the chapter around the three delineations I described above: *teacher as authority, author and authoritarian.* While these constructs provide a useful structure for this chapter, I also illuminate their static nature as well as the boundaries between them.

Examining Authority in Context

The discussion in this chapter is better understood by first broadening the observation lens and looking more widely at the backdrop. Authority in this classroom must be understood in the larger context of the school and society. It is erroneous to see Elizabeth as an actor in a vacuum without recognizing the implicit and explicit forces that influenced her actions. Public school teachers have always been expected to control their classrooms (McNeil, 1986). Like most teachers, Ms. Darcy was given the message that she alone was in charge of maintaining order. "As long as everything seems to be going smoothly in the classroom, everything is basically okay" (interview, 6/24/02).

Very few avenues of support for classroom management existed in the school. When disciplinary problems occurred, the teachers' main option was to elicit help from the school's security guard. During her first year of teaching, Ms. Darcy did depend on him at times. However, she "[did] not like the way he treat[ed] the students" (interview, 2/19/02), and therefore chose to handle discipline matters herself during her second year of teaching. I observed the security guard's actions on several occasions. The following event typified his style. While escorting a tardy student to Ms. Darcy's room, the security guard opened the door, ordered another student (who was quietly completing his work)

to stand up, physically moved to within inches of the students' face, yelled at him to pull his pants up, demanded that he remain standing, and then left the room, slamming the door (field notes, 2/19/02).

Ms. Darcy, in only her second year of teaching, was developing her teaching personae in an environment that did not provide her with support or resources that matched her convictions about teaching and discipline. Further, students at Elks Middle School were at times openly resistant to both teachers and subject matter. In fact, in Ms. Darcy's classroom, when a department head filled in so that Ms. Darcy could attend a meeting, the majority of the students were out of their seats chasing or escaping from a bee for twenty minutes (field notes, 4/17/02). In addition, when Elizabeth briefly left the room in my charge, I could not finish delivering instructions to the students because so many of them were talking at once. When I informally observed these students in their other classes, they were often out of their seats or off task.

As a new teacher, Ms. Darcy was continuing to develop her role as an authority. During her first year, she "was surprised at how out of control [the students] could be. I didn't know what my role was, what I needed to establish and when I could let them go and I have learned a lot about that" (interview, 6/5/02). Throughout her second year of teaching, Ms. Darcy was creating an authority role she could be comfortable with, stemming from her belief that "there's an established power within the teacher's role which is good as long as it's not manipulated by the teacher" (6/5/02). Elizabeth's guiding principle was that, "My authority as a knowledgeable guide has to be trusted by my students, they have to buy and believe that in order for it to work" (6/24/02). Ms. Darcy's

students did "buy and believe" and this played a large role in making the classroom a productive working environment. Her curriculum motivated students to want to learn. However, curriculum alone is almost never enough to keep students unfailingly engaged in class. To this end, Ms. Darcy closely monitored and controlled students' actions. Alexia clearly articulated this sentiment, "everyone does pretty much what they are supposed to be doing because she is always checking on you and if you talk or something she screams at you so everyone just does what she wants" (interview, 4/12/02). Keeping students working hard was very important to Elizabeth. She used an egg timer to help ensure that students stayed on track, "because in my first year of teaching, they wouldn't get right to work, or wouldn't work very hard, but the timer really helps keep us all on track" (3/1/02).

Another important role for Ms. Darcy in terms of developing and establishing her own authority centered on determining what was appropriate in the classroom and ensuring students adhered to these guidelines. Elizabeth stated that "I do have students write from their experience a lot and I have it filtered through me in terms of what was appropriate and inappropriate for the classroom" (6/24/03). I asked Ms. Darcy if she worried, especially during lessons she opened up to students' own experiences and language, about students bringing in things she regarded as inappropriate. She responded:

> Right now on summer vacation I am in a mode where I'm not in the classroom and when I am in the classroom my character is more imposing than it is outside the classroom. The students know by my bearing in the room that I wouldn't take that lightly and I wouldn't appreciate them devaluing the work in progress by trying to shock the class or something like that and so typically that never happens. I actually can't think of any time when it's been really, really inappropriate used. I think it's really

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because of weeks and months of my setting the stage for what's appropriate and inappropriate in the classroom (interview, 6/24/03).

Amazingly, considering the students' age level, the norm in other classrooms, and the variety of "risky" topics Ms. Darcy raised, during my entire data collection, I do not remember a time either.

The students themselves played a pivotal role in creating the teacher's authority in the classroom. "The students do assert themselves, informally and subversively, by telling the teacher what they like and don't like, by disrupting class, by resistant nonparticipation, by faking interest, by breaking the rules, by cleverly 'playing the angels' to beat the system" (Shor, 1996, p. 32). The students articulated a clear and consistent message during interviews: they wanted, or thought they needed, a strong authority figure. The students expected and trusted Elizabeth to know what they should learn and to provide them with the knowledge and information they needed. When I asked students in the first round of group interviews to describe the role of a teacher, their answers included, "to teach us the right stuff," "to prepare us" and simply "to teach us." In both group and individual interviews, the students expressed their confidence in Ms. Darcy's ability to teach them what they needed to know and to push them to work hard.

In addition to identifying Ms. Darcy as the authority on what they should learn, the students also relied on her authority to keep students on task and to create a productive environment in the classroom. As Marquita noted, Elizabeth's role differed from lesson to lesson: "In Socratic Seminar you are more free to say whatever you want but in mini-lessons she does the talking" (4/11/02).

Throughout all class situations, Ms. Darcy was a constant force monitoring the classroom. Both the students and Elizabeth believed that this imposing presence was necessary in order to keep the learning environment productive. In contrast to their other classes, where the students reported they often goofed off and rarely did much work, they consistently described Ms. Darcy's class as a place where they worked hard and were under control (round one interviews, 4/5/02, 4/8/02, 4/10/02). For example, Calvin stated, "I think this class is one of the classes with the most work. Other classes don't have as much work" (interview, 4/10/02). Further, many of the students, in individual interviews, specifically referenced Elizabeth's role as a strong authority as necessary to keeping the class in order. Andre said "if she didn't do that [act strict] people would not get their work done" (interview, 4/22/02). Nhat stated that that Ms. Blosser was "strict so she can make students learn" and added that if she wasn't strict, "people wouldn't write down stuff, they would be talking to other kids, not working and learning" (interview, 4/17/02). Juan commented that "In Mr. Black's class, he isn't hard at all, and the students just take advantage and goof around all the time" (interview, 4/18/02).

Teacher as Authority

As in most typical classrooms, Ms. Darcy often acted as the authority in the classroom. For example, she decided (for the most part) how class time would be organized, where students would sit, when they would do certain activities, and what grade they would receive. Students were reminded of her power each day as she asked (or ordered) them to spit their gum out, to move to

a different seat, to talk more quietly in their group work, or to stop working on a specific task. During the two lessons I am focusing on in this chapter, a debate and a Socratic Seminar during *The Outsiders* unit, Ms. Darcy's authority was apparent in two different ways. First, she was the lessons' primary decision-maker; she decided on the objectives and procedures for each lesson, she organized class time, and she outlined specific guidelines for students' work. Second, Elizabeth closely monitored students' behavior during the lessons.

Specifically, Ms. Darcy decided ahead of time that students would have a debate over the definition of a family and specifically where two characters in the novel *The Outsiders*, Sodapop and Ponyboy, should live. In the novel the parents of Darry, Sodapop and Ponyboy die and the three brothers remain living together, under the care of Darry, who is 21 years old. Throughout the novel, a possibility exists that the younger boys will be sent to live in a foster home. First, Ms. Darcy asked students to write individually, answering the following question:

> Imagine you are a judge who must decide the fate of Ponyboy and Soda. What decision would you reach? Use your book to come up with 3 reasons to support your decision. Then write a 3 paragraph answer. Include your three reasons, where you think they should live, and how you came to your conclusion.

Ms. Darcy wanted students both to think about this issue in the novel and expand it further to question society's definition of a family (interview 3/13/02). Based on the students' positions, Ms. Darcy divided them into two sides: one side thought Sodapop and Ponyboy should remain with Darry and the other side thought they should be removed and placed into a foster home. Then Ms. Darcy broke each group into two subgroups. During the preparatory work, Ms. Darcy gave each

subgroup specific tasks. One subgroup was to find specific textual evidence from the novel to support their side's position about where Sodapop and Ponyboy should live. The other subgroup was instructed to articulate what they think a good family is, according to society's definition. Then, they were to state what they think a good family is and discuss how they agree and disagree with society's definition. The subgroups reconvened, consolidated their work, and appointed three members to speak for their side throughout the debate. She decided that students would first write an essay to determine their views and she gave them clear instructions for that essay. Further, she gave students specific guidelines to follow to prepare for the debate, and she provided an exact format to follow during the debate. This format included an opening argument by each side, two chances for each side to provide evidence for its position, a rebuttal from the other side, and a closing statement. In addition, throughout the students' preparatory work, she carefully supervised their work. She kept a close eye on all students, as she walked around and checked on each group, answering questions, helping them organize, and encouraging them to work hard (field notes, 2/26/02).

These same aspects of authority were evident during the Socratic Seminar, which Ms. Darcy learned about in her graduate education courses and decided to implement it in her classroom (interview, 2/22/02). A Socratic Seminar (Adler, 1982) names a particular way a teacher leads a class discussion. This teaching method is implemented to help students understand information by fostering a thoughtful conversation in the classroom, focusing on a specific text. The goal of a Socratic Seminar is to help students develop a deeper

understanding of complex ideas in the text through dialogue rather than by memorizing bits of information. This particular Socratic Seminar took place over several class periods as students prepared for the Seminar, participated in whole class discussions, and wrote reflections. The Socratic Seminar focused on different social groups and gangs in *The Outsiders*, students' lives, and society.

For the Socratic Seminar, like for the debate, Ms. Darcy made the majority of the decisions about when the Seminar would take place and what texts the students would discuss. Elizabeth also provided clear guidelines for students about her expectations for their behavior, and she continued to monitor them during the Seminar. Ms. Darcy posted students' responsibilities (such as do not interrupt or act silly, do look at class members, do not dominate the entire conversation, etc.) on charts in the front of the classroom. Students selected one responsibility on which they would focus during the Seminar that day. Ms. Darcy sternly told the students that the seminar would stop if the rules were not followed. During the Seminar, she occasionally stopped the discussion to remind students that they needed to focus on their responsibilities in order to continue the conversation. During interviews about the Socratic Seminar, the students noted that though the structure differed from the normal classroom set-up, it was still clear that Ms. Darcy was in charge:

> Alexia: We get to say our opinions but Ms. Darcy doesn't let us get too silly (4/12/02).
> Marquita: We do more of the talking but we are still following her [Ms. Darcy's] rules (5/8/02).

Elizabeth: I think an effective classroom should operate within the teacher's guidelines, as a way to enable students' academic and emotional safety.

While the students acknowledged that they had more of a voice in these conversations than in other classroom activities, they still ultimately recognized Ms. Darcy as the unmistakable authority. During these lessons, Ms. Darcy did what a good teacher does: She acted as "someone who knows something worth learning, who knows how to teach what [students] need to know, who knows how to listen to students and how to be fair with grades and assignments, and who can maintain order" (Shor, 1996, p. 20).

Teacher as Author

Though Ms. Darcy was a strong authority during both of these lessons, at the same time she also took the role of *teacher as author*, creating opportunities for students to engage in the practice of freedom (Greene, 2000) as they were "co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher" (Freire, 1997, p. 62). Each lesson included aspects where the teacher and student departed from the typical teacher-centered instruction that continues to permeate many public school classrooms. On a structural level, the set-up of the furniture created an environment where Ms. Darcy and the students moved from the typical teacher and student hierarchy to one in which participants learned together. For example, during the debate, the three student representatives from each side faced each other as the rest of the class (including Ms. Darcy) took a seat in the audience. For the Socratic Seminar, the students and Ms. Darcy arranged their desks in a circle, all being seated at the same level.

Notably, during both of these lessons the students took on leading roles. In the debate, the students spoke to each other and carried out the entire debate,

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with Ms. Darcy silently observing from the audience. During the Seminar, the students also spoke to each other, as they agreed and disagreed with each other and posed questions. During long segments of time during the Seminar, Ms. Darcy did not speak at all. This type of student participation gives students' opportunities to act as Subject in the classroom. As Alexia and Andre express below, students recognized that during the Socratic Seminar they moved outside of the roles they normally adopt at school.

> Alexia: It was fun because we got to talk and say what we thought about things and we don't usually get to do that in school (interview, 4/12/02).
> Andre: You tell your opinion, what you think about stuff. Usually, in other classes, we just sit there and listen (interview, 5/10/02).

Importantly, during both of these lessons Ms. Darcy altered the "vertical patterns characteristic of banking education" (Freire, 1997, p. 61). Instead, students actively participated in their learning. Particularly during the Socratic Seminar, Ms. Darcy and the students engaged in dialogue. Consequently, though Ms. Darcy was a strong authority in these two lessons, she and her students did engage in "the practice of freedom" (Greene, 2000).

In addition to acting as an author through the designs of the lesson, Ms. Darcy also created opportunities for students to act as Subjects by connecting her students to the subject matter, by drawing the lessons from ideas real and important to them, and by "creat[ing] situations alive with activity and reflection" (Greene, 2000, p. 11). Educational theorists point out that in order to build the emancipatory educational experiences vital in critical literacy, students must be engaged in their learning (Freire,1997; Greene, 2000; Shor, 1992). In this

section, I first describe how Elizabeth successfully engaged her students in the subject matter by both deliberately basing the lessons on ideas interesting to her students and by giving students opportunities to explicitly connect their lives to the lessons. Then, I describe discussions Ms. Darcy facilitated to help her students question and critically analyze society and their realities.

In both the debate and the Socratic Seminar, Ms. Darcy chose ideas that her students could relate to and then helped them connect to the lessons. By building this type of student investment, Ms. Darcy authored an environment of freedom that is key in critical literacy. In order to create freedom in the classroom, in order to make classroom "situations alive with activity and reflection" (Greene, 2000, p. 11), students must be truly present, meaning that they must be active in the learning process as their ideas are authenticated and valued, and they must also be open to learning.

First, for the debate, when Elizabeth selected the topic, she purposely chose a subject they would be interested in:

> I wanted the debate to be about something that affected them. "What is a family" really touches a nerve with a lot of them, which I wanted it to do, because a debate should spark interest. With that enthusiasm, they will be able to create a good argument (interview, 3/13/02).

Students' enthusiasm for the topic was evident in their work throughout the preparation for the debate. Whereas in other assignments students were at times slow to start, they began writing their essays about Ponyboy and Sodapop's fate as soon as Ms. Darcy gave them instructions. In my field notes, I noted that the entire class seemed to be focused in an especially determined manner. In addition, on their way out of the classroom at lunch time, Tonya asked

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Marquita and Kiara if they thought Ponyboy and Sodapop should go to a foster home or not. Discussing school topics outside of the classroom may be a rare occurrence but this lesson genuinely interested the students because of the topic itself and their involvement in it. (field notes, 2/26/02)

Similarly, the Socratic Seminar topics interested the students in room C132. Students actively participated in the Seminar discussion. Not only did every student in the class share at least two comments during the Seminar, but also the students spoke enthusiastically as they shared their ideas. Even more, when I asked students to tell me what they thought of *The Outsiders* unit during interviews, several of them commented about their interest in these particular conversations. Marquita told me that she "especially enjoyed the Socratic Seminar because she [Ms. Darcy] compared us to the book and that's interesting." Though Nhat was not a very active participant in class discussions and did not seem to really delve into the issues in post-writing activities, he commented that the Socratic Seminar was "fun because we talked about subjects that were interesting to us, the students." Crystal, who also did not contribute very many responses, also said that the Socratic Seminar was her favorite part because "it was very interesting to hear students' ideas about the question [asked]," (interviews, 5/8/02; 4/17/02; 5/14/02).

In addition to basing the lessons on topics that her students were interested in, Ms. Darcy also gave students opportunities during each of the lessons to connect what they were learning to their own lives. After the debate, Ms. Darcy asked students to answer two questions:

What did you hear today that made you think of your own family?

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How did the debate affect your own definition of a family?

Even when a teacher thinks a lesson relates to students' lives, it is possible for students not to make these connections; by asking students to write about these two questions, Ms. Darcy helped them make these links explicit as shown in students' responses. For instance, several students, such as Nhat and Alfredo, connected to the positive ideas about family expressed during the debate. Alfredo wrote that, "like they said, it [family] is a group of people who is together. I think my family is the same. Nhat similarly noted that connection, "when they said parents give you guidance because my family always gives me guidance." Other students, though the realities of their lives are not as rosy, were still able to make connections between the debate and their own lives, as Jenetha wrote: "The part that made me think of my family was when she gave an example of Pony, Soda and Darry fighting."

While the above students wrote about how the debate made them think about their own family, other students, such as Kiara and Juan, connected to the different ideas about what defines a family, focusing specifically on whether or not kids need two parents. Kiara wrote that "one debate team said there should be two parents when really you don't need two - for example, my mom is a single parent." Juan noted, "It affected me by letting me know that you don't need two parents to have a family." These students' writing illustrated the type of personal connections students made to the lesson. It also showed the relationship established in Ms. Darcy's classroom between the students' worlds outside and inside of the classroom. While Kiara drew on her home experiences to respond

to the subject matter during the lesson, Juan carried the learning from class out into his broader thinking about family.

Ms. Darcy also gave students opportunities to connect their own lives to the subject matter during *The Outsiders'* Socratic Seminar. In preparing for the Seminar, which focused on social groups and gangs in the novel and society, Ms. Darcy began by asking students to respond to several prompts:

> What social group do you belong to? How would you define your group of friends? Do different groups at Elks Middle School make fun of each other? How would you define a gang? What are your feelings about gangs? Do you think there are gangs in the Elks Middle School area? Why do you think so?

Elizabeth encouraged students to be specific in their answers. Students wrote about a wide variety of groups to which they belonged. For example, Crystal belonged "to 212 because it's with people who live in Powder Mill and I do" and Juan "was in a soccer group."

Almost all of the students responded that they believed gangs were active in the neighborhoods surrounding Elks Middle School. Students wrote about the gang activity they saw in the school, from gang members messing with other kids to graffiti decorating the bathroom. They also noted gang activity they saw in apartment complexes they lived in. A few students also noted gang members they knew and Marquita wrote about her own involvement with gangs:

> I used to be a Dice Chick where there were a group of boys and two girls from Adelphi. I didn't live around Adelphi then. When I discovered that there was a little hatred between them, I knew I could not be in two groups that hated each other. So I stuck with my neighborhood group 212 which I have been associated with for three years.

As we see in the above comments, Ms. Darcy helped students make connections between their own lives and the themes of the novel. Specifically, they wrote about their experiences with social groups and gangs. In both of these lessons, students had opportunities to make explicit personal connections to the subject matter. These types of connections were an integral part of positioning students as Subjects in this classroom as they helped these students relate to school, engaged students in their learning, and opened opportunities for growth.

Another essential component of the teacher as author involves creating opportunities for students to take on roles as Subjects; for this to occur, the teacher as author creates situations in which student are free to express themselves as powerful communicators and humans. From a critical literacy perspective, freedom of expression means that learners see themselves as actors or creators in the classroom and in society. To this end, Ms. Darcy facilitated discussions where students questioned their own realities and considered issues of inequity, power, justice, class, and race. In these conversations, Ms. Darcy helped her students explore social constructs rarely examined in school settings (Adams, 1995,) and they began to reveal the constructed nature of perceptions often accepted as truth in society.

Specifically, during the debate, Ms. Darcy encouraged her students to take a nuanced and complex look at a basic, often taken-for-grated definition of what it means to be a family in our society. Elizabeth asked students to define what a "good family" is according to society, the novel, and their experiences. Throughout, one side of the debate took the conventional position, arguing for the traditional two-parent family. Marquita argued that Ponyboy should move to a

two-parent foster home because he would have a better chance to go to college, pointing out that Sodapop had already dropped out and claiming that adult parents would provide stability and security. Jenetha supported Marquita's argument, adding that Pony, Soda and Darry did not always get along.

Students from the other side of the debate countered these ideas. Juan presented a position outside of this norm, stating that a family includes people who share love and show compassion, whether there are two adult parents or not. Alexia pointed out that the standard belief is not always true as Johnny (another character in the book) has two parents but they do not support him and they abuse him. Chris added that a family is not reliant on two parents, but are people who comfort and care for each other. He used specific examples from the book to show ways Darry, Soda and Ponyboy cared for each other. For example, Darry cooked dinner for his brothers and checked up on Ponyboy's activities.

Throughout the debate, the students analyzed this issue from multiple angles. This practice allowed them to see several different points of view and to disrupt the notion that there is only one way of looking at things or one universal truth. In an interview weeks after this lesson, Tonya (interview, 5/16/02) spoke about how the complex analysis Ms. Darcy facilitated helped her think critically about what a family is:

> You might see something like what is a family but then you start to think, is a family what I really think it is, they seem like they're [Ponyboy, Sodapop, Darry] a family, but then people are trying to split them up and tell them a family is with two guardians.

Tonya is beginning to question the standard "the people" are trying to enforce. I asked Tonya, "So, what does Ms. Darcy do?" She replied:

Well she assigns it, and at first you think oh I don't want to do that. But then you start thinking about it and you be like no it ain't this. I get confused sometimes personally because of the fact that she makes me get thinking like that, because I have been thinking a certain way all my life, like a family is this, but then Ms. D. is bringing something different into my life and I'm like wait a minute. And I start thinking and I get confused and I think but I thought it was this and then I asked my parents and they might tell me something different and I come to school and Ms. D. tells me something else.

Elizabeth: Especially in middle school, a good teacher tries to introduce conflicting and varied concepts. These are skills introduced to be developed and refined throughout the learner's life. Tonya's description of her thought process during the debate lesson shows Ms. Darcy's success in reaching her critical goals. Tonya "starts thinking about it" (no small matter for middle school students) and reconsiders what "[she has] been thinking ... all [her] life." Tonya recognized that Ms. Darcy is "bringing something different into [her] life" and pauses, "I'm like wait a minute" and genuinely thinks about, even becoming confused by her reconsideration. Tonya also shows here an awareness of Ms. Darcy's teaching and of her own learning process. She is able to articulate the critical thinking she is going through in this classroom.

During the debate lesson, Tonya met a goal fundamental in critical literacy; she examined and questioned an assumption that she held and that permeates certain facets of society. At the same time, she met a goal central to Elizabeth's critical teaching practice. Ms. Darcy asked her students to analyze their own thinking and specifically focused on questioning what society considers standard, such as how a family is defined.

I want students to pause and mindfully consider what they have to say. I want them to feel comfortable with not always knowing the

answer. Basically, without just reacting. The social maneuvering where everyone is given the chance to consider what they think ... to pause and listen and craft and think. It's a skill that a lot of adults don't have (interview, 7/15/03).

In this way, she encouraged her students not to simply accept the standard as truth or as right but to instead develop more nuanced viewpoints that might lead them to more transformative thinking.

Similarly, in the Socratic Seminar - which lasted two class periods (2/27/02-2/28/02) - students engaged in the "critical study of knowledge, power and society" (Shor, 1996, p. 155), which is at the heart of teacher as author. The class questioned the status quo; in particular, they asked and answered questions about different social groups and the ways our society is stratified. From the beginning, Ms. Darcy set the tone for dialogue, rather than more teacher-directed question-and-answer style classroom practice. The students and Ms. Darcy sat in desks in a circle and she began by reminding them that they were to look at and talk to each other. She then went on to open with questions "designed to get all students involved" (interview, 3/13/02). She began by stating, "Don't look at me, look at other class members. It is more like a conversation, rather than a teacher giving you a question, but more like a conversation. First, I would like you to look at the cover of the book, and go around and tell one thing you see on cover that is different from other students."

> Zalmai: There is blood under the Outsiders.
> Marquita: The faces of Johnny, Ponyboy, Randy, Cherry.
> Luis: The Socs and their fancy cars and clothes.
> Leroy: There's the movie theatre where Ponyboy starts in the book.
> Nhat: There are lots of colors, reds and purples, and dark in the back.

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In my field notes, I noted the energy in the room during this warm-up period. "Though this is a relatively surface-level opening, the students are really getting into it. They all contribute, look at their books intently to find something new to say, and laughing and looking for what other students raise" (field notes, 2/27/02). Ms. Darcy engaged students as participants in a way that everyone felt welcome enough to contribute. During this opening piece, she did not speak between students' responses, instead letting students reply to each other. She then probed them to think deeper about the book title, asking them why they thought the book is titled the Outsiders.

> Deon: Because they are not really that popular, they are different from the Socs.
> Marquita: I would add to Deon saying they were different from the other groups, they were more emotional.
> ......
> Crystal: I agree with Marquita, they really are emotional, because Ponyboy was so upset when Johnny died that he could not go back to school or eat or even get out of bed.
> Ms. Darcy: And what is an Outsider?
> Luis: Someone who is left out of the inside. Someone from another place.
> Marquita: But they separated themselves.
> Crystal: I don't think they separated themselves. They were left out of the Socs with their fancy cars and always beating up the Greasers. They had to be together because they didn't have nobody else.

After Ms. Darcy allowed a "wait-time" minute and asked students if anyone else wanted to add to Crystal's comment, she again moved the conversation to a deeper level. As evidenced above, Ms. Darcy continued to allow students to respond to each other without constantly interjecting comments of her own. She then prodded the conversation to move it further along. In the next section of the conversation, Ms. Darcy asked students questions to set the context of the story and the characters, specifically by addressing issues of race and class. She

intended to "bring these issues out in the book before extending this type of thinking to relate it to issues in their own lives and society" (interview, 3/13/02), [areas Ms. Darcy raised the second day of the discussion.] Ms. Darcy asked students to identify the two main groups or gangs in the novel. She encouraged them to reference the book with specific details to describe the groups and characters. She also specifically asked students to "consider these groups in terms of social class, who has more money and resources."

> Juan: The Greasers are poorer than the Socs.
> Kiara: The Greasers are lower class while the Socs are upper class.
> Calvin: Socs have Mustang cars and Madras shirts.
>
> ......
> **Ms. Darcy:** And what is the central conflict in the story?
> Leroy: The Greasers are poorer than the Socs, the Socs have nicer clothes, the fight is the main problem.
>
> .....
> Jenetha: There are bigger issues.
> **Ms. Darcy:** Such as?
> Andre: Everyone they loved died in their lives, creating anger.
> **Ms. Darcy:** Who in the book is angry?
> Marquita: Ponyboy says that Darry is angry for everything, and Dally is angry about his parents and childhood. And they are all angry for what happens to Johnny.
> Jenetha: The Socs have their own problems, Randy said Bob had his own problems

By raising issues of social class in the discussion the students discussed a central concept in *The Outsiders*. Social class is rarely addressed explicitly in school (Adams, 1995), and teachers therefore often miss opportunities to connect education inside and outside of school, and to examine important aspects of their environments. Elizabeth brings in relevant texts and uses them to broaden students' thinking about their own social realities. By engaging in such discussion, she attempts to help students see their own lives as gendered, raced and classed (Greene, 1988), and to help them gain insights into the origins and

structures of the society in which they live. The ultimate goal of this type of critical examination is to inspire students to take "control over the direction of [their] lives," (Fehring & Green, 2001, p. 10), to make decisions about who they want to be and who they no longer want to be, and ultimately to recreate both themselves and the contexts around them (Giroux, 1988).

Ms. Darcy continued by pointing out two key words, "anger and respect" and asking students "how do those two things deal with the main conflict in the story, how does the anger and the respect, how does that play in with the main conflict, how are anger and respect related? Marquita responded that "when somebody is angry, they take it out on other people, they use their anger as an excuse to get respect." As the end of the class period neared, Ms. Darcy asked other students if they could add to Marquita's response. Ms. Darcy then ended the first day's discussion by pointing out that though both gangs in the book are white, connections between gangs and race often exist.

She asked students to write a response to the question: What are connections between gangs, or groups of people, and race? Ms. Darcy explained that she wanted to use writing here "to push each student to think further, sometimes writing is the best method for that, especially after students have been talking for quite a while" (interview, 3/13/02). Alexia responded:

> At my old school races usually stuck together. There weren't that many Hispanics and Blacks... The white race stuck together and the Hispanics and Blacks were one group. I belonged to the Hispanic and black group. In this school there is a lot of diversity and race doesn't matter in the same way.

Alexia's response shows that she made connections between group identity and race. She was able to express the fluid nature of social constructs and comment

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on how they can change depending on the context and situation. In her other school, where there were fewer students of color, those students "usually stuck together" while the plethora of diversity in her new school meant that "race [did not] matter in the same way." By giving students chances to articulate on issues of race in their surroundings, Ms. Darcy often brought unacknowledged ideas to the surface where they can be named, discussed, critiqued, and possibly changed.

Ms. Darcy continued the Socratic Seminar in a second day of discussion and extended the conversation to make connections between the novel and their lives. First, she asked students to read a quote by Randy, one of the Socs:

> "You can't win, even if you whip us. You'll still be where you were – at the bottom. And we'll still be the lucky ones with all the breaks. So it doesn't do any good, the fighting and the killing. It doesn't prove a thing. We'll forget it if you win, or if you don't. Greasers will still be Greasers and Socs will still be Socs."

After asking students to identify the speaker and the events in the book surrounding Randy's statement, Ms. Darcy moved outside of the book and into the larger society. Specifically, she asked students, "Now let's take a look at our society today, we know the Socs are the top, I want you to think about who would occupy the top position, if you could think of one particular person who would be the Soc, of our society today."

> Students: Bill Gates, George Bush, Dr. Watts (the school principal).
> Ms. Darcy: What about a Soc race?
> Marquita: White.
> Several students nod or voice agreement.
> Ms. Darcy: What about a top profession, a Soc profession or job?
> Students: Broker, lawyer, doctor, judge, someone who makes a lot of money.
> Ms. Darcy: Would there be anyone in that top group that wasn't white?

Students: Johnny Cochran, Abe Gordon (local news reporter), Brian Gumbell.

Ms. Darcy specifically worked in this conversation to connect the book to the students' present contexts. While the book used two gangs, the Socials and the Greasers, to divide society into the "top and the bottom," Ms. Darcy asked students to consider the top (and later the bottom) in our current society. By identifying specific individuals in this group, such as "Bill Gates, George Bush, [and] Dr. Watts" the class set a concrete picture of these demarcations. Then, as Ms. Darcy pushed the students to consider various professions in "the top" she began to help them see the demarcations outside of only specific individuals. Further, by continuing to interject questions to keep race in the conversation, she further connected the themes of the book to situations currently in their local and broader contexts. As the conversation continued, Ms. Darcy asked the students similar questions about the "bottom" and the students specifically discussed their own role in this configuration.

> **Ms. Darcy**: What's more important than race?
> **Students**: Money, social status, who you know.
> **Ms. Darcy**: Who occupies the bottom?
> **Calvin**: Us.
> **Jesse**: We're more in the middle.

The Socratic Seminar about *The Outsiders* asked students to see themselves in relation to both the characters in the book and also to other people in their local and national communities. Ms. Darcy pushed the class to consider the complex relationship between social class and race. At the end of the lesson the students themselves demonstrated the dynamic nature of social class as they expressed alternative points of view about their own positioning. Rather than

viewing social class as a static and agreed-upon construct, they articulated the

subjectivity and context-specific qualities of its definitions and realities.

Ms. Darcy herself reflected on the level of conversation the students

engaged in during the Seminar:

> I think today they recognized social reality, they stated issues of race and
> class ... I also want them to think more about how it affects their lives, to
> define themselves within the structure ... I think there has to be a step
> defining where they are, and then they would   have to list ... the factors
> that isolate, that pre-program someone into a certain spot. Because you
> have to be able to identify the oppression before you can be an activist or
> you are just swinging out at stuff. They would have to define themselves,
> identify the   chains, the structure, not just what the structure is, but the
> mechanism, that keeps people in their roles.

Elizabeth decided to continue engaging students in these steps of "defin[ing]

themselves, identify[ing] the chains, the structure, not just what the structure is,

but the mechanism, that keeps people in their roles" by planning another Socratic

Seminar about Langston Hughes' poem "Mother to Son," which I discuss in

Chapter Seven.

During the Socratic Seminar, Ms. Darcy facilitated critical conversations,

guiding students to think about issues of race and class both in the novel and in

society. These issues are extremely significant, yet rarely mentioned in many

schools (Gay, 1988). Adams (1995) found that even when a teacher included

multicultural literature in the classrooms, "classroom discussions were void of any

meaningful and honest discussion about racism in today's society" (30). Ms.

Darcy's students recognized both the importance of talking about such issues

and its usual absence. When I asked Alexia what she thought of *The Outsiders*

unit, she mentioned that she especially liked the Socratic Seminar because "it

talks about race and that is important." Alexia added that "at school, teachers

don't take much time to talk about these important issues, when a person says something to another person about race, like saying nigger, teachers don't say anything" (interview, 4/12/02). Elizabeth included such topics in her curriculum because:

> Race is so important to the direction the US is heading. Your own contribution to racist or classist thought or action, directly or indirectly. I want kids to start questioning what the factors are behind race and class. So that will grow into a continuing thoughtfulness of why does this exist. Driving by slums and thinking about what creates to the structure of slums and is there something I'm doing that's contributing to this (interview 7/15/03).

Elizabeth's statement identifies ideals critical literacy theorists hope that educators espouse. Ms. Darcy recognized that race is a defining concept in American society, understood that we are all complicit in continuing stratification, and sought to create a vision of change with and for her students. The content of the Seminar, like the content of the debate, opened up chances for students to act as Subjects in their learning. The students explicated social stratification within the book and society, thinking about connections between class and race, and they commented upon where they fit within society. While students often feel alienated from what they learn in school (Shannon, 1992), in these lessons, Ms. Darcy asked her students to connect their life experiences to the novel *The Outsiders*. Further, she helped her students make personal connections to societal assumptions and structures that often seem removed and disconnected from their lives.

Teacher as Authoritarian

While during the overwhelming majority of the time, Ms. Darcy was either in the role of *teacher as authority* or *teacher as author* there were times when she became *teacher as authoritarian.* This role underlies Alexia's quote that "if you talk or something she screams at you" (interview, 4/12/02). *Elizabeth: This is interesting to me. The word "scream" is far from the term I would use to describe my interactions with my students.* Ms. Darcy herself acknowledged that though she might not like it, her experiences taught her that sometimes students responded best when they were yelled at, [*Elizabeth: It's a teacher-student role they're familiar with, so at times, the yelling is comforting]* or in my words "acted upon" (field notes, 5/30/02). In this section, I read one event to illustrate her position as teacher as authoritarian.

This event occurred on the day of the debate, in the period immediately before the actual debate. During the several days leading up to the debate, I was thrilled, particularly as a researcher, because I was seeing critical literacy in action. One group was questioning society's assumptions, arguing that though many people might not think 21-year-old Darry could raise his brothers, he showed his capabilities throughout the book. Another student talked about how the two-parent family (society's notion) does not speak to her because her mom is a single parent and she has a great family. Further, another group of students expressed the importance of context, claiming that what would work in one situation might not work for Darry and Ponyboy (field notes, 2/26/02).

When I reached the classroom on the day of the debate, students were filing in and sitting with their debate groups. The students would use the first period, prior to lunch, to make final preparations for the debate; the debate would

begin immediately following their lunch period. Many students were working quickly, preparing opening and closing arguments, and practicing with the students who would actually participate in the debate.

While most of the students accepted their roles and responsibilities, the three students (Andre, Marquita, Kiara) who sat in front of me did not. Ms. Darcy visited the group and sternly told them that she meant what she said yesterday. (I had not been in the class the previous day). Andre needed to do his part! He needed to take the other students' notes which they had scribbled onto various sheets of paper, to copy them neatly onto one page, and to add an introductory and concluding paragraph. She firmly told Andre that he had not helped his group at all in finding textual evidence and he was not going to get away with doing nothing. In the same tone, Ms. Darcy told the girls they were not to cover for him; he needed to do his share. She clearly reminded them that they would not be able to bring their notes, the various sheets, to the debate but would only be able to use the sheet that Andre would create. A few minutes later, right before lunch, Ms. Darcy returned to the group, saw that Andre had not copied over the other students' work, and harshly took the various papers from his desk. As a result, the speakers on Andre's side of the debate would not have the notes they had spent the week preparing and would not have any written work to bring with them to the debate (field notes, 3/7/02). *Elizabeth: Reading this reminds me of the conflict in teaching critically. Goals like inquiry-based learning do not supercede other goals like personal responsibility, cooperation and respect.*

Reflecting on the event, I wondered: Why hadn't Andre copied the work over? What had he been doing while he was sitting there? Was this fair? Was it

that important for Andre to copy their notes over? Why wasn't he more invested in his work? What would the students do now during the debate? And most of all, were critical literacy teachers supposed to act like that? *Elizabeth: Critical literacy teachers are as flawed as others, perhaps with a potential to be more so by trying to "shake things up" a bit.* While this event was well within the confines of normal classroom teaching, in my own reading of this event I think it moved into the realm of teacher as authoritarian.

I also wonder if things might have been differently if I had been in class the day before. This group of three students sat directly in front of my desk. On most days, I interacted with the students sitting right around the desk. Further, Andre, Kiara and Marquita were students I had pretty strong relationships with through the class and interviews. There were many other class periods in which I assisted students who were having trouble getting started on their work. I very well may have prodded Andre to begin writing. Looking back on this event, if I had influenced Andre to do his work, I may have altered the events in the classroom and my own data collection.

My strong response to Ms. Darcy's actions may be the result of a variety of factors. I was disappointed by this turn of events especially because the debate preparation lessons were such rich pictures of critical literacy teaching. This event called into question students' seemingly genuine engagement in the assignment. Further, it raised concerns for me about Ms. Darcy's reaction to students who were not truly participating in her lessons. My reaction connects back to my initial beliefs about critical literacy teaching and specifically my naïve expectations that students would be completely engrossed by a critical literacy

curriculum. Though I do still critique this event I also have come to a place where I understand it differently. Literature about critical literacy (Bigelow et. al, 1994) often purports the idea that if you "make the work interesting the discipline will take care of itself" (Wolk, 1998, p. 72). At the beginning of this study I saw critical literacy as a panacea that would create a nearly perfect classroom community. While it is true that engaging curriculum plays a role [and played a role in this classroom] in keeping students interested and motivated, I realize now that it is unrealistic to expect any form of instruction to interest every student at every moment. Eight graders are going to veer from the learning environment in the classroom inevitably and all teachers are going to have to attend to these issues. *Elizabeth: Exactly. And a critical literacy assignment can be used by some students to not step up.*

My response was also influenced by my relationship to these particular students. By this point in the school year, I really liked and felt pretty close to many of the students in room C132, particularly these three. Kiara sat near my desk and we often talked for a few minutes before or after class. Marquita and Andre were both focus students who I had spent considerable time interviewing. I had great respect for them as writers as well as they had both produced class work I thought was exemplary. *Elizabeth: This may affect your hurt feelings to my actions.*

It is also important to consider the multiple possible interpretations why Andre did not do the work. Maybe he did not do his work because he was too busy being social with the girls or even trying to show off for them by being bad. Possibly he wasn't interested in the debate and did not want to put effort into

something he did not care about completing. It is possible that something had happened in Andre's life outside of school that made him angry or belligerent. He may have been slow to start his work and then dug his heels in once Ms. Darcy threatened him. Knowing Andre throughout the school year, I think he simply just did not get down to work. There were other times when I noted that Andre talked or even sat quietly instead of doing his work (field notes, 2/25/02; 5/8/02). He even admitted that "sometimes I'm lazy and just don't feel like working" (interview, 4/22/02). Thus, I do not think Andre was intentionally going up against Ms. Darcy. He never acted openly resistant before or after this event and Ms. Darcy herself described him as "very respectful" (interview, 2/22/02). *Elizabeth: I think Andre was aware of his piece, and knew what to do. He wasn't caught unaware.*

Looking back at this event with my more complex, practical view of critical literacy, I recognize that critical literacy teachers are inevitably faced with the reality that all students are not always going to be engaged. Further, it is still their responsibility to keep the working environment productive. Ironically, Andre himself believed that "If [Ms. Darcy] wasn't so strict then people wouldn't do their work, they would think it was okay not to do their work" (interview, 4/22/02). Andre probably read this event less harshly than I did.

However, I still think it is noteworthy to read this instance as authoritarian because it was out of sync with the way teachers and students in a critical literacy practice share authority over actions and learning. While it is unrealistic to think that in any classroom, all students will be completely invested in their work at all times, this demonstration of authority in a brief moment sends a message to

students contrary to the long range goals of critical literacy. For even in these moments when students are not invested in their work and/or do not do what they are supposed to do, ways still exist to treat them as Subjects in their own learning. Basically, once Ms. Darcy saw there was a problem, I think she may have been able to play the role of problem-solver instead of reacting angrily and threatening the group. *Elizabeth: This had been tried the day before, and ignored by Andre.* She might have asked Andre why he still was not completing his work, if there was anything he did not understand, or if there was a way to make it easier for him to work (such as moving to his own table). She also might have asked Kiara and Marquita what they thought would help the situation. *Elizabeth: These ideas of using the students as problem-solvers are great suggestions and ways I would like to explore further in my teaching.* Of course, teachers are humans and therefore not perfect and Ms. Darcy very well might have believed that this was an appropriate level of responsibility to assign to the students. Ultimately though, this type of reaction was not an isolated incident and this role of authoritarian, while maybe even necessary, still works against the teacher "creat[ing] situations alive with activity and reflection" (Greene, 2000, p. 11).

Conclusion

This chapter places issues of authority within the shades of gray context I raised in Chapter One. Teachers "can not be totally outside the system if the system continues to exist" (Freire, 1985). The system and the students within the system place certain expectations of authority on teachers. As Shor (1996) notes, "If I deny these professional signs of authority, I will broadcast

incompetence or carelessness. This will tell [students] that they are in an 'anything-goes' class where I lost their respect and confidence, thus inviting frivolous disregard for the work, or even chaos" (20).

As we see in this chapter, by moving back and forth between *teacher as authority, teacher as author,* and *teacher as authoritarian* Elizabeth Darcy was able to remain in a position students respected while at the same time giving them opportunities to act as Subjects in their own learning. My data illustrates how Ms. Darcy both strictly established her authority in the classroom and also shared her authority with students by giving them genuine opportunities to speak and lead during class. Ultimately, although Ms. Darcy maintained her authority as a teacher, it did not prevent - and in fact might even have allowed - students to experience freedom (Greene, 2000) in the classroom.

Chapter Six

GRAMMAR LESSONS AND PROTEST POEMS

In the previous chapters, I analyzed times in Ms. Darcy's teaching practice in which she blended critical literacy goals and her school district's more traditional goals in the same unit or lesson. For example, in *The Outsiders* unit, Ms. Darcy taught academic formats and standard Discourse while simultaneously delving into critical content such as analysis of society's assumptions and discussions of race and class. In the poetry unit, Ms. Darcy followed her district curriculum's topic of autobiography while incorporating diverse, non-mainstream themes and multiple Discourses. Chapters 4 and 5 illustrate the type of teaching that occurred most of the time in room C132.

This type of teaching exists somewhere in the shades of gray between traditional and critical teaching. Ms. Darcy believed that "critical literacy fits very beautifully within an academic setting." This "fit" included a strong belief in and commitment to teaching students standard knowledge. As Ms. Darcy explained, "learning the standard is very much part of critical literacy for me." Believing that the students desperately needed standard knowledge to be successful in school and society, Ms. Darcy prioritized this learning in her teaching practice. In this way, she firmly had "one foot within the system." At the same time though she believed that "learning to negotiate within the society that exists is a very necessary part. [It] is also not all or enough." Ms. Darcy was also very

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committed to actively working with her students to see "flaws in what exists and seeing beyond that to create who you are in this world and to create changes around you." To do this, Ms. Darcy also moved that other foot outside of the system in order to bring in Discourses, topics and questions not typically part of the system. (interview, 7/8/03)

During the majority of days, Ms. Darcy drew ideas from both critical literacy and more traditional conceptions of Language Arts. However, some lessons focused solely on critical or traditional goals. In this chapter, I focus on occasions where Ms. Darcy's lessons did not blend these two approaches, but rather focused solely on one or the other in order to continue describing Ms. Darcy's teaching practice as a whole. Specifically, I examine both more traditional lessons about grammar and critical lessons about protest from three angles: I contrast the way knowledge was defined, the purpose of the lessons, and the positions the students and Elizabeth occupied in the learning process. Ultimately, by contrasting the lessons from these three angles, I demonstrate in this chapter how students received dual messages about conformity and change. While this chapter concentrates on lessons that contain almost solely traditional *or* critical conceptions of literacy, I end the chapter by reviewing the I-Search paper assignment to show how these dual notions of conformity and transformation existed together in the same assignment.

Grammar Lessons

In this section, I focus on aspects of Ms. Darcy's practice that directly align with her school district's curriculum. As I described in Chapter 3, these lessons worked toward a particular purpose for education - preparing all students for success in our current educational system and society by teaching them standard knowledge and skills. As Ms. Darcy described, "it is something they will be expected to know in high school" (interview 5/14/02). While in many ways the lessons I describe here seem like ordinary parts of Language Arts education, I highlight them in my data analysis because it is important to question and disturb that very ordinariness - what is often accepted as the norm. Specifically, I analyze how these lessons defined knowledge in particular ways, how they aimed toward conformity to a standard Discourse and how they positioned students and the teacher in relation to this knowledge and purpose.

Writing Convention Mini-lessons and a Parts of Speech Unit

Throughout the school year, Elizabeth led writing convention mini-lessons to teach skills such as grammar, vocabulary and writing conventions. These mini-lessons were a regular part of this Language Arts class. In the beginning of the school year, Ms. Darcy asked each student to buy a folder and create a writing handbook that would be separate from their other materials. Ms. Darcy instructed the students to create a table of contents on the first page and record

the topic of each mini-lesson. Throughout the school year, students' writing handbooks contained information about such topics as prefixes, verbs, synonyms, conjunctions and quotation marks.

While the individual grammar lessons were not identical, they followed a typical format. Ms. Darcy often based them on worksheets contained in her school district's adopted textbook materials. Frequently using transparencies on an overhead projector, Ms. Darcy presented information and asked students to copy that information into their handbooks. The information usually included definitions, examples, and practice exercises. At the beginning of the lesson, Ms. Darcy - standing near the overhead - read and introduced the topic to the students, explaining the model sentences, asking volunteers for answers to the example exercises, and recording on the transparency the answers students gave. Then as students worked on practice exercises, Ms. Darcy monitored the students to make sure they were copying the information and completing the work. At the end of the lesson, Ms. Darcy asked volunteers to share their answers to the practice exercises and told all students to copy down the correct responses.

Below are excerpts from my field notes from a mini-lesson about prefixes and suffixes that highlight the format of that lesson (2/11/02):

> Ms. Darcy begins class by putting a transparency on the overhead titled "Prefixes and Suffixes." Under prefixes, she has written "re" and "fore," and under suffixes "ment" and "less." She writes the definitions and asks the students to copy this information into their writing handbook. She reminds them to put the title and page number in their table of contents. She reads each of the definitions. Students have 3 minutes to copy it down. She puts a second transparency up [it looks like a page out of a workbook] with sample exercises to practice.

Students have to choose the correct meaning for each prefix or suffix.
1. without: -ful, -ment, -less, or -ness.
2. again: re-, fore-, un- or -less
3. act or process of: -ful, -ment, im-, -tion
4. before: pre-, fore-, re-, -ment

Next, they have to choose whether each of eight words has a prefix, a suffix, or is a compound word. The words are tugboat, forefather, enjoyment, reinstall, weekend, meaningless, blackbird, and reuse.

Students work for 10 minutes. Ms. Darcy asks Calvin to pick his head up. Chris has not yet started and she tells him "get going." She asks Kiara to work more quickly and says to the whole class, "Start working." Ms. Darcy asks for volunteers to share the correct answer - she calls on Marquita. No one else raises their hand. "Come on." She calls on Alexia.

The mini-lesson these field notes detailed are typical of the mini-lessons throughout the semester. The room was usually very quiet during this time. Ms. Darcy walked around the room and prompted students to copy the work down. I never observed students blatantly resist doing the work during the mini-lessons, but they often had their heads down, waited to get started until Ms. Darcy spoke directly to them, worked more slowly than Ms. Darcy expected, or failed to volunteer to answer the practice exercise questions. *Elizabeth: You capture the atmosphere clearly.*

While mini-lessons throughout the year focused intermittently on teaching students standard English conventions, in April, Elizabeth focused a whole unit on these conventions. Specifically, the students studied parts of speech. She broke the students up into seven groups and assigned each group a part of speech (nouns, pronouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, prepositions, and conjunctions/interjections). Each group of students was instructed to learn about their particular part of speech and then teach about it to the rest of the class. Ms. Darcy gave each group specific objectives for their learning and their teaching.

The groups were given the opportunity to actively find the information but [*Elizabeth: Is this a bad thing?*] they were told exactly what they needed to find and were given clear parameters for how to share the information with the rest of the class. For example, she asked the noun group to cover the following objectives:

Objective 1: Define and identify nouns
Objective 2: Distinguish between singular and plural nouns
Objective 3: Distinguish between common and proper nouns

Each group was given the precise objectives they were to meet in their presentations. Elizabeth worked individually with each group and also provided multiple resources for students to use to complete their objectives, including a variety of textbooks and writing guides. In addition to grading each group for their presentation, she also administered quizzes about parts of speech at the end of each lesson and at the end of the unit.

As Ms. Darcy prepared for the unit, she told me she thought it was important for her students to learn about parts of speech in order for them to be successful as they moved into high school and because parts of speech are considered basic, essential knowledge in our society (field notes, 4/8/02). *Elizabeth: I would add that having background knowledge in grammar creates opportunities for students to excel in a broader way.* Elizabeth also explicitly told the students that the unit was important because it would get them ready to be successful in their future (field notes, 4/26/02). In this unit, her aim matched the school district's central purpose for teaching Language Arts, preparing students for school and life success.

The mini-lessons and parts of speech unit described above illustrate a typical component of many Language Arts classrooms. Most state standards and district curricula encourage this type of instruction. It differs from the other lessons described in this dissertation thus far, as more time was teacher-directed and students had fewer opportunities to be creative. While this traditional instruction did not comprise a majority of Ms. Darcy's teaching practice, it did occur a significant amount of the time, with a short mini-lesson occurring at least once a week and the parts of speech unit lasting several weeks. I address three questions in the next section in order to analyze this traditional component of Ms. Darcy's teaching practice: how was knowledge defined during these lessons, what was the purpose of these lessons, and how were students and teachers positioned in the learning process. *Elizabeth: I like your questions - so juicy!*

Knowledge as a Commodity

In the lessons described above, knowledge was approached as something that had already been created and existed on its own, outside of any person or group of people. The writing convention mini-lessons and parts of speech unit followed a pattern common in "contemporary instructional practices [where] knowledge is objective and stable" (Cohen, 1988). It was stable in the sense that it was perceived as if it was concrete and already completely developed, and objective in the sense that it was presented as inherently neutral. Though Ms. Darcy made it clear that this knowledge was important for her students to learn, the knowledge itself was not investigated in terms of its origins or cultural connections. *Elizabeth: I also tried to instill in them that these grammar lessons*

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are necessary to be successful in a more diverse world than Elk Middle School.

,As I mentioned above, Ms. Darcy drew some of the grammar lessons from her textbook materials and it makes sense that these materials often present knowledge as "objective and stable;" this type of instruction has a very long tradition in American schooling (Cohen, 1988; Phillips, 1995; Sfard, 1998). Knowledge, in these lessons, was approached as a concrete object that could be put onto an overhead and copied and stored in a writing handbook.

Traditionally, knowledge has been approached as something that students need to obtain and a main purpose of education has been to help students "gain ownership over some self-sustained entity" (Sfard, 1998, p. 5), which in this case was punctuation rules, parts of speech, and prefixes. As such, learning exemplified "the idea of … gaining possession over some commodity" (ibid). In each of Ms. Darcy's mini-lessons, the goal was that students would "gain possession" of the grammar and writing convention rules as they copied them down [*Elizabeth: and practiced them*] into their writing handbooks. Similarly, in the parts of speech unit, each group was supposed to "gain possession" of the information about their particular part of speech by searching through reference books and verifying information with the teacher.

The knowledge in these lessons was broken into concepts - including the definition and types of nouns, the specific rules for quotation marks, or the definition of various prefixes and suffixes. "Concepts are to be understood as basic units of knowledge that can be accumulated, gradually refined, and combined to form ever richer cognitive structures" (Sfard, 1998, p. 5). Following this line of reasoning, these concepts can be quizzed and they can be applied to

various other situations. During the mini-lessons, Ms. Darcy asked students to apply what they were learning to various exercises. She then sporadically had quizzes to see if they accumulated the knowledge and if they could apply it in other ways. Similarly, during the parts of speech unit, Ms. Darcy gave the students quizzes over the knowledge they were learning. Ultimately, Ms. Darcy wanted her students to be able to use this knowledge in a variety of situations in their academic futures.

The parts of speech unit design, in theory, could have offered chances for students to be more creative. If students had taken ownership over their learning and their presentations, they could have engaged in a genuine search for information they wanted to know. However, the groups were told exactly what they needed to learn and, as Elizabeth pointed out, "did not really invest [themselves] in their learning" (interview 5/14/02). Nor were the students creative in their presentations. While they could have used games, role plays or other alternative ways to teach the information to the students, the groups used a reference book to find the information and then transferred the information from the reference book onto a poster to display to the rest of the students. In this way, knowledge was approached as a discrete entity the students were supposed to possess at the end of the lessons. *Elizabeth: This is interesting. It makes me wish that my own delivery had been more varied. Perhaps there is a relationship between the two.*

Purpose: Learning the standard Discourse

What was the purpose of learning about grammatical concepts and standard language conventions? Ms. Darcy described her purpose: "I think of the mini-lessons as 20 minutes to give them the content, the didactic, the little skills I want them to have ... I feel good about teaching them because it is something they will be expected to know in high school" (interview, 3/13/02). Specifically, Ms. Darcy's aim was to teach students grammar and writing conventions, such as rules of punctuation, capitalization and subject-verb agreement, consistent with what I term "standard Discourse." In the previous chapter, I explained that during *The Outsiders* unit, specifically during the debate and Socratic Seminar, Ms. Darcy wanted students to learn how to participate in traditional academic formats for writing and conversations. The grammar and parts of speech lessons described in this chapter also aim at teaching students standard Discourse. This information – what part of speech a word is, what verb tense correctly fits into a sentence, or what punctuation fits within a particular sentence – is often tested, in different formats, on a variety of standardized tests. For example, this type of knowledge, tested on yearly state required exams, college acceptance tests, and national teacher examinations, is a definite gatekeeper into gaining access to certain programs, institutions, and careers. In Chapter Three, I illustrated how this purpose is very much in line with the school district's conception of Language Arts instruction. The school district is committed to giving students what they will need to be successful in our current society. This purpose dates back to the beginning of public schools in this country and continues to pervade our educational system (Powell et al, 1985). One of Ms. Darcy's goals was "to

prepare them [the students] to be successful students in high school" (interview 2/28/02).

Further, the students themselves concurred with this purpose. When I asked students in group and individual interviews about the purpose for Language Arts class, every student response indicated that they believed the purpose of Language Arts class was to help them be successful in the current educational system - in high school and college - and in our current society in order to get a job. During group interviews, when I asked students what they thought the purpose was for Language Arts class, each group came up with a variation of "preparing them for their academic future" and I wrote these responses on the board. Then, at the end of the group interview, I asked them to individually comment on the stated purpose. They all indicated that they agreed with it. In the individual focus student interviews, I gave the students index cards with various class components on them (these components were drawn from the group interview responses). I asked students to organize the cards in order of importance and every student put the mini-lessons first or second. *Elizabeth: Wow! So the part where they're personally invested the least (at least outwardly) is considered one of the most important.* Marquita (interview 4/11/02) elaborates on why the grammar mini-lessons were important. Her comments are typical of the other focus students.

> It prepares us for what we need to know. They are very important for
> writing. The way she has us copy stuff down, we copy down what we
> need to learn. It is what I need   to know for my career, for high school,
> and college. I am in the Best Friends group, with a lot of girls and we get ·
> together and talk about a lot of stuff and it helps with school, and I am
> going to Upward Bound so I could get a scholarship there ...I will be the

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only one inour family to go because my brother didn't go to college, my oldest sisters just got their GED.

In addition, in an end-of-the-year survey, Ms. Darcy asked the students: "Which folder used in this class do you think was the most important? Rank order each one from 1 to 6, with 6 meaning the most." The majority indicated that the writing handbook was the most important folder. As Jones (1989) noted, it is not the teacher alone, nor the district or state, that decides upon instruction in the classroom. The students themselves have a stake in what they are learning and a role in how they are learning. Their participation in the classroom works with and against various types and purposes of education. Jones (ibid) also recorded working class students' propensity toward a "conception of school work as an act of receiving … [where] the basic task for the students is to 'get' the *teacher's* knowledge … [and] to 'get' the school knowledge they need in order – they maintain – to improve the economic condition in their lives" (24-26). The purpose underlying the grammar lessons, and furthermore the conception of knowledge in these lessons, fit in many ways with the students' beliefs and desires. As I further describe in Chapter Seven, Ms. Darcy's teaching practice overall, and especially the critical literacy work, may have been more effective because it included these traditional components that students valued. *Elizabeth: Yes. I feel like the blend helped create a sense of trust. I wasn't too far gone ☺.*

Positions: Leader and Followers

In examining the mini-lessons and parts of speech unit, I have shown that knowledge in these lessons was defined as objective and stable and the purpose

for these lessons was to gain this knowledge in order to obtain the standard Discourse. *Elizabeth: I also think the idea of the knowledge being pre-determined by outside forces is important here.* Now, I investigate how the teacher and students were positioned in the learning process.

The teacher was positioned as the one who already had the knowledge. Knowledge was approached as a commodity that a person can possess, and Ms. Darcy, as the teacher, possessed it and aimed to pass it to her students. Further, the teacher was positioned as the one who made decisions about how the students were going to receive the knowledge. Ms. Darcy carefully decided ahead of time exactly what students should walk away with at the end of the 20 minute lesson. For the parts of speech unit, she gave each group of students objectives that identified the exact knowledge they needed to have and that they needed to pass on to the class. For example, the noun group needed to know and distinguish between singular and plural nouns, and common and proper nouns. This format dominates many of the lessons in our educational system (Goodson, 1998; Cuban, 1984). In fact, a popular lesson plan format follows this pattern. The objectives are known ahead of time and clearly stated along with assessments that closely match the objectives, and these are implemented to make sure students have learned the established knowledge. In this lesson plan format, which is similar to the mini-lesson format Ms. Darcy followed, the teacher explains and models for the students and gives the student independent practice.

During the grammar lessons, the students were positioned mostly as followers. The students were often silent during mini-lessons as they received the information Ms. Darcy presented. They participated if Ms. Darcy called on

them to share an answer to one of the exercise sentences, which almost always had a definite right or wrong answer. The passion and emotion that existed during many class periods in room C132 was usually absent during the lessons, evidenced in the field notes presented earlier in this section: "Ms. Darcy asks Calvin to pick his head up. Chris has not yet started [working]. No one else raises their hand [to volunteer an answer]" (field notes, 2/11/02). *Elizabeth: I agree. I think that's why I limited the time to only 20 minutes.* During my first round of interviews with the focus students, I presented students with eight index cards, each containing one component of Ms. Darcy's teaching practice, and asked them to sort the cards according to what they enjoyed the most to the least. Of the seven students I asked, five of them listed the mini-lessons last or second-to-last.

Although the parts of speech unit design potentially allowed students to play a more active role than in the grammar mini-lessons, they were still positioned as followers, as their work consisted of ascertaining the information the teacher had clearly and completely defined for them. Then, each group of students became the teacher who already had the knowledge and worked to give it to the other students, thus positioning the rest of the class as followers. Ms. Darcy herself noted that the students did not really invest themselves in the unit: "the students did not really go into depth and it took a lot of class time with their presentations, and I didn't think they were really good presentations, and the other students weren't really listening" (5/14/02). Specifically during the parts of speech unit, Ms. Darcy spent an unusually long amount of time prodding the groups to finish their work (field notes, 4/26/02). This contrasts sharply to the

lessons I look at in the next section - where students were genuinely and powerfully engaged.

Protest Poems

In addition to teaching lessons on grammar and parts of speech, lessons that matched the school district's purpose for education, Elizabeth also taught content that matches critical literacy's purposes - to help students view inequities in their own lives and society and make changes in their communities. In this section, I focus on a series of lessons in which students read and wrote about protest, and followed up by taking action in their community. First, the students read several examples of activists taking stands against injustice through writing and speaking: excerpts from Nelson Mandela's (1995) autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream Speech," and poetry by Langston Hughes and June Jordan. As the class read the pieces together, they analyzed the various writing styles the authors used and discussed how language use varied depending on the specific purpose, audience and context. In addition to looking at specific literacy techniques, such as word choice and rhythm, the students also compared how the authors used literacy to protest injustices in their lives and society.

Using the activists as models, Ms. Darcy then gave students the chance to speak out in protest. She provided her students an opportunity to use their literacy to speak out against personal and societal discrimination and created a space in their classrooms where students took positions of power. As Ms. Darcy explained the assignment to the students, she emphasized that students were to

choose issues they felt passionate about and encouraged them to rely on the models for direction. Students wrote about a wide variety of issues including sexual assault, racial profiling, slavery, rape and prejudice and they used emotion and passion in their writing that is rarely seen in public school classrooms. For example, Kiara wrote about discrimination African Americans face, Marquita wrote a piece titled "The Ghetto" about violence in her neighborhood, Chris wrote about racial discrimination he and his mother experienced in "Toys R Us," and Tonya spoke out against a situation when a girl was abused by a man she met on the internet.

Two of the students, Andre and Crystal, wrote poems that highlight the ways this lesson made it possible for students to engage as powerful Subjects. Analyzing these two protest poems, I examine the students' language and the positions they took in their writing and in the classroom. Andre's poem, "Store Madness," has many similarities to his earlier poem about hair weaves. In writing both poems, Andre took a very active role in literacy and learning which differed from his usual position in school, which was less engaged. Again, he drew on his own experiences and used his own Discourse. In this poem, though, he uses this opportunity to speak out against discrimination.

As I walk through the	1
7-eleven to get a snack	2
I see the white store clerk	3
eyeballin At my back.	4
Thinking that I'am going to	5
steal something when I just	6
Wanna get a snack	7
Why is he discriminating and hating?	8
Is it just because I'am black with my backpack	9
That ain't right yo. All these other kids running	10
around Jumping up and down	11

Maybe it's cause they	12
White and I'am black.	13

As we see in lines 3, 9, and 13, he specifically addressed inequity between Blacks and Whites. This assignment gave Andre the opportunity to publicly oppose this discrimination, as he states in line 10, "that ain't right yo."

We can also see his use of other Discourses besides a traditional school Discourse. For example, in line 4, he used the term eyeballin without the "g" ending. In the sentence "that ain't right yo," he made a strong point using two nonstandard words - "ain't" and "yo." In lines 12 and 13, he strayed from standard pronoun usage: "they White." In line 7 he includes the word "wanna," as part of his Discourse. Andre followed in the tradition of Langston Hughes - providing a social critique of society by writing a short piece about an inequitable event using a Black Discourse. This would be a great feat for any student, but is especially noteworthy because Andre did not typically engage in school in these ways. During this assignment, as in the earlier lesson about Wallace Stevens' poem, Andre engaged actively. He wrote enthusiastically and wanted to share his work with others. He was the center of attention in the classroom for his work as the students positively affirmed his poem, applauding and asking him to read it again. This opportunity allowed Andre to turn a critical eye on society; it also inspired him to participate in the classroom as a Subject in his own learning.

A second student, Crystal, also African American, described an incident that happened to her in a poem titled, "Sexism and Rape." As Crystal explained in an interview, this involved a man who "liked to sexually harassed young girls and stuff and he tried to do that to me and we had to go to court" (interview,

5/14/02). Like Andre, Crystal spoke out against an injustice in her life. As Andre claimed "that ain't right yo," Crystal also made a declaration: "they think they have that right, but I know they don't." She repeated this line multiple times in the poem. Also like Andre, Crystal used her primary Discourse throughout the poem – including words like youngings, pumpin and the phrase "shame on that man." While Crystal was a relatively compliant student, she did not often engage deeply in school. As she explained, "when things don't interest me I do them but [without] much effort" (interview, 6/13/02). However, she poured herself into this assignment; it gave her an opportunity to reflect on a powerful event. Like Andre, this led her both to participate in literacy in very engaging ways and to take a central place in the classroom. Further, Crystal explained that after writing this poem in class, "I write poems at home now when I feel too much" (interview 5/14/02).

Why is it that men over the age of 30,
Take advantage of youngins.
They think they have that right.
But I know they don't.
It makes my heart start pumpin.
Like a tree
In a severe storm,
With that force
I am truly annoyed.
My thoughts and emotions,
Run everywhere,
Should I go near him.
I would not dare.
Now that I've told my ma.
What happens to him.
I do not care.
All that was left to do was cry, cry.
I didn't talk for days.
Weeks months went by.
The time is coming to go to court.

I will look him in the eyes.
Or something of the sort.
Why is it that men over the age of 30,
Take advantage of youngins.
They think they have that right.
But I know they don't.
I've succeeded
Without a word said
Now we'll go home
I feel the need for a warm bed.
We pull up to my house.
What happen ma,
I didn't lie.
I didn't get to testify.
Crystal he has confessed his crime.
Shame on that man
He is not worth a dime or my time.
Be happy I told you
Cause I was mighty scared
To do such a thing he must not have cared.

Ms. Darcy allowed space for students to bring their primary Discourse into the classroom, even though it differed from the Discourse espoused by the school district. Both of these poems show how this assignment allowed students to engage in authentic literacy tasks, providing opportunities to explore and express their own voice. While Andre gained power by reading his piece out loud to the class, Crystal gained power by writing the poem. She explained, "I was getting it all out, and it helped me a lot emotionally, cause it used to bother me a lot but writing it helped me get it out and move on" (interview, 5/14/02). Crystal needed to explore this event in a Discourse that enabled her to write intuitively and emotionally. This literacy act helped Crystal work through a painful event. This activity allowed Andre and Crystal to speak out against things that happened to them and to transform themselves from positions as victims to ones of power. In addition to giving students a chance to work through and speak out against individual episodes of discrimination, Ms. Darcy also connected literacy and justice more broadly. Ms. Darcy focused on literacy's potential to transform an audience, in large ways evidenced by the model activists the lesson started with, and in smaller ways as the students themselves created a powerful space in room C132.

Ms. Darcy's critical practice also moved outside of the classroom walls. She followed up on the "protest poems" later in the school year with a "neighborhood improvement project." In groups, students investigated their neighborhoods and wrote a report detailing positive and negative elements of their community. Then, each group narrowed in on one negative element they thought they could positively impact. Through a process of meetings, research,

and writing, Elizabeth guided the students to plan steps they could take toward making improvements, to identify resources they could use to help them, and ultimately to take action to improve their neighborhood. Students organized to create a petition to oppose a local liquor store's practice of selling liquor to children, to clean up trash in the neighborhood, and to organize a petition and school pledge to create a more positive school climate. *Elizabeth: I remember the sense of shock the students experienced when told they had to truly do something in the "outside world." It was very interesting to point them in that direction.*

Knowledge as Created

In contrast to the grammar lessons' conception of knowledge as something concrete that already exited, knowledge in these lessons was presented as something that was being created. Rather than being "objective and stable," the creation of knowledge was presented as dynamic and contextual. As the class read the model activists' work, they discussed how each specific writer was influenced by the position they were in at the time they wrote and by the audience they wanted to reach. In addition, Ms. Darcy expressed the notion that the context itself determined the way a piece was read, received and known. For instance, "the original audience of Martin Luther King's 'I Have a Dream Speech' created a specific set of meanings while in my class, we created another [meaning]" (interview, 2/22/02). As students wrote their own protest poems, Ms. Darcy guided them to draw from the model pieces as well as from their own identities and experiences. They each created a text, a piece of knowledge, to

share with the rest of the class. In this way, Ms. Darcy recognized the "crucial role [of] each individual pupil's interests and experiences in the learning process." (Goodson, 1998, p. 31). As we see in the examples of Crystal and Andre, the knowledge the students created was tailored to individual students' lives and needs.

Similarly, during the neighborhood improvement project, the lesson grew from students' knowledge of their neighborhoods. In order to put the students into groups, she asked them about the community in which they lived. Specifically, she asked the class to detail the different neighborhoods around the school and listed these on the board. Rather than giving them specific knowledge to learn, she was genuinely drawing on the knowledge they already had. Using the knowledge they had of the community's geography, she guided them to delineate various boundaries within their community. Using this delineation, the students then got into groups with other students who lived in their specific neighborhood. In these groups, Ms. Darcy asked the students to fill out a "neighborhood improvement committee worksheet." On this worksheet, the students detailed resources in their community and described the strengths and the weaknesses of their neighborhood. In this work, they were drawing on what they knew in order to create an improvement plan. Students were encouraged to connect their knowledge outside of school and inside of school. During an interview, Marquita indicated that she liked the neighborhood improvement project and when I asked her why, she said "because that's where you come from and that's going to be how you react to things. If it's bad at home you are likely to

do it at school" (interview, 4/11/02). Marquita is making connections here between school and home.

During these lessons, the knowledge itself was built through a series of interactions, rather than presented as a "self-sustained entity" (Sfard, 1998). According to critical literacy theory, it is through interaction that "teachers and students attempt to make themselves present as active authors of their own worlds" (Macedo & Freire, 1987 p. 17). During the protest lessons, Ms. Darcy wanted her students to interact with the model activists and each other as they created and read their pieces (interview, 3/13/02). To this end, Ms. Darcy chose model activists with whom students could identify - due to a similarity in race, class, and/or Discourse. She encouraged her students to "talk to" these writers as they created their own texts. Andre created his piece in the style of one of those models, Langston Hughes. During the protest lesson, the audience provided an important component as students shared what they created with the rest of the class. During the neighborhood improvement project, the students created their ideas through a series of interactions with the other group members. In addition, as they designed their projects, each group received feedback and suggestions from the rest of the class. During the protest and neighborhood improvement project lessons, students were creating knowledge as "active authors" as they spoke out against injustices and took action against problems in their community.

Purpose: Turning a Critical Eye on Unfairness

The purposes for these lessons differed considerably from the grammar lessons described in the first part of this chapter. Here, Ms. Darcy concentrated on what she termed "civic goals that have always been a part of education, turning a critical eye on unfairness ... what else could we ask from a citizen than speaking out against injustices?" (interview, 7/15/03). Ms. Darcy thought the lesson would help students gain literacy because "it allows them to create a voice to speak out against injustice ... If literacy is about finding a voice, then they did that" (ibid). Importantly, voice in these lessons moves beyond the standard Discourse that occurred exclusively in the grammar lessons.

While the purpose of the grammar lessons was to gain parts of the standard Discourse, the purpose of the protest lesson was to use multiple Discourses to "find a voice" in the classroom and the purpose of the neighborhood improvement project was to expand this voice and make a difference in the community. Andre provided an example of how this purpose was achieved during the protest lessons. As I previously explained, Andre was a student who tried hard to obey and please his mother, but did not really enjoy school. However, as he poured out his passion and emotion, and was encouraged to use writing to protest something in his life, he powerfully engaged in literacy. When I asked Andre to share something from his writing notebook with me at the end of the year, he chose his protest poem and read it to me with a huge smile on his face. He told me that he was very proud of this piece he felt "powerful to read it" to his peers (interview, 4/22/02). Andre' protest poem gave him an opportunity to name discrimination and he provided a strong, important message of critique to the class. This type of exercise of power helped Andre

understand how literacy can be used in authentic contexts to make a difference in his life, as he voiced his protest. During the protest pieces, many students spoke about things they felt needed to be changed in society.

The follow-up neighborhood improvement project gave students an opportunity to take this powerful voice and put it into action to make a small change in their community. After students identified strengths and weaknesses in their neighborhood, they chose one element to work on to improve. The groups met several times and continued to fill out the neighborhood improvement committee worksheet. This worksheet guided students through a series of steps and group meetings. On it, students wrote out a detailed plan about what they were going to do. They identified people and other resources they could draw on to help them achieve their goal. They decided on roles for each group member, anticipated potential problems, and thought of solutions to help them reach success. In this lesson, the purpose was not to learn knowledge already established in order to help them individually, but rather to make a change that would benefit the entire community. This way of thinking, using resources to help others, rather than drawing on resources for self gain, is not a prominent way of thinking in most classrooms. Ms. Darcy's used this classroom assignment toward a purpose synonymous with critical literacy; thinking, discussing and writing in order to improve one's community.

Positions: Leaders and Leaders

The positions Ms. Darcy and her students held during the protest poem lessons and neighborhood improvement project were dynamic in nature, with

Elizabeth *and* the students taking on roles as creators and leaders in the classroom during different points in the lesson. Right from the start of the lesson, Ms. Darcy shared the floor; as the class read about a variety of activists who protested in society, these model writers shared power with Ms. Darcy. Whereas in the grammar mini-lessons Ms. Darcy alone symbolically stood for the voice of power, here she literally and figuratively shared that power with others: "I want the students to see these models in the classroom, to feel their strong presence" (interview, 6/24/03).

Ms. Darcy also viewed her students during these lesson as teachers as well as students. She described her view during the protest poems: "the students use that [the models] to jettison into their own writing and then they come back and teach me how they've used the model" (interview, 6/24/03). As Ms. Darcy planned the lessons around students' unique experiences and insights, she aimed to learn from her students as she taught them. Andre provided a good example; he relied on the model of Langston Hughes poetry to provide his own critique. He described something that Ms. Darcy could not experience in the same way that he did. Ms. Darcy planned this lesson to give students opportunities to be creators in the classroom. Each of the students brought his or her own voice to the classroom; in this lesson, Ms. Darcy drew on this knowledge and guided the students to express themselves on paper. Similarly, during the neighborhood improvement project, the students taught Ms. Darcy about the different neighborhoods in their community. *Elizabeth: This even further cut down assumptions of where "underprivileged" kids come from.* They showed her

how they viewed their neighborhoods and they defined its strengths and weaknesses.

Also, during both of these lessons, different from the grammar lessons, Ms. Darcy could not and did not plan ahead of time exactly what the outcomes would be. In the protest poems, Ms. Darcy knew that the students themselves would decide what they would protest against and she would find out as a member of the audience. During the neighborhood improvement project, Elizabeth did not know what element of the neighborhood the groups would work to change. Therefore, she could not foresee all of the steps and work that would go into their projects. Elizabeth Darcy had the flexibility to go along with their choices and the faith that it would work out to be productive.

There were challenges; in particular, one group of boys struggled to get their work done as they planned to decrease litter in their community. Ms. Darcy had to visit that group several times and she held them in at lunch to work after they failed to make progress during class time. She accepted this uncertainty and was able to keep the project productive by giving them individual attention and working with them to fill out the neighborhood improvement committee worksheet.

In addition to acting as authors as they wrote their protest poems, Ms. Darcy also put students in positions as leaders as they read their work to the rest of the class. As I noted, Andre commented on the power he felt when he read his piece to the class (interview, 4/22/02). Also, at the end of the school year, when Ms. Darcy asked students to choose and read one piece from their writing portfolios, many of the students read their protest poems. The students and Ms.

Darcy responded exuberantly with applause and words of praise as the students took on roles as activists, leaders and change-agents (field notes, 6/10/02).

<div align="center">Dual Notions of Conformity and Transformation</div>

In this chapter, I described grammar lessons that align with a more traditional notion of Language Arts and protest poems that match with critical literacy's ideals. By examining the way knowledge was defined in these lessons, I pointed out that while the first treated knowledge as a commodity, the second conceived of knowledge as something created. Whereas the grammar lessons' purpose was to help students learn the standard Discourse, the protest poems asked students to turn a critical eye on society. Finally, while students held more traditional positions as teacher and students during the grammar lessons, they acted as teacher-student and students-teachers (Freire, 1997) during the protest poems.

What do we gain by contrasting the lessons in these ways? What comes of these comparisons? Examining knowledge, purpose and positions during these lessons demonstrates how Ms. Darcy's teaching practice included dual notions of conformity and transformation. Looking closely at these different lessons, we see two different pictures. In the grammar lessons, the way knowledge is defined, the purposes that are set and the positions that are held – they all carry messages of conformity. On the contrary, the protest poems lessons paint a picture of transformation – where knowledge is created, purposes for education are synonymous with creating change, and teachers and students hold dynamic and often interchangeable positions in the classroom.

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Specifically, in the grammar lessons, the underlying message to students embedded in this instruction is that they need this standard knowledge - which had been created by others and existed outside of them - in order to be successful in life. There exists a possibility of change in this conception, because knowing this standard knowledge may help students who have been historically denied positions of power access those positions. But as Freire (1997) argues, this type of change is not the same as transformation. When a teacher presents knowledge to the students as gospel, students are taught to simply accept this knowledge as the truth, rather than factoring in the complex nuances of context. Reality is presented as "motionless, static, ... and predictable" (Freire, 1997, p. 52), something that is already set for the students rather than something they can create. *Elizabeth: I think students need a sense of both - what is pre-established for success and how to create within that structure.* Similarly, as the teachers attempt to "fill students with the contents" (ibid) of the standard Discourse, both the students and the knowledge are disconnected from the dynamic flow of power, agency and creation. While they may be able to change their own place in society by gaining the standard Discourse, they will not change their relationship to the knowledge itself, which is integral in critical literacy.

Meanwhile, the types of change vital in critical literacy were prevalent in the protest poem lessons. Knowledge was poetry and ideas and actions; it was students who created this knowledge. Throughout the lessons, the students were innovators. As they took center stage in the classroom, the students were energetic composers who engaged with each other and their learning. The purpose for these lessons was the opposite of fitting into one's surroundings.

Instead, students were asked to speak out against aspects of their society and to take a part in changing situations they saw as unjust or wrong. The message to the students was that they should not exist as passive members in their communities. Instead, they should use their voices and skills to actively shape their surroundings. Similarly, the students took on active roles in the classroom; during these lessons, the students acted as Subjects in their own learning.

One More Look: The I-Search Paper

While this chapter focuses on lessons that contain almost solely traditional *or* critical conceptions of literacy, I want to end by looking at how these dual notions of conformity and transformation existed together in the same assignment. In the I-Search research paper, Ms. Darcy worked toward traditional and critical purposes in the same assignment. An I-Search[8] paper is a type of research paper in which students choose a topic they want to know more about, write the paper in the first-person narrative, and include in their paper their process of research as well as what they learned about their topic. In addition to using written research resources like books or the internet, students also use resources like interviews or field trips. Elizabeth drew from her school district's curriculum guide, her critical literacy beliefs, and her teacher preparation course materials to create a unit based on the I-Search paper.

One of the purposes for this unit matched the school district's purpose for Language Arts education; she wanted each individual student to gain a common set of skills deemed necessary for future school success. In a speech to the

[8] The I-Search paper is drawn from Ken Macrorie's (1988) book, *The I-Search Paper*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers.

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students during class, and in a discussion with me after class, she stated that this was an important assignment because it would teach the students research skills necessary for high school academics (field notes, 5/8/02). To this end, throughout the unit, she taught various aspects of the research process that she decided, in consultation with her district curriculum, were important for students to have.

For example, after students chose their question to research and wrote down what they already knew about the subject as well as questions they had, she taught them a skill she thought was important for their future school success – how to find information on the internet. She guided them to identify key words and phrases to search, showed them various search engines, and taught them to bookmark potentially helpful websites. In addition, Ms. Darcy taught students how to navigate the library to collect information and how to access other academic reference materials, such as encyclopedias. During the unit, she taught them how to reference their resources in the standard academic format. While students worked together throughout the process, she made it clear that it was important for each of them to learn the academic research process (field notes, 5/14/02).

In addition to teaching them academic skills to prepare them for future educational success (i.e. reports they would write in high school), Elizabeth also thought it was important to give students an opportunity to write up their research report in the style expected in high school (field notes, 5/21/02). To accomplish this, she expected all students to use standard writing conventions in their papers. Students were graded on their correct [or incorrect] use of standard

English, sentence structure and verb tense. They were expected to find valid facts about their topics, based on a traditionally academic notion of "valid" and "facts." They were also required to present a clear chronological structure of their research process in their final paper, with a beginning, middle and end.

This assignment worked toward the school district's purpose - preparing the students for future success in our current society by individually acquiring a set of common knowledge. At the same time, it also worked toward critical literacy's purposes as Ms. Darcy encouraged students to explore current inequities in society, to ask questions about how things got to be this way, and to investigate other, more equitable, possibilities. Specifically, Elizabeth was intentional about the students' process of choosing topics. Early in the unit, Elizabeth planned a lesson to help students find their I-Search question (field notes, 4/26). She began class by putting four main categories on the overhead. Elizabeth chose categories that lend themselves to the type of investigation integral to critical literacy: health, environment, local government, and teen concerns. The students grouped themselves according to which category sounded most interesting and then spent the rest of the class period brainstorming possible questions. The students were not required to choose a question in these areas but many of their questions did result from this class period. Similarly, in a list Elizabeth provided for students who were having a hard time deciding on a question, she provided critical questions such as "How do news stations decide what youth news to cover?" and "How do cigarette companies market to teens?" Again, though students were not required to use one of these questions, many of them chose questions from this list. Ms. Darcy

used her influence as the teacher to guide them toward critical I-Search questions. While not all of her students researched critical topics, the majority of them did.

Kiara looked at school funding inequities. Her question was: Did Gatwick County [a neighboring, wealthier country] educate better than our county. In her report, she wrote that:

> Gatwick County has bigger schools than ours. I know that schools in North Central Public School District don't have enough books for all the students. The newspaper article said that Gatwick County has better educated teachers.

Crystal looked at what societal and personal factors led teen girls to turn to prostitution. The two segments below show her ideas at the beginning and end of her search.

> I really hope to learn more about what exactly makes girls want to give up a good life for a terrible and uncomfortable life and how to help young girls to stay away from prostitution ... Teachers and parents need to help young girls to look and search for a job to make money ... Young girls shouldn't be exploited like that, in sexual active behavior.

In addition, Alexia investigated global politics, looking at the United States' involvement in the Middle East. Marquita researched how homosexuals and bisexuals are portrayed in the media. Calvin and Keith studied immigration issues, focusing on the different policies governing legal and illegal immigration. Tonya and Nhat looked at the history of banned books. Alfredo explored what attributes labeled a country first, second, or third world. Finally, Juan examined access to health care in his county.

In addition to guiding students to ask critical questions, Ms. Darcy embedded into the process other aspects of critical literacy, such as connecting to your community and considering issues of injustice. First, Elizabeth stressed the wealth of resources in their families and communities and encouraged students to interview community members as part of their I-Search process. This component of the assignment motivated students. For example, Andre interviewed a local DJ to find out more about parental advisory labels on CDs. While Andre expressed his interest in this topic as he searched on the computer (field notes, 5/8/02), the interview really motivated him. He asked Ms. Darcy three times if he could interview "Itch", a local DJ, as part of the paper, as if he were surprised that this would count in school. He wrote that "interviewing a DJ was the best part of my I-Search ... I was very excited to have received such good information from DJ 'Itch.'" This interview was a central part of Andre's paper, it encouraged him to put in effort, and he received an A on his paper. Through concrete actions, Ms. Darcy used this assignment to give students opportunities to value and access their lives outside of the classroom and connect it to their school work.

Elizabeth's goals for the I-Search paper were not solely for individual students to gain; she also wanted the classroom to become a place to think about communal change. She asked students to view their topics through a critical lens, investigating assumptions underlying their subjects, examining the origins of their topics, and considering how their topics contributed to, as well as hurt, the social welfare of society. She modeled this process using a student's topic – banned books. She wrote several questions on the overhead to engage students

in critical discussion and to show them the type of investigations she was looking for in their work: Why would books be banned? What led to books being banned? Who would benefit from banning books? Who would be hurt by banning books? Was there a pattern in what books were banned? During presentations to the class about their work, Ms. Darcy asked students to raise (and also raised) these types of pointed critical questions about their topics. In these ways (field notes, 5/29/02), Elizabeth infused the I-Search assignment with purposes for literacy according to critical literacy.

Conclusion

While it is possible to look at the I-Search as a perfect combination, this conclusion provides a simplistic solution to a complex issue. There are a number of reasons it makes sense for teachers to include more traditional conceptions of Language Arts in their classrooms. Historically, schools explicitly and implicitly exist to inculcate youth into the existing society. This pressure is especially strong within our current political climate. Further, the students in Ms. Darcy's classroom are not automatically going to find academic or economic success in their futures. By providing them with access to the standard Discourse, Ms. Darcy gave them a chance to thrive in high school and beyond. Moreover, this is what the students themselves wanted from her class.

Though from a critical perspective, the messages of conformity that existed in these lessons may lead students down a path of substantiating and reifying an unjust status quo, the instruction must be viewed from a larger vantage point. Room C132 existed within a department, building, district, and

country - all that more or less pushed toward a more traditional conception and purpose for education. Elizabeth Darcy managed to bring in moments of transformation. She found openings for critical thought in the windows, texts, and students. At the same time, though, traditional messages of conformity traveled with gravity and pushed against the occasions when the classroom was "alive with activity and reflection" (Greene, 2000).

Chapter Seven

LOOKING ACROSS THE DATA

In Chapters Three through Six, I analyzed the data I had collected in Ms. Darcy's classroom in a variety of ways, exploring critical possibilities that were opened up in the classroom as well as the boundaries that limited these opportunities. I set the stage in Chapter Three by examining part of the landscape that influenced the teaching and learning in room C132. By looking closely at several district curricular documents, I introduced the instructional context of the study. Then, in Chapters Four, Five, and Six I focused on several specific lessons Ms. Darcy taught in order to investigate critical literacy in her teaching practice. Chapter Four contains a close look at several critical literacy components embedded in poetry lessons. In Chapter Five I focused on issues of authority and freedom during Ms. Darcy's teaching of the novel *The Outsiders* and in Chapter Six I examined differences between lessons about grammar and ones about protest poems.

In this chapter, I take a broader view of the classroom to provide further commentary about the possibilities and limitations in Elizabeth Darcy's teaching practice and to glean what we can learn from looking at a wider scope of the context within and around room C132. The purpose of this study is to investigate critical literacy in one classroom; throughout I pay particular attention to how the specific context influenced the way critical literacy was enacted in this classroom.

My purpose in this chapter is to highlight and examine a pattern that shows up across all of my data chapters: the pushes and pulls in Ms. Darcy's teaching between traditional and critical approaches to teaching Language Arts. I argue that Ms. Darcy successfully embedded critical literacy components in her practice while working *within* the contexts her classroom existed in *without* strongly challenging those contexts. Ms. Darcy made it possible for her students to act as Subjects in the classroom, authoring their own texts as they read and wrote. These opportunities were not always fully extended to help students more broadly author their own lives and imagine and work toward other alternatives in society.

Ms. Darcy herself recognized that there is a limit to her critical practices:

> I only push them [the students] so far. I introduce things, ways of questioning, without expecting them to be questioning at my level. I welcome this critical side of them without expecting them all to be critical. The best way I can explain the line I walk with them -- I introduce ways to question and express enthusiasm about questioning without expecting them to be unhappy and revolt against their life situation (interview, 3/13/02).

This quote raises the question I posed in Chapter One: is this a traditional classroom with critical tendencies or a critical classroom with traditional constraints? Again, I intend to show it is both. "This critical side" of learning is well woven into the curriculum; it is not an add-on nor is it a stance that pervades the entire teaching practice.

It is important to note that my representation of Ms. Darcy's classroom is only one way of framing her teaching practice. As I examined Ms. Darcy's teaching practice and re-examined my data, my lenses constructed this pattern of pushes and pulls between traditional and critical approaches to teaching

Language Arts. I decided that this pattern was significant and built a case around it. For example, I focused in on lessons about grammar and lessons about protest poems and concluded that these lessons contained different definitions of knowledge and different purposes for education. Similarly, my lenses viewed the critical conversations about the novel *The Outsiders* with duplicity: first as engaging lessons where critical literacy was happening and second as illustrations of critical literacy within limits. In addition, I was delighted by the ways students shared authority in the classroom and at the same time struck (maybe overly so) when Ms. Darcy took Andre's paper during the debate preparation; these feelings and observations ended up framing a chapter of this dissertation. Overall, the claim or interpretation that critical literacy and a more traditional approach co-existed in this classroom and both complemented and limited each other arose from considerable time in the research site, careful data collection, thorough data analysis, and extensive (re)reading of educational literature. It is important to note though that these are not the only interpretations, or I would argue even the best interpretations, of this teaching practice. They are merely my interpretations, that I made both consciously and unconsciously, and that I worked conscientiously and carefully to come to in order to tell a story and make points in an attempt to add valuably to the field.

Chapter Overview

Chapter Seven begins with an analysis of challenges to critical literacy teaching that existed in Ms. Darcy's classroom. I consider the conformist nature of teachers and schools and explain how deeply-held beliefs about connections

between education and standard knowledge bound classrooms within the system. These challenges created a current that pushed Elizabeth Darcy's teaching in traditional directions. In the second section of this chapter, I concentrate on critical literacy elements that Elizabeth constructed in the classroom that pushed against the current moving the classroom in traditional ways. The section begins with a discussion about the opportunities Ms. Darcy created for students to act as authorities in the classroom. Next, I explore how Elizabeth used activist authors to bring critical voices into the classroom and I consider ways she connected education to social change. Chapter Seven intends to look across the data to provide a broad understanding of the various currents creating this teaching practice. By including traditional elements in her teaching practice, Elizabeth met her own needs, as well as those of her school and students. Ironically, these traditional elements helped make it possible for critical literacy to thrive while they simultaneously limited its promise.

Challenges to Critical Literacy Teaching

Critical literacy aims to help learners author their own worlds by taking an active role in creating and examining their views of their realities, potentially leading to them make concrete changes to those realities. Thus, the ultimate goal of critical literacy is to help students become authors of the multiple contexts in which they exist and to be authors of yet to be imagined worlds. But as this study highlights, they are learning critical literacy in one specific context: school. In this section, I investigate the multiple forces in the classroom that propel the classroom in traditional directions. My own data collection occurred almost

exclusively in room C132, as I traipsed through the building to the classroom and then back out to my car each day. However, in reality the teaching practice obviously was not so contained. It was affected by a myriad of forces, both inside and outside of Elizabeth's control. For example, society, the school district and building influenced the classroom practices. The classroom was also influenced by the beliefs, desires and expectations that Ms. Darcy and her students brought with them when they walked in the door. The context Elizabeth Darcy worked in did not foster critical literacy teaching; in fact, many aspects of her situation both advertently and inadvertently pushed the class in traditional directions. In this section, I examine several challenges to critical literacy practices, including the conformist nature of teachers and schools, and the authority bestowed upon standard knowledge.

The Conformist Nature of Teachers and Schools

Traditionally, teachers have been conformists. During the beginning of universal schooling and the common school movement, many people "saw teachers as similar to factory hands - as agents charged with implementing detailed specifications developed in central headquarters" (Lortie, 1975, p. 5). This perception works against the notion of teachers as change-agents. Instead, throughout history teachers have been conceptualized as workers who compliantly implement others' ideas and decisions. In our current educational system, teachers continue to receive detailed instructions about what and how they are supposed to teach from their districts. We see this hierarchical design in the case of North Central Public School District. Jackson (1990) also remarked

on the conformist nature of both teachers and teaching, noting how conformity reifies within a reoccurring cycle. The work of teaching inherently encourages a conformist manner and people who enter the profession often bring to it a conformist nature.

While there are both real and romanticized examples of revolutionary teachers, these individuals are remarkable, in our own educational histories as well as in popular culture, because they are exceptions.[9] While teachers are counted upon to work hard, be creative and do a good job, they are rarely encouraged to be truly radical. In our current culture, people often see teachers as advocates for mainstream ideology, not critics of its practices. For example, the chair of the history department at a high school on the East Coast attempted to bar a student teacher from being hired because he remained silent during the school's daily Pledge of Allegiance. The department chair, who had the support of a majority of teachers in the department, believed that the prospective teacher did not hold the patriotic values crucial to the profession (personal conversation). This example reveals deeply held beliefs about teachers acting in accordance with mainstream America.

This conception of teachers as conformists influences the culture of North Central Public School District and Elk Middle School in concrete ways. For instance, Ms. Darcy was actively discouraged from stepping out of the role of conformist. At a team meeting, she raised objections to a school plan calling for teachers to dedicate what she considered to be excessive time to standardized test practice. She suggested that the team propose an alternative plan to the

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[9] Examples of popular culture that highlight revolutionary teachers include: the movie *Dead Poet's Society* starring Robin Williams and the movie *Mona Lisa Smile* starring Julia Roberts.

administration. Though several other team members agreed with her objections, they were not willing to approach the administration. Further, they urged her to follow the plan rather than challenge it in any way (field notes, 3/12/02). In addition, after another teacher observed books on Elizabeth's book shelves that were not on the district approved book list, she warned Ms. Darcy to remove those books and emphasized the importance of sticking to the list. Elizabeth was repeatedly discouraged from stepping out of perceived boundaries.

In addition, Elizabeth did not work in an environment that visibly welcomed critical literacy. In an interview, I asked Elizabeth what she thought other teachers at her school would think about her desire to "engage students in a critique of inequality in society." Her response reveals her impression that her colleagues were not supportive of it:

> It would depend, some people would be like give me a break, these kids don't know shit, and people would joke or make real cynical remarks. Then I could see a couple people being like woah. But I can't see many people saying I try to do this. It would definitely help if more people would have these same goals. I think sometimes my kids think my class is like lala land, it would be easier [if other teachers tried to do this] (interview, 6/24/03).

In Elizabeth's estimation, at worst teachers would think students could not or should not be taught in this manner, and at best they might find it interesting. Critical literacy illuminates issues rarely included in typical classrooms; these practices often make teachers outsiders in the buildings in which they work. As Elizabeth's response reveals, she did not believe she had collegial encouragement or support to engage in critical literacy teaching.

In addition to forces that work against teachers being too radical, other factors also diminish the possibilities for schools to be very revolutionary places.

For all students, maybe especially middle school students, school is one aspect of their lives - and not the most influential or important one. There are other significant influences, like television, video games, and commercials that often reinforce mainstream societal messages. Though students indicated in interviews and on their final class surveys that they enjoyed Ms. Darcy's class, it was but one class in their daily schedule. It was a small part of school, which is a small part of their lives.

On a day to day basis school is typically conceived of as a place one has to go - not as a life-altering experience. By being part of the system, Elizabeth's classroom embodied this conception. The students were scheduled to be in her class and to be there at certain times; they had no choice or negotiation within those bounds. Ms. Darcy was required to give students grades at certain times which can work against more revolutionary teaching (Wolk, 1998). Ms. Darcy also chose to enforce a variety of school rules. As is customary at the school, students waited in a straight line before entering her room and exited in the same manner. She enforced the school rule about appropriate clothing and monitored what the students wore. She arranged the desks in various configurations of rows, as teachers typically do in their classrooms. Finally, Ms. Darcy repeatedly ordered students to spit out their gum. As Tonya noted, "every school I went to the rules are basically the same" (interview, 5/16/02). In other words, the rules in Elizabeth's classroom looked like ordinary school - which is not typically thought of as particularly revolutionary.

The students themselves expected the classroom to be a typical class in their school day. They believed what they needed from school were the

traditional notions of reading and writing. The students did not walk into class and ask Ms. Darcy to delve into injustices in society or transform the way they thought about themselves or their communities. Even when they enjoyed lessons drawn from a critical view of literacy, they fundamentally considered the core aspects of critical literacy as an extra or not even appropriate for school. For example, Alexia often offered sophisticated responses to questions about race, class and power, particularly in writing, and she reported how much she enjoyed critical discussions and specifically Socratic Seminars. But Alexia also revealed after one particular discussion that though she enjoyed it, she thought of it as "an extra because you come to school to learn reading and writing and race is just your opinion, you could talk with your friends about that" (interview, 4/12/02). Her statement highlights the fact that the traditional notions students have of school are firmly established and deeply entrenched.

Similarly, Tonya, another student who provided keen insights into critical literacy topics and acknowledged how Ms. Darcy's lessons often got her thinking differently from ways she thought before (interview, 5/16/02). But she also questioned critical literacy's place in the classroom. She recognized the potentially controversial nature of many critical literacy topics and concluded that if she were a teacher, "I wouldn't talk about it that much. I think it's important but you don't want to start nothing" (interview, 5/16/02). She recognized that not only are these topics typically avoided in school, but they have the potential to cause trouble as well. The strong push to remain in neutral territory and the possible trouble embedded in "starting something" outweighed the importance of the lessons in her mind.

Finally, Andre raised another factor dissuading deviation from what is considered to be school as usual. The typical subject matter taught in a Language Arts class (reading, writing, grammar etc.) is conceived of as public or neutral bodies of knowledge and very appropriate for instruction. However,

> if a teacher asks you about status, like if you are rich or poor, I don't think that's right because that's private, it's just to you and your family, it's nobody's business but yours (interview, 6/7/02).

Society and school often position issues of status or class within the private realm. In this way, these topics can easily be viewed as inappropriate for the seemingly neutral space of a public school classroom. Ms. Darcy faced students' conceptions of many of the topics central to critical literacy as "extra," "trouble" or "private" and inappropriate. As I have shown throughout this section, Elizabeth Darcy's teaching practice existed within societal, school, and students' conventional conceptions of teachers and school. These conceptions point toward a more traditional notion of Language Arts, one that does not overtly challenge the status quo and does not genuinely implicate learners, education, or the school as a community.

The Authority of Standard Knowledge and the Achievement Ideology

The previous section highlighted the conformist nature of teachers and schools. In this section, I delve into other currents working against the tides of change vital in critical literacy. Specifically, I argue that multiple forces, both inside and outside of room C132, gave standard knowledge and Discourse unquestioned authority within the context of the classroom. Further, this unquestioned authority both sustained and was sustained by the achievement

ideology. The achievement ideology is based on the notion that if you behave yourself, work hard, and earn good grades, you get a good job, and make a lot of money (MacLeod, 1995, p. 97). This ideology, "the reigning social perspective that sees American society as open and fair and full of opportunity" (ibid, p. 3) underlies the school district's purpose for education - if students learn the necessary knowledge they will be successful in society. This ideology perpetuates a meritocratic view of our current educational system and keeps people working inside of this system in order to achieve their purposes. While a persuasive argument insists that by teaching non-mainstream students this standard knowledge, they will be able to change society by accessing otherwise unattainable positions within society (Delpit, 1995; Hirsch, 1996), it is my intent here to demonstrate that standard knowledge and Discourse in room C132 pushed against critical literacy's attempts to move outside of the system in order to change it.

The pressure to remain inside the system and to work exclusively toward preparing students for success within society came from the district, the students, and Elizabeth herself. While Ms. Darcy was not closely monitored to ensure her lessons precisely followed the district curriculum, she did feel pressure to stay within the general confines of the documents. This pressure resulted in part from messages she received from her school, at team meetings, during professional development, and in conversations with colleagues. She explained, "I more or less stick to the curriculum but I do change it. They take it pretty seriously. We had many professional development (seminars) about it as new teachers. And even now there is one team member who really refers to it" (interview, 6/24/03).

Her commitment to teaching the standard knowledge prioritized in the district curriculum also came from her own beliefs that this is important. "I take it as my responsibility to teach them what they will need to be successful in high school and beyond" (interview, 7/15/03).

Significantly, learning the standard Discourse and standard knowledge was most important to the students. In fact, the students' conceptions of a Language Arts class closely matched the school district's conception. In my first round of interviews, when I interviewed groups of students, I asked them to define a Language Arts class, not Ms. Darcy's class in particular, but a Language Arts class in general. Overwhelmingly, group members answered "reading, writing, spelling, and grammar." Not only was that what students thought a Language Arts class was and what they expected, it was also what they wanted it to be. As I noted in Chapter Six, the students wanted the class to prepare them to be successful in the current educational system – in high school and college – and in our current society in order to get a job. The students believed that they needed this knowledge and that when/if they had it they would succeed in society. In particular, their faith in the achievement ideology created a strong force in terms of what they expected and wanted from Ms. Darcy and the Language Arts class.

Using the Standard Discourse

In particular, though the content of Ms. Darcy's teaching practice often moved outside of a traditional conception of Language Arts, standard Discourse still held unquestioned authority in the classroom. Standard Discourse,

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specifically regarding a Language Arts class, as outlined in the school district documents, involved the intricacies of reading and writing in standard English. It included standard grammar, writing conventions and vocabulary. In addition, the district curriculum emphasized standard ways of writing essays, organizing arguments, and reading texts. Though there were times when students used other Discourses, as noted especially in their poetry, standard Discourse was the primary language of instruction. Further, though students questioned societal assumptions and structures in Ms. Darcy's classroom, they did not question the way in which they were engaging in these discussions. Specifically, (standard) Discourse itself was left outside of critical analysis

In room C132, many lessons reified standard Discourse. For example, during the debate in *The Outsiders* unit, Ms. Darcy structured the introductory essay students wrote in ways that match the school district's traditional conception of Language Arts. Specifically, the lesson followed two standards:

> Standard 1.8.5.2: Draw ... conclusions ... about text and support them with textual evidence.
> Standard 3.8.1.4: support all statements and claims with relevant ...facts ... and/or specific examples.

As Elizabeth modeled essay writing and circulated the room helping individual students, she used and encouraged standard English and standard writing conventions. Ms. Darcy asked the students to organize their essays in a standard way, with a beginning, middle and end, and she required them to include main points and supporting textual evidence. This standard format continued the next day as Ms. Darcy arranged students into two sides and instructed them to work in groups to prepare materials for a short debate on the

topic of what a family means in the novel and in our society. Again, as Ms. Darcy modeled and helped students write their opening and closing arguments, she used and encouraged standard English. Also, students were to prepare for the debate by finding specific textual evidence from the novel to support their position.

Further, the debate itself ran according to a formal, academic format. Ms. Darcy told each side to present their arguments in a "matter-of-fact manner, without too much emotion" (field notes, 2/26/02). The students spoke entirely in standard English; each side presented an introduction, body and conclusion to their argument and used text to support their ideas. Historically, this format is recognized as the standard, traditional way to have a debate.

Similar to the debate, the structure of the Socratic Seminars, as the name states, relies upon an ancient Greek, Western structure for discussion. This type of discussion resembles the Discourse embraced in the school district's curriculum and is closely related to white, middle class norms of dialogue (Au, 1986). For example, students are required to speak one at a time, retain a clear line of argument, connect their ideas to the ones before and refrain from speaking off-topic. Ms. Darcy asked her students to make explicit connections to the previous speaker's comments before sharing their own ideas.

Ms. Darcy has very specific reasons for wanting her students to learn the standard Discourse she promotes in the debate and Socratic Seminar. When I asked her why she included these formats, she answered:

> For economic reasons it is very important for them to know how to
> write in standard English and speak in academic ways so they will

be taken seriously by the dominant power in the culture (interview, 2/10/02).

Many other critical literacy scholars agree with this notion. Delpit (1995) argues that explicitly teaching students the rules of power is a necessary step toward an equitable education. In addition, Christensen (1994) acknowledges "We must teach our students standard English because they are the ones without power and have to use the language of the powerful to be heard" (144). Similarly, Macedo (2003) acknowledges that it is unjust to deny minority students mastery of the dominant discourse. However, Macedo, Christensen and Delpit are clear about the context in which they believe the dominant Discourse should be taught. Christensen (1994) states:

> Asking my students to memorize the rules without asking who makes the rules, who enforces the rules, who benefits from the rules, who loses from the rules, who uses the rules to keep some in and keep others out, legitimates a social system that devalues my students' knowledge and language. Teaching without reflection also underscores that it's OK for others to dictate something as fundamental and personal as the way we speak (145).

Delpit (1995) too believes that "even while students are assisted in learning the culture of power, they must also be helped to learn about the arbitrary nature of those codes and about the power relationships they represent" (45). The vital critical examination Christensen and Delpit call for was not an explicit part of these lessons or of Ms. Darcy's teaching practice. I asked Ms. Darcy her personal opinion about the importance of teaching the standard Discourse, she answered

> I kind of feel it doesn't matter if I think it's a good way or not, it's the accepted way in this country. So, I want them to learn how to say stuff in socially acceptable ways and in language to speak and be heard (interview, 6/24/03).

As Ms. Darcy herself viewed the standard Discourse as the "accepted way in this country," she similarly asked her students to accept its value without overtly questioning or reflecting on its power.

Macedo (2003) expresses the notion that mastery of dominant discourse should be understood as a weapon for subordinate students to ultimately change their position in terms of literacy in society. The classroom did not contain open conversations about the exclusiveness or injustice embedded in the authority of the dominant Discourse or how what they were learning could be viewed as a weapon. Furthermore, they did not explicitly reflect upon the other Discourses they speak outside of school or the relationship between these Discourses. They did not question their own conceptions of standard English, which many of them valued and wanted to learn (even exclusively) in Language Arts class. In this way, students were implicitly asked to accept (or continue to accept) the authority of a Discourse without necessarily understanding the consequences, without realizing that one Discourse is not inherently better than another, and without understanding how Discourses could be used as weapons of transformation.

The Achievement Ideology

In this section, I analyze data collected during a lesson about Langston Hughes poem "Mother to Son", students' group and individual interviews, and students' survey responses to show that the unquestioned authority of standard Discourse both sustained and was sustained by the achievement ideology. The achievement ideology rests on two assumptions – the key to success is academic

performance and there are equal opportunities in society. My data analysis demonstrates that Elizabeth's students believed in the achievement ideology and that this belief led to their desire to learn standard knowledge and Discourse in this Language Arts class.

As the students read "Mother to Son, Elizabeth guided them to note the metaphors, and to use their experiences to make sense of the text. First, several students read the first stanza of the poem aloud.

> Well, son, I'll tell you:
> Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
> It's had tacks in it,
> And splinters,
> And boards torn up,
> And places with no carpet on the floor –
> Bare.

After reading the stanza, Ms. Darcy asked the students what they thought Mother might have experienced in her life. Marquita thought she might have lost a job, Tyrrell stated that she had no money to pay rent. Andre noted "she probably got evicted and that would be a tack because it stays with you" and Tonya added that her husband could have left her and she had no money for food (field notes, 3/13/02). Later in the discussion, Elizabeth asked the students where they thought Mother was climbing to and Marquita quickly responded, "I think the middle class"; other students nodded and vocalized agreement.

After working through the poem, Ms. Darcy connected this poem to the novel *The Outsiders*. She asked them what group Mother would belong to, the Socs or the Greasers. The students answered that it would be the Greasers because she did not have a lot of money and she had a life of hard times

(3/13/02). Ms. Darcy ended the lesson by asking students to respond to the following prompt:

> Read the quote from Randy [a Soc]: "You can't win, even if you whip us. You'll still be where you were - at the bottom. And we'll still be the lucky ones with all the breaks. So it doesn't do any good, the fighting and the killing. It doesn't prove a thing. We'll forget it if you win, or if you don't. Greasers will still be Greasers and Socs will still be Socs." Who do you believe more - Randy or Mother?

Every single student believed Mother more than Randy. Juan observed, "I hear that a lot of parents say it [what Mother said] to their kids. When they get a little older it starts to become true." Crystal, too, believed Mother more because "it's true you can be whoever you want to be when you grow up because you've set your mind to it. Anything is possible if you believe enough and work hard." Alexia's response most clearly shows perceived connections between school success and "making it" in society:

> I believe Mother more because when I said Randy was right I believed what he said that there will always be Greasers and there will always be Socs and I do believe there will always be the poor and the rich but like mother said if you don't want to be in the poor class you can always get out if you are young enough and go to school and try hard to become what you want.

Students believed that if one works hard, particularly in school, one will be successful in society, in spite of what they learned in this class otherwise.

Follow-up interviews further reveal the students' belief in the achievement ideology. They think that academic success is essential to and further guarantees life success. As Nhat said, "You try your hardest in school so not to be a failure in life" (interview, 6/12/02). In their responses, they defined life success exclusively in financial terms, stating that making it meant having

money, being rich. Throughout the group and independent interviews, students expressed the belief that they would be successful in life if they did well in school. Though at other times in their school work and in interviews they mentioned discrimination, they fervently expressed their belief in the possibilities for success in American society. As Nhat stated, "everyone starts out clean and they have a chance to build" (interview, 6/12/02).

The students believed that a person (such as themselves) from the lower class could make it to middle class. This was true even though this is not what they saw around them. As the following excerpts from interviews (6/6/02; 6/7/02) with Alexia and Andre show, they had very limited experiences with anyone who had "made it."

> Alexia: I know people who come from poor neighborhoods and then they
> go to college and they get good jobs like lawyers.
> Rachel: Who do you know that this has happened to?
> Alexia: My cousin's friend, he's from a poor neighborhood and he's in
> college right now and he wants to be a lawyer.
> Rachel: Do you know anyone else in this situation?
> Alexia: [After a moment of silence] No.
>
> Andre: I seen people in the world that come from nothing, from the
> projects, and made something of it.
> Rachel: Can you give me an example of such a person?
> Andre: [Pauses for over a minute] I have one neighbor, he kept his mind
> focused and stayed in school, friends around him were always like doing
> drugs or cutting school and he just stayed away from that crowd.

These students fervently believed, central to the achievement ideology, if a person really tries hard, he or she can succeed in society, making it to the middle class. Yet, they have very few real examples in their lives, as Alexia can only think of a "cousin's friend" and Andre mentions "one neighbor." Further, around them, in their

families and neighborhoods, there are multiple examples of people who are in the lower economic classes.

Therefore, how do the students explain why a person did not succeed financially? In interview after interview, students attributed people's lack of making it in society, not to societal structures or discrimination, but to their own personal failures. Marquita told me about her troubled older sister and claimed it was her sister's own choices that caused her failures (interview, 6/5/02). Similarly, Andre stated that the people he saw not making it were "lazy, they don't really focus on what they want to do with life, they don't take the time to see that their future is really important to them" (interview, 6/7/02). Nhat told me about his grandmother who "worked very hard when she came to the United States for her children to be very successful, but they weren't that successful [because] they didn't understand English that much, so they were kind of stupid, they didn't even know anything about this country" (interview, 6/12/02). Finally, Alexia described her mother, saying "She didn't work hard. She didn't even go to high school. She had me" (interview, 6/6/02).

Just as the students judged their family members' or neighbors' failures based solely on their individual actions, they also thought the only thing that would hold them back from succeeding financially would be their own lack of effort in school. Andre thought if he was not successful, it would be because he was in the wrong crowd (interview, 6/7/02), and Nhat worried that "some subjects in school are hard for me and if I get a bad grade they might not let me get a good job ... I play too much games. I could work harder" (interview, 6/12/02).

Their belief in the achievement ideology translated into what the students wanted to learn in Language Arts class. They consistently stated that what they wanted to learn was the knowledge that would prepare them for their future; specifically, they wanted to be prepared to do well in high school, in college, and in their careers. Even when students complained in interviews about the grammar mini-lessons they saw the lessons as valuable. For example, Alexia commented that "the mini-lessons are boring when she is talking at you but they are important" (interview, 4/12/02) and Trisha noted that, "we need to learn that stuff" (interview, 4/8/02).

Ultimately, the students wanted to learn the standard knowledge and Discourse in Language Arts class because they believed that was what they needed to be successful in the current educational system and society. Further, they believed that once they had this knowledge they would find success within this system. Elizabeth too, at least at some level, believed these ideas to be true. Though she had a sophisticated understanding of issues of race and power and concretely "believed that people in power will do what they have to do to stay there, they'll not always treat those under them fairly" (interview, 7/15/03) she also believed that "students need these skills in order to succeed" (ibid).

The achievement ideology is often critiqued because it downplays a reality of injustice embedded within our educational system and our society. However, to not accept it, particularly within the context of schooling, can equal a situation devoid of hope. Christensen (1994) writes, "we must teach our students how to match subjects and verbs [and standard English] because they are the ones without power and, for the moment, have to use the language of the powerful to

be heard. But, in addition, we need to equip them to question an educational system that doesn't values their life and their knowledge" (145). These sentences fit neatly together on the page but they do not translate nearly as easily into an 8th grade classroom. This conception sets up a dual role for teachers: teach standard Discourse and teach students to question it. Christensen's writing suggests that these goals are worked toward simultaneously. But the reality of these dual goals can be complicated, confusing and even unproductive for students and for teachers. Since the beginning of universal public education, school has been built, in part, on the notion that education can be the great equalizer. Though this conception of schooling is problematic, it also has its place in today's classrooms. It provides purpose for teachers and students on a daily basis. It gives teachers an institutional authority. As Ms. Darcy recognized, "my authority as a knowledgeable guide has to be trusted by my students, they have to buy and believe that in order for it to work" (interview, 6/24/02).

Throughout this section, I have focused on the societal, district, teacher and students' beliefs about the importance of teaching standard knowledge in Language Arts class. These beliefs pushed for a teaching practice that overwhelmingly prioritized standard knowledge. Throughout Section One, I emphasized various challenges to critical literacy that existed in this classroom. These challenges came from the context surrounding the class as well as from the participants within it. They influenced what class members expected from the class and how they acted during class. Together, these challenges created currents within the classroom that pushed it to be a more traditional Language

Arts class. In the next section of this chapter, I focus on elements that Ms. Darcy constructed that pushed against these traditional currents and for a more critical literacy practice.

Currents of Critical Literacy Teaching

As I described in Section One, Ms. Darcy faced multiple challenges to critical literacy teaching. These barriers came from society, the school and district, her students, and even some of her own notions. A variety of factors pushed the classroom in traditional directions. However, Ms. Darcy strongly believed in the value and importance of critical literacy. As she explains, "I see literacy and knowledge as linked to power so part of my long-term goal is that they become empowered to question and look critically at their world" (interview, 7/8/03). In Section Two, I highlight important elements that Ms. Darcy created in the class to reach these goals and propel it in critical directions. As I illustrate throughout this section, though the students held many traditional views about the class, they positively participated in the critical literacy features of the class.

Students Sharing Authority

As the teacher in the classroom, Ms. Darcy acted as the authority in many ways. She also created significant opportunities for the students to be authorities in the classroom, both in terms of what they learned and how they acted. Ms. Darcy allowed her students to be Subjects in room C132, making it possible for them to become active agents in their own learning. Ms. Darcy explained, "I also share authority with the students because I do give time for them to be the

authority" (interview, 6/5/02). She gave students opportunities to hold authority in a variety of ways: by positioning the knowledge they brought with them in the center of the instruction, by giving them "the floor," and by allowing their questions and opinions to drive classroom instruction.

Students occupied positions of authority as Elizabeth repeatedly asked them to place their experiences in a central role in the classroom. In poetry lessons such as "Where I'm From," "Thirteen Ways," and the protest poems, Ms. Darcy asked students to focus on their own lives. In "Where I'm From" poems students wrote about their backgrounds and in "Thirteen Ways" Ms. Darcy asked students specifically to write about objects from their daily lives. In the protest poems, students described and commented on powerful occurrences in their lives. For example, Chris and Andre depicted incidents of racial profiling and Crystal wrote about an occurrence of sexual harassment.

This component, having students draw on their own lives, existed in numerous other poetry lessons as well. For example, the students wrote poems about who they used to be compared to who they are now, their wishes and dreams, and what they hope to experience in their future. Further, drawing on their lives was not only done in poetry lessons; it was also common theme in many of their assignments, even in more traditionally academic ones. During a writing assignment that focused on composing a five paragraph essay, the students practiced this skill by writing about a hero in their lives. Further, when they learned the intricacies of writing short stories, they wrote about an important event in their lives. Many teachers ask students to write about themselves,

especially in personal narratives; for Ms. Darcy, basing writing assignments around students' experiences was a central theme.

The students recognized that their own experiences played a central role in the class and that this component differed from other Language Arts classes. In the first round of group interviews, I asked students to compare Ms. Darcy's class to their past Language Arts classes. The students noted how in other Language Arts classes in 6th and 7th grade, they wrote reports about topics the teacher gave them, while in Ms. Darcy's class they often wrote about their lives. As Crystal put it, "In here, not like there [in other classes], we write about things in the heart, that matter" (interview, 5/14/02). Students' lives were an authority as they authored texts in Ms. Darcy's class.

Ms. Darcy relied on students' experiences and knowledge when designing lessons. This was highlighted in the neighborhood improvement project. In the first part of the lesson, Ms. Darcy asked students to use their knowledge of their community to map out the various neighborhoods around the school. She then used the students' maps to create groups according to geographic areas to which the students belonged. Also, students' own knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of their community, as well as the resources available, were the central factors in completing the assignment. During the neighborhood improvement project, she told students that she had learned a lot about their community in the time she had been teaching there and wanted to learn more from them (field notes, 4/5/02). In another assignment, students were called on to write a speech about their dreams for the world in the future. When Ms. Darcy introduced this assignment, she told the students that the future was up to them,

that they were the ones who had a lot of ideas about how the world should be, and they were going to stand up and express what they knew (field notes, 2/7/02).

Ms. Darcy also placed students' experiences in the center of instruction by asking them to draw on their experiences to make connections to subject matter. For example, during the unit about the novel *The Outsiders*, she told students that in order to fully understand the book they had to think about their lives in connection to the book. Specifically, she asked students to answer a variety of writing prompts about social groups and gangs in their own lives: "What social group do you belong to? How would you define your group of friends? Do different groups at Elk Middle School make fun of each other? What are your feelings about gangs?" She also asked them to name the characters with whom they most identified, and to think about the social status of the groups in the book and the society as they see it today. Another time Ms. Darcy asked students to draw on their own experience was during a Socratic Seminar about the poem "Mother to Son." As the students worked through the poem's stanzas, she asked them to use their own lives to imagine what "Mother" might have gone through. (field notes, 2/28/02; 3/13/02)

In addition to drawing on their own experiences, students also acted as authorities in room C132 when they took center stage, or owned the floor in the classroom. This practice was a regular occurrence throughout the semester. Students gave speeches about their dreams for the future and they read their "Where I'm From" and protest poems. During many of these performances, Ms. Darcy sat down in the audience to listen and gave the students the spotlight.

This spotlight was an important place for students to gain confidence, invest in reading and writing, and share their work. In an interview, Tonya recalled her experience reading a poem she wrote called "Chat line." "Dede stood up and said that was tight and it made me feel good, like I wrote something important that people actually liked" (interview, 4/25/02). Tonya's classmates' response gave her an experience she could not have had without the opportunity to take center stage in the classroom. Similarly, reflecting on reading his protest poem, Andre stated that he felt "powerful to read it" to his peers (interview, 4/22/02). Students participated as authors in the classroom, as they wrote their pieces, and also as they stood up and read them to the class. The students also took a more active role during Socratic Seminars and *The Outsiders* debate.

Finally, Ms. Darcy placed students in positions of authority in the classroom by having their opinions and questions drive instruction. This aspect was most salient during the I-Search paper assignment. The I-Search paper was built on students' own questions. Crystal articulated the essential ingredient embedded in putting students in the driver's seat: effort. She explained (interview, 6/13/02):

> Crystal: I'm stating my own opinion and I'm getting my own question, something that I want to know, and I think I'll do a better job cause, cause it's something that I want to know, I'll do it
> Rachel: If you got assigned something, you might not do it?
> Crystal: I would probably still do it, but I wouldn't be that into it, I wouldn't put all of my effort into it.

Crystal differentiated the type of work that often happens when assignments are teacher-directed from the learning that can happen when students take on legitimate and authentic roles. When students' work satisfies their own desire for

knowledge, the learning process is qualitatively different than when it is completed to answer the questions of and for others. It is the process itself and the position of the student that shifts substantially during assignments like the I-Search paper. Instead of going through the motions, distancing one's passion and personal investment from school, these types of assignments allow students to pour their effort into school.

This connection to school and these relationships between a genuine search for knowledge and the classroom are the key to being a Subject in one's own learning. Tonya added to the difference between work teachers assign and work that is "important for you." She stated (interview, 6/13/02):

> Tonya: When you write about something that's important for you, it's always on your mind and I start thinking about it and I get going and I write stuff down. But when I write about something that I don't want to, that a teacher just assigns me to, I don't even think about it until the last minute and then I just rush and do it and then it don't be that good.

Her quote further illustrates the connections made possible between in school and out of school literacy when students drive instruction.

Freire's initial ideas about critical literacy stemmed from his belief that "education is suffering from narration sickness" (Freire, 1997, p. 52), specifically teachers constant narration to/at students. His central aim was to move students from sideline positions as spectators in educational terrain to starring roles. Ms. Darcy, by valuing students' knowledge, allowing them to take center stage, and having them guide their own learning, moved her students into the driver's seat. Students' positioning transcended traditional classroom boundaries and created more transformative spaces.

Critical Voices in the Classroom

In addition to providing opportunities for students to act as authorities in the learning process, Ms. Darcy also created currents of critical literacy by bringing critical voices into the classroom. In Section One of this chapter, I commented on the prevalent conformist nature of schools and throughout this dissertation I have painted Elizabeth's school in this same conventional light. To put it mildly, advocates for revolution were not in abundance at Elk Middle School. In addition, throughout the previous chapters, I have demonstrated ways Elizabeth was implicitly and explicitly discouraged from moving outside of the school's traditional bounds. Further, I have shown that in addition to it not being in her best interest to be too radical, it also was not in her character. However, Ms. Darcy found ways to bring critical voices and activist messages into her classroom.

Specifically, I focus on two teaching practices Ms Darcy used to bring these alternative, potentially controversial, ideas into room C132. First, Elizabeth based her writing pedagogy around activist writers who critiqued society, wrote in multiple Discourses, and connected literacy and "rising up" (Christensen, 2000). Second, Ms. Darcy implemented a series of one-day lessons built around national commemorations that allowed her to link education and social change. Ms. Darcy created avenues to bring voices of protest into the classroom in ways that were benign enough to fit with her school, students and character but powerful enough to carry messages about injustice, dissent and change. In these ways, her teaching practice was not solely about preparing students for the

current society but also about "encouraging the play of imagination, encouraging inventiveness, [and] opening up alternative possibilities" (Greene, 2000, p. 11).

Imagination, inventiveness and alternative possibilities were welcomed into the classroom by the inclusion of a variety of activist writers. These writers brought multiple Discourses into the classroom, they critiqued society and they modeled activism. When I asked Ms. Darcy to describe her teaching, she began by talking about the writers as models she brought into the class. Many of her first comments centered on the importance of these authors' voices. For example, she explained that, "I base a lot of the writing we do around models of great writers. The models set the tone and bring into our classroom powerful and diverse voices" (interview, 6/5/02). This element of her class, bringing in outside writers as models, was forefront in her mind because they played a large role in the classroom.

Like the majority of Language Arts teachers, Ms. Darcy wanted her students to access models of good writing. "I think students need a model because language is so complicated and I want them to use that model as a stepping stool and then be creative in their own ways with the model. The model is the starting point" (interview, 3/13/02). Ms. Darcy wanted her students to go beyond reading the authors' words; she wanted them "to see the writers around them, hear their voices over their shoulder ... [Ms. Darcy] want[ed] to fill the classroom with the body, spirit and languages of model writers" (interview, 3/13/02). Lessons about these model authors usually included activities typical in a Language Arts class. Ms. Darcy introduced the writers' background to the

students, discussed the text with the class, and asked students to write responses to the pieces of writing.

What was unique about this approach was that Ms. Darcy drew primarily on activist authors. She focused lessons around the writings of activists often read in school, such as Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and Anne Frank. She also included protesters who are read less frequently in K-12 classrooms, such as June Jordan, Langston Hughes, and Richard Wright. Activist authors played a prominent role in bringing critical literacy components into the classroom. Raising issues about race, power and social change can be viewed as controversial in school, regardless of how they are broached. However, I believe that by using outsiders to bring up these issues, rather than bringing them up herself, and by embedding these radical voices within reading and writing activities routinely done in school, Ms. Darcy normalized these critical literacy activities and made them less contentious than they would have been otherwise.

Ms. Darcy's teaching of June Jordan's, "I Must Become a Menace to My Enemies" characterized her use of activist writers. The students approached the poem in a manner typical in Language Arts classes. They did a little research on the poet and her life. In this pre-reading stage, though, Ms. Darcy included a critical discussion about the treatment of African Americans currently and historically and highlighted Jordan's explicit decision to use writing to speak out against injustice. The poem too was addressed in ways often used in Language Arts classes. The students looked for metaphors in the text and paraphrased each stanza. However, the content of the poem veered the discussion from a traditional course. The students engaged in conversations about race and

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confrontation and they debated the best way to stay up for your rights (field notes, 3/22). Throughout the lesson, traditional teaching structures were used to raise dissenting perspectives.

The authors Ms. Darcy included also brought multiple Discourses in the classroom. "I want to bring in voices that will speak to the students" (interview, 6/5/02). These authors were meaningfully chosen to reflect the Discourse and experience of the student as well as to ensure that a variety of cultures participated in the classroom. The multicultural collection of writers reinforced the notion that valuable writing is composed by people of various backgrounds, races, and Discourses. For instance, when teaching about haikus Elizabeth introduced students to pieces by Japanese poets, both historical and modern, as well as to haikus written by Richard Wright.

These activist authors, in addition, demonstrated that connections could and should exist between writing and protest. Many of the activist authors spoke out against injustices, and used reading and writing to evoke their passions and positions. For example, the protest poem lesson began with students reading and learning about activists such as Nelson Mandela and Langston Hughes. She pushed students to "listen to their voices, imagine their struggles and their own circumstances as they wrote these words" (interview, 6/5/02). Similarly, a speech students wrote about their dreams for the future was drawn from Martin Luther Kings "I Have a Dream" speech. During this lesson, too, Ms. Darcy impressed upon students the need to "see, hear, and feel Martin Luther King" in the words of his speech. She wanted his memory, life and words "to sit next to the students as they composed their own work" (field notes, 2/7/02).

In addition to bringing in activist authors to conceptualize literacy as protest, Ms. Darcy found ways to connect literacy and social change by celebrating a variety of nationally proclaimed, yet not always widely acknowledged commemorations. For example, the students in Ms. Darcy's classroom celebrated Peace Week, Mother's Day, Earth Day, and National Peace Corps Day. The celebrations included a plethora of reading and writing activities. Just as she did with activist writers' ideas, Ms. Darcy normalized messages of protest by discussing them through the lens of ordinary commemorations. She approached these lessons very matter-of-factly. Rather than stating the importance of talking about women's rights, the environment, or poverty, Ms. Darcy introduced the lessons by informing students, "It is Peace Week" or "It's Mother's Day." The inclusion of these events on the seemingly neutral calendar gave them the perception as the norm for any classroom context. While these commemorative days and their celebrations in room C132 were not starting mass revolutions, students were consistently getting message about societal problems and engaging in the work of imagining and implementing solutions.

The examination of peace moved beyond a surface level. During Peace Week, Ms. Darcy had the students read a piece by Thich Nhat Hanh called "Peace." Students read about Hanh's life, his anti-violence work during the Vietnam war and his exile from Vietnam. They talked about possible causes for violence, both globally and locally. Ms. Darcy asked students to think about violence in their own lives, as well as violence in the United States and the world. She raised questions about violence, such as "Is it always physical?" and "How

can it be stopped." Ms. Darcy asked the students to imagine how a man who experienced so much hardship could still speak so eloquently for peace. "What drives such a person? What qualities must he have" she asked. (field notes, 2/11/02). The students grappled with the complexities of violence and peace and were introduced to a worldwide spiritual leader and exiled protester. Finally, she asked them to respond to the poem and "write about their own thoughts of peace, the need for peace in the world and in your life." Ms. Darcy used this commemoration to bring in another message about the need and possibilities for change, to introduce the class to a revolutionary leader, and to ask them to imagine alternatives in their own lives.

Conclusion

This chapter began with the question: Is room C132 a traditional classroom with critical tendencies or a critical classroom with traditional constraints? Throughout the chapter, I demonstrated the currents pushing Ms. Darcy's teaching practice toward traditional conceptions of Language Arts and described counter-currents pushing for more critical notions of literacy. On the surface, the classroom in many ways resembled school as usual. Standard knowledge and traditional purposes of education were high priorities. At the same time, radical voices and messages emanated from activist writers, during celebratory commemorations and through students' writing and discussions.

The traditional boundaries may have limited critical literacy's impact. The critical examination of texts such as "I Must Become a Menace to My Enemies" or *The Outsiders* did not extend to standard English grammar exercises or students'

"Where I'm From" poems. The definition of text could have been opened to include more literal and figurative pieces of work. In addition, the authority of standard Discourse was not rigorously critiqued and injustice embedded within the American Dream not consistently exposed. At the same time though these traditional conventions aided critical literacy. Ms. Darcy's students poured themselves into critical literacy lessons without the resistance often reported as part of critical literacy practices (Cervetti, 2004; Shor, 1992). This engagement was partly the result of the trust the students had of Ms. Darcy to be a "knowledgeable guide." Incorporating critical notions of literacy into familiar structures of schooling both limited their impact and also made them possible. Critical literacy was not an add-on in this classroom; it was woven into the threads of the teaching practice throughout the school year. Nor was it the stance from which every lesson was built exclusively. This classroom existed in the gray areas between a traditional approach to education and a critical one. In Chapter Eight, I consider what we might learn from Ms. Darcy's teaching practice.

Chapter Eight

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONVERSATIONS

This final chapter considers how Elizabeth Darcy's teaching practice might productively inform educators about issues of critical literacy teaching. What might others learn from my research in this classroom? Typically, a dissertation's final chapter includes conclusive statements to sum up the work and concrete suggestions for what should be done based on what the study found. As Segall (1999) noted, "a conclusion, by definition, is meant to end, close, halt, and terminate what has preceded" (313). An alternative way of ending is "to sustain a critical conversation with the situation, to highlight the politics of knowing, to re-discover that which we believe we have already discovered, to unlearn that which we have already learned, and thus learn further by learning again" (ibid). In this chapter, I incorporate both typical components and alternative processes. Specifically, I both discuss implications resulting from what I learned and also attempt to explore some dilemmas and complexities of critical literacy embedded within my dissertation.

As I stated in Chapter One, this dissertation is the story of Elizabeth Darcy's teaching practice during the 2001-2002 school year and also simultaneously the story of my growing and developing theories about critical literacy. At the beginning of my graduate school education, my passion manifested itself in what could be considered extreme positions. I resonated with

Smith's (1995) pronouncement, "let's declare [the] education [system] a disaster and get on with our lives" and Gee's (2001) notion that schools won't be able to make substantial reforms toward equity unless the larger society changes. While I ultimately still feel affinity toward these views, I have become more invested in the possibilities and connections between the current system and an imagined ideal. In this chapter I grapple with the spaces between traditional and critical approaches to literacy education. To this end, I further develop the shades of gray I introduced earlier in the dissertation and ask what is gained and lost by basking in the in-between.

Chapter Overview

In the first section of the chapter, I discuss what the research data presented in this dissertation suggests as implications for critical literacy, teacher education, and professional development. I began with the image of critical literacy teaching as a balancing act, "keeping one foot inside the system and the other foot outside" (Freire, 1985, p. 178). In this chapter, I use my analysis of Ms. Darcy's teaching practice to discuss the types of support that help pre-service and practicing teachers enact this balance. I first discuss steps teacher education programs might take to prepare and support prospective teaches, particularly focusing on the importance of creating a critical stance. I also address the support practicing teachers need to continue developing critical practices, specifically highlighting the value of local and national networks.

After suggesting possible implications resulting from the study, I turn my attention to opening up dialogue about issues and complexities that came to light

during the data collection, analysis and textualization. Here, I revisit the notion of shades of gray to problematize the ground between traditional and critical teaching by playing out a conversation with my own different voices. I end by suggesting ideas for further research and reflecting on my current work and how this research transformed my ideas and beliefs.

Implications for Teacher Education

A Critical Teaching Stance

Teaching is a profession of uncertainty; on a daily basis, teachers are confronted with countless decisions (Jackson, 1990) and multiple dilemmas (Lampert, 1985). Critical teaching, with its reliance on students' input and dynamic topics, can raise even more ambiguity (Shor, 1992, 1996). As we see throughout the data, Ms. Darcy's teaching practice was filled with this uncertainty.

One incident illustrating this uncertainty occurred during Ms. Darcy's teaching of the poem, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" by Wallace Stevens, discussed in Chapter Four. In particular, when Ms. Darcy asked the students to emulate Steven's style of writing while focusing on an item from *their* everyday lives, students wrote about a wide variety of topics, many which were not typical to mainstream curriculum or to Ms. Darcy's realm of life experience. For example, Andre and Marquita both wrote about hair weaves, Jenetha wrote about bandanas, and Luis wrote about a religious symbol. Ms. Darcy described the feelings of uncertainty she experienced when Andre read his poem about hair weaves. "It shocked me because coming from a white culture it was an unusual thing to write about and it was a glimpse into an African-American growing up

culture, this is as usual for African Americans as brushes and curling irons" (interview, 7/15/03). In this instance, Ms. Darcy's reliance on student input brought into class topics she wasn't expecting.

Another interaction with Andre also raised uncertainty for Ms. Darcy. During *The Outsiders* debate preparations, Andre failed to follow the clear expectations Ms. Darcy laid out for the students. After Ms. Darcy read my interpretation of the events in this dissertation, she noted that "reading this reminds me of conflict in teaching critically ... [combining] inquiry-based learning [and] other goals like personal responsibility, cooperation and respect." In this situation, Ms. Darcy dealt with the uncertain response of a student within the complex moments of teaching. Responding to my reaction of this events, she noted the "potential [of critical literacy teachers] to 'shake things up' a bit" and the tenuousness this can cause.

A final example of the uncertainty Ms. Darcy faced on a day-to-day basis involved a displeased parent. As I described in Chapter Four, when one particular parent came to school to complain about her child's grade, Elizabeth was pulled from her classroom to meet with the parent with no prior warning. She was left alone in the assistant principal's office with the parent who screamed at her without allowing space for discussion. As I noted in my field notes (4/26/02), this episode really affected Ms. Darcy. "Elizabeth is really on edge today. She seems very unsettled by the parent situation. Another teacher advised her to document 'everything' and she is now starting to keep a documentation log." Looking back, this situation was resolved after this one incident, but in the moment, it seemed to weigh heavily on Ms. Darcy.

This dissertation illustrates the uncertainty Ms. Darcy faced throughout the school year. This affected her in a range of ways, from positive surprise to negative emotion. Britzman (2003) and Segall (2002) assert that teachers, and especially new teachers, inevitably face such uncertainty. Ms. Darcy, like all teachers and especially new teachers, understandably looked for certainty to guide her through the unsteady terrain (Britzman, 2003). She reflected (interview 7/8/03), "the best thing was for me was to sit down after my first year and really come up with the backbone and of course I keep meddling with that. I had to learn to really listen to myself and think about what I wanted to see my classroom look like." While teachers will always "meddle with that," especially taking into account their specific contexts, in this section I advocate for teacher education to help pre-service teachers create a teaching stance, and more specifically, a critical teaching stance.

Elizabeth gained strength from thinking through her own "backbone" or as I term it teaching stance, as she commented that thinking it through was "the best thing for me." A teaching stance is a "philosophy, an attitude, a bearing, a way of encountering students based on a set of core values about kids and their learning potentials" (Fried, 1995, p. 139). This research supports the idea that this type of teaching stance can help teachers gain the steadiness they need to face the uncertainty of classroom life. However, while Ms. Darcy took significant time on her own - outside of a community of educators, mentors, or colleagues - to create this stance, I propose that teacher educators explicitly help their students create this teaching stance. While these notions are often implicit in teachers, it is

productive for them to make their teaching stance explicit to themselves and others.

Researchers often make recommendations about what needs to be done that is not being done. However, as a teacher educator, I know from experience the reality that teacher education courses are already packed too tight. Fortunately, my implications do not involve fitting anything else in, but rather suggest highlighting the critical issues that already exist in (teacher) education. Helping pre-service teachers create a critical teaching stance is not something that must be added, but rather to be embedded into existing teacher education programs. A critical teaching stance entails seeing everything as text that can be interpreted dynamically (Birch,1989) and viewing issues of race, equity, culture and justice as central to the work of teaching. In this section, I detail four implications for teacher education programs to facilitate prospective teachers developing a critical teaching stance: structuring teacher education programs to incorporate critical issues throughout the curriculum, connecting critical teaching and good teaching, expanding notions of text, and preparing for the realities of schools.

Structuring Teacher Education Programs

Ms. Darcy, as a white woman, fit the typical profile of a prospective teacher (Cochran-Smith, 1995). However, she also brought uncommon experiences with, and commitment to, diversity (Chisholm, 1994). Specifically, Ms. Darcy lived for several years in a large, diverse city and she also participated

in the Peace Corps in Africa. Further, she explicitly expressed her goal, "teaching for me is part of my way of bringing about social change" (interview, 4/23/02). Though she entered teaching with a commitment to social change, her teacher education program did not embed these ideas thoroughly throughout the program. Ms. Darcy recalled, "I learned about Freire through a professor but it was recommended, actually to another student, outside of the regular course work ... Those ideas were not raised as a real part of any of the classes" (interview, 4/23/02). Ms. Darcy was forced to make connections for herself between critical literacy and education. As I wrote throughout this dissertation, Ms. Darcy successfully incorporated components of critical literacy throughout her teaching practice. However, I also noted ways in which a critical perspective was left out of her teaching, such as during grammar instruction. This research supports the notion that critical literacy should be embedded throughout teacher education programs in order to prepare people to truly infuse their own teaching practices with critical thought.

It is particularly important to embed such issues of diversity and equity throughout teacher education programs taking into account many prospective teachers' backgrounds and preconceived notions (Chisholm, 1994). Prospective teachers do not necessarily enter teacher education programs intending to develop a critical teaching stance. Teacher education candidates continue to fit a white, middle class demographic profile while schools grow increasingly more diverse (Cochran-Smith, 1995) and many prospective teachers do not see issues of culture, diversity and racial or economic equity as central to teaching and learning (Lazar, 2004). Therefore, a teacher education program must embrace a

unified mission of presenting these issues as integral to teaching. While teacher educators themselves will and should hold different definitions of equity and diversity, what must be consistent is their belief that consideration and discussion of these ideas is central to the work of creating teachers.

In terms of the structure of a teacher education program, while an initial course in issues of diversity and equity can play a role in a prospective teacher's education, it is important to integrate these ideas throughout the program. To genuinely influence prospective teachers' beliefs about and enactments of teaching, they must see the connections between critical issues of race and equity and issues of classroom management, learning, and assessment. When issues of diversity or multiculturalism are separated out into an isolated course, it can inadvertently send the message that such issues can be dealt with separately from the real work of teaching, that which is learned in methods and related courses. (Zeichner, 1995)

Importantly, this critical teaching stance is not limited to, or based on, a particular grade level, teaching population/context, or subject matter. In this dissertation, I focused on critical literacy in Ms. Darcy's specific situation, a middle school Language Arts classroom. However, the fundamental nature of critical teaching permeates all settings, albeit in different ways depending on context. As evidenced in Ms. Darcy's teaching practice, it involves connecting subject matter and students' lives, incorporating diverse topics and language, engaging in interpretation as multiple, and "creat[ing] situations alive with activity and reflection, encouraging the play of imagination, encouraging inventiveness, opening up alternative possibilities" (Greene, 2000, p. 11). The aim for teacher

educators is to influence their students so that the critical fabric of education plays a central role in the way teachers teach. It isn't necessarily most important to prepare teachers to plan units that specifically focus on racism or classism; instead what is crucial is helping prospective teachers view teaching, learning, schools and students with a critical stance that recognizes the influence and importance of equity, culture and diversity. It isn't about all students or all faculty seeing race, equity, culture or justice in the same way but instead about making these aspects part of the work of teaching and recognizing that they have consequences for designing a seating chart in a 3rd grade classroom, teaching a science lab lesson in high school biology, or planning a parent-teacher conference.

Expanding Notions of Text

This dissertation focused on critical literacy in Ms. Darcy's teaching practice. In particular, I noted the way she and her students "read" texts critically. For example, Ms. Darcy viewed *The Outsiders* as a text that contained issues of race and class, as well as assumptions and connections still relevant today. This stance was evident in the way she taught this book, engaging students in a debate over the definition of a family and facilitating a Socratic Seminar about class in our current society. This stance influenced students, as Tonya reflected on the debate and described how Ms. Darcy "makes me get thinking ..., because I have been thinking a certain way all my life, like a family is this, but then Ms. D. is bringing something different into my life and I'm like wait a minute" (interview, 5/16/02).

However, there were other aspects of Ms. Darcy's teaching practice that she did not view as texts and that she did open up for dynamic interpretation to herself or her students. For example, in her teaching practice Ms. Darcy approached grammar as an entity to passively accept and learn. Whereas she surrounded students' learning of novels with activities geared to help them examine diverse interpretations as part of comprehending the books, grammar was outside of this analysis. It was not presented as something to be questioned, discussed or analyzed but simply something to consume. This approach toward grammar limited students, as well as Ms. Darcy's, engagement and learning.

By approaching everything as text, prospective teachers would be more likely to [and help their students to] open up more aspects of teaching to this type of analysis. However, preservice teachers often enter into education programs without considering this type of analysis a central priority (Lazar, 2004). Teacher education programs could play a valuable role preparing their students to embody a critical teaching stance by centralizing the notion that everything is a text that can be interpreted dynamically (Birch,1989). This notion encompasses two connected steps. First, it expands the definition of text to include a wide variety of things, including people, building, photographs, governments, maps, flags, advertisements (Shannon, 1992; Willinsky 2001). Second, it opens up interpretation to include a myriad of factors including the reader's own history, culture, language, and experience ((Rosenblatt, 1978) and emphasizes meaning as raced, classed, and gendered (Greene, 1988).

Centralizing the notion that everything is a text that can be interpreted dynamically opens up conversations and reflections that could help pre-service

teachers think about consequences, origins, possibilities and alternative options available in many facets of teaching. The act of interpreting texts dynamically prioritizes *how* a text means more than *what* a text means (Birch, 1989). Because "your language, your background, biases ideas, beliefs, politics, education, etc. *determine* your understanding [and because] they are not invented by you [but] are socially determined by the institutions and discursive practices that constitute the social networks you are involved in" (Birch, 1989. p. 24) these constructs and institutions must be delved into as part of the reading of texts. In a teacher education program this approach would involve prospective teachers reading all types of texts, including textbooks, poems, standards, report cards, novels, classroom management decisions, parent-teacher conferences. Dynamic textual interpretation entails considering how who we are influences how we read and interpret texts.

The goal would be for prospective teachers to recognize that there are no absolute meanings, or absolute rights and wrongs in any of these texts or interpretation. Further, prospective teachers would recognize that "the 'rightness' of a decision ... of an idea about the world ... is relative not to some inherent correct order for the world ordained somehow in nature, but to a theory, a position, a set of ideas, institutionally created and constructed" (ibid, p. 25). This stance would open up for consideration the way prospective teachers interpret all types of decisions, information, actions and ideas within a teaching practice. It would also open up for dialogue the variety of consequences and possibilities for students that are embedded within every facets of teaching.

Importantly, Segall (2002) noted that changing prospective teachers' practices and conceptions of education involves more than teaching *about* these ways of thinking, being and teaching. "For such theories to become a real, viable option they have to be experienced and their experiences theorized. If we believe in teachers who are thoughtful, critical, and reflective, we ought to provide them meaningful opportunities to be so as learners. In other words, teacher education should be a place where student teachers don't only learn *about* education but where they actively and publicly engage their own education as students learning to teach" (167). Several teacher educators write about their efforts incorporating this work into their courses. For example, when teaching about assessment, Butin (2002) "conducted an experiential learning activity in order to make vivid the problematics of norm-referenced classroom assessment" (15). His students participated in various assessments in order to experience them; Butin then asked his students to reflect on what they went through and learned. Lazar (2004) asked her students to create a profile on one elementary school student by interviews the student, as well as the student's parents and teacher. In addition, the prospective teachers tutored this elementary school student for a semester and recorded their own conceptions. Creating a profile from all of these different sources allowed these prospective teachers to see the students from a variety of perspectives. Overall, while it is impossible and undesirable to practice this type of textual interpretation at every single opportunity, teacher education students must experience reading a variety of texts in their pre-service education.

Connecting Critical Teaching and Good Teaching

Ms. Darcy viewed critical literacy *as* good teaching; "critical literacy to me is just good teaching and I really believe that" (interview, 7/15/03). Ms. Darcy's teaching practice provides a powerful example of critical teaching as good teaching. While there were times I was disappointed that the classroom didn't take on a more radical stance, my analysis concluded that room C132 contained a productive illustration of critical teaching. Ms. Darcy herself lauded, "I can ... fulfill an activist role while being an ordinary teacher" (interview, 4/23/02). In addition, as I concluded in Chapter Seven, the fact that her students saw Ms. Darcy as a "good teacher" propelled the critical work in the classroom. Ladson-Billings (1995) similarly focused on connections between critical teaching and good teaching. She reported a common response from administrators, teachers, and teacher educators after hearing about culturally relevant pedagogy (which shares many attributes of critical teaching): "that's just good teaching."

This dissertation focused on the connections between good teaching and critical teaching. These connections are important for teacher education students more broadly. For even teacher education students drawn to the ideals of critical teaching often ask "this sounds great, but what does it look like" (Glazier et. al., 2003). Making explicit connections between good teaching and critical teaching would not aim to provide teachers with recipes to follow, but instead aspire to give them a picture of what it might look like and to help them wrestle with challenges likely to surface as they try these practices themselves. As I argue in this section, focusing on such connections is good teacher education practice.

It is possible to introduce a critical teaching stance by reading about its theoretical definitions or by focusing specifically on differences in race, class, or gender. However, these approaches can be viewed as radical or irrelevant. Therefore, it is more productive to begin by making connections between components of a critical teaching stance and ideas/beliefs prospective teachers may already hold. For example, teacher educators can build on notions of good teaching such as: teaching all students without marginalizing anyone, connecting to and valuing students' prior knowledge, and viewing students as problem solvers and question askers.

As Oakes and Lipton (1999) argue, the curriculum in many teacher education courses, including such issues as learning theories, curriculum, subject matter and assessment are necessarily within a context of "teaching to change the world." For teaching is inherently about crafting the future and therefore necessitates consideration of the kind of future we want to create. Creating a teaching stance is best initiated when it is built into the work of teaching. For example, when teacher educators in methods classes discuss how to have a discussion or how to teach "basic" skills, they can push their students to think about who might have the easiest time participating and succeeding and why. When talking about parental involvement, teacher educators can help their students think about the cultural notions embedded in communication.

Kohl (2000) writes about the connection between good teaching and critical (or social justice) teaching in a slightly different way, offering "pedagogical and personal suggestions learned over 30 years' experience":

Hone your craft as a teacher. When I first began teaching, I jumped into struggles for social justice. During one of my efforts a community person asked: 'So, what's going on in your classroom that's different than what you're fighting against? Can your students read and do math?' I had to examine my work, which was full of passion and effort but deficient in craft. I realized that I needed to take the time to learn how to teach well before I extended myself with authority and confidence in organizing efforts. This is essential for caring teachers. We have to get it right for our own students before presuming to take on larger systems, no matter how terrible those larger systems are. As educators, we need to root our struggles for social justice in the work we do every day, in a particular community, with a particular group of students.

While Oakes and Lipton (1999) detail ways to bring social justice teaching into good teaching practices, Kohl is writing about the importance of embedding good teaching practices into social justice teaching. Teacher educators also need to realize, and help their students realize, that "learning how to teach [subject matter] well" is an integral part of teaching their students.

Preparing for the Realities of Schools

In the previous sections, I detailed several steps teacher education programs could take to help their students develop a critical teaching stance. However, this research study illustrated the reality that schools are not always hospitable to critical conceptions of teaching. Ms. Darcy noted her perception of her colleagues' response to critical teaching, "some people would be like give me a break, these kids don't know shit, and people would joke or make real cynical remarks. Then I could see a couple people being like woah. But I can't see many people saying I try to do this" (interview, 6/24/03). Similarly, I illustrated throughout this dissertation the lack of support Ms. Darcy received from her administration or school district. In addition, during her first year of teaching, Ms.

Darcy faced difficult challenges to classroom productivity, noting, "I was surprised at how out of control [the students] could be. I didn't know what my role was, what I needed to establish and when I could let them go and I have learned a lot about that" (interview, 6/5/02). Such "control" issues are important for every teacher; they can be particularly complex for critical teachers who already tend [as Ms. Darcy expressed in her text of this dissertation] "to shake things up a bit."

Oakes and Lipton (1999) and Cervetti (2004) also found that for a variety of reasons schools are not always hospitable to critical conceptions of teaching. In this section, I argue that in order to prepare prospective teachers to hold onto a critical teaching stance, they must prepare students to deal with the myriad of potential challenges to critical teaching illustrated throughout this study. Nieto (2000) notes the benefits of using case studies because of their ability to illuminate thoughts and insights into particular settings, thus opening up possibilities for discussion. Video case studies that pay particular attention to issues of equity and diversity would offer an optimal way to allow students to see these classrooms in action as a starting point for dialogue.

In addition, it is important that teacher education courses explicitly confront disconnects between critical teaching and possible school contexts. As Featherstone noted (1995), even student teachers aware of the traditional forces in many schools had an incredibly hard resisting their power. It will help prospective teachers if they are equipped with a toolbox to deal with these difficulties. Using case studies, prospective teachers could discuss possible challenges such as how to productively deal with student resistance of how to connect to students' prior knowledge when it differs from the teacher's. The

toolbox should also include resources to help new teachers search out colleagues with similar teaching philosophies and also equip them to productively connect to others even with differences. Dealing with these possible disconnects directly will help prepare teachers to cope as they begin their teaching careers.

<div align="center">Beyond Pre-service Education</div>

Above, I discussed what teacher education programs can do to help teachers create a critical teaching stance. However, Elizabeth's experience clearly demonstrates that developing this stance does not stop once teachers enter their own classrooms. Ms. Darcy needed guidance as she struggled to implement and further develop her critical teaching practice. Ms. Darcy continued to grow in her teaching practice, but it was often done on her own, as she "sat down [alone] after [her] first year and really [came] up with the backbone" of her teaching (interview 7/8/03). Ms. Darcy herself stated the importance of other critical colleagues, explaining "it would be easier if other teachers tried [to implement critical literacy]" (interview, 6/24/03). Further, she valued my ideas about her teaching, commenting in this text after my suggestions about her dealings with Andre during *The Outsiders* debate: "These ideas of using the students as problem-solvers are great suggestions and ways I would like to explore further in my teaching." There are many possible avenues for this type of reflection and continued learning. Though Ms. Darcy entered teaching through an alternative program and had already completed her master's education during her first year of teaching, many teachers do continue on with their master's

education. The implications discussed above for pre-service teachers would benefit practicing teachers.

Feiman-Nemser, Parker & Zeichner, (1992) argue that all teachers need professional development to continue growing as they begin teaching. Specifically, teachers need professional development that offers extensive opportunities for learning and allows teachers to invest in and control their own learning (Stein, Smith & Silver, 1999). Ideally it would be best if teachers received this type of support through district-level professional development. However, that may not be realistic considering the multiple pressures and directions in many school districts. Instead, I concentrate here on existing successful networks that offer such opportunities and focus on issues of equity and justice. I detail a few specific organizations as examples of groups providing the kinds of education and support that help teachers continue to develop a critical teaching stance. These networks could be expanded and better connected with school districts or teacher education programs.

The first organization, called Teaching For Change, focuses on improving equity in Washington DC schools by responding to the needs of the teachers there. In particular, it offers a year-long course for teachers examining the theory and tools that promote an equity-centered approach to teaching reading and writing. This year, the course is taught by renowned anti-racist educator Enid Lee. With monthly session for the entire school year, classroom observations and teacher-generated case studies the course will highlight ways to be academically rigorous and committed to social justice and racial equity. Students will delve into ways to draw on students' prior knowledge, how to improve their

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curriculum and how to engage others at their schools. Ongoing courses like these allow teachers to continue their learning with an experienced educator, network with other local colleagues, and analyze their own classroom practices.

Another possible approach to this type of professional development is exemplified by Teachers 4 Social Justice, a grassroots non-profit organization whose mission is to provide opportunities for self-transformation, leadership, and community building to educators in order to affect meaningful change in the classroom, school, community and society. The organization organizes small study groups that meet tri-weekly to provide teachers with focused, peer-based professional development opportunities that are tied to existing classroom practice. Study group topics include "Curriculum Design as Social Justice Action," "Discipline from a Social Justice Perspective," and "Justice and Access through Math and Science." The study groups are facilitated by classroom teachers, who are trained to help members articulate their problems, connect them to larger issues of social justice, and identify action plans. Solutions to classroom and school-wide problems are arrived at through investigation and reflection on issues through a social justice lens. In this set-up, teachers are learning with and from other teachers with equity playing a central and guiding role.

One final example of a local group facilitating professional development is the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools (BayCES), a network of K-12 and member of the National Coalition for Essential Schools. One component of this nonprofit organization promotes equity through data-based inquiry and collaboration. Specifically, participating schools are provided with "coaches" who

work extensively with teachers. The coaches train and support teachers as they embark on action research in their own classrooms. The teachers receive one-on-one support as well as partake in study teams with the other participating teachers. All work is focused on issues of equity. This approach builds cadres of teachers within schools who are intensely working for social change.

My purpose in detailing these groups is to highlight existing opportunities for sustained, productive professional development that help teachers continue to develop a critical teaching stance. These groups receive grants in order to work both inside and outside the system to create social change. They offer intense, long-term support and education for teachers trying to implement principles of critical literacy practices. Such groups offer possibilities for teachers to network, continually improve, and expand. These networks provide models that could be expanded to affect more teachers and students.

Ending with Shades of Gray

In the previous section, I detailed some implications resulting from my research. In a sense, these implications close my study. They wrap up my work with clear ideas for possible steps to follow my research study. They intend to leave the reader with a sense of finality, answering the question "so what?" and providing what can be done based on what was written. At the same time though there is another way to close this work. As I stated in my methodology, I tried to connect what I was studying to how I was studying. I studied a critical way of reading words and the world, a problematizing approach to thoughts, ideas and texts. Though this journey took me to a place with some definite ideas about

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what could come next, it also sent me rereading, questioning and pondering in ways that lead to few definite answers but a greater knowledge of the subtleties. In this next section, I attempt to probe some of the complexities embedded within my study to leave some ideas at play as I conclude my dissertation.

As I stated in Chapter One, this dissertation's intent is not to critique what Elizabeth Darcy could have done better to reach the goals of critical literacy nor was its purpose to reveal how Ms. Darcy's intentions or articulations differed from her practice. Instead, my main focus has been to show that critical literacy in classrooms is messier than it is often conceptualized and described. In this section, I aim to highlight this messiness by drawing on the concept of shades of gray. Rather than seeing traditional literacy and critical literacy as binary conceptions of teaching practice, I have analyzed throughout this dissertation the shades of gray between these two approaches. As I focused on Ms. Darcy's teaching of poetry, the novel *The Outsides* and an I-Search paper, I highlighted the ways she included both traditional and more critical ways of looking at texts, students, and society. While I think there are some negative outcomes of blurring the lines between these two approaches (which I discuss below) I ultimately find value in focusing on connections between these approaches.

As I mentioned in Chapter One, several authors have theorized about the shades of gray in multicultural education, drawing out various phases, approaches or stages. Nieto (2000) charted levels, moving from monocultural, tolerance, acceptance, respect and finally affirmation, solidarity and critique. She detailed what each level included in terms of (among other things) the existence of antiracist education, the pervasiveness of multicultural education, and the

extent of critical pedagogy. The levels are clearly arranged from least to most desirable. Sleeter (1988) similarly organized her conception of equitable education in terms of approaches moving from least desirable, "teaching the exceptional and the culturally different" to most desirable, "education that is multicultural and socially reconstructionist." Her book too details the goals and practices of each approach. Another important conception of multiculturalism originated with Banks (1999) who constructed stages of multicultural education, moving from "Stage One" which offers no change from the Eurocentric, male-centric standard to "Stage Five" which involves a structural reform completely making over the curriculum with a multicultural perspective and also implements social, race, sex, and class issues. These are valuable heuristics as they open up the shades of gray between more traditional and more multicultural or critical conceptions of education.

My own conception of shades of gray draws a similar spectrum, with traditional conceptions of literacy on one side and critical conceptions of literacy on the other. Rather than delineating levels or stages that move from one to the other, Elizabeth Darcy's teaching practice illuminated to me the messiness, dilemmas, unanswerable questions and contradictions that exist in between. I concluded that within the realities of schools there is no best approach, no concrete set of definitives to stand on while teaching. Teaching "with one foot in the system and the other outside" is indeed a daily balancing act where teachers "build a work identity that is constructively ambiguous" (Lampert, 1985, p. 178), where they "confront [the] difficult existential truth about education rarely discussed and, more often than not, actively avoided: trying to teach is deeply

unsettling and conflictive because experience itself ... is a paradox, an unanticipated social relation, and a problem of interpretation" (Britzman, 2003, p. 3). My attempt in my dissertation and in this final section is to conceptualize and theorize critical literacy in "constructively ambiguous ways" as an "unsettling problem [or act] of interpretation." I wanted to use a writing style to help me evoke this messiness, rather than just to describe it. I therefore draw on dialogue as it allows room for overlap, contradictions, synthesis and synergy. This dialogue is not meant to repeat what I have already said, but to recognize the partiality of what I have [and therefore have not] said, and to open up gaps and ambiguities by viewing ideas and conversing with different lenses (Kumashiro, 2002).

This dialogue takes place within the multiplicity of my own identities, as two voices emerge. One voice, which begins the conversation, is devoted to the theoretical possibilities of critical literacy. The other voice, which I put in italics in order to differentiate it from the first voice, both esteems and raises questions about critical literacy's practical realities. I anchor this discussion around central questions (bolded below) drawn from my analysis of the curriculum documents in Chapter Three and the grammar lessons and protest poems in Chapter Six: what do you teach, how do you teach, and what are the roles of teacher and students within the classroom. The conversation ends by considering, what is critical literacy teaching?

What should critical literacy teachers teach? One of the tensions that continued to arise when I was writing surrounded the role of mainstream knowledge, or the standard Discourse, in school.

In this classroom, standard Discourse played a principal role. In addition to being central in the curriculum, the standardized tests and the expectations and culture of the school, it appeared to be very important to both the teacher and students. Part of being critical too is trusting that students know what they need. So, the currents pushing the teacher to prioritize mainstream knowledge came not only from factors surrounding the classroom but from the key players inside as well.

True, and remember that critical literacy is not an abandonment of traditional literacy or mainstream knowledge but a critical and reflexive engagement with it as well as a movement beyond. It is a reflexive endeavor that engages traditional notions of literacy in ways that moves learners beyond them.

But I am not sure that that engagement is always going to look critical and that seems to be the real issue you are trying to get at. Put your question another way - If we say that teaching this mainstream knowledge is embedded in the history of public education and our mindsets, then (how) can teachers work both against and for historical goals for public education and the achievement ideology?

To answer your question, yes, I think teachers can work both against and for historical goals for public education. Many critical educators address this issue. Macedo (2003), Christensen (1994) and Delpit (1995) among others acknowledge that students must be taught the standard Discourse within an environment that acknowledges and question the culture of power.

Your notion of "acknowledging and questioning the culture of power" is a theoretical view, the environment you describe is evasive. A teacher may be able to keep this theoretical view in her mind as she teaches students how to match subjects and verbs according to the rules of standard English. But I don't think middle school students necessarily can. When they are knee deep in the minute, repetitive, encompassing type of practice it takes to really learn something like mainstream Discourse, it is unrealistic to expect they will also be critical at every moment. Are you going to finish every sentence teaching and correcting matching subjects and verbs ... this is correct within standard English, or are you going to say this is correct or incorrect. Is the teacher going to stop every five minutes of the lesson and say, why again are we learning this ... or who speaks like this ... who does this benefit. While these questions should play a role in the classroom, there will be times when the focus is on getting them to be able to write a certain way.

But it isn't about any individual moment of instruction but about developing a stance in students to approach mainstream knowledge or standard English in a critical way.

Teaching though is about the individual moments. Stance is dynamic, not static, so students do not either have it or not have it. Even if students do dynamically interpret (Birch, 1989) grammar during a discussion about it, they are not necessarily going to see it this way when they are practicing it. And I am not so sure I would want that questioning part of their brain at work all the times. Sometimes, I want them to learn what is being taught. Delpit (1995) is clear about the priority. This study deals with urban kids who don't already have the mainstream Discourse they need. Ms. Darcy offers an important warning to critical literacy teachers, 'the transformative experience that teachers are searching for with their students, one thing they need to keep in mind is that they have already gone through their education and they're choosing to create a transformational critical space and their students are not coming with the same awareness about the importance of critical views on society, at least not conscious ones, so you have to be really careful about how you infuse that piece"
(interview, 7/15/03).

But Delpit (1995) is also clear about the importance of embedding this instruction within the larger context of power. And furthermore, are you having enough faith in students ... in particular students of color? Their experiences very well may lead them to see the power and injustice embedded in standard Discourse.

There are a myriad of ways to experience the world from positions considered outside of the mainstream. Students in general and students of color in particular

are not going to see standard English in just one way. Besides, students thinking they need school to be successful is an important key in them doing well and once that is questioned, even with the best of intentions, it can lead to failure (Gates, 2003)]. The achievement ideology is problematic but it can also serve as solid ground for students and teachers to propel them to invest in school. In this research, Ms. Darcy is [though not only] an agent of school, and sometimes she relies on her class being "school as usual" to be productive.

But ..

I know, at the same time "school as usual" is absolutely the problem.

I continue to believe there are more enlightened ways to teach mainstream knowledge. Particularly to teach standard Discourse, I think the new literacy/whole language approach can help make learning more active for students. Ms. Darcy did rely at times on the writing workshop approach and during these times the students were learning grammar as they wrote. It may have helped her too to follow new literacy even further.

I agree the writing workshop propelled the classroom in positive directions but educators also talk about the need to be explicit, especially with struggling learners (Delpit, 1995; Schoenbach et. al. 1999). And even within whole language, while the theoretical position values all dialects, in terms of time,

grades, what you will get credit for, school still values one way of speaking and writing over others.

But if students learn mainstream knowledge in a way that doesn't help them challenge inequities in their lives and society, they themselves may get more opportunities, which is important, but this approach is not as closely connected to overall societal change.

True.

I still think it is possible to teach standard Discourse in a context that interrogates language, recognizes and questions the culture of power, and considers and works toward other more equitable ways a society could operate.

And I think it is possible for students and teachers to work toward that stance but that in daily ways in daily practice there are going to be moments when teaching the mainstream Discourse looks just like it does in a more traditional class, with a teacher who cares about the students and wants them to learn so each of them can go to college. Okay, well, we already touched on this a little when you talked about the new literacy, but specifically, how are you expecting a critical literacy teacher to teach?

That question raises a central issue. A huge problem of school is that students are positioned as consumers, rather than creators of knowledge. Critical

classrooms work against the notion that knowledge is something to be taken in and instead connect knowledge to imagination (Berry, 1998; Freire, 1985). One key is connecting established knowledge to students' knowledge. For example, Freire (1996) broke words down into syllables to teach students to match letters and sounds, and as he did this he asked students to create new words and also to analyze the meanings of words.

You need to keep in mind that there are some main differences between Freire and current K-12 classrooms, especially urban middle and high school ones, in the U.S. He worked with adult students in new schools he created. He based his curriculum and texts on the students' language, which he had time to investigate before teaching. Here, teachers are routinely given 25-100 students' names on the first day they need to start teaching them. I do think there are times when this type of dynamic learning can and should happen. But I also think there are times when teachers need to break down the knowledge they want students to learn into discrete bits and then teach it to the students - which is more or less commodifying knowledge. The typical lesson plan, recognized by national teaching organizations, relies on measurable objectives.

This goes back to one of the questions pondered in the first chapter. The "finished product" for critical literacy teachers includes students becoming Subjects in the world: able to "critique ... issues which surround us as we live, learn, and work - to help understand, comment on and ultimately control the direction of our lives" (Fehring & Green, 2001, p. 10). In order for students to

take on these roles outside of the classroom, they need to take on these roles inside of the classroom. This hinges on them being problem-posers, problem-solvers, and question-askers in their own learning process.

I agree and I see that happening in class discussions, group activities, and even in their own writing projects. But there are other discreet skills students need to learn as part of school and I don't think it is realistic that they will always learn these skills in a dynamic way. Students and teachers are conditioned for a more static type of learning and both groups feel successful when they know what they are supposed to learn. Schools genuinely need measurable assessments. At its base, knowledge is an unfurling of uncertainty. But sometimes classroom lessons are built around certainty. Teachers need to know sometimes exactly who is learning what and this at times involves breaking knowledge down into little measurable bits, teaching it to students, and assessing whether or not they have it.

I do see how this raises the question of equity and vision both for the short term and long term. It is important that critical literacy teachers recognize that students who are often marginalized in society are also often marginalized in school by not benefiting from instruction - and to work against this trend. Too, Lubienski (1990) found that a new alternative more student-centered approach to teaching math did not benefit the working class students as much as middle class students. But as Willinsky (2001) admonishes: "we need to find ways of beginning with the young the very rereading and rewriting of the world that falls to

each generation. This is our privilege and responsibility as teachers who are, after all, working directly on the future" (9). If we want students to access and act in the world differently, we have to create those differences in the classroom.

It goes back again to the notion of "school as usual." Butin (2002) writes that "what is constraining is the departmentalization of knowledge into disciplines, of individuals into age-cohorts, and of time into 50-minute units" (15). Perhaps if these constraints were lifted ... We seem to continue to go around this issue of school as usual. One of the things that seemed to bother you in the study was that Ms. Darcy's classroom was not more of "an oppositional space." Are critical classrooms oppositional spaces? How realistic is that? How optimal?

First and foremost critical literacy classrooms are oppositional spaces that center around "people being able to read and understand [texts] alternatively or even oppositional to the way they were intended to be read" (Alvarado, 1992, pg. 96). This stance is similarly turned on pieces of society, such as how Ms. Darcy asked her students to view and debate the definition of family. It is also applied to school itself and what is taken for granted there as business as usual. "It utilizes pedagogies that invite [learners] to read and write against the grain of unquestioned tradition; a pedagogy that encourages students to read and write their own environment critically, to make connections between how they learn and what they learn, between the overt, the hidden, and the null curriculum of their own experiences" (Segall, 1999, p. 306).

I do see how the classroom is an oppositional space in which students read poems, certain aspects of society, and their own experiences. And I see how components of the classroom could be read similarly, and that Ms. Darcy could have taken this on more in her practice.. But I also think about middle school students and order in the classroom. While I see the value in differentiating this space from school as usual, I also see the value of doing "school as usual" in the day to day practice of a teacher. Tonya, a student in the classroom, said, "I don't really question the rules cause every school I went to the rules are basically the same so it is easy for me just to follow them" (interview, 5/16/2002).

And is that a good thing or a bad thing?

It is both. It is good because there are 25 students in the classroom and they are all entering at very different points. They are reacting to their past school experiences and their lives outside of school. Many may welcome the act of resisting but this may manifest itself as resisting the teacher - whatever her intentions. Critical literacy teachers, like all teachers, are day in, day out at a grueling pace year after year. It helps the teacher to rely on the "school as usual" rules, for students to sit in their desks, not to throw spit wads across the room, and not to talk when the teacher is talking.

But "school as usual" relies on students passively accepting what goes on around them. Even if they have a particular experience critically analyzing a novel or poem, something more fundamental must change to truly have a lasing effect, to

truly create a kid who participates in the world in ways that lead him to stand up and say this is wrong and it could be different. Critical literacy isn't something students and teachers can occasionally do, but something they must breathe.

I agree with that and think it was well put. So, ultimately, what then is or counts as a critical literacy teaching practice? A prospective teacher approached me this summer in the midst of a teacher education course about critical literacy. He stated that he did not agree with the origins of critical literacy - such as the Frankfort school or Marxism, and didn't consider himself part of the political left. But there were pieces of critical literacy that struck a cord with him and he thought could help him engage his students in his aim toward improving their literacy; he wanted his students to engage themselves in their worlds as problem-solvers. He wanted to know if critical literacy was for him. Is critical literacy only something for teachers like Cissy Lack who ultimately risk their jobs for to follow their teaching philosophies? Do you have to be as Ms. Darcy stated, "a battering ram?" Can a teacher be critical if she does not focus lessons on issues of race, class or gender?

I do think it is important to differentiate critical literacy from other approaches, to draw at some point a line in the sand. If any type of connection to students' lives or active learning in the classroom becomes critical literacy, I think it will lose its value and power. Critical literacy is not an add-on to a curriculum, it is not certain ways of teaching that teachers can pick and choose from; it is a stance with a political vision.

But what is the point at which you say, "your stance is critical and yours is not critical enough. Or that part of your practice is critical but that part is not." Who decides and does it matter ?

The local and networks you mentioned above, they need to start with some type of shared understanding about what they are aiming toward, even if there are complexities and differences within beliefs and enactments. I am not sure exactly what the lines are and I don't think it is productive to put energy into differentiating who is critical and who is not. The shades of gray construct works to acknowledge the spaces and possibilities between critical literacy teaching and traditional teaching. Furthermore, the discussion here illuminates the fact that these distinctions aren't clear cut and absolute. I think it is valuable to blur the lines but I still think the lines exist.

Final Words

Future Research

This dissertation has explored questions related to the messiness involved in critical literacy teaching. The implications from this study raise possibilities for future research. As I stated in the introduction, there are few studies detailing critical literacy in action, especially with new teachers. Research aimed at providing more pictures, and more analysis, of teachers engaging their students in critical literacy would better inform the field. In particular, I would like to see more studies investigating disconnects between critical endeavors and realities in public schools that may attempt to thwart these efforts. In addition, while I

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included Ms. Darcy's voice at the very periphery of this research study, the field would benefit from research that allowed teachers' voices, as well as students' voices, to play a larger role in studies. While this research study joins a few others in closely investigating a small number of teachers (Cervetti, 2004; Damico, 2003; Michel, 1999), it is also important for researchers to examine critical literacy practices more broadly.

In addition, there are two areas of inquiry within critical literacy I think need more particular attention. One area is assessment. Research could shed light on a number of important questions: Should students be assessed on their engagement with critical literacy and if so, how? How does critical literacy pedagogy connect to more standard forms of assessment? If critical literacy is successful in a certain classroom, does this learning stay with students as they move on from this classroom - do they carry what they learned to other contexts? I also think research studies should explicitly investigate connections between reading the word and the world. Freire originally infused critical literacy into programs to teach illiterate men to read. We need studies that examine critical literacy in terms of engaging students in discussions about equity or in projects within their communities; we also need studies that investigate critical literacy as a way to improve students' abilities to read and write written texts (defined more traditionally).

Where Does This Leave Me

As I discussed in this dissertation, throughout this research study, my own views changed as I learned to theorize critical literacy in shades of gray. My

developing ideas did not change my commitment to and belief in critical literacy as a powerful and important philosophy of literacy education. I still believe that the practice of critically reading one's own world can lead to transformation and that by illuminating their positions in local and global contexts, examining the origins of societal structures, and investigating their own lives as raced, classed, and gendered (Greene, 1988), students can gain insights into who they are, how they (and society) got to be this way, and what consequences are created by their identities and actions. Ultimately, I think critical literacy can inspire students to take "control over the direction of [their] lives," (Fehring & Green, 2001, p. 10), to make decisions about who they want to be and who they no longer want to be, and ultimately to recreate both themselves and the contexts around them (Giroux, 1988).

Ms. Darcy's teaching practice, though, opened up my eyes to the messiness of critical literacy as it interacts with more traditional conceptions of schooling. Though I hesitate to accept it and still romanticize teachers (and students) standing on desks and hollering, "we are changing things right here, right now," it also made me realize that "school as usual" has a place in classrooms. In my current job, as I help student teachers use critical literacy to engage high school readers, we rely on school rules and integrate traditional notions of teaching and learning into our curriculum and pedagogy. I have come to really value Kohl's (2000) notion that "passion and effort" for critical literacy must be integrated with "learning how to teach well," which sometimes necessitates acting within the system. Sometimes, the realities of "teaching with

one foot inside the system" means accepting that the shades of gray between traditional and critical teaching are good places to be.

APPENDICES

THIRTEEN WAYS OF LOOKING AT A BLACKBIRD
BY WALLACE STEVENS

I
Among twenty snowy mountains,
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the blackbird.

II
I was of three minds,
Like a tree
In which there are three blackbirds.
III

The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds.
It was a small part of the pantomime.

IV
A man and a woman
Are one.
A man and a woman and a blackbird
Are one.

V
I do not know which to prefer,
The beauty of inflections
Or the beauty of innuendoes,
The blackbird whistling
Or just after.

VI
Icicles filled the long window
With barbaric glass.
The shadow of the blackbird
Crossed it, to and fro.
The mood
Traced in the shadow
An indecipherable cause.
VII
O thin men of Haddam,
Why do you imagine golden birds?
Do you not see how the blackbird

Walks around the feet
Of the women about you?

VIII
I know noble accents
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;
But I know, too,
That the blackbird is involved
In what I know.

IX
When the blackbird flew out of sight,
It marked the edge
Of one of many circles.

X
At the sight of blackbirds
Flying in a green light,
Even the bawds of euphony
Would cry out sharply.

XI
He rode over Connecticut
In a glass coach.
Once, a fear pierced him,
In that he mistook
The shadow of his equipage
For blackbirds.

XII
The river is moving.
The blackbird must be flying.
XIII
It was evening all afternoon.
It was snowing
And it was going to snow.
The blackbird sat
In the cedar-limbs.

WHERE I'M FROM
BY GEORGE ELLA LYON

I am from clothespins,
from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride
I am from the dirt under the back porch.
(Black, glistening
it tasted like beets.)
I am from the forsythia bush,
the Dutch elm
whose long gone limbs I remember
as if they were my own.

I am from fudge and eyeglasses,
from Imogene and Alafair.
I'm from the know-it-alls
and the pass-it-ons,

from perk up and pipe down.
I'm from He restoreth my soul
with a cottonball lamp
and ten verses I can say myself.

I'm from Artemus and Billie's Branch,
fried corn and strong coffee.
From the finger my grandfather lost
to the auger
the eye my father shut to keep his sight.
Under my bed was a dress box
spilling old pictures,
a sift of lost faces
to drift beneath my dreams.
I am from those moments –
snapped before I budded –
leaf-fall from the family tree.

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