

"NOT AS MULTICULTURAL AS I'D LIKE": WHITE ENGLISH TEACHERS' USES OF
LITERATURE FOR MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION IN PREDOMINANTLY WHITE CONTEXTS

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ABSTRACT

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Research at the intersection of multicultural education and English education has established that English teachers who engage multicultural literature study in predominantly White contexts face formidable challenges. English teachers not only meet a dearth of multicultural literature curriculum but also struggle to overcome student resistance and norms of Whiteness in classroom discourse. Existing research has contributed to a deeper understanding of the complexity of the issue. However, much existing research assumes that literature is either multicultural or not, that multicultural education means applying pedagogy to content that is already multicultural, and that the myth of the generic, emancipated critical educator is a solution. Drawing on Critical Antiracist Multiculturalism and Critical Whiteness Studies, this dissertation study aims to challenge those assumptions and to identify new possibilities for teaching and research. Informed by critical educational methodology and employing a multi-phased qualitative research design, this dissertation explores the following research questions: What literature, if any, do White English teachers use to enact multicultural literature study in predominantly White contexts? How do White English teachers use literature to enact multicultural literature study in predominantly White contexts? What challenges do they face? And how does Whiteness shape their work?

I explain that White English teachers who participated in the survey reported using literature by White authors, often canonical literature, to address multicultural themes, most often race and racism. Bringing together canonical literature and multicultural themes constructs a curricular borderland characterized by tensions and conflicts. I follow up on those findings with a case study of one White English teacher who employed a critical multicultural approach to *To Kill a Mockingbird* with her White students. Through that case study, I identify a constellation of practices she used to make Whiteness visible and to teach her students about institutional racism. At the same time, I explore how she and her White students participated in Discourses of Whiteness even as they attempted to disrupt them. Bringing together critical multicultural pedagogy and traditional English curriculum constructs a pedagogical borderland. Next, I explore one White English teachers' negotiations of competing discourses informing her notions of "diversity" and "prejudice" thereby complicating her purposes for multicultural literature study. By foregrounding multicultural discourse, a research interview provided a borderland space in which the White English teacher grappled with tensions and conflicts related to her curriculum and pedagogy.

Finally, taken together, data chapters suggest that among the many challenges White English teachers negotiate are Discourses of Whiteness that work simultaneously at individual, institutional, societal, and epistemological levels and complicate "White contexts." Ultimately, this dissertation suggests that grappling with conflicts and tensions is the essence of critical antiracist multicultural literature study in predominantly White contexts. In other words, borderland discourses, which illuminate those conflicts and tensions, offer generative spaces for doing such work.

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CARLIN BORSHEIM-BLACK

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This dissertation is dedicated to my mom, Christeen Borsheim, who has always
believed I could do anything.
And to my husband, Stuart Black, who supports me in everything.

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PROLOGUE

Three years into my career as an English teacher I found myself teaching *House on Mango Street* in a rural and predominantly White teaching context in Michigan. When I started my teaching position, I was disappointed but somewhat unsurprised to find that every single novel in the curriculum was written by a White male. Over time, however, colleagues and I were able to secure funding and approval to adopt Sandra Cisneros's *House on Mango Street* as a new required novel for English 10. We chose *House on Mango Street* because we hoped it would offer our students an opportunity to read a novel written by a woman and by an author of color. Additionally, we liked the book because the beautiful collection of vignettes told a story about Esperanza, a young Mexican American girl growing up in an urban neighborhood in Chicago. Not only did the book explore those good old English-y themes like family, overcoming adversity, and coming of age, it told a story about a Mexican American cultural background that contrasted the rural, White community in which our students were growing up. We valued the book because many of our students had little experience with racial or cultural diversity in school curriculum or in their daily lives.

The book also raised issues of power, discrimination, and inequality. Having grown up in a community much like the one I was teaching in, I knew that it was unlikely that my students had encountered curriculum or experiences that challenged their own prejudices or the perceived normalcy of their White perspectives. So rather than simply celebrating Esperanza's culture or emphasizing universal experiences that Esperanza and my students might have had in common, I hoped to approach the novel in a way that would help my students recognize their own culture and cultural assumptions and to consider their

Whiteness, perhaps for the first time. Although I did not have the language to label it as such at the time (or the ability to pull it off very effectively) I recognize now that I approached teaching *House on Mango Street* from a critical antiracist multicultural perspective.

On one day during our *House on Mango Street* unit, my students and I read a vignette called “Those Who Don’t” in which Esperanza calls attention to consequences of stereotypes:

Those who don't know any better come into our neighborhood scared. They think we're dangerous. They think we will attack them with shiny knives. They are stupid people who are lost and got here by mistake. ... All brown all around, we are safe. But watch us drive into a neighborhood of another color and our knees go shakity-shake and our car windows get rolled up tight and our eyes look straight. Yeah. That is how it goes and goes (Cisneros, 1984, p.).

In preparing the lesson for this day, I had written out some questions about stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. I planned that we would define “stereotype,” give examples of stereotypes we were familiar with, talk about what makes stereotypes harmful, and discuss the connection between stereotypes and prejudice and discrimination. I initiated a whole class discussion by asking, “What is a stereotype?” Students, of course, knew what a stereotype was. That question seems obvious now, even trite. But my students were eager to discuss the issue I had raised, and so they chimed in with a few questions of their own:

“But aren’t some stereotypes true? Like Black people being good at basketball. There are more Black basketball players in the NBA. So isn’t there some truth in some stereotypes?”

“Yeah, and that’s a positive stereotype. Do all stereotypes have to be bad? I don’t get why it is bad to say that Black people are good at basketball.”

“I think sometimes Black people stereotype White people too, like we all raise cows on farms or drive pickups. Can Black people be racist against White people?”

“My mom said that if I go to the University of Michigan, they give minorities more scholarships than White people. Is that true? That is reverse discrimination, isn’t it?”

That lesson left me feeling ill-equipped for navigating complex topics and students’ equally complex questions. Research I had read often located the challenges of multiculturalism in the students, pointing out that White students frequently resist meaningful discussion of multicultural issues, like racism. But I felt the problem should not be placed on my students. I was the teacher; I was the one responsible for shaping discussions and for re-directing us when we got off course. In moments like these, I wanted to take advantage of the “teachable moment” but in many cases I left complex questions unexplored because I did not have any answers myself and I did not know what to do with students’ questions.

That discussion on *House on Mango Street* was not my only attempt at Critical Antiracist Multiculturalism. In fact, multicultural issues came up frequently in discussions of literature with my students, even in our discussion of canonical texts. For example, race and racism came up in the study of literature as we read *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Montana 1948*, and even *Of Mice and Men*. And here we were: a White woman and White students. For the majority of my high school English teaching career, I taught in a predominantly White district; it was rare to have a student of color in my classroom, and if I did, that poor kid was usually the only one. Sometimes students said overtly prejudiced things during

literature discussions but I often shied away from pointing out students' overtly racist remarks because I was uncertain and conflicted about how to handle them publicly. Sometimes students said things that I knew were flat out wrong or over-simplified, but I did not have the pedagogical techniques or depth of knowledge to take our learning deeper. I often attempted to help students understand sophisticated issues like White privilege, oppression, and marginalization but the challenges of my own Whiteness and our collective Whiteness left me with more questions than answers.

And because I struggled, I sometimes questioned whether it was always better to engage multiculturalism. Could I do more harm than good if I did not know what I was doing? What if I miseducated students by oversimplifying complex issues? What suddenly made me the expert on multiculturalism? And what exactly was my goal anyway? What did I hope to achieve and how would I know if I had achieved it? Critical multicultural literature instruction was very different the literature instruction I saw as a student in high school and even college. How would Critical Antiracist Multiculturalism look if it went well? How did Critical Antiracist Multiculturalism fit with other goals of literature instruction, such as learning to analyze and interpret literature? How did it fit with English goals more generally, such as learning to write?

I share my experiences from my own classroom because it helps to characterize the nature of the "problem" at the center of this study: of *White teachers* using *literature* to address multicultural themes, most often *themes of race and racism*, in *predominantly White teaching contexts*. The narrative at the heart of this prologue helps to illustrate that the "problem" evokes several complex and dynamic layers, each of which continues to challenge both researchers and teachers. Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 of this dissertation are

designed to consider and complicate each of the layers on their own and in relationship to one another.

In addition to characterizing the problem, I also share my classroom experiences to emphasize how I have drawn on my own experiences during all phases of this research process. My positionality as an English teacher with experiences teaching in predominantly White contexts and as a White woman who grew up in a rural and predominantly White community are reflected—for better and for worse—in the questions that guide the study, the ways I interacted with the English teachers who participated in this study, my approach to data analysis, and the way I wanted to tell the story of the findings, to name a few. As such, I attempt to make interests various and sometimes conflicting interests and perspectives explicit throughout this dissertation.

In the next chapter, I review recent research related to secondary literature curriculum, multicultural literature pedagogy, and White teachers' engagement with multiculturalism. I also describe the theoretical framework at the foundation of this dissertation study, which is based on Critical Antiracist Multiculturalism and Critical Whiteness Studies. In Chapter 2, I discuss methodological assumptions of this project as an example of critical educational research, introduce the English teacher participants, and describe methods of data collection and analysis. Chapter 3, the first data chapter, complicates familiar assumptions about "multicultural literature" curriculum. Chapter 4 shifts the focus to pedagogy as I present a case study of one White English teacher's critical multicultural approach to a canonical novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, in a predominantly White teaching context. And Chapter 5 explores the teacher, illustrating how competing discourses about diversity and prejudice influence and sometimes complicate purposes of

multicultural literature study in predominantly White contexts. Finally, in Chapter 6, I look across all three data chapters to complicate familiar notions about “White contexts.” In that chapter, I also review the claims, limitations, and implications of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 1: IT'S COMPLICATED: WHITE ENGLISH TEACHERS, CANONICAL LITERATURE, MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION, AND WHITE CONTEXTS

In this chapter, I review research related to secondary literature curriculum, the use of literature for multicultural education, and White teachers' uses of literature for multicultural education in predominantly White contexts. Following the review of existing research I articulate the research questions that guided this study. Finally, I outline a theoretical framework based on Critical Antiracist Multiculturalism and Critical Whiteness Studies.

Literature Review

Secondary Literature Curriculum

Early phases of the multicultural education movement focused on curriculum reform (Banks, 2004). In English education, the selection of course texts, namely novels and book-length works, was—and continues to be—of central concern. An emphasis on literature within multicultural education stems from a belief in the power of narrative to serve as both “a mirror and a window” (Glazier & Seo, 2005) for students to learn about themselves and others, to speak to and even transform an individual's way of thinking about him/herself and the world, to offer opportunities for students to develop personal, social, and political understanding (Goebel, 1995a; McGinley et al., 1997; Saha, 2000; Spears-Bunton, 1998).

As such, much research at the intersection of English education and multicultural education has focused on explicit curriculum, namely the inclusion or exclusion of multicultural literature. Although the definition of the term “multicultural literature” continues to be the topic of much debate within the field (Cai, 1998), it is generally defined

in terms of authorship. Although some scholars define multicultural literature as literature written by authors of color (Russell, 2005), other scholars take a more inclusive view to define multicultural literature as literature written by authors from historically marginalized population (Bishop, 1997; Dressel, 2005; Jordan & Purves, 1993; Norton, 2003). In contrast, it is generally agreed that literature written by White authors, including canonical literature, is considered non-multicultural. For this study, I define multicultural literature as literature written by authors of color for reasons I will explain in greater depth in the theoretical framework.

For decades, research has documented the dearth of multicultural literature, regardless of how it is defined, in typical secondary literature curriculum (Applebee's, 1993; Fang, Fu & Lamme, 1999; Stallworth, Gibbons & Fauber, 2006; Stotsky, 2010; Yokota, 1993). The most well-known and most comprehensive study was conducted by Applebee (1993). One of Applebee's (1993) goals was to explore the extent to which book-length works reflected a "White, male, Anglo-Saxon tradition." Although he found that literature curriculum had changed slightly since Anderson's study in 1964, he also found that curricular changes did not reflect the "multicultural heritage of the United States." Applebee (1993) found that of the top twenty-seven most frequently taught titles, none were written by people of color. Other research finds multicultural literature to be particularly scarce in rural and culturally homogeneous teaching contexts (Willis & Palmer, 1998).

Stallworth et al. (2006) conducted a smaller-scale survey of English teachers in Alabama. Although they too found that literature curriculum included few multicultural titles, they also found a shift in terms of what is meant by "classics" from ancient writers

like Plato and Aristotle to more modern British and American writers. For example, traditional “classics” like *Beowulf* and *The Iliad* had been replaced with American standards such as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Great Gatsby* and *The Scarlet Letter*. Recently, Stotsky (2010) documented change in literature curriculum, noting that the frequency with which works on the top ten lists have declined, suggesting that literature curriculum is becoming less standard and more “idiosyncratic.”

Each of these studies documented change of some sort, suggesting that the canon is not impervious to evolution. What is most striking about the finding is that although specific titles have changed, there has been remarkable stability in terms of the dominance of White authors. For example, looking across the top ten lists from the three studies (see Table 1), one can see that the most frequently taught book-length works include no authors of color. Although titles written by authors of color have increased in popularity, research has established that required secondary literature curriculum includes few book-length works by authors of color (Anderson, 1964; Applebee, 1993; Stallworth, et al., 2006; Stoski, 2010).

Categorizing literature as multicultural or not has been helpful for documenting the need to include more literature by authors of color in secondary literature curriculum. However, the categorization of literature as multicultural or not has neglected the fact that canonical literature—including many of the most popular titles taught in English classrooms—make themes of race and racism part of the curriculum, whether English teachers choose to address them or not. For example, *To Kill a Mockingbird* raises issues of race and racism and reinforces a familiar narrative about White saviors and Black victims. Who would Atticus Finch be without Tom Robinson? Atticus Finch is defined in contrast to

Tom. *To Kill a Mockingbird* is not typically considered “multicultural literature” but it certainly raises multicultural themes regarding Whiteness, White privilege, White supremacy, racism, and institutional racism. Ultimately, *not* considering race and racism in canonical literature maintains invisibility and seeming naturalness of the canon.

Table 1

Most Frequently Taught Book-length Texts I

Applebee (1993)	Stallworth et.al. (2006)	Stotsky (2010)
<i>Romeo & Juliet</i> (1597) by William Shakespeare <i>Macbeth</i> (1623) by William Shakespeare <i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> (1884) by Mark Twain <i>Julius Caesar</i> (1623) by William Shakespeare <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> (1960) by Harper Lee <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> (1850) by Nathaniel Hawthorne <i>Of Mice and Men</i> (1937) by John Steinbeck <i>Hamlet</i> (1603) by William Shakespeare <i>The Great Gatsby</i> (1925) by F. Scott Fitzgerald <i>Lord of the Flies</i> (1954) by William Golding	<i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> (1960) by Harper Lee <i>The Great Gatsby</i> (1925) by F. Scott Fitzgerald <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> (1850) by Nathaniel Hawthorne <i>Romeo & Juliet</i> (1597) by William Shakespeare <i>Julius Caesar</i> (1623) by William Shakespeare <i>The Crucible</i> (1953) by Arthur Miller <i>Macbeth</i> (1623) by William Shakespeare <i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> (1884) by Mark Twain <i>Animal Farm</i> (1945) by George Orwell <i>A Separate Peace</i> (1953) by John Knowles	<i>Romeo & Juliet</i> (1597) by William Shakespeare <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> (1960) by Harper Lee <i>The Crucible</i> (1953) by Arthur Miller <i>Julius Caesar</i> (1623) by William Shakespeare <i>Of Mice and Men</i> (1937) by John Steinbeck <i>Night</i> (1960) by Elie Wiesel <i>The Great Gatsby</i> (1925) by F. Scott Fitzgerald <i>Lord of the Flies</i> (1954) by William Golding <i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> (1884) by Mark Twain <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> (1850) by Nathaniel Hawthorne

From this perspective, it is possible to read a canonical text from a multicultural perspective or a multicultural text from a canonical perspective. Taking this view of literature has presented a challenge in this dissertation in terms of language. On one hand, I use the terms “multicultural literature” and “canonical literature” to utilize language familiar to the field. On the other hand, by continuing to use those terms I rely on a

dichotomy that I ultimately strive to deconstruct. I have tried to make these kinds of tensions around language transparent throughout this dissertation.

Although I continue to rely on term “multicultural literature” to refer to literature written by authors of color, I have tried to purposefully use the phrase “use of literature for multicultural education” rather than “multicultural literature instruction” or “multicultural literature pedagogy” where possible to highlight the possibility that one could read any kind of literature from a multicultural perspective. The use of literature for multicultural education is the topic of the next section.

Literature and Multicultural Education

As my anecdote in the prologue illustrated, selecting multicultural literature is just one dimension of the larger issue of White teachers using literature for multicultural education in predominantly White contexts. Another dimension is pedagogy, which includes both pedagogical orientation toward literature instruction and specific practices. In terms of pedagogical orientation, recent research in the field of English education has emphasized the limitations of purely reader response approaches to using literature for multicultural education (e.g., Applebee, 1993; Appleman, 2000; Boyd, 2002; Dressel, 2005; Hines, 1997; Rabinowitz & Smith, 1998; Rogers et al., 1997). Although making personal connections may be useful for scaffolding comprehension, engagement, and appreciation of multicultural texts, approaches that focus exclusively on personal connections without also engaging students in a critical consideration of the text may do more harm than good if they reinforce negative stereotypes or enable students to gloss over issues of power and oppression (Boyd, 2002; Dressel, 2005). For example, if White students are asked to identify with Tom Robinson, from *To Kill a Mockingbird*, for example, by journaling about

times when they felt unjustly accused, this approach risks giving students the impression that they understand oppression. It also ultimately reinforces a surface-level understanding of racism. As a result, the field has called for explicitly critical approaches to using literature for multicultural education (Beach et al, 2008; Carey-Webb, 2001; Hines, 1997; Juzwik, 2010; Thein, 2010).

The goals of critical approaches with students in predominantly White contexts are often framed in terms of transformation: to challenge students' assumptions, to change their beliefs, to disrupt that which is taken for granted. Research has shown, however, that such transformations are notoriously difficult to achieve (e.g., Beach et al., 2008; McIntyre, 1997; Sleeter, 2006, 2011). In fact, much of the research suggests that transformation and lasting change are rarely accomplished within a semester-long course. Many multiculturalists point out that developing a critical consciousness, like a lot of learning, is a life-long endeavor; that there are no quick fixes or rote approaches for reaching multicultural goals.

Orientation or "approach" constitutes just one dimension of overall pedagogy. Research identifying specific practices is also important for supporting English teachers who aspire to put critical approaches into practice. Researchers have identified several what I am calling "promising practices" for using literature for multicultural education with White students. For example, it is generally agreed that community building is important before engaging in dialogue about multicultural themes (hooks, 1994; Tatum, 1997). It is helpful to offer students specific language for talking about controversial or sophisticated issues (Kailin, 2002). Teachers can circumvent problematic lines of discussion by framing issues for students effectively (Anagnostopoulos, 2011), for example by framing discussion

of racism as an institutional issue and not an interpersonal one. When teachers use literature for multicultural education in predominantly White contexts, an exploration of students' cultural assumptions, including an examination of Whiteness and White privilege, is an important part of that work (McIntyre, 1997; Milner, 2005; Sleeter, 1993, 1995a, 1995b). More than anything, these examples highlight the importance of spending ample time, building trust, sustaining attention, and honoring the complexity of the work (Florio-Ruane, 2001).

These promising practices constitute important progress for the field. However, because researchers have generally categorized literature as multicultural or not, researchers have generally studied the use of literature for multiculturalism based on the assumption that it is something applied to literature that is already multicultural. Very little attention has been paid to whether or how English teachers address multicultural themes like race and racism as they come up in canonical literature. Studying English teachers' treatment (or not) of multicultural themes raised by canonical novels is important because non-critical approaches to canonical novels may also miseducate students in the same ways that non-critical approaches to multicultural novels do. Do White English teachers use canonical literature to address multicultural themes and, if so, how? What practices might be conducive to addressing multicultural themes in canonical literature?

White Teachers Engaging Multiculturalism

Multicultural education is often a site of struggle, especially in predominantly White contexts. There is no shortage of research focused on the complexities of engaging in such work with White students. Research has established that White students often subvert, resist, and/or experience dissonance when literature challenges taken-for-granted values

and assumptions (e.g., Apol et al., 2003; Asher, 2007; Beach et al, 2008; Gordon, 2005; Haviland, 2008; Marx & Pennington, 2008; McFalls & Cobb-Roberts, 2001; McIntyre, 1997; Sleeter, 2006, 2011).

And multicultural education can be difficult for teachers too. Teachers themselves have described their struggles. They have reported challenges related to their own limited cultural identity or race consciousness (Cochran-Smith, 2000, McIntyre, 1997; Ahlquist, 1991; Cochran-Smith, 1991, 1995; Ellsworth, 1989; Paley, 1996, 2000; Sleeter, 1994; 1995a; Weiler, 1988), as well as the difficulty of overcoming their own Whiteness. In fact, Lewis, Ketter & Fabos (2001) found that their book club, comprised of White English teachers and teacher educators, frequently sustained norms of Whiteness despite their expressed goal to disrupt them.

For the teacher, employing a critical approach to literature instruction requires more than learning a few principles of practice. Burroughs (1999) notes that teachers must not only select multicultural literature, they must also change their notions of what counts as a text and change how they structure classroom talk and texts. Dong (2005) argues that “teachers must increase their own cultural knowledge and develop their sensitivity and teaching skills to promote cross-cultural understanding and use multicultural literature to validate expressions of cultural knowledge, perspectives and differences” (p. 367). Critical multicultural literature instruction involves White English teachers transforming their own attitudes and orientations, as well as their methods of exploring the issues of culture, race, and diverse voices in literature (Banks, 1993; Spears-Bunton, 1998). In essence, a critical approach requires a particular way of thinking, of reading against texts, of critiquing the status quo.

Despite the complexity of the work, research has often considered White teachers in one dimensional terms. Alsup (2006) argues that although research has often focused on how teachers can encourage critical and multicultural learning in their future students, it rarely focuses on how to develop critical and multicultural learning in teachers themselves. The focus on students rather than teachers tends to assume that “the teacher is already self-actualized, already emotionally and affectively prepared ... with few personal challenges left to face” (Alsup, 2006, p. xv). Ellsworth (1989) points out that White teachers are often depicted in terms of what she calls “the generic critical pedagogue,” who is already enlightened, already critical, and an agent of change who is struggling against her students, obstacles to change. These portrayals of teachers, many of which have focused on promising examples of practice, have been important for documenting what is possible in critical multicultural education. However, one dimensional portraits do not reflect the complexities with which many teachers struggle in their particular contexts. What Discourses do White English teachers bring to their use of literature for multicultural education in predominantly White contexts? What challenges do they face? How does Whiteness shape their work?

Across these bodies of research—secondary literature curriculum, multicultural literature study, and White teachers engaging multiculturalism—researchers have dealt with complexity of each layer of the “problem” of White English teachers using literature to address themes of race and racism in predominantly White contexts separately, acknowledging that each layer is already complex. This study aims to not only complicate each separate layer by challenging common assumptions, but also to consider them in relationship with one another.

To build on and extend work in secondary literature curriculum, multicultural literature pedagogy, and White teachers engaging multicultural literature study in White contexts, this study explores the following research questions:

1. What literature, if any, do White English teachers use to enact multicultural literature study in predominantly White contexts?
2. How, if at all, do White English teachers use literature to enact multicultural literature study in predominantly White contexts?
3. What challenges do White English teachers face as they enact multicultural literature study in predominantly White contexts?
4. How does Whiteness shape White English teachers' multicultural literature study in predominantly White contexts?

Theoretical Framework

Despite the focus on diversity, our desires for inclusion, many professors still teach in classrooms that are predominantly White. Often a spirit of tokenism prevails in those settings. This is why it is so crucial that "Whiteness" be studied, understood, discussed--so that everyone learns that affirmation of multiculturalism, and an unbiased inclusive perspective, can and should be present whether or not people of color are present. Transforming these classrooms is as great a challenge as learning how to teach well in the setting of diversity" (hooks, 1994, p. 43).

Critical Antiracist Multicultural Education

Multicultural education grew out of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and protests against racism in education. Multicultural education was originally conceived to develop curriculum and practices that not only reflected diverse racial experiences but also

challenged the Whiteness at the center of much curriculum (Banks, 2004). Over time, multicultural education evolved to be more inclusive as women, people with disabilities, and gay rights advocates added their voices to the conversation (Banks, 2004). In response, the field has worked to address intersectionality, the relationships between multiple types of difference, for a broader, more complex view of diversity (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

In the field of multicultural education, increased inclusivity has been viewed as both a strength and a weakness. On one hand, a more inclusive notion of multicultural education acknowledges the many ways individuals are marginalized by dominant culture in terms of race, class, gender, language, sexual orientation, or religion, for example. Looking across all types of difference emphasizes what marginalized people have in common and affords opportunities to unite forces for social justice education. On the other hand, critics argue that multicultural education can become too inclusive. For example, critical antiracist multiculturalists, who are concerned with race and racism, point out that the move toward inclusivity has pushed race and racism from the center and oversimplified understanding of structural racism (Banks, 1996; Grant, 1995; Nieto, 1996; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). Nieto (1996) explains: “it is easier for some educators to embrace a very inclusive and comprehensive framework of multicultural education [because] they have a hard time facing racism” (p. 7). Critical antiracist multiculturalists argue that understanding and interrupting racism requires a theory that speaks directly to experiences and concerns of people of color. As such, critical antiracist multiculturalists make race and racism their central concern (Banks, 1996; May, 1999; McIntyre, 1997; Nieto, 1996). Nieto (2010) explains, “I define multicultural education as embedded in a sociopolitical context and as antiracist and basic education for all students that permeates all areas of schooling, and

that is characterized by a commitment to social justice and critical approaches to learning” (p. 26). In addition to addressing the needs of students of color, critical antiracist multiculturalism makes antiracism and antidiscrimination an explicit part of the [multicultural] curriculum and has called for more meaningful multicultural education of majority, as well as minority students (May, 1999).

Critics of inclusive iterations of multicultural education have pointed out consequences in the classroom as well. For example, multicultural education has often been interpreted as emphasizing universal experiences across difference. This “universalist” interpretation of multicultural education has been widely criticized for trivializing cultural diversity and limiting students’ understanding of prejudice and oppression with benign celebrations of ethnic customs and foods, for example. As a result, multicultural scholars have advocated for more “critical” multicultural education (Banks, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2004; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; May, 1998; Nieto, 2010; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). Specifically, critical antiracist multiculturalism brings principles of critical pedagogy to multicultural education with an explicit focus on race and racism. Like critical pedagogy, critical antiracist multiculturalism:

- honors voices and experiences of people of color;
- teaches through collaboration and dialogue;
- encourages consideration of multiple perspectives;
- fosters self-reflexivity and consciousness of self as a racial being;
- examines power and oppression;
- examines discrimination as systemic, rather than simply interpersonal,
- critiques traditions of schooling; and

- engages students in social action (Au, 2009; May, 1998; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995).

A critical antiracist multicultural approach teaches students to not only value all people and appreciate difference, but also to understand privilege and oppression. This study operates on the assumption that multicultural education is imperative for preparing citizens for socially just participation in a diverse society. (Au, 2009; Banks, 2004; May, 1998; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995).

One of the central goals of critical antiracist multiculturalism in predominantly White contexts is to disrupt Whiteness. It may take the form of teaching students about their Whiteness and helping them to develop an awareness of their own racial identities, White privilege, and White supremacy (Banks, 2004; Kalantzis & Cope, 1999; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; McIntyre, 1997). Kalin (2002) advocates a two-pronged approach that addresses racism on both the individual and institutional levels. Kalin (2002) offers a curricular framework that includes considering one's own "White racial autobiography," naming White privilege, defining "race" and examining the language of race, learning about the antiracist tradition, and examining historical roots of institutionalized racism. At the same time, critical antiracist multiculturalism attempts to acknowledge the diversity of White people by avoiding the tendency to essentialize, suggesting that Whiteness is monolithic or that all White people experience Whiteness in the same way.

Within English, critical antiracist multiculturalism often revolves around the teaching of literature, which has the potential to raise multicultural themes or bring diverse perspectives to the table through narrative. From a critical antiracist multicultural perspective, using literature for multicultural education should go beyond a celebration of

difference (i.e., beyond reader response only) to include, among other ways of reading, a critical reading of a text as political artifacts. Engagement with tensions in literature should encourage students to reflect on their own racial and cultural background and question their assumptions. A critical antiracist multicultural reading might mean “reading against” a text, to use a text to read the world, to use the text to illuminate the ways oppression works institutionally, and the ways Whiteness is complicit in that oppression.

Aligned with critical antiracist multiculturalism, this study focuses explicitly on race and racism. The decision to focus on race and racism specifically, rather than difference more inclusively, not only afforded me the opportunity to zero my attention in on one issue and to understand that issue in depth but also reflected my commitment to prioritizing antiracism in education. At the same time, however, it also meant that I ignored other aspects of difference. My decision to focus on race and racism should not be interpreted as a conflation of multicultural education with a consideration of race or as a dismissal of the importance of other aspects of difference within a larger multicultural agenda. To be clear, I view the study of race and racism as one topic under the umbrella of multicultural education.

In most cases, I use the phrase “critical antiracist multiculturalism” to reflect my orientation to multicultural education. At the same time, to avoid verbosity and repetition, I have sometimes also used shorter phrases as shorthand. From this point on, when I use the term “multicultural education” or “critical multiculturalism,” I use it as a more concise synonym for “critical antiracist multiculturalism” unless I indicate otherwise.

A Focus on White Contexts

The case can be made that multicultural education especially benefits majority-group students, who may develop an unrealistic and overblown view of their place in the world because of the unbalanced and incomplete education they have received in the school curriculum in particular and the larger society in general. That is, although the schooling of bicultural students often has failed to include their histories, discourses, and cultures, majority-group students also have been miseducated to the extent that they have been exposed to only majority discourses (Nieto, 2010, p. 25).

The scholarship that looks into the mind, imagination, and behavior of slaves is valuable. But equally valuable is a serious intellectual effort to see what racial ideology does to the mind, imagination, and behavior of masters (Morrison, 1992, p. 12).

Multicultural education is often framed in terms of making curriculum and pedagogy relevant and responsive to students from racially, culturally, and linguistically marginalized backgrounds (Banks, 2004; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 1999). From this perspective, multicultural education is meant to empower underrepresented students, counter negative stereotypes, and improve achievement. This dimension of multicultural education is imperative. This study, however, operates on the premise that multicultural education could be and should be *also* framed in terms of including representations and experiences from a variety of racial, cultural, and ethnic perspectives with students who might be considered “mainstream” or “status quo,” students from culturally homogenous communities with few opportunities for encountering difference.

Critical multicultural education in predominantly White or culturally dominant contexts is important for several reasons. First, due to the fact that schools remain segregated (Kozol, 2006; Orfield & Gordon, 2001) and that the teaching force is largely White (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005), many classrooms could be characterized as being predominantly White. In these contexts, race and culture are often considered relevant only to “others.” It is not surprising that meaningful multicultural education is often sparse in such contexts (Rogers & Soter, 1997).

Second, due to a common perception of Whiteness as invisible, neutral and natural, many educators do not recognize the relevance of multiculturalism in predominantly White contexts (Kalantzis & Cope, 1999). Whiteness often remains most invisible to those who are themselves White. It is in these contexts that multicultural education has the potential to offer students opportunities for considering multiple perspectives, for questioning cultural assumptions, for learning about a variety of cultures and groups, and for considering their own racial and cultural backgrounds. I likewise assume that multicultural education is important in predominantly White because its potential to make Whiteness visible.

Third, highlighting Whiteness, White privilege and White supremacy with White teachers and White students is imperative because research shows that students’ awareness of their own racial background is related to their understanding of racial difference (Tatum, 1992). In other words, as White people develop their own White racial identities, they become more able and likely to understand race and racism in more complex terms. Not being able to conceptualize the complexities of Whiteness as a race and larger system of oppression perpetuates its invisibility. Opting not to talk about race, and

especially Whiteness, is a reflection of White privilege. In these ways, a focus on multicultural education in predominantly White contexts reflects an antiracist agenda.

Critics may question, rightfully, my explicit focus on White contexts in this study. Leonardo (2002) warns that studies that focus on Whiteness risk self-indulgence that co-opts conversations about race, racism and injustice to focus, once again, on the issues relevant to White people. At the same time, the field of Critical Whiteness Studies aims to contribute to an antiracist agenda by tracing the history and present-day legacy of Whiteness as it operates systemically to privilege White people at the expense of people of color. A central tenet of Critical Whiteness Studies hinges on the fact that Whiteness maintains power, in part, through maintaining invisibility. Cultural models of Whiteness persist precisely because people, namely White people, are often unaware of them. Critical Whiteness scholars therefore work to deconstruct Whiteness as a category, de-legitimize its centrality, neutrality, and seeming “naturalness,” and reveal the ways it operates as an ideology tied to material privilege and social status.

Because Whiteness often remains invisible, especially to those who are White, Critical Whiteness scholars remain skeptical of the possibility for White researchers to study Whiteness without being complicit in the reproduction of Whiteness in the process. Some critics argue that researchers of color might be in a better position to study Whiteness. However, hooks (1994) and others argue that racism is a White problem, that White people need to teach themselves and engage in their own antiracist projects without relying on people of color to do that work for them (Allen, 2004; McIntosh, 1989; Sleeter, 1993; West, 1994).

It is certain that for a White woman—such as me—to take up issues of race and racism with an explicit focus on Whiteness runs the risk of turning the focus, once again, on an already privileged group whose members are already the subjects of the majority of academic research. Therefore, I have looked to models of other White women who have done “White on White” (McIntyre, 1997) research to explore my positionality as a White woman and researcher (e.g., Haviland, 2008; Lewis, 2004; McIntyre, 1997).

Whiteness

The definition of “Whiteness” is the topic of much debate in the field of Critical Whiteness Studies (Rasmussen, Klinenberg, Nexica & Wray, 2001). Here I outline three ways of looking at Whiteness. First, Whiteness is a socially-constructed racial category that has been used to justify (and legally defend) social inequality based on race. Critical Whiteness scholars who study Whiteness from this perspective assert that Whiteness is not objective or biological but arbitrary and malleable. Historians illustrate how what it means to be White has changed over time (e.g., Ignatiev, 1995; Roedigger, 1999). Those who study Whiteness from a more global perspective point out that what it means to be White is also geographically-specific.

Second, Whiteness operates materially as “White privilege,” a system of unearned advantages and rewards from which White people benefit (Frankenburg, 1994; Lipsitz, 2006; McIntosh, 1989). Harris (1993) argues that Whiteness is a form of property protected by American laws regarding property rights and ownership. Critical Whiteness scholars also acknowledge, however, that Whiteness is not monolithic; not all White people experience their Whiteness as privilege to the same degree. “Intersectionality” helps to

account for the ways Whiteness intersects with other aspects of difference (Crenshaw, 1989).

Although I understand Whiteness to operate in the ways outlined above, in this study, I focus on a third way of thinking about Whiteness, which is that Whiteness operates discursively as an ideology, a cultural norm. For example, to use Delgado & Stefancic's (2001) example, "Whiteness is normative ... It sets the standard. Other groups, such as Indians, Latinos, Asian Americans, and African Americans are described as *nonwhite*. That is, they are defined in terms of or in opposition to whiteness—that which they are not" (p. 76). White discourses are dominant and maintained, in part, through invisibility and silence.

Discourses of Whiteness

Because Whiteness is constructed discursively, examining discourse offers a possibility for studying constructions of Whiteness. To do so, I draw on Gee's (2005) capital "D" Discourse as "ways of combining and integrating language, actions, interactions, ways of thinking, believing, valuing, and using various symbols, tools, and objects to enact a particular sort of socially recognizable identity" (p. 21). Gee's (2005, 2008) notion of Discourse is particularly useful to this study because it encompasses not only the words people say, but also values, beliefs, and cultural models, for example, included in ways of being and doing White.

In addition to Gee's (2005, 2008) "Discourse" I use the term "Discourses of Whiteness" to emphasize that there is more than one White Discourse. I adapt Scheurich & Young's (1997) framework of levels of racism—individual, institutional, societal, and epistemological—to explore how Discourses of Whiteness work at different levels.

Individual. Individual racism includes examples of overt and covert acts of prejudice that are racially based (Scheurich & Young, 1997, p. 5). At the individual level, the focus is on interpersonal prejudice and discrimination. In the past, research focused on this level has explored the ways White students and White teachers participate in Discourses of Whiteness in classroom interactions. McIntyre's (1997) characterized classroom interactions in White educational contexts as "White talk" that insulates White people from examining their/our own individual and collective roles in perpetuating racism (p. 31). Haviland (2008) extended McIntyre's notion of White talk to identify specific discourse moves that are characteristic of White Educational Discourse (WED), including avoiding words, making false starts, engaging in safe self reflection, asserting ignorance and uncertainty, letting each other off the hook, citing authority, silence, changing the topic, affirming sameness, joking, agreeing and supporting, praising and encouraging, teacher and student caring, socializing and sharing personal info, emphasizing a contributions approach to multiculturalism, and focusing on barriers to multicultural education. Haviland (2008) notes that Whiteness can be found not only in what is said but more often in what is left unsaid. Therefore, in this study I looked not only for features of White Educational Discourse but also for silences and denials, including colorblindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2003) in statements like "I don't see race," for example.

Institutional. Institutional racism exists "when institutions or organizations, including educational ones, have standard operating procedures (intended or unintended) that hurt members of one or more races in relation to members of the dominant race. It also exists when institutional or organizational cultures, rules, or symbols have the same biasing effect" (Scheurich & Young, 1997, p. 5). Existing work at this level as explored how

curriculum (both hidden and explicit) and policies continue to privilege White students at the expense of students of color.

Societal. Societal racism exists “when prevailing cultural assumptions, norms, concepts, habits, and expectations favor one race over one or more other races” (Scheurich & Young, 1997, p. 6).

Epistemological. Epistemological racism exists because “current research epistemologies – positivism to postmodernisms/poststructuralisms – arise out of the social history and culture of the dominant race and logically reflect and reinforce that social history and that racial group (while excluding the epistemologies of other races/cultures) with negative results for people of color in general and scholars of color in particular” (Scheurich & Young, 1997, p. 8).

Table 2

Levels of Discourses of Whiteness

Scheurich & Young’s (1997) Framework	Adaptation for Levels of Discourses of Whiteness
Individual	Refers to overt and covert acts of prejudice that are racially based. Also includes the ways individuals recognize and/or talk about themselves as racialized beings (or not).
Institutional	Refers to ways explicit or hidden curricula, classroom culture, and school culture reflect the values, norms, and practices of a dominant Discourse of Whiteness.
Societal	Refers to the classroom’s situation within the community and the ways the assumptions, norms, concepts, habits, values and expectations of that community reflect a dominant Discourse of Whiteness.
Epistemological	Refers to ways of “saying, doing, and being” in English education that reflect a dominant Discourse of Whiteness. Also refers to ways of “saying, doing, and being” in school that reflect a dominant Discourse of Whiteness.

Adapting Scheurich & Young's (1997) framework for the four levels of racism helped to account for the multiple Discourses of Whiteness. I conceptualized these levels overlapping, interacting, and contradicting. Such categorization can reveal the myriad ways Whiteness is not only reflected individual teachers' decisions, or individual interactions in classrooms, but also embedded in the very norms, values, and systems on which English education was built (and on which it continues to operate). I focus on relationships between these levels in Chapter 6.

Identities

In addition to informing the study of Whiteness, Gee's (2008) notion of Discourse also informed an exploration of identity in this study. According to Gee (2008), participation in different Discourses constitutes different identities. Individuals belong to many different social groups and people learn to be "people like us," by participating in those groups, acquiring the Discourse(s) of that group:

Discourses are ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing, that are accepted as instantiations of particular identities (or "types of people") by specific groups, whether families of a certain sort, lawyers of a certain sort, bikers of a certain sort, business people of a certain sort, church members of a certain sort, African-Americans of a certain sort, women or men of a certain sort, and so on and so forth through a very long list. Discourses are ways of being "people like us." They are "ways of being in the world"; they are "forms of life; they are socially situated identities. They are, thus, always and everywhere social and products of certain histories (Gee, 2008, p. 3).

Identities reflect different perspectives, different roles, and different ways of seeing the world. This definition of identity contrasts a more psychological understanding of “identity” as singular, fixed, or developmental. For example, I am not only a doctoral candidate, I am a researcher, a former secondary English teacher, a multicultural educator, a wife, a mother, a White woman, a Midwesterner, and a sometimes yogi. I am not simply one or the other; I am all of them together. I participate in each of these Discourses.

Individuals negotiate their different identities, foregrounding and backgrounding different aspects of their identities based on the circumstances of social situations. As individuals move from one social situation to the next, they make decisions about which Discourses on which to draw and which social and cultural memberships to foreground. For example, I have negotiated different aspects of my identity during this research process. During interviews with English teachers, I found myself downplaying my position as a researcher, preferring to foreground my extensive classroom experience, in order to identify with participants, make them feel comfortable, and gain their respect as a “real English teacher,” rather than an out-of-touch researcher. At those times, I drew on teacher Discourses and English education Discourses to identify myself as “one of us.” During meetings with my committee, however, I have foregrounded my identity as a researcher, hoping to gain credibility as an educational researcher and a scholar among my peers. At those times, I drew on academic Discourses and researcher Discourses to identify myself as “one of us.”

Gee (2005, 2008) uses “Discourses” and “socially situated identities” synonymously, emphasizing that the language we use does not simply reflect our identity; rather, our sense of ourselves is constructed through Discourse. Because people construct who and

what they are via, language-in-use, or Discourse, critical discourse analysis (Gee, 2005) offers a possibility for exploring situated identities.

Discourses—and therefore identities—are *ideological*. And because they are also multiple, ideologies can compete with one another, resulting in conflicting beliefs, desires, fears, anxieties and intentions. Acknowledging the conflicts, tensions, and contradictions between different identities helps me understand my mixed feelings when entering graduate school required me to foreground my identity as an academic and background my identity as a teacher, for example. It also helps my understand why my husband (an attorney) thinks it is funny to use words like “Discourse” and “pedagogy” out of context and in the context of our daily lives; he is calling attention to the tension between my different identities.

Borderland Discourses

Gee (2008) uses the term “borderland discourse” to describe the “space between” different, competing Discourses. Borderland discourses are created by participants to negotiate the conflicts and tensions that can arise from affiliation with different Discourses. Gee (2008) offers an example of a Puerto Rican girl from an inner-city junior high school navigating the spaces between her home Discourse and the academic Discourse of school. This girl and her classmates co-created a borderland Discourse defined, in part, by the conflicts and oppositions between the Discourses in which they participated. Similarly, Alsop (2006) draws on Gee’s (2005) notion of borderland discourse to describe a space where teacher candidates grappled with tensions and conflicts between personal and professional identities as they figured out what it meant to be a teacher.

Participating in borderland discourses does not reflect crossing over the border from one Discourse to another. Nor does it reflect abandoning one Discourse for another. Rather, borderland discourses constitute something new created out of negotiating the conflicts, tensions, and contradictions between ideologies of different Discourses. The new, in-between space, which is often characterized by tension, contradiction, and conflict, has the potential to be generative (Alsup, 2006). The borderland discourse can help individuals navigate the conflict, tension, and contradiction. In this study, I use “borderland discourse” to refer to the in-between space where individuals grapple with conflicts and tensions of competing Discourses related to diversity, prejudice, and the purposes of multicultural literature study in predominantly White contexts.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

This dissertation study is an example of critical educational research. This chapter explains how critical theory informs my orientation toward knowledge, purposes of research, and research methods. I go on to describe the English teachers who graciously participated in various phases of this study and the contexts in which they taught. Next, I go on to describe my research design, which included three phases of data generation, including survey, interviews, and literature unit studies. Finally, I describe my data analysis process. Consistent with the critical approach taken, I weave personal reflection throughout the chapter to make visible the ways my positionality shaped all aspects of this research project.

Research Orientation

Because different people mean different things when they use the word “critical,” I align my study with a postmodern and feminist notion of critical, such as that described by Lather (1991) in her foundational book *Getting Smart*. Lather’s (1991) characterization of critical educational research grew out of a response to (or outright rejection of) the impression that knowledge could be objective or verifiable. In contrast, critical researchers view knowledge as socially-constructed, culturally situated, and ideological. Critical educational research methodology holds that research cannot claim to ever be politically or ideologically neutral. From this perspective, the question shifts from “are the data biased” to “whose interests are served by the bias?” (Lather, 1991, p. 14). I adopted a critical orientation to research in an effort to embrace the ambiguity and complexity of multicultural literature study, as well as to critique it in terms of Discourses of Whiteness.

Critical methodology is also consistent with the way I conceive of my role as a researcher in this study—as both researcher and participant (Cohen et al, 2007; Lather, 1991). Critical researchers foreground the fact that researchers’ personal experiences, frames of reference, and values all contribute to shaping the research project, including the questions asked, the methods employed, the relationships built with participants, and the interpretations pursued. My thinking about reflexivity and my position as a researcher is informed by the work of other critical educational researchers, like Lather (1991) who argues:

Ways of knowing are inherently culture-bound and perspectival ... Such a stance provides the grounds for both an “openly ideological” approach to critical inquiry (Lather, 1986b) and the necessity of self-reflexivity, of growing awareness of how researcher values permeate inquiry” (p. 2-3).

The process of this research study has made me progressively more aware of how my experiences as English teacher, White woman, doctoral candidate, and wife and mother have shaped this project. As such, I have made a concerted effort to write myself into this methodology chapter and throughout this dissertation.

Participants

Survey Participants. I compiled a sample of 911 secondary and middle school English teachers across all regions of Michigan from a comprehensive list of all schools in Michigan found on the Michigan Department of Education Website. From that list, I selected every fifth school on the list. Next, I visited school websites to access email addresses. Sometimes schools had websites. Sometimes they did not. Sometimes schools offered information about individual teachers and sometimes they did not. Sometimes they

listed only the department chair. Sometimes they listed all English teachers. Sometimes they provided email addresses. Sometimes they did not. Sometimes those email addresses worked. Sometimes they did not. When schools had websites and when they provided email addresses of English teachers, I copied the email addresses of a percentage of the teachers. For example, if there were four English teachers, I picked one. If there were 20 English teachers, I picked five. This sampling process resulted in a sample of 911 English teachers from all regions of Michigan. Second of all, the sample included English teachers who taught at schools that provided current websites and email addresses. From that group of 911 English teachers, 382 participants returned responses for a response rate of 42%, which was adequate for a survey aimed at gaining insight through frequency counts and qualitative analysis of open-ended questions (Cohen et al., 2007). Again, I make no claims about correlation, causation, or generalizability as a result of the survey data.

Ninety-two percent of participants reported teaching in public schools. Participants reported a range of experience levels, ranging from 1-5 years of experience to 21-40 years or more of experience, and 69% reported holding graduate degrees. Ninety-two percent reported teaching in rural, small town, or suburban contexts. Eighty percent characterized their teaching context as predominantly White; and 96% of survey participants identified themselves as White.

Interview Participants. Of the 382 teachers who responded to the survey, 75 expressed interest in participating in a follow up interview. I selected 12 interview participants who 1) identified themselves as White, 2) identified their teaching contexts as predominantly White, and 3) identified at least one of their literature units as addressing themes of multiculturalism. I was particularly interested in talking to English teachers who

expressed enthusiasm about participating in an interview and/or who expressed an interest in multiculturalism. I contacted potential interviewees via a personal email.

Given that the data came mostly from predominantly White, small town, or suburban contexts, this study, like all studies, tells a partial story; that story would likely have been different if the demographics of the survey sample had looked different or was more diverse. The decision to select an all-White sample was recursive. In other words, I began the research project with an interest in multicultural literature study in White contexts. However, I did not settle on the decision to study White teachers exclusively until after I realized that the survey sample had been overwhelmingly White. At that point, I decided to capitalize on the Whiteness of the data sample, rather than to compensate for it, by studying White teachers specifically. This decision also reflects that fact that a majority of the teaching force identifies as White. Ultimately, I made the decision to follow up with the 96% for this study based on my commitment to the importance of multicultural education in White contexts and understanding that White English teachers often face formidable challenges achieving meaningful multicultural work.

Table 3

Interview Participants

Pseudonym	Type of Community	Student Population	Years of Experience	Education
Maricela ¹	Rural	Predominantly White; socioeconomically diverse	21 – 40 years	M.A.
Chandra	Small Town	Predominantly White; socioeconomically diverse	6 – 10 years	M.A.
Rae	Small Town	Predominantly White	11 – 15 years	Ed.D

¹ All names throughout this study are pseudonyms.

Table 3 (cont'd)

Carlene	Suburban	Predominantly White; socioeconomically diverse	11 – 15 years	M.A.
Ellen	Suburban	Racially and ethnically diverse	16 – 20 years	M.A.
Lance	Suburban	Predominantly White; culturally homogenous	11 – 15 years	M.A.
Amie	Small Town	Predominantly White	1 – 5 years	B.S.
Hillary	Small Town	Predominantly White	1 – 5 years	M.A.
Tania	Small Town	Predominantly White	16 – 20 years	M.A.
Melissa	Rural	Predominantly White	11 – 15 years	M.S.
Max	Rural	Predominantly White; socioeconomically diverse	6 – 10 years	M.A.
Anna	Small Town	Predominantly White	1 – 5 years	B.S.

The interviews served as a useful tool to identify participants who spoke thoughtfully and enthusiastically about addressing multicultural issues through literature in their predominantly White contexts. Also, the interviews served as an opportunity for the participants and I to get to know one another a little bit before I would observe a literature unit in their classrooms.

Literature Unit Study Participants. From the group of 12, I followed up with three English teachers to ask whether they might be willing to participate in a literature unit study and allow me to observe them teaching a literature unit they identified as addressing themes of multiculturalism in a predominantly White classroom. All three of the literature units addressed the theme of race and racism specifically. I could have made the decision to observe literature units focused on a range of multicultural themes, such as gender, class, sexual orientation, language, world cultures, to name a few. However, I was interested from

the outset in how White teachers and White students negotiate race and racism during their study of literature. My initial interest in White students and White teachers addressing the theme of race and racism was reinforced by the survey, in which English teachers who participated reported that race and racism was the most commonly addressed “multicultural theme.” (I discuss this finding more in Chapter 3.) Ultimately, I decided to observe three units focused on the same theme 1) because White teachers and White students talking about race poses notoriously difficult pedagogical problems, 2) English teachers reported often addressing themes of race and racism through literature study, and 3) focusing on one theme afforded the opportunity to focus narrowly on one issue rather than several.

I did not just select the following three participants because they focused on the same theme. The English teachers who are the focus of the literature unit studies stood out by expressing interest in learning more about multiculturalism and about their own practice, describing specific units and lessons that addressed specific themes of race and racism, and demonstrating an awareness of the complexities of addressing race and racism in predominantly White contexts.

Table 4

Literature Unit Study Participants

	Community	Focal Course	Novel of Study
Max Ottley	Bloomington	English 10	<i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> by Mark Twain
Rae Belmont	Wheatstone	English 9	<i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> by Lorraine Hansberry
Anna Allen	Clearwater	English 9	<i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> by Harper Lee

Although I conducted three literature unit studies, Max and his unit do not feature prominently in the data chapters of this dissertation. In the next section I introduce Rae, whose purposes for multicultural literature study are central to Chapter 5 and Anna, whose literature unit is central to Chapter 4. I describe each English teacher, describe the communities and schools in which they taught, share my reasoning for selecting these participants, and provide overviews of the units I observed.

Rae Belmont. Rae had been teaching for more than a decade and her years of experience showed in her confidence. Rae was also the chair of her English Department, responsible for leadership and decisions regarding curriculum selection, aligning courses to changing state standards, and other administrative matters. She also took pride in being the Advanced Placement (AP) teacher and she wove preparation for the AP exam into every lesson I observed, even in the pre-AP English 9 course. Like me, Rae was working toward a Ph.D. in English education but unlike me she was doing so while teaching high school English full-time. And she was dedicated to her students in and out of the classroom, often spending personal time in the summer traveling with her students so they would have an opportunity to travel out of state.

Rae taught in Wheatstone, Michigan, a small predominantly White community with population of about 2,800 people. The demographics of Wheatstone stand in stark contrast to another medium-sized city located in the same county, which I call Gladstone, with a predominantly African American population and which is economically depressed.

Student enrollment at Wheatstone High School is 901 students. It is classified as a “rural/fringe” district by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) with 867 students who identify as White, 13 students who identify as Hispanic, 7 students who

identify as American Indian/Alaskan, 7 students who identify as Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1 student who identifies as Black. A total of 22% of students qualify for free and reduced lunch. As Rae explained, the faculty and staff take great pride in not only building community by upholding WHS traditions but also preparing students for college with a rigorous academic program. In fact, Rae told me that she believes their English department boasts one of the most rigorous English curriculums in the state.

I selected Rae as a focal participant for a literature unit study because she indicated that she addressed the concept of segregation during their study of *A Raisin in the Sun* and connected that concept with the segregation between communities in their own county. I was interested to see how Rae dealt with that topic, especially as it related to their community.

Rae's *A Raisin in the Sun* unit lasted a total of five days. Rae's pre-AP English 9 (Advanced American Literature B) course moved quickly; she covered a many texts. As they neared the end of the course and the end of the school year, Rae was feeling the pressure to get through the last few units. On the first day of the unit, she presented a PowerPoint to provide background information on *A Raisin in the Sun* and Lorraine Hansberry. She encouraged students to take notes on the PowerPoint because "this will be important for your exam." Sometime during each day was spent assigning parts and doing a "Readers Theater" of the play aloud in class. Rae often followed up their reading with clips of the movie version so students could see how the play was staged and hear the dialect as performed by the actors. Throughout the unit, Rae connected the racism in the play with examples of racism in contemporary American society. On the fourth day of the unit, she presented a PowerPoint that documented racism from the Jim Crow era through present

day. One slide asked, “Does racism and prejudice still exist today?” The slides included statistics that emphasize inequities that exist between White Americans and Americans of color, such as discrepancies in incarceration rates and the injustice of the legal system. Rae briefly mentioned the fact that the county they live in remains quite segregated and that Michigan is one of the most segregated states in the nation.

Table 5

Rae’s Unit

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
		<i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> and Lorraine Hansberry PowerPoint Act I Clips of the movie	Read aloud Act I Contemporary Classics Study Questions	Read aloud Act II Jim Crow PowerPoint
Poem: “The Tropics of New York” by Claude McKay Act I Quiz PowerPoint on Jim Crow	Washington/DuBois PowerPoint Final Test			

Anna Allen. Anna Allen was in her second year of teaching. Although she might technically be described as an “early career teacher,” she was very talented and seemed like she had been teaching much longer. My relationship with Anna was different from my relationship with Max or Rae because Anna and I originally knew each other in a teacher educator/teacher candidate situation. I originally developed a relationship with Anna when I taught a methods course in which she was a student. After Anna graduated, secured a job,

and taught for a year, she contacted me looking for resources related to critical pedagogy. She contacted me around the time I was recruiting participants for the interviews. Our communication was not limited to one initial interview and the literature unit studies. Rather, we continued to talk regularly about critical pedagogy via email and in person.

Anna taught in Clearwater, Michigan, a pretty little lakeside community well known in the state as a popular destination for tourism and recreation. The population of Clearwater was approximately 2,500 and the district was categorized as a “rural/fringe” by NCES. Ninety-eight percent of the population identified as White in the 2010 census. Student enrollment at Clearwater High School was 825. Of the 825 students, 796 students identified as White, 10 identified as Asian/Pacific Islander, 8 identified as Black, 5 identified as Hispanic, and 2 identified as American Indian/Alaskan. Fifteen percent of students qualified for free and reduced lunch. Clearwater High School ranked in the top 2% of U.S. high schools according to U.S. News and World Report, a designation reflecting the number of Advanced Placement courses and exam takers from the school.

I selected Anna for participation in the study because she described critical multicultural goals of her *To Kill a Mockingbird* unit during our initial interview. Also, knowing that Anna was a very talented teacher and a committed critical pedagogue, I was very interested to see how she addressed institutional racism with ninth graders and in her predominantly White context.

Anna taught a 7-week unit on *To Kill a Mockingbird*. She took an explicitly critical antiracist multicultural approach to the novel, which is the topic of focus of Chapter 4. She employed what I call a “constellation of practices,” which I think were central to the critical multicultural approach, which included articulating critical multicultural objectives,

integrating supplementary texts and counterstories, making Whiteness visible, and assessing students' understanding of multicultural concepts. Throughout the unit, Anna wove a variety of non-fiction texts, including editorials, newspaper articles, and documentaries to connect their examination of institutional racism in the novel with an examination of institutional racism as it continues to operate today. I describe Anna's unit in much more detail in Chapter 5.

Table 6

Anna's Unit

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
		Journal: What is equality? Is everyone in our country equal? Is it important for everyone to be equal? Chaps 1 – 2	Chaps 3 - 4	
Vocabulary Review Chap 5 Characterization	Chapter 6	Journal: Write about a time when you were judged. Connotation and denotation Discussion about the N word YouTube Clip Small group activity: Write a quiz question	Chaps 7 - 8	Vocabulary Quiz #2 Black History Month Speaker
YouTube clip about the study with Black dolls and White dolls Journal: Chaps 9 – 10	Snow Day	Chap 11 – 12 Journal: How does race affect my life? Discussion	Quiz Journal: What is courage?	Chapter 13 – 14 Film: Prom Night in Mississippi

Table 6 (cont'd)

Teacher Sick Day				Vocab Quiz La’Ron Williams story
Chapters 19 – 20 Scottsboro Trials	Act out the trial	SNOW DAY	SNOW DAY	No School – Winter Break
No School – Winter Break	Trial	Feminist theory Characterization	TED talk: Ideas Worth Spreading Chapter 28	Finish Book Integrating Quotes
Test	Socratic Seminar	Writing Instruction	Writing Instruction	

Carlin Borsheim-Black. Although I also try to write myself into each part of this dissertation, in this section, I also make explicit how my positionality factored into the research process. First, my experiences growing up in a small, rural, culturally homogeneous and predominantly White Midwestern community certainly played a role throughout all phases of the study, partly because I shared those experiences with research participants who were also White and who also either grew up in and/or currently live and teach in rural or suburban communities. As a result, I felt that I understood the contexts participants in this study were teaching in. At the same time, it complicated the research process because English teachers who participated in this study sometimes used shorthand language, or assumed I knew what they meant, rather than articulating their ideas fully. For example, at one point, Rae said, “you know, it’s a typical small town.” Although “you know” indicated that she accepted me as an insider, which contributed to our positive rapport, she

also felt that she did not need to explain what she meant by a “typical small town” during the interview.

Similarly, my Whiteness likely served as both an asset and a liability. For example, I felt that at times participants, all of whom were White, may have felt comfortable talking with me about multicultural issues, especially race and racism, because of our shared Whiteness. However, through this research process I have learned to pay more attention to the ways my positionality limits me. McIntyre (1997) and Haviland (2008) have written extensively about the fact that a White woman engaging in the study of Whiteness risks colluding in Discourses of Whiteness through the research process. I embarked on this research process familiar with their work and cognizant (I thought) of the role my Whiteness would play. However, I must confess that, as ridiculous as it may sound, the extent of the role Whiteness would play in this project was not obvious to me until several months into the analysis process. It was not until I began to dig deeper into analysis of interview data that I began to recognize (as much as I did not want to admit it) that I participated in Discourses of Whiteness during the interview. For example, I noticed myself “agreeing and supporting,” “engaging in safe self reflection,” and “letting others off the hook,” all of which are features of Haviland’s (2008) White Educational Discourse. One of the great epiphanies of this dissertation occurred when I finally, though reluctantly, recognized my own collusion in Discourses of Whiteness.

I have realized in greater depth that I proceeded with this research project not from outside Discourses of Whiteness but from within them. At this point, my position might be characterized as “paradoxically aware of one’s complicity in that which one critiques” (Lather, 1991, p. 10). And this position has both limited and deepened the project because

it. For more detailed description of my participation in White Educational Discourse, refer to Appendix E.

Research Design and Data Generation

I employed a three-phase research design to explore the following research questions:

- What literature, if any, do White English teachers use to enact multicultural literature study in predominantly White contexts?
- How, if at all, do White English teachers use literature to enact multicultural literature study in predominantly White contexts?
- What challenges do White English teachers face as they engage multicultural literature study in predominantly White contexts?
- How does Whiteness shape White English teachers' multicultural literature study in predominantly White contexts?

Phase 1 of the research design included an online survey of 382 English teachers from Michigan. Phase 2 included interviews with a sub-sample of 12 English teachers. And, in phase 3 I conducted “literature unit studies,” observing literature units of three English teachers. Each phase informed data generation and analysis at the next phase. While each method offered certain strengths, none alone addressed the complexity of the object of study on its own; the combination of three methods—survey, interviews and literature unit studies, each selected for their strengths for answering particular dimensions of the research questions (See Table 1)—contributed to the power of this multi-phased design.

Table 7

Data Matrix

	1. <i>What</i> literature, if any, do White English teachers use to enact multicultural education in predominantly White contexts?	2. <i>How</i> do White English teachers use literature to enact multicultural education in predominantly White contexts?	3. What challenges do White English teachers face as they engage multicultural literature study in predominantly White contexts?	4. How does Whiteness shape White English teachers' multicultural pedagogy in predominantly White contexts?
Survey	X			X
Teacher Interviews 1	X	X	X	X
Observations	X	X	X	X
Teacher Interviews 2		X	X	X
Teaching artifacts		X		X
Student Interviews				X

Phase 1: Survey (Fall 2009). The survey was designed to solicit basic and standardized information about curriculum from a fairly large sample. By conducting a survey and replicating specific questions, I was also able to connect this study with a long tradition of similar survey studies in the field of English education (e.g., Anderson, 1964; Applebee, 1993; Stallworth et al, 2006; Stotsky, 2010). By designing additional and original open-ended research questions, I was able to extend and complicate existing studies. Ultimately, the survey was valuable to the extent to which it generated data to answer the

research questions related to curriculum and provided rich contextualizing information for subsequent phases.

The online survey instrument included eleven open- and closed-ended questions (Bauman & Bason, 2004; Cohen et al, 2008; Fowler, 2009). (See Appendix A for the full survey.) To build on existing research, this survey replicated specific questions from the Applebee (1993) and Stallworth et al (2006) studies:

- For each grade level or course you teach, please list the book-length course texts you currently use.
- Do your selections include writers from diverse backgrounds and experiences and if so, how?
- To extend existing research and explore English teachers' pedagogical uses of literature, this study also included original questions, including:
- Do you use any of these book-length works to address themes of multiculturalism or diversity? If so, please list the titles you use and the topics you address."

Survey studies often reflect a positivistic understanding of knowledge, assuming that knowledge is objective and generalizable. As such, skeptics may wonder what place a survey has in a study that purports a critical methodology. Given my view of all knowledge as partial and biased, I do not make claims about the representativeness of the sample, the generalizability of the findings, or the objectivity of the questions. Rather, I made the decision to conduct a survey because I sought to connect this study with existing studies in the field and because I wondered if there might be alternative interpretations to the data presented in existing work. In other words, I did not treat such "quantitative" data as objective. I wondered, could there be alternative interpretations of simple frequency

counts? If teachers were offered an opportunity to respond to open-ended questions, how would they interpret the term “multiculturalism”? Essentially, I wanted to build on existing work by replicating aspects of previous studies but then to also turning a critical lens on typical interpretations. As such, the survey provided rich contextualizing information regarding the book-length works English teachers reported using, the ways teachers reported interpreting the term “themes of multiculturalism” and the ways they reported using texts. Subsequent phases of the research design were important for generating the kinds of data the survey could not offer.

Phase 2: Interviews (Fall 2010-Spring 2011). In the next phase, I interviewed 12 of the original interviewees. Twelve interviews offered a variety of perspectives, while also remaining feasible within a three-phase design. I initially scheduled 60-minute interviews, but interviews lasted anywhere from 50-120 minutes, depending on the length of interviewees’ responses and the amount of time individuals were willing to spend. I conducted semi-structured interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Cohen et al., 2007), asking a few standard questions of every interviewee but keeping the flow of the interview open for responding to interviewees’ unique contexts and experiences. The standard questions enabled me to look across English teachers’ answers to the same question. Interviews allowed me to move past questions of “what” to address questions about “how” and “why” White English teachers use the literature they do in the ways that they do.

I asked participants about their communities, teaching contexts, courses, curricula, school cultures, student populations, teaching styles, definitions and interpretations of multiculturalism, course texts, examples of specific lessons and teaching practices, personal experiences with diversity, and professional training and development related to

multiculturalism. I also followed up on their individual survey responses with probing questions. (See Appendix B for Teacher Interview protocol). The interviews also served as a tool for identifying potential participants for the literature unit studies.

Although interviews provided opportunities for talking one-on-one with English teachers about what they do and why, single interviews did not begin to explore participants' practices and purposes in depth. Like the surveys, interviews were disconnected from the context of teachers' classrooms, practices, and students. Literature unit studies, which included classroom observations and additional interviews with English teachers, offered opportunities to collect data in context. Literature unit studies were designed to shed light on *how* White English teachers engage multicultural literature study in predominantly White contexts, as well as how constructions of Whiteness shaped curriculum and instruction.

Phase 3: Literature Unit Studies (Spring 2011). I conducted three literature unit studies, each one focused on a *White English teacher* using *literature* during a unit he or she identified as *addressing themes of multiculturalism* in a *predominantly White context*. During each literature unit study, I visited the classroom 1-3 times per week (depending on my schedule, teachers' schedules, and classroom schedules and accommodating snow days, sick days and holidays) for the duration of a literature unit, which ranged from 1 week to 8 weeks. During each literature unit study, I observed classroom interactions, took field notes, interviewed the teacher and students, and collected teaching artifacts and student work, all of which are describe in more depth below. My focus on curriculum-in-action at the unit level is modeled after similar work by Juzwik (2009).

Classroom Observations. Repeated classroom observations within individual classrooms gave me an opportunity to gather data in situ (Cohen et al., 2011). Classroom observations gave me an opportunity to observe teachers' practices and interpret their pedagogical approaches. I coordinated visits so I could observe on days during which teacher and students were engaging in "key lessons" as identified by the teachers.

Field notes. During observations, I used a chart to help me focus and organize my field notes. (See Table 8). The column labeled "Text" focused my attention on the novel of study, as well as chapters of the novel, and supplementary texts. "Theme" focused my attention on literary themes teachers emphasized on any particular day or even within a particular activity. "Approach" focused my attention on teachers' approaches to literary instruction, such as New Criticism, Reader Response, Skills-based, and Critical/Cultural Studies. "Practice" focused my attention on teachers' ways of organizing classroom activities, including small group work, large group discussion, recitation, journaling, for example. The "Discourse" column provided me a space to make notes about the ways teachers were shaping discussions about race and/or the ways teachers and students were talking about race/racism. In that category, I made notes about White Educational Discourse (Haviland, 2008), use of pronouns "we" and "they," discussions about the "N word," for example. The "Notes" column offered a space to make notes to myself about excerpts of audio recordings that I would want to revisit in the analysis phase.

Table 8

Observation Chart

TIME	CURRICULUM		PEDAGOGICAL ORIENTATION		CONTEXT	
	Text	Theme	Approach	Practice	Discourse	Notes

Teaching artifacts. I collected (originals or photocopies of) teacher notes, curriculum guides, lesson plans, handouts, assignment descriptions, tests and other teacher-generated artifacts. I also took photos of notes on the board and student work on the walls.

Audio recordings of classroom interaction. I audio recorded each class session I attended. I elected not to video record classroom interactions because I felt I could get the data I wanted without video footage. Audio recordings of classroom instruction offered an opportunity to look closely at teacher practices, especially the ways the teachers organized classroom discourse, the ways teachers responded to student talk, and the ways Whiteness operated discursively in the classroom and shaped teachers' uses of literature for multicultural education in predominantly White contexts.

Interviews with teachers. I conducted and audio recorded at least one interview with each teacher at the end of the unit. During those interviews, I asked follow up questions about specific curriculum, practices, or approaches that I observed during the course of the unit. I tailored the interview questions to follow up on specific observations during the literature unit study. In addition to the scheduled interview, I often had informal conversations with teachers after lessons, in between classes, or while walking through the hallways. I did not record those conversations. Instead, I reflected on those conversations in my field notes.

Interviews with focal student participants. Although this study foregrounds the teacher and backgrounds the students, I interviewed focal students from each classroom, because I felt talking with students would be important for getting a sense of the teaching context and understanding why teachers made the curricular and pedagogical decisions they did. I also felt that talking with individual students would give me insight as I tried to interpret classroom discourse. (See Appendix C for Student Interview Protocol).

The power of the literature unit studies was in the opportunity to gather data in context. Repeated visits to schools and classrooms for classroom observations helped me to understand the context in which the focal teachers were situated and contributed to analysis. These three methods in combination reflected my effort to explore the connectedness of curriculum, pedagogy, and context, as well as my understanding of multicultural literature study as complex and context-specific. In terms of methods, the multiple approaches to data collection reflected my efforts toward rigor, providing opportunities to generate different kinds of data that might both support and contradict one another. See Table 9 for an inventory of the entire data set.

Table 9

Data Inventory

Data Source	Data Collected
Survey	381 responses (42% response rate), including open- and close- ended questions for both descriptive statistics and qualitative analysis
Interviews	12 interviews

Table 9 (cont'd)

Literature Study 1: <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i>	10 visits over 6 weeks. Taking into account 4 snow days and 1 teacher sick day, I observed 10 of 27 days of the unit). I gathered audio recordings of each day, observation protocols, field notes, notes on several informal conversations, 1 formal teacher interview; 2 focal student group interviews; teaching artifacts; examples of student work
Literature Study 2: <i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i>	11 visits over 6 weeks. Taking into account 4 snow days, 1 teacher conferences day, and 2 teacher workshop days, I observed 11 of 23 days of the unit. I gathered audio recordings of each day, observation protocols, field notes, notes on several informal conversations, 2 formal teacher interviews; 3 focal student group interviews; teaching artifacts; examples of student work
Literature Study 3: <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i>	4 visits over 1 week. I gathered audio recordings of each day, observation protocols, field notes, notes on several informal conversations, 1 formal teacher interviews; 2 focal student group interviews; teaching artifacts; examples of student work.

Data Analysis

In this section, I offer an overview of data analysis that informed the project overall. Essentially, analysis spanned all phases of the research process. For example, I analyzed data as I took field notes, making decisions about what to pay attention to, what to include, what to exclude, how to characterize teachers' approaches to literature, how to categorize pedagogical practices, and what to identify as "Discourses of Whiteness." I analyzed as I sorted, filtered, and organized data, making decisions about what was relevant to my research questions and what was not. For example, it was not reasonable (or productive) to transcribe audio-recordings of all classroom interactions, so I bounded audio data by transcribing class time devoted to literature instruction and excluding class time devoted to other aspects of practice, such as vocabulary instruction, grammar quizzes, or daily business. And I analyzed as I transcribed interviews, paying particular attention to teachers' perspectives on multiculturalism, description of their teaching contexts, and reflections on their pedagogy, for example.

After the note taking, transcribing, sorting, and filtering, I analyzed data more intentionally. Critical educational research does not seek to simply document or describe but to pursue many possible interpretations of data, each one subjective and inscribed with interests (Cohen et al, 2007; Lather, 1991; McLaren & Giarelli, 1995). With those goals in mind, I read the data through several interpretive lenses:

Reading for themes. I uploaded all data into Atlas, a software program designed for qualitative data analysis to keep track of themes that I inferred as I read. During my initial reading of the data, I temporarily labeled themes, including “book-length texts,” “teachers’ beliefs in the power of literature,” “teachers’ values,” “reasons why teachers don’t do multicultural education,” and “personal experiences with diversity,” to name a few. (For a full list of themes see Appendix D.) This list of codes is not exhaustive. Atlas allowed me to print off the examples included within each theme. I re-read data organized within themes to deepen my thinking and ultimately to refine themes. I wrote analytical memos about decisions regarding themes as I went along. I thought about this type of reading as “reading with the data” in an effort to characterize it.

Reading to critique. Committed to going beyond a presentation of main themes and make visible the ways power was being reproduced in curriculum, pedagogical practices, and classroom discourse, I also read data from the lens of “ideological critique.” I thought of ideological critique, an established tradition within critical methodology (Lather, 1991; McLaren & Girelli, 1995), as “reading against the data.” Specifically, I read through the lens of Critical Whiteness, looking for examples of Discourses of Whiteness. Because I was interested in exploring Discourses of Whiteness on several levels, I also drew on Scheurich & Young’s (1997) levels of racism. For example, at the individual level, I

analyzed for the ways teachers and students participated in Discourses of Whiteness during classroom interactions drawing on Haviland's (2008) concept of White Educational Discourse (WED) and identified examples of avoiding words, making false starts, engaging in safe self reflection, asserting ignorance or uncertainty, letting others off the hook, citing authority, silence, changing the topic, affirming sameness, joking, agreeing and supporting, praising and encouraging, teacher and student caring, socializing and sharing personal information, emphasizing contributions approaches to multiculturalism, and focusing on barriers to multicultural education. At the institutional level, I analyzed Discourses of Whiteness reflected in explicit and hidden curriculum and ways of doing English in the classroom and the school. At the societal level, I analyzed for the ways Whiteness in the classroom reflected cultural models, cultural norms, and stereotypes, for example. At the epistemological level, I looked for assumptions about Whiteness in typical understandings of what counts as "Literature" in English education. Because Discourses of Whiteness operate covertly, I also drew on Critical Race Theorists, such as Bonilla-Silva (2003) to look for colorblindness and other covert forms of racism. And, I drew on Critical Whiteness scholars (e.g., Lensmire, 2010, 2011; Lewis , 2004; Trainor, 2002, 2008), especially those located in literacy studies, to think about ambivalence and the emotional or persuasive appeal of racist discourses.

In the beginning, this was the only kind of analysis I intended to do. In fact, I went along in this critical vein of analysis for several months, documenting instances of teachers participating in Discourses of Whiteness. Proceeding with this line of analysis, I wrote (sometimes harsh) critique. I began to think, however, that although ideological critique helped me see how power (Whiteness) was operating through curriculum, pedagogy, and

classroom discourse in day-to-day interactions, ideological critique alone did not begin to address the complexity of the “problem” as I witnessed it in English teachers’ classrooms. In fact, I felt unsatisfied with what I felt was a one-dimensional and somewhat tidy analysis of otherwise very complex data. I reached a turning point in this project when I realized that an ideological interpretation was only one of many possible interpretations—and maybe not the most productive one.

Reading for believing. To overcome the constraints of reading for critique, I revisited Elbow’s (1986) essay “Embracing Contraries,” in which he encourages a stance of both methodological doubt and methodological belief. On one hand, he acknowledges the tradition of critical inquiry to question and critique: “researchers need the systematic, disciplined, and conscious attempt to criticize everything no matter how compelling it might seem—to find flaws or contradictions we might otherwise miss.” Questioning and critiquing constitute “methodological doubting.” But, Elbow argues, methodological doubting is “only half of what we need” ... “Thinking is not trustworthy unless it also includes methodological belief: the equally systematic, disciplined, and conscious attempt to believe everything no matter how unlikely or repellent it might seem—to find virtues or strengths we might otherwise miss” (p. 257). To make the possibility of alternative interpretations of the data possible, I brought Elbow’s framework of methodological belief and methodological doubt to the analysis process to open up possibilities for *reading for alternative interpretations*.

To employ methodological belief, I followed Becker’s (1998) advice in *Tricks of the Trade* and began to ask myself, “In what ways do these findings make absolute sense?” In this line of analysis, I drew on my own experience as an English teacher, when I struggled

with multicultural literature study myself. When I questioned myself and my ability because sometimes I felt (and sometimes I still feel) like I was doing it badly, or even doing more harm than good. I remembered my frustration when my students turned conversations about racism into conversations about their own experiences with oppression, thereby skirting the issue of racism—and when I did not know how to make those conversations more productive. I remembered the competing pressures of teaching English.

And I asked others' for their interpretations. I often shared emerging ideas with participants to solicit their feedback and ask whether my analysis resonated with their experiences. For example, during the interview phase, I shared one of the findings from the survey data with interviewees. I explained that the survey suggested that many English teachers use literature by White authors to address multicultural themes. I asked interviewees for their insights on this finding. During the interviews and informal conversations during the literature unit studies, I shared ideas with participants in similar ways to “test out” my emerging analysis with others. I also shared emerging findings with members of my regular writing group to solicit their viewpoints, looking for alternative interpretations.

Reading for “heat.” At times different readings led to contradictory interpretations. I tried embrace the conflict, rather than to resolve it. In fact, I began reading for “heat” (Lawrence, 2011). By heat, I refer to uncertainties, troubling moments, and seemingly irresolvable conflicts. Although it was often tempting to ignore instances and examples that complicate challenge developing findings, I pushed myself to confront and then pay even more attention to data that did not fit neatly with my emerging thinking. I challenged

myself not to ignore or dismiss data that caused me frustration, uncertainty, and sometimes even anger. I tried to sit with complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity. I began to realize that data that provoked those kinds of emotion, that kind of “heat,” often proved to be the most generative. Reading for heat is consistent with critical methodology, which attempts to challenge positivist assumptions about the possibility of one singular truth or interpretation, choosing instead to embrace complexity and contradiction (Lather, 1991).

In all, I wrote 195 memos (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995), including analytical memos, methodological memos, synthesis memos, and reading memos. I wrote analytical memos during the each phase of data generation —survey, interview, and literature unit study. I memo-ed about how major themes, the relationships I saw between themes, and the decisions I made as I refined those themes into “findings.” I wrote memos about reading for themes, reading for critique, reading for believing, reading for reflexivity, reading for head, and reading for dichotomies. I wrote vignettes about poignant classroom interactions. Finally, I periodically wrote “synthesis” memos to keep the big picture of the project in mind.

CHAPTER 3: A CURRICULAR BORDERLAND: COMPLICATING “MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE”

As I explained in Chapter 1, a sturdy tradition of research at the intersection of multiculturalism and English education has documented the book-length works most commonly used in American English classrooms (e.g., Anderson, 1964; Applebee, 1993; Fang, Fu & Lamme, 1999; Stallworth et al., 2006; Yokota, 1993). These studies document the stubbornness of the traditional literary canon and the predominance of books written by White authors. This body of work has contributed to questioning the taken-for-grantedness of the literary canon, highlighting the fact that the omission of voices of color is not neutral; what is left out of curriculum teaches students as much as what is left in. Literature curriculum dominated by White perspectives teaches a “hidden curriculum” (Apple, 2004; Eisner, 2005) that constructs Whiteness as “normal” and neutral, while marginalizing voices of color. This research has been essential for documenting the urgent need for curricular change.

However, this body of work has also operated on some limiting assumptions about what constitutes “multicultural,” categorizing literature as either multicultural or not multicultural. By categorizing literature as either multicultural or not and by focusing solely on the inclusion or not of multicultural titles (as they are typically defined), existing research has overlooked the possibility that multicultural education might be done in other ways within English. This chapter aims to trouble those existing assumptions.

This data chapter highlights the findings of a survey of nearly 400 English teachers to answer the following questions:

- What book-length texts are most frequently taught?

- Do English teachers address multicultural themes?
 - o If so, what book-length texts do English teachers use to address multicultural themes?
 - o If so, what multicultural themes do English teachers report addressing through those book-length texts?

Findings of this study suggest that English teachers who participated in this study frequently use canonical texts written by White authors—such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain, for example—to address multicultural themes, including race and racism. This finding raises new and different questions about what constitutes “multicultural literature”

Conceptual Framework

In *Playing in the Dark*, Pulitzer Prize winning novelist Toni Morrison (1992) challenges the assumptions underlying the categorization of literature as multicultural or not:

I have been thinking about the validity or vulnerability of a certain set of assumptions conventionally accepted among literary historians and critics and circulated as "knowledge." This knowledge holds that traditional, canonical American literature is free of, uninformed, and unshaped by the four-hundred-year-old presence of, first, Africans and then African-Americans in the United States. It assumes that this presence—which shaped the body politic, the Constitution, and the entire history of the culture—has had no significant place or consequence in the origin and development of that culture’s literature. Moreover, such knowledge assumes that the characteristics of our national literature emanate from a particular

"Americanness" that is separate from and unaccountable to this presence. There seems to be a more or less tacit agreement among literary scholars that, because American literature has been clearly the preserve of White male views, genius, and power, those views, genius, and power are without relationship to and removed from the overwhelming presence of black people in the United States. This agreement is made about a population that preceded every American writer of renown and was, I have come to believe, one of the most furtively radical impinging forces on the country's literature. The contemplation of this black presence is central to any understanding of our national literature and should not be permitted to hover at the margins of literary imagination (p. 5).

Morrison's (1992) revolutionary way of thinking about the relationship between race and American literature highlights the fact that the literary community, including English teachers and English education researchers, has commonly assumed that the lack of African American characters in American literature meant that African Americans played an insignificant role in the historic development of American literature. The insight at the center of Morrison's argument illuminates that the canon of traditional American literature was constructed in contrastive relationship to Blackness (what Morrison calls an "Africanist presence"). In other words, American authors defined "American" not so much by asserting what it *was* but by asserting what it was *not*: Black. Morrison's argument is that an assumed lack of race in the literary canon does not reflect actual absence of Blackness but rather a concerted effort not to see it. In fact, Blackness has always been central to American literature. Morrison asserts that re-reading canonical works with "a

close look at literary “blackness,” could lead to a deeper understanding of “the nature—even the cause—of “literary Whiteness.”

In this chapter, I draw on Morrison’s (1992) argument as an interpretive lens through which to consider the relationship between canonical literature and multicultural literature.

Chapter-specific Data Analysis

The initial phases of data analysis included generating descriptive statistics to summarize the data. First, I tabulated the book-length texts English teachers reported using to determine which book-length works were most frequently taught. This phase of analysis constituted a direct replication of previous studies. Second, I tabulated whether or not English teachers reported addressing themes of multiculturalism or diversity by simply categorizing their answers as “yes” or “no.” This analytic move—and subsequent analytic moves—marked a deliberate diversion from previous research and reflected the notion that English teachers might address multicultural themes using book-length works that are not typically considered multicultural. Third, I tabulated the book-length texts English teachers reported using to address themes of multiculturalism. Finally, I tabulated how many of those titles were written by White authors and how many were written by authors of color.

Qualitative analysis included categorizing topics that participants listed as “themes of multiculturalism or diversity.” It is important to note that the survey did not ask about specific topics. Rather, participants responded to open-ended questions using their own language. As a result, qualitative analysis offered an opportunity to explore how English

teachers interpret “themes of multiculturalism and diversity.” A list all of all collapsed categories is included in Table 14 in the findings section.

Some of the coding seemed straightforward. For example, “feminism” and “gender stereotypes” were coded as “Gender,” which became its own category. “Autism” and “people with disabilities” were coded as “Abilities/Disabilities,” which became its own category. In addition to Gender and Ability/Disability, Immigration, Colonization, Sexual Orientation, Language Diversity, Class, and Race all seemed fairly straightforward, because participants referred to specific aspects of difference in terms of historically marginalized populations that are frequently discussed under the umbrella of critical multiculturalism.

Not all coding was as straightforward. For example, the similarities and differences between participants’ citations of “prejudice,” “discrimination,” “diversity,” “lack of diversity” and “culture” took careful attention to tease out. Those topics seemed similar to the extent that they cut across difference more generally. However, it became clear that “diversity” and “lack of diversity” often referred to the value of diversity to society. For example, “*The Giver* discusses ‘sameness,’ which allows us to take this in a variety of directions about how diversity should be valued!” Diversity/Lack of Diversity became its own category. It also became clear that “culture” was being used to refer to world cultures. For example, representative responses in this category included “*The Breadwinner*: life in Afghanistan” and “*The Other Side of the Sky*: Arab culture.” “Culture” became its own category. And, it became clear that “prejudice” and “discrimination” referred to consequences of many different kinds of difference. Representative responses included, “*The Cay*, prejudice” and “*The Outsiders*: prejudice, cliques.” Prejudice/Discrimination became its own category.

One theme stood out as being different from the rest. Topics such as “choices,” “grief and grieving,” and “seeing life from the perspective of others” seemed different to the extent that they did not relate to an aspect of difference or marginalization specifically. Rather, these topics seemed to emphasize that individuals are all similar despite diversity and, conversely, that difference itself is universal or relative. As one respondent explained, “Each novel is set in a different place from our town. Everything represents diversity.” These responses were all coded as “Universal Difference,” which became a category.

Analysis of interview began with reading for themes. Early on, themes included, “what literature do teachers use,” “power of literature,” “values,” “reasons why teachers don’t do multicultural education,” “personal experiences,” to name a few. (For a full list see Appendix D.) This list of codes is not exhaustive. Ultimately, I refined these themes and compared them with themes from the survey analysis.

Both Canonical and Multicultural

Traditional Literature Curriculum

One purpose of the survey was, in the tradition of past research, to document book-length literature curriculum. In all, English teachers reported using 318 different book-length works across all grade levels. The tally of most frequently listed titles resulted in the top ten list shown in Table 10.

Table 10

Most Frequently Taught Book-length Texts II

Borsheim-Black (2012)
<i>Romeo & Juliet</i> by William Shakespeare (1597)
<i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> by Harper Lee (1960)
<i>Of Mice and Men</i> by John Steinbeck (1937)
<i>The Great Gatsby</i> by F. Scott Fitzgerald (1925)
<i>Lord of the Flies</i> by William Golding (1954)
<i>The Crucible</i> by Arthur Miller (1953)
The Odyssey# by Homer
<i>Night</i> by Elie Weisel (1960)
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain (1884)
<i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> by Lorraine Hansberry (1959)

Findings of this survey are, in many ways, consistent with previous research, simply documenting the consistency of the traditional literature canon (e.g., Applebee, 1993; Stallworth et al., 2006). For example, looking across the three lists (see Table 11), one can see that *Romeo & Juliet* remained the number one most popular text, appearing in the number one position on all three lists. *To Kill a Mockingbird* also held steady in the number two position. *Of Mice and Men*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* also appeared on all three lists. Findings across the three surveys document remarkable consistency over nearly twenty years. This consistency is remarkable given dramatic social, cultural, and demographic change in the United States during that time.

At the same time, survey data also documented a certain amount of change. If we go back a little further, to Anderson's (1964) study (see Table 12) we can see that the titles were almost completely different. In fact, only four of the titles from Anderson's (1964) list—*Macbeth* (1623), *Julius Caesar* (1623), *Hamlet* (1603), and *The Scarlet Letter* (1850)—appear on Applebee's list. And none appear on the list from this present study. In this way,

this study supports Stallworth et al.'s (2006) finding of a shift in terms in terms of "classic" works.

Table 11

Most Frequently Taught Book-length Texts III

Applebee (1993)	Stallworth et al. (2006)	Borsheim-Black (2012)
<i>Romeo & Juliet</i> (1597) by William Shakespeare <i>Macbeth</i> (1623) by William Shakespeare <i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> (1884) by Mark Twain <i>Julius Caesar</i> (1623) by William Shakespeare <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> (1960) by Harper Lee <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> (1850) by Nathaniel Hawthorne <i>Of Mice and Men</i> (1937) by John Steinbeck <i>Hamlet</i> (1603) by William Shakespeare <i>The Great Gatsby</i> (1925) by F. Scott Fitzgerald <i>Lord of the Flies</i> (1954) by William Golding	<i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> (1960) by Harper Lee <i>The Great Gatsby</i> (1925) by F. Scott Fitzgerald <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> (1850) by Nathaniel Hawthorne <i>Romeo & Juliet</i> (1597) by William Shakespeare <i>Julius Caesar</i> (1623) by William Shakespeare <i>The Crucible</i> (1953) by Arthur Miller <i>Macbeth</i> (1623) by William Shakespeare <i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> (1884) by Mark Twain <i>Animal Farm</i> (1945) by George Orwell <i>A Separate Peace</i> (1953) by John Knowles	<i>Romeo & Juliet</i> by William Shakespeare (1597) <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> by Harper Lee (1960) <i>Of Mice and Men</i> by John Steinbeck (1937) <i>The Great Gatsby</i> by F. Scott Fitzgerald (1925) <i>Lord of the Flies</i> by William Golding (1954) <i>The Crucible</i> by Arthur Miller (1953) <i>The Odyssey</i> by Homer <i>Night</i> by Elie Weisel (1960) <i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> by Mark Twain (1884) <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> by Lorraine Hansberry (1959)

Additionally, *A Raisin in the Sun* appeared on the top ten list of this study,

constituting the first author of color and the second female writer to be included on a top ten list. And *Night* by Elie Wiesel has moved into a more prominent position. Stallworth et al. (2004) were optimistic that the shift toward more modern and contemporary works as "classics" would mean that secondary literature curriculum would begin to include more multicultural titles. They cited the rise in popularity of texts like *A Raisin in the Sun*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and *Things Fall Apart* as evidence of progress. The inclusion of an

author of color and a Holocaust survivor may point to the progress that Stallworth et al. (2006) predicted.

Table 12

Most Frequently Taught Book-length Texts IV

Anderson (1964)
Macbeth (1623) by William Shakespeare
Julius Caesar (1623) by William Shakespeare
Silas Marner (1861) by George Eliot
Our Town (1938) by Thornton Wilder
Great Expectations (1861) by Charles Dickens
Hamlet (YEAR) by William Shakespeare
Red Badge of Courage (1895) by Stephen Crane
Tale of Two Cities (1859) by Charles Dickens
The Scarlet Letter (1850) by Nathaniel Hawthorne

So is literature curriculum consistent or changing? Despite change in terms of what is meant by “classic” and the inclusion of two texts that may be considered multicultural, the fact remains that nine of the ten book-length works were written by White authors; only one was written by an author of color, *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry. What seems most salient is the consistency in the Whiteness of literature curriculum. Although literature curriculum has evolved, it continues to be dominated by White authors. Because book-length works continue to hold a privileged position in literature curriculum, excluding book-length works by authors of color continues to place White voices at the center of curriculum and to push voices of color to the margins. The by-product of this explicit curriculum is a hidden curriculum (Apple, 2004; Eisner, 2005), which teaches students that “classic,” “quality” and canonical literature is written by White authors, while supplemental materials and less authoritative texts are written by authors of color. It teaches students that White perspectives constitute the norm, while perspectives of

individuals of color offer counter examples and “other” ways of looking at common themes in English class.

Past research has tried to explain the stability of literature curriculum. English teachers have explained that they are not as familiar with literature by authors of color as they are with “classic” texts; they reported sticking with “classic” literature due to a concern with quality; they simply use materials available to them because schools lack the financial resources to replace course texts with new titles; they do not have the institutional freedom to make curricular changes; they do not perceive the Whiteness of the canon to be a problem; they prefer and/or feel comfortable with familiar texts; and/or they fear of censorship (Applebee, 1993; Bigler & Collins, 1995; Stallworth et al (2006).

During a follow up interview with one of the English teachers, Amie, I asked, “Why do you think there are so few multicultural titles in the literature curriculum at your school? Is it time? Money?” She responded, “I think those are definitely excuses, but I’m not sure they are good explanations as to why we don’t do more.” Amie’s response suggested that it is also possible that English teachers shy away from controversial and complex multicultural issues and use reasons such as lack of time and resources as excuses rather than having to say that they choose not to include multicultural literature. Bigler & Collins (1995) found that in addition to curricular concerns, teachers expressed concerns about dealing with controversy. They supported “celebrating diversity” as long as it did not “go too far” or “stir the kids up” (p. 15-16).

As Morrison (1992) explains, “the habit of ignoring race is understood to be a graceful, even generous, liberal gesture” (p. 10). Similarly, Tatum (1993) acknowledges that people feel embarrassed, awkward, and uncomfortable when engaging in dialogue

about prejudice because they realize they are breaking a social taboo by talking about race and racism, because they fear being perceived as racist, and because they are uncertain whether talking about race will actually make colorblind children more color conscious. These uncertainties may contribute to English teachers avoidance of multicultural topics.

With a Multicultural Twist

Surprisingly, perhaps, given the homogeneity of the top ten list and findings of past research, 89% of those who responded to the question reported that “yes,” they do use book-length works to address multicultural themes. Many English teachers expressed a desire to create an inclusive curriculum, stressing the importance of multiculturalism in culturally homogeneous settings: “Yes! These students live in a small town and we try to incorporate as much diversity as possible so they are aware of their surroundings.” In fact, only a minority of English teachers said that they did not address multiculturalism at all (represented in Table 14 as “No, I do not address multiculturalism.”) More commonly, English teachers noted that they did not address multiculturalism to the extent that they would like: “Not as much as I’d like. The area I teach in is a small town ... we are mostly a White community. It’s difficult to incorporate diversity because of a number of reasons.” Another participant explained, “I would like to include more diversity... unfortunately the community in which I teach isn’t fond of approving books of diversity.” This finding suggests that a dearth of multicultural literature curriculum may not reflect a dearth of desire on the part of English teachers to engage in that work.

Teachers’ valuing of multicultural literature for their White students is refreshing, because existing research suggests that educators in many rural and suburban schools, where students are often White, “multicultural education is viewed as unnecessary” (Jenks,

Lee & Kanpol, 2001; p. 87). A belief that multiculturalism is unnecessary in “mainstream” teaching contexts reflects a common assumption that multicultural curriculum and pedagogy are for the benefit of students of color and students from historically marginalized populations. Several teachers who participated in this study expressed the opinion that multiculturalism is important, perhaps especially so, in their homogeneous contexts because their students lack understanding of racial and cultural diversity.

But how do English teachers use book-length works to address “themes of multiculturalism and diversity” if they include little-to-no multicultural literature? English teachers reported that 69% of the book-length works they use to teach multicultural themes were written by White authors. The texts most frequently reported as being used to address multicultural themes, listed in Table 5, included canonical works, such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain. Of the eleven book-length works most frequently used to address multicultural themes, eight were written by White authors. In other words, English teachers reported often using literature by White authors to address themes of multiculturalism.

Examples can help shed some light on the texts used and the themes addressed. For example, *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* were most frequently listed as being used to address themes of race and racism. *Of Mice and Men* was frequently listed as addressing prejudice and discrimination and *The Great Gatsby* was frequently listed as addressing class and/or gender. *The Giver* was frequently listed as being used to address diversity or the lack of diversity. And *The Outsiders* was frequently associated with prejudice and discrimination or universalism. For example, respondents reported using

The Outsiders to address multicultural themes such as “diversity,” “individualism,” “acceptance,” “class,” and “cliques.”

Table 13

Book-length Works Most Frequently Used for Multiculturalism

Title Listed	Number of instances
<i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> by Harper Lee (1960)	62
<i>Of Mice and Men</i> by John Steinbeck (1937)	29
<i>Night</i> by Elie Weisel (1960)	27
<i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> by Lorraine Hansberry (1959)	25
<i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> by Mark Twain (1884)	24
<i>The Outsiders</i> by S.E. Hinton (1967)	16
<i>The Great Gatsby</i> by F. Scott Fitzgerald (1925)	13
<i>House on Mango Street</i> by Sandra Cisneros (1984)	13
<i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i> by Zora Neale Hurston (1937)	13
<i>Diary of Anne Frank</i> by Anne Frank (1947)	10
<i>The Giver</i> by Lois Lowry (1993)	10

This finding can be interpreted as deeply problematic. Adapting the traditional canon for multicultural goals constitutes an additive approach to multiculturalism, which leaves the White perspective firmly in place (Banks, 2004). In the past, researchers have interpreted similar findings as a misunderstanding on the part of English teachers about the meaning of multiculturalism. Stallworth et al. (2006) interpreted teachers’ listing of texts by White authors as multicultural as “confusion”:

many of the teachers responded yes, that they were including multicultural selections. Yet many of the works and authors they listed are not normally considered multicultural literature; rather, many were works long established in the literary canon (p. 488).

But is a critical interpretation of this finding the only one? It is true that using canonical works to address multicultural themes, like racism, risks foregrounding White perspectives and reproducing the dominance, neutrality and invisibility of Whiteness. Unless, of course, teachers engage students in “reading against” such texts. From this perspective it may seem more plausible—even generative for conceiving of new lines of inquiry and directions for critical multicultural pedagogy—to address multicultural issues through a study of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Morrison (1992) argues that reading American literature through a critical race lens may lead to a more productive, deeper understanding of American literature. Certainly, high school students could consider how Harper Lee’s construction of the iconic hero, Atticus Finch, depended on her construction of the iconic victim, Tom Robinson. Who would Atticus Finch be without Tom Robinson? Would Atticus Finch, the capable and altruistic humanitarian, have been able to establish himself as such if Tom Robinson had not been falsely accused of sexually assaulting Mayella Ewell? Pursuing such questions could make problematic constructions of Whiteness visible for students.

What about *Huckleberry Finn*? The novel has been widely criticized and even banned from secondary literature curriculum in reaction to accusations about racism. Morrison (1992), for her part, defends a critical reading of *Huck Finn*:

If we supplement our reading of *Huckleberry Finn*, expand it—release it from its clutch of sentimental nostrums about lighting out to the territory, river gods, and the fundamental innocence of Americanness—to incorporate its contestatory, combative critique of antebellum American, it seems to be another, fuller novel (p. 54).

Morrison goes on to model the kind of critical analysis that is possible by critiquing the naïve and innocent child narrator, the interdependence of slavery and freedom, Huck's growth as dependent on Jim's character being less-than-human, less-than adult, for example. Once again, critical readings against *Huck Finn* could deepen students' understanding of racism and make the construction of Whiteness visible for White students.

The possibilities for examining race in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* are obvious. What about the other texts teachers reported using to address multicultural themes? How might an English teacher address multicultural themes through the study of *Of Mice and Men*, a novel with one minor character of color, Crooks? In our follow up interview, Hilary explained that during their study of *Of Mice and Men*, she teaches students about the term "marginalized voices" and what it means "to push people into the margins and take away their power." She addresses these issues, specifically, following their reading of Chapter Four, in which "weak and powerless" characters—Curley's Wife, Lennie, Candy, and Crooks—gather in Crooks' room in the barn. During the scene, Curley's Wife, otherwise relatively powerless in relationship with the White men on the farm, threatens to have Crooks lynched. Hilary explained that this scene sets the stage for her and her students to discuss race, marginalization, power, and objectification. Finally, they make connections across course texts:

Of Mice and Men is the last of the three books we read, so I'll usually ask them about how that relates back to [*House on Mango Street*] because there's the vignette where they roll up the windows in the car and look straight ahead so they don't get into any trouble when they go into the White neighborhood; and the White people do

that when they come into their community. So we talk about that scene and feeling powerless.

Hilary listed *Of Mice and Men* as a text she uses to address multicultural themes. Upon first glance, I was skeptical, concerned that such a practice might constitute a glossing over of multicultural topics. During our follow up interview, Hilary explained how she introduced students to critical antiracist multicultural concepts such as power and marginalization and connected those concepts in their reading of a book by an author of color. As Morrison (1992) instructs, “Even, and especially, when American texts are not ‘about’ Africanist presences or characters or narrative or idiom, the shadow hovers in implication, in sign, in the line of demarcation” (p. 47). Hilary is doing what Morrison encourages by interrogating race in a canonical American novel.

In some ways, this finding makes perfect sense. English teachers report having little freedom and few resources to select or change literature curriculum (Applebee, 1993; Stallworth et al., 2006). Perhaps addressing multicultural themes through canonical literature reflects English teachers’ solutions for dealing with myriad constraints. This finding may reflect English teachers’ resourceful efforts to negotiate multiple curricular objectives. For example, in addition to multicultural goals, English teachers balance state and district mandates, students’ reading levels and interests, college preparation, tradition, (un)available resources and their own values (Applebee, 1993; Stallworth et al., 1996). It is possible that using texts written by White authors to address multicultural themes allows English teachers to juggle several different—even seemingly contradictory—goals at once.

Race and Racism in Canonical Literature

Although English teachers reported addressing many different multicultural topics (see Table 14), “race and racism” was reported as the most frequently addressed theme.

Race and racism, reported to be most often addressed using novels written by White authors, primarily *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, seemed to refer most often to African Americans in the United States. Books by authors of color most frequently used to address race and racism included *A Raisin in the Sun* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Given the fact that three of the top ten most frequently listed book-length works include racism as a central theme—*To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *A Raisin in the Sun*—it is not surprising that race and racism would be listed as the most frequently addressed theme.

Table 14

List of Multicultural Topics Addressed

Topics	Direct quotes: book-length works and topics addressed	Instances
Race/ racism	<i>“To Kill a Mockingbird, racism, civil rights and the legal system”</i> <i>“Huck Finn, slavery and the historical significance of the novel”</i> <i>“Othello, race and discrimination”</i>	100
Difference in general	<i>“Tuesdays With Morrie, seeing life from perspectives of others”</i> <i>“Romeo & Juliet, independent thinking and being”</i> <i>“The Giver, choices”</i> <i>“Each novel is set in a different place from our town. Everything represents diversity.”</i> <i>“All of them.”</i>	93
Diversity/ lack of diversity	<i>“The Cay, diversity”</i> <i>“The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian, diversity”</i> <i>“The Giver, discusses sameness, which allows us to take this in a variety of directions about how diversity should be valued.”</i> <i>“1984, lack of diversity and the problems it creates”</i>	56

Table 14. (cont'd)

Class	" <i>The Great Gatsby</i> , socioeconomic disparity"	33
Culture	" <i>The Breadwinner</i> , life in Afghanistan" "The Other Side of the Sky, Arab culture" " <i>The Odyssey</i> , Greek culture"	30
Prejudice/ discrimination	" <i>The Diary of Anne Frank</i> , we discuss prejudice, hatred and propaganda." " <i>The Outsiders</i> , discrimination"	25
Holocaust	" <i>Night</i> , holocaust and genocide" " <i>Number the Stars</i> , the holocaust"	25
No	"No, we do address this through anthologies." "No, British Literature is not very diverse."	14
Ability/ disability	"The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime, autism." " <i>Miracle Worker</i> , people with disabilities"	13
Religion	" <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> , religious beliefs and practices" " <i>The Crucible</i> , Diversity of religious beliefs"	9
Gender	"Romeo and Juliet, feminism" " <i>A Doll's House</i> , role of women in culture and time period."	6
Immigration	"Tortilla Curtain, immigration" "House on Mango Street, immigration"	4
Colonization	" <i>Heart of Darkness</i> , colonization/brutalization of Africa and its contemporary ramifications" "Cry the Beloved Country, apartheid issues"	3
Sexual Orientation	" <i>The Hours</i> , homosexuality"	2
Language diversity	"Linguistic dialects"	1

In a few cases, respondents reported addressing the legacy of slavery and racism today, including "the American Dream then and now," "the segregation of cities," and "racism and the legal system." However, more commonly, responses reflected historical perspectives on race, such as "Jim Crow laws," "the Civil Rights movement," "the Emancipation Proclamation," "the history of racism," "racism in the 1800's" and "racism in the 1900's." In our follow up interview, Amie discussed how she deals with racism through their study of *To Kill a Mockingbird*:

In historical context. To introduce the novel, we do a lot of research on Jim Crow eras and laws. They all have different topics and they do digital stories based on their topics. ... and then we continue to talk about that throughout the novel. I do my best not to censor the book at all; I say what is written. [(The “N word.”)] A lot of students are shocked at first and I say, “Why am I saying this? Why is it important to hear this?” And actually see it. We talk about that and how it was commonly used, why it was used and why it was not okay. But, mostly talk about the racial issues in a historical context.

Critical Antiracist Multiculturalism emphasizes the importance of moving beyond historical and interpersonal dimensions of racism to address contemporary and systemic dimensions of oppression and privilege. Focusing on race and racism as a historical and interpersonal issue has the potential to miseducate students that racism no longer exists and misses opportunities to teach students about the ways the legacy of historical racism lives on in systemic ways in their own lives. That being said, underscoring race and racism within canonical novels takes Morrison’s (1992) argument to heart with the potential for engaging students with a deeper reading of American literature (Morrison, 1992).

A Curricular Borderland

Canonical Literature and Multicultural Literature

Existing research at the intersection of multicultural education and English education has focused on the inclusion or not of multicultural literature as it is commonly defined, in terms of authorship. That existing research has operated on three basic assumptions: 1) that literature is either multicultural or not multicultural; 2) that a dearth of multicultural literature also meant a dearth of multicultural pedagogy; 3) that

multicultural pedagogy entailed applying pedagogy to curriculum that was already multicultural. This chapter challenges those assumptions. Many of the English teachers who participated in this study affirmed that they do use book-length works to address multicultural themes and that they often use novels written by White authors (including canonical texts) to do it.

Based on the assumptions cited above, past research has interpreted English teachers' reporting of canonical works as "multicultural" as a mistake on the part of teachers. As Stallworth et al., (2006) explained: "many of the teachers responded yes, that they were including multicultural selections. Yet many of the works and authors they listed are not normally considered multicultural literature; rather, many were works long established in the literary canon (p. 488). However, Morrison's (1992) argument suggests that researchers should not be so quick to dismiss the possibility of addressing multicultural themes, such as race and racism, through canonical texts in American literature. To this point, little-to-no research within English education has explored the English teachers' engagement of multicultural themes through literature not typically considered multicultural.

It is important to note that I am not making claims in this chapter about how English teachers either do or do not engage critical antiracist multiculturalism through literature written by White authors. I am, however, arguing that, for better or for worse, English teachers who participated in this survey reported that they address multiculturalism, most often race and racism, with literature written by White authors, including canonical novels. If English teachers report doing it, researchers interested in multiculturalism within English education should consider studying it. So far, multiculturalism within canonical

novels constitutes uncharted territory. As such, this chapter makes a contribution by identifying a new line of inquiry. And it raises several additional questions. What do English teachers mean when they say they “address multicultural themes”? How do English teachers engage in such work?

Racism in Canonical Literature

English teachers reported race and racism as the most frequently addressed theme. Considering the list of most frequently taught titles, including *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, it is not surprising that race and racism were listed as the most frequently addressed. Skeptics may question the suitability of novels written by White authors to address multicultural themes. To be sure, novels like *To Kill a Mockingbird* are fundamentally limited in their potential to serve the purpose of addressing race and racism. For example, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960/2010) centers on Atticus Finch, the honorable attorney portrayed as the White savior working on behalf of Tom Robinson, the victim unfairly accused of rape. The novel, written from a White perspective and focused on the perspectives of White characters, frames race and racism through a White point of view and foregrounds a White perspective. Addressing multicultural themes from a culturally dominant perspective risks an additive approach to multiculturalism (Banks , 2003, 2004) because it leaves the dominant White perspective firmly in place.

However, Morrison (1992) offers another way of looking at that finding, arguing that race is always already embedded within American literature (even when the novel is not explicitly about race or racism). Morrison’s (1992) argument begs the question, “How could one teach literature by White authors *without* addressing multicultural themes?” To read *To Kill a Mockingbird* and not address institutional racism, for example, could over-

simplify racism. In addition, *To Kill a Mockingbird* offers an opportunity to address Whiteness, White supremacy, and White privilege. And, given the popularity of novels like *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Adventure of Huckleberry Finn*, it is certain that these novels are teaching students something about race and racism whether teachers explicitly address those themes or not.

In Chapter 1, I introduced the concept of borderland discourse as the in-between spaces created by participants to grapple with conflicts and tensions of different and potentially competing Discourses. I revisit the definition here to argue that English teachers' using canonical novels to address multicultural themes constitutes a curricular borderland. For example, *To Kill a Mockingbird* is not a multicultural novel by typical standards; but it is also not *not* multicultural by Morrison's (1992) standards. The novel is explicitly about racism, but it is told from a White point of view and by a White author. It makes strong points about the injustice of the legal system and the ugliness of hate, but it glorifies the White hero in contrast to the Black victim. Similarly, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is not multicultural by typical standards, but it is also not *not* multicultural. It is about racism, but it is told from a White point of view and by a White author. Many literary scholars consider it to be one of the first antiracist texts, but many English educators, parents, and students find the language and characters so problematic they feel it should not be taught in schools. Bringing together canonical literature and multicultural education highlights the tensions between multicultural Discourses and Discourses of traditional literature study.

As Gee (2005, 2008) explains, borderland discourses, created out of the struggle between competing ideologies, are often characterized by tension and conflict. As such, I

argue that by bringing multicultural Discourse together with Discourse of traditional literature study, English teachers create a curricular borderland. Thinking about the tensions as a borderland space highlights the potential for English teachers to engage with questions, such as should addressing racism using a novel like *To Kill a Mockingbird* constitute multicultural literature study? What are the limitations of teaching about racism and difference from dominant points of view?

Of course, it must be noted that the ultimate and preferable goal would be to include more authors of color. In fact, I do not want to overshadow the goal of diversifying secondary literature curriculum with works by authors of color and from historically marginalized populations. Incorporating more literature by authors of color continues to be an important goal. That being said, the reality is that literature curriculum continues to be shaped by Discourses of Whiteness. Looking for spaces for multiculturalism within those Discourses of Whiteness offers a curricular Borderland Discourse. Perhaps considering the possibility of addressing multicultural themes like race and racism through literature written by White authors, contributes, as Morrison (1992) suggests, to a “wider landscape” for addressing multiculturalism in English.

Survey data served as a spring board for subsequent phases of data collection and analysis in this dissertation. For example, the overwhelming majority of English teachers who participated in this survey identified themselves as White. I followed up on that overwhelming majority and focused on White teachers. English teachers who participated in this survey reported that yes, they did address multicultural themes. I followed up on that majority and interviewed teachers who said they did address multicultural themes.

English teachers who participated in this survey reported that race and racism were the more frequently addressed multicultural theme. I followed up on that majority and focused specifically on White English teachers who addressed the theme of race and racism through the study of canonical novels. And, because this study operates on the premise that multicultural education is essential for White students, Chapter 4 explores these questions through a case study of one White English teacher who employs a critical multicultural approach to *To Kill a Mockingbird* with her White students.

CHAPTER 4: A PEDAGOGICAL BORDERLAND: A CRITICAL MULTICULTURAL APPROACH

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

Despite the contemporary focus on multiculturalism in our society, particularly in education, there is not nearly enough practical discussion of ways classroom settings can be transformed so that the learning experience is inclusive. If the effort to respect and honor the social reality and experiences of groups in this society who are non-White is to be reflected in a pedagogical process, then as teachers--on all levels, from elementary to university settings--we must acknowledge that our styles of teaching may need to change (hooks, 1994, p.).

English education researchers have often assumed the dearth of multicultural literature reflected a dearth of multicultural pedagogy. The survey study presented in the last chapter called that assumption into question, citing that English teachers who participated in the survey reported that they often use literature written by White authors, including canonical novels like *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, to address multicultural themes like race and racism in predominantly White teaching contexts. Addressing multicultural themes via canonical works is likely not what multicultural literature scholars had in mind in terms of diversifying English curriculum. The prospect of it raises several questions. What do English teachers mean by “address multicultural themes” and what might a multicultural approach to a canonical novel look like?

The field has called for explicitly critical approaches that help students embrace complexity and confront difference, privilege, and oppression (Anagnostopoulos, 2010; Beach et al. 2008, Carey-Webb, 2001; Dressel, 2005; Haviland, 2008; Juzwik, 2009;

McIntyre, 1997; Rogers & Soter, 1997; Tatum, 1997). Because critical literature instruction remains the exception rather than the norm, research has offered few models of what critical approaches might look like in practice, in context. Although many critical scholars warn that focusing on particular practices risks being construed as “one-size-fits-all solutions” (Bartolome, 1994, from Chavez & O’Donnell, 1998), identifying specific practices can offer critical multicultural educators support for engaging in complex work and is important for emphasizing that all critical pedagogy must be rooted in the particulars of specific contexts (Ellsworth, 1989). What practices might be conducive to critical multicultural literature study in predominantly White contexts?

In this chapter, I draw on data from the survey, interviews and literature unit studies to construct a case study of a White English teacher’s critical multicultural approach to *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee in a predominantly White teaching context. The following research questions guided this study: Given a single teacher with an espoused stance to a critical approach:

- What practices support critical multicultural literature study?
- What practices support critical multicultural learning when using texts by White authors?
- What practices support critical multicultural learning in a predominantly White teaching context?

I argue that Anna’s approach to *To Kill a Mockingbird* was “critical multicultural” to the extent that it honored the voices and experiences of people of color through supporting texts and counterstories; promoted open dialogue about race and racism; encouraged self-reflexivity by encouraging students to talk about their Whiteness; critiqued traditions of

schooling by “reading against” a canonical text (to some extent); framed racism as institutional rather than interpersonal, and had the potential to contribute to social change through students’ changed thinking (Au, 2009; May, 1998; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995).

Critical Antiracist Multicultural Pedagogy

Although I discuss critical antiracist multiculturalism in more depth in the theoretical framework in Chapter 1, I revisit central tenets of critical antiracist multicultural pedagogy because I use it as an interpretive lens for reading Anna’s practices. Critical antiracist multiculturalism, which counters non-critical iterations celebrations of cultural diversity without addressing power and oppression, brings principles of critical pedagogy to multicultural education with an explicit focus on race and racism (Banks, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2004; May, 1998; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). Specifically, critical antiracist multicultural pedagogy:

- honors the voices and experiences of people of color;
- teaches through collaboration and dialogue;
- encourages a consideration of multiple perspectives;
- fosters self-reflexivity and consciousness of self as a racial being;
- examines power and oppression;
- examines the institutional aspects of inequality,
- critiques traditions of schooling; and
- engages students in social action (Au, 2009; May, 1998; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995).

One of the central goals of critical antiracist multiculturalism in predominantly White contexts is to disrupt Whiteness. It may take the form of teaching students about

their Whiteness and helping them to develop their own racial identities (McIntyre, 1997). A critical approach to multiculturalism in White contexts means addressing Whiteness, White identity, White privilege, and White supremacy (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). It means, essentially, turning the lens on one's own complicity (Banks, 2004; Kalantzis & Cope, 1999). Kalin (2002) advocates a two-pronged approach that addresses racism on both the individual and institutional levels. Kalin (2002) offers a curricular framework that includes considering one's own "White racial autobiography," naming White privilege, defining "race" and examining the language of race, learning about the antiracist tradition, and examining historical roots of institutionalized racism. At the same time, Critical Antiracist Multiculturalism attempts to acknowledge the diversity of White people by avoiding the tendency to essentialize.

A Constellation of Promising Practices

In this section, I explore Anna's pedagogy (both teaching orientation and specific practices) as a case of a critical multicultural approach to *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a text not typically described as "multicultural." I identify specific pedagogical practices that Anna employed as part of her critical multicultural approach to a *To Kill a Mockingbird*, including articulating critical multicultural objectives, utilizing supporting texts, integrating counterstories, formatively and summatively assessing students' understanding of multicultural concepts, and being reflexive. To give a sense of progression through the unit, I begin with Anna's orientation to teaching English generally and *To Kill a Mockingbird* specifically. Next, I discuss her articulation of multicultural objectives and use of supporting texts and counterstories. I consider the ways she made Whiteness visible to her students. I describe her use of assessments. Finally, because the purpose and nature of

critical multicultural pedagogy is context-specific, I also consider how “critical multiculturalism” was shaped by and responds to her predominantly White teaching context. Finally, I explore the ways Anna and her students participated in Discourses of Whiteness even as they attempted to disrupt them. I end with a discussion of potential contributions of this case study.

Anna and Clearwater

Anna was a second-year English teacher at Clearwater High School (CHS) in Clearwater, Michigan at the time of the study. A White woman in her early twenties, and who had recently graduated from a prominent teacher education program at a large state university, Anna stood out among her peers as a very talented early career teacher. She moved to Clearwater following graduation when she accepted her first teaching position. As a native of Michigan, she was familiar with the area before she moved there. Anna told me that Clearwater is a “nice little town” located on a large lake that draws major tourism to the area. Clearwater is also in close proximity to another lakeside community well known for being an upper class get-away with a quaint downtown of boutiques and restaurants. The student population of the school is 96% White and, according to both Anna and Mr. Potter, the high school principal, middle-to-upper class.

The high school building itself reflected the middle-to-upper class status of the community and student body. The attractive brick building included a fitness and aquatic center. A banner hanging from the fence around the tennis courts boasted CHS’s elite ranking as top 2% of U.S. high schools according to U.S. News and World Report. These rankings were calculated by the ratio of the total number of students in the school and the number of students who take Advanced Placement (AP) tests. Clearwater offered a range of

AP classes across the curriculum and a large percentage of students took advantage of those more prestigious and rigorous options. As I walked through the hallways on my way to Anna's classroom in the morning, there were no students wandering the hallways. The hallways were clean, quiet and orderly. The halls were neatly decorated with student work, such as painted portraits and diagrams of cell systems. Lockers were adorned with signs and tags marking students as members of sports' teams, competitive cheer teams, and clubs and organizations. I was surprised that the girls' bathroom was stocked with decorative boxes of tissues and bottles of scented hand lotion, comforts not found in many high schools. Anna told me that a small group of teachers provided those accouterments for the girls to give a "homier feel." Both teachers and students appeared to take great pride in the school facilities.

Inside classrooms, students did not wear coats or caps. I did not witness students texting under their desks during class or sneaking to use their iPods during class time (as I often have when I have visited classrooms to observe teacher interns, for example). Students did not lug huge backpacks through the hallways. Details of daily school life seemed to operate too smoothly to be true. In fact, one day Anna opened her grade book to show me that every single student had completed his/her homework for that day. She explained that while there have been a few students to fail her course because they did not do their homework, it is not uncommon for every single student to turn in a particular homework assignment. It is not surprising, given the idyllic conditions at CHS, that teaching positions are highly sought-after. In fact, the principal explained that Anna was one of five hundred candidates who applied for that specific teaching position. He also told me that Anna stood out among the crowd as being a particularly talented early career teacher.

During one of his observations of her teaching in those first years, he was especially impressed by her facility for generating student engagement and participation in whole class discussion. During one lesson he observed, he said, every student participated at least once. By my own observation, Anna brought a confidence and complexity to her position that is rare for a new teacher. In turn, Anna expressed gratitude to work with a supportive and capable administrator who offered guidance, but who also offered her plenty of space and freedom to develop her own interests and talents.

Employing a Critical Approach

Anna approached teaching English as a “critical” (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1989; Shor, 1987) endeavor. She saw opportunities to teach for social justice in her classroom in ways she hoped would impact her individual students but also their school, community and the world. When she described her mission for teaching, she spoke of her cousin, also in her twenties, who earned a law degree and started a non-profit organization to work on behalf of migrant workers’ rights. Anna hoped to be able to work from her teaching position in similar ways—to advocate for social change.

Although she was motivated by the value of social justice, she was still working out what critical pedagogy could look like in her classroom. She found inspiration in the work of classic critical literacy scholars. She talked to me about her experiences reading Paulo Freire (1970) and Ira Shor (1987). She felt motivated by their calls for social justice education, but she wondered aloud about what that critical pedagogy might look like in Clearwater—a predominantly White and middle-to-upper class community. Freire’s (1970) activism revolved around developing critical consciousness to empower the “oppressed” to be able to work for their own liberation. On one hand, Anna thought critical literacy in

Clearwater could include empowering her students, too, to some extent to “read against” texts, including popular media, for example. On the other hand, Anna clarified that “the purpose of critical literacy with these kids, it’s kind of backward; it’s teaching tolerance and understanding; it’s not rising up.” Teaching critical literacy in Clearwater was “backward,” she reasoned because her students might be characterized (in the most broad terms) as “oppressors,” rather than the “oppressed” (Freire, 1970). She read a quote from Shor (1999) aloud during our interview: “This is where critical literacy begins for questioning power relations, discourses and identity relations in a world not yet finished, just or humane.” She went on to say:

I feel like that is so critical for our students to think about because they think of the world as finished—and just. Especially Clearwater, it is very just. They live in a bubble. So, thinking beyond the bubble, almost. And it’s different to challenge the status quo ... so that idea of White kids not wanting to challenge the status quo, of something that is in their benefit... because why would they want to?

For Anna working toward critical literacy with students in Clearwater, who are typically White and middle-to-upper-class and therefore privileged, meant not only empowering them with critical consciousness, but also implicating them, pointing out their privilege, and helping them question their assumptions about the world being a “just” place. She, like other critical educators (e.g., Nieto, 2000; Tatum, 1997) felt that critical multicultural education “especially benefits majority-group students, who may develop an unrealistic and overblown view of their place in the world because of the unbalanced and incomplete education they have received in the school curriculum in particular and in the larger society in general” (Nieto, 2010, p. 25).

She looked for examples of other teachers doing critical work in their classrooms. She read about Ernest Morrell's (2007) work with urban youth in California and Linda Christensen's (2002) work with students of diverse racial, cultural and linguistic backgrounds in Oregon, but she had not found examples of critical teaching in a context like hers: "When I first thought about it, I started looking up "critical literacy" and finding that it was just for inner city kids—and then started thinking about it for my kids anyway. ... I used some of [Linda Christenson's] stuff, but it wasn't the same." She had little luck finding resources to help her think about the challenges of getting her students "to think beyond the bubble" of their culturally dominant context.

Although Anna's goal to help her students think outside of their bubble applied to all of her students, at times the focus on Whiteness meant that the few students of color in the class were marginalized. In other words, Clearwater's student body was 96% White; 4% of students were not White. These demographics were reflected in Anna's English 9 course. At times, Anna asked students to reflect on their backgrounds and experiences, often assuming a White experience. At times she talked about the ways "our" point of view is limited, using pronouns to suggest that all students shared the same positionality. Most days I sat behind Brianna, a mixed race girl adopted by White parents. As a mother of a mixed race child myself, I could not help but wonder what Brianna was thinking as Anna referred to "we" and "us." But Brianna rarely spoke up in class and declined to be interviewed. Anna was aware of the dynamic and admitted that she sometimes feels unsure about how to handle it. She noted that she did not want to put students of color on the spot by calling on them or asking them to share their perspectives for the benefit of the rest of

the class. That being said, the White Discourse that dominated the class marginalized, even silenced, the non-White students in the classroom, like Brianna.

Anna continued to negotiate the complexities of a critical multicultural approach as she went along, looking for opportunities within the required literature curriculum, which included *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *Of Mice and Men*, Greek mythology (including *The Odyssey*), and Arthurian legends. For example, she began the course using Appleman's (2009) critical "lenses," asking students to "read" magazine advertisements from Feminist, Marxist, and archetypal lenses. Anna wanted to help her students, from the beginning, to develop habits of thinking "critically" and "reading against" texts. She shared with her students a TED talk by Chimamanda Adichie (2007) called "The Danger of a Single Story" to show students how all stories are told from a particular, slanted vantage point. Adichie's talk illustrated the consequences of stories that are told and, often more importantly, stories that are not told. Anna used "the danger of a single story" as a framework for the entire English 9 curriculum. She periodically came back to the theme to ask students about whose stories were being told, whose stories were not being told, and what lessons they might learn from considering those questions. Anna was teaching her students to "read against" texts from the first day. To use common metaphors from the language of critical pedagogy, she and her students were continually making the familiar strange, making the invisible visible. Her continual critical literacy work in the course more generally set the stage for taking a critical multicultural approach to *To Kill a Mockingbird* specifically.

Although Anna endeavored to employ a critical approach, like many English teachers, Anna balanced multiple approaches to literary instruction, including new

criticism, reader response, a skills-based approach, as she juggled the myriad objectives of traditional literature instruction and critical multiculturalism. She wove these various threads in the classroom together with the daily rhythms of high school life, trying to vary the kinds of activities from day-to-day and taking into account snow days, a school assembly for Black History Month, and her own schedule as a competitive cheerleading coach.

Articulating Critical Multicultural Objectives for *To Kill a Mockingbird*

One central, concrete critical multicultural objective informed Anna's work throughout the unit. She wanted students to understand and be able to articulate the concept of institutional racism. Near the middle of the unit, as students were reading about the trial of Tom Robinson, she defined "institutional racism" on the White board for her students: "the unequal distribution of rights or opportunities to individual or groups that results from the normal operations of society. Usually unintentional. Also the belief that race accounts for differences in human character or ability and that a particular race is superior to others based on arbitrary things." She contrasted institutional racism with interpersonal racism, which she defined as "an individual showing racism (this can be either overt or covert). In our initial interview, Anna explained that she aimed to complicate students' current, typical understanding of racism as overt and interpersonal:

Racism can seem trite. The idea of racism. "We know. We know. Racism exists and we can't be mean to black people." That's their overall attitude. They have read things in middle school, but it's tied up in a neat little bow. To crack open the shell you need to really get a buy in. And I think the intellectual aspect can be that buy in. Like different levels of racism and we're going to read different articles. That can

make it more authentic. I think they want to talk about it in a more sophisticated way.

By “different levels” of racism, Anna was referring to an article she had recently read (in preparation for this unit) about interpersonal, institutional and epistemological levels of racism. Although Anna did not think her ninth graders were ready for lessons on epistemological racism, she felt that engaging students in learning about more “sophisticated” aspects of racism would help her avoid what Heilman (2007) refers to as “happy multiculturalism,” which describes more benign celebrations of difference. Students, Anna predicted, had been through those kinds of multicultural discussions before at other grade levels.

Although Anna did not use the term, I argue that her objective was “critical multicultural” for a few key reasons. First, she included, even prioritized, a study of racism. Second, this particular objective reflects critical multiculturalism because it framed racism as systemic and not merely interpersonal. Third, by working to challenge students’ assumptions, her objective had the potential to contribute to social change (antiracism) in a general sense.

“To understand and give examples of institutional racism” was not the only critical multicultural objective of the unit. Anna also wanted her students to begin to examine their own White racial identity and to think about how/why the meaning and usage of racial slurs have evolved since the historical context of the novel. To be sure, Anna had many other English Language Arts goals for her students as well, including more traditional literary study goals, such identifying symbolism, understanding direct and indirect characterization, learning new vocabulary and writing an argumentative essay, to name a

few. Anna wove a “understanding institutional racism” together with writing objectives, vocabulary objectives, more traditional literary analysis like identifying symbolism and understanding characterization, and strategies for student motivation.

Anna’s objective of “understanding institutional racism” helped me to characterize her unit as critical multicultural. At the same time, I the extent to which framing “understanding institutional racism” as a concrete concept might make racism seem like an objective, rational concept to be learned, thereby distancing White students from having to examine their own complicity.

Integrating Supporting Texts

Anna explained that in the past, discussions about race and racism in her teaching context had been derailed because students perceived that racism exists or that because they do not perceive themselves to be racist, discussions about racism are not relevant or necessary: “They’re like, ‘Oh, it doesn’t exist.’ Or like the idea that, ‘Oh, I’m not racist myself, so why do I have to talk about it? That breaks down, that stops conversations. Because I’m not racist there’s notion to talk about.” To preempt this issue, Anna used texts to show her students examples of racism—historical and contemporary. She shared newspaper articles, YouTube videos and personal examples to illustrate the prevalence of racism today. They watched a documentary called “Prom Night in Mississippi” that told the story of an American high school that hosted two separate and segregated proms—one for Whites and one for Blacks. She also included texts that related to their own community to relate to their immediate contexts and lives. For example, they read an editorial written by a local resident about his recent experience with racism in their own community. She also included a discussion of the American legal system, pointing out how institutional racism

results in discrepancies in convictions and sentencing rates related to race. Providing supporting texts gave students specific and complex examples for talking about *how* not *whether* racism operates today. The texts gave students something to talk from/about, rather than asking (White) students' to discuss their own (very limited) experiences with, understanding about and opinions on racism. Offering the texts was a proactive move to preempt the misunderstandings she anticipated.

These supporting texts also connected institutional racism in the novel with institutional racism in society today. Another one of her purposes for sharing contemporary examples seemed to be to make the point that racism is not a "thing of the past," it is not just a relic of small southern towns (like Maycomb) at the turn of the century and that racism is not disconnected from their own lives. Connecting events in novels with events in contemporary society reflects a common move in English education to demonstrate to students how reading "old" canonical works is relevant to their lives today.

As I argued in Chapter 3, supplementing a novel unit with supporting texts does not make up for the fact that the central novel of study remains a canonical text written by a White author. On one hand, supplementing the unit with supporting texts reflects Anna's savvy effort to make a traditional unit into something more critical. On the other hand, the fact remains that it continues to prioritize literature written by White authors and to marginalize literature written by authors of color.

Integrating Counterstories

Among the texts Anna integrated into the unit were "counterstories," stories "that aim to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 144). For example, she included works such as

“Human Family,” a poem by Maya Angelou, “Not Poor, Just Broke,” a short story by Dick Gregory, seemed to help Anna mitigate the problem. She said:

Obviously, *To Kill a Mockingbird* was told by Harper Lee and Scout. Female and White perspectives. So, it is important to bring in different perspectives from the same time frame. ... Supplemental texts are so important.

Critical race scholars point out that counterstorytelling can be valuable for its “destructive function” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). “Critical writers use counterstories to challenge, displace, or mock these pernicious narratives and beliefs” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 43). For Anna and her students, these poems and short stories by authors of color offered “counterstories” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) to the White perspective on racism in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

One counterstory in particular seemed particularly powerful. About half way through the unit, as students were reading about the trial of Tom Robinson (chapters 19 – 20), Anna asked students to listen to an oral story called “From Flint, Michigan to Your Front Door: Tracing the Roots of Racism in America,” told by La’Ron Williams, an African American and a professional storyteller from Michigan. His story was set in Flint, Michigan, making it particularly relevant to these students’ lives. Here is an excerpt to represent his style:

A lot of the time, at the end of the day, the grown-ups on my street would get together and carry on a tradition that was started a long time before any of us was born. They would gather on my family’s front porch and they would talk and tell stories about their lives. It didn’t matter that these people were tired from a hard day’s work or that they were “just’ factory workers. They found the time to give to

each other at least a tiny bit of the respect that wasn't given to them by the larger society. On that porch, they coped with their fears and the harshness of their lives and they shared their joys and their good times.

Mr. Puckett would usually be the one to start out. He'd say, "Ya'll know what I had fuh suppah last night? Three chicken feet, some neckbone soup, and a wish sammich. Ya'll know what a 'wish sammich is, right? That's where you take two pieces of bread, put 'em together, and wish you had some meat! Ha, Ha, Ha!"

Williams' story is about a African American boy's close-knit community, where his father takes him to hang out with the other guys the Barber Shop, where they listen to "Do-wap," and where they hang out with their neighbors on their front stoops. Williams' brand of storytelling also weaves narrative with instruction about complex issues. This particular story illustrated how red lining resulted in predominantly Black neighborhoods, and how factory owners hired a surplus of workers so they could pay lower-than-average wages. Near the end of the story, Williams' recounted an experience in elementary school:

Well, I remember one time when the whole third grade class was working on painting a huge, banner mural painting to illustrate a story that Mrs. Paris had read to us. We drew it out first, and then we were going to paint the parts that we drew. Well, I was a pretty good artist, so I finished drawing my part of the banner before anybody else. So Mrs. Paris came over and gave me a bunch of cups of paint that she had mixed up and labeled before class. I picked up one of the cups and I started to paint one of the people in my part of the banner. But before I could get very far, one of the few White students in the class stopped me. She said: "You're not supposed to use *brown* to color history people!"

Williams talked about “flesh colored paint” and the assumptions underneath that label. He also talked about the lesson he learned that day about the assumptions his fellow classmates made about the skin color of the founding fathers, which made him think about his own skin color differently than he had before.

This story is not a counterstory because it tells a story that describes a childhood that may be different from the childhood stories the students in Clearwater would tell. It is a counterstory because it challenges stereotypes and grand narratives about Black communities. It is a counterstory because in his story La’Ron is not a minority; he is part of the majority in his community. It is a counterstory because it is not written in response to or from the White perspective that the students of Clearwater were so used to.

If English teachers use books by White authors to address multicultural themes, one of the greatest risks is an “additive approach” (Banks & Banks, 2003) to multiculturalism, to leave White perspectives firmly in the proverbial “center,” to offer students no opportunities to consider perspectives other than their own. Although it would be, in my view, preferable for Anna to be able to teach a book-length work by an author of color, counterstories have the potential to disrupt White students’ typical experiences and familiar storylines. Williams’ story offered a platform from which to potentially question their own taken-for-granted assumptions. And Williams’ story about racism from an African American perspective, countered the story about racism from a White perspective as seen in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Making Whiteness Visible

Anna expressed concern about whether she would be able to do an adequate job of addressing racism in the novel—and concern about the consequences if she did not do an

adequate job--as a result of her own Whiteness. She understood that her Whiteness could create "blindspots" (hooks, 1994) in her pedagogy because, in Anna's words, as White people "we don't know what we don't know." And, so, as she pointed out, as a White teacher she risked reproducing White privilege and supremacy. This reflection on her Whiteness and the potential for blindspots indicated to me a relatively developed (albeit continually developing) White racial consciousness, a quality of central importance for a White teacher doing critical multicultural work in a predominantly White context.

Along those same lines, Anna felt that for her students to really understand institutional racism, they would also need to understand White privilege. In order to teach them about White privilege, she would also need to raise their awareness of their own Whiteness. She speculated that these lessons might constitute their first ventures into the territory of their own racial identities, so she was deliberate about designing scaffolding lessons that she integrated over time. Initially, to open up dialogue about "times when you realized you were White," they read an article about a friend of hers who played quarterback and who was one of the only White students on a mostly Black campus at Jackson State in Mississippi. She used this example to make the point that this football player's Whiteness seemed "normal," even invisible, to him until he found himself in the minority. During their discussion of that article, Anna shared two personal stories about times when she realized her own Whiteness.

One time in my Freshman year of college ... I was going to get my hair chopped off. I called a couple of places and they were full, but I was feeling impulsive so I called a few different places. I'm calling and I finally make an appointment with a salon. She gives me directions and I take the bus. It took me 45 minutes to get there and it's an

all Black salon. And they kind of laugh at me and ask, “Are you the girl who called here an hour ago.” I’m like “Yeah, that was me,” and they’re like, “Oh, we thought you were White.” I’m like, “Okay... well, can you cut my hair?” And they were like, “Well we can...”

Through this narrative Anna modeled her thinking about her own developing racial identity. Her narrative, which made it “okay” to admit or confess similar experiences, opened the floor for students to tell similar narratives about their own experiences (cf., Juzwik, 2007, 2009; Juzwik et. al., 2008; Parmar, & Steinberg, 2008). Tina shared: “My mom used to live in Detroit. When we went to the mall we’d be some of the only White people there.” Other students went on to share similar examples. Sharing their experiences was productive to the extent that they were making Whiteness visible. It helped them to get past the tendency for White people to only think about race when talking about others.

Anna related their narratives back to the novel by highlighting the scene where Scout and Jem attended the trial and sat in the balcony of the courtroom with their Black maid, Calpurnia and the other Black citizens of Maycomb.

Later, during a discussion on the “N-word,” Anna called attention to the invisibility of Whiteness in language during a discussion:

1. **Jonah:** It’s like a history.
2. **Sarah:** They get mad if you use it.
3. **Anna:** Then they get mad... who is “they?”
4. **Sarah:** African Americans. I know that in the hallway I’ve even heard
5. people in the hallway who aren’t African American use it to call out to
6. their friends. And, um, I think the meaning has changed and they don’t

7. really understand what they're doing.
- 8. Anna:** Do you think those same people would be comfortable calling out
9. to another White friend in Silver Rapids hallway?
- 10. Students:** NO! (Some laughter.)
- 11. Anna:** Why not?
- 12. Sarah:** Because it's offensive to African Americans.
- 13. Anna:** In a school that isn't all White?
- 14. Caleb:** Not ours.
- 15. Anna:** And why is it offensive?
- 16. Sarah:** Because of the history behind it.
- 17. Sarah:** We don't have the same understanding of the word as they do
18. maybe because their ancestry put up with it and so they are the only ones
19. who can use it.
- 20. Anna:** What's the history behind it?
- 21. Sarah:** We used to always use it as a degrading term.
- 22. Anna:** We?

In line 3, Anna asked, "Who is they?" And again, in lines 21 – 22 Anna, asked "We?" In these examples, Anna called attention to students' use of pronouns. By calling attention to something that so taken-for-granted, Anna made—to some extent—Whiteness and cultural assumptions within their language a little bit more visible. Although I do not think she pushed them to the point of being able to articulate the consequences of pronoun usage, I do think she made "the familiar strange" and encouraged students to use specific language.

In lines 8 – 9, she makes the Whiteness of their school visible when she asks whether students thought people would use “nigger” in “Silver Rapids,” a near-by town with a predominantly African American population. By challenging students’ use of the language in their own predominantly White school in contrast to the predominantly African American school, she calls attention to racist behavior that may seem invisible in their own community. In other words, if you wouldn’t do it there, what makes you think you can do it here?

This short excerpt from one classroom interaction begins to illustrate that Anna was able to challenge students’ assumptions without shutting students down. Anna’s ability to facilitate open discussions on Whiteness in a classroom of White students is promising given the fact that existing research suggests that White teachers and students tend to avoid “hot lava” topics like race or promptly shut them down if they do come up (Florio-Ruane, 2001; Glazier, 2003; Haviland, 2008; Morrison, 1992; McIntyre, 1997; Pollack, 2004).

Deepening Literary Analysis

This discussion was also connected to their study of the novel. They went on to connect their discussion of the “N word” with language used by characters in the book, including “colored,” “negro” and “nigger.” They discussed what language use could tell them about characterization based on which characters used which words. They also questioned whether using those terms indicated racism during that historical context, or whether it was just “historically accurate.” In fact, they went on to challenge assumptions about Atticus Finch and the fact that he uses the word “colored” rather than “nigger.”

- 1. Krista:** I think colored is showing the most respect you can think of during

2. that time.
3. **Anna:** Okay, so it is just referencing a difference of a group of people in order
4. to be specific. Okay, and we know that Atticus uses this word. Does he seem
5. racist?
6. James: No.
7. **Troy:** A little.
8. Rachel: Yeah.
9. Anna: How so?
10. **Rachel:** He sees them as different classes of people. Like you would see a
11. poor person.
12. **Troy:** Yeah, I understand it. It doesn't say it in the book directly, but like it
13. seems like he would be.
14. **Brian:** He didn't ever say anything against them.
15. **Rachel:** But if you were rich, looking down at a poor person, that would be
16. like Atticus.
17. **Anna:** So by using this term he has some feeling of superiority.
18. **Rachel:** Um, because he has a lot of education, he seems to be a little bit more
19. mild about a lot of things, so it seems like he isn't so racist.
20. **Anna:** So it isn't his intent.

Atticus Finch is a cultural icon, typically beyond reproach. But, in this case, Anna engaged her students in “reading against” the text, opening up critique by asking if Atticus could be considered racist. And, drawing on their new understandings of racism as more than covert individual acts, Troy said, “A little.” And Rachel said, “Yeah.” At that point Troy and Rachel

try to articulate how Atticus might be implicated in racism even though he is a symbol of antiracism in the novel. Rachel tried to articulate her understanding of racism as institutional by comparing Atticus's racism with being rich. Although Rachel did not quite have the language, it seemed that she was trying to call attention to Atticus's privilege. He did not have to act overtly prejudiced or even intend to be prejudiced to be privileged by systemic racism. Similarly, Troy acknowledges that the book does not say it directly but he reads between the lines—reads into the gaps—to acknowledge that it would seem unlikely that a White man living in the South in the 1930s could escape being implicated in racism.

In this case, I would argue that by engaging her students in reading against the text from a critical multicultural approach, Anna not only supported Troy and Rachel's more complex view of racism but also supported deeper understanding of traditional English goals. For example, the exchange I recounted above took place in the context of a lesson about characterization. Anna taught students about direct and indirect characterization, as well as dynamic, static, round, and flat characters. In this example, Rachel and Troy's growing understanding of racism as systemic led to a more complex analysis of Atticus Finch, one of the most iconic characters in American literature. Atticus is often understood in uncomplicated terms as a hero fighting against the odds to defend Tom Robinson. Troy and Rachel analyzed Atticus as a more complex, dynamic character, demonstrating an understanding of racism, as well as an understanding of indirect characterization and an ability to analyze characters. By identifying and underscoring race and racism within this canonical novel, Anna took advantage of an often neglected layer that can lead to a deeper understanding of American literature (Morrison, 1992).

Discourses of Whiteness

My impression of Anna's unit was that it engaged ninth graders with complex issues of institutional racism and White racial consciousness. That being said, when all was said and done, I do not want to tell too neat of a story. There was also something a little unsettling to me. In my field notes I had identified instances when "I wish she had gone further with this discussion," or, "She initiated the discussion and then shut it down once it got going." Looking across instances like these, I began to characterize them as instances of "White Educational Discourse." To illustrate, I continue with the exchange described above. After Rachel and Troy speculated about whether Atticus might be implicated in systemic racism, Jenna said:

1. **Jenna:** I'm thinking at this period of time you can't really judge people and
2. make a distinction about using colored or not because it is just the way it
3. was. And if someone does that today, you might not make as big a distinction,
4. but back then there was still segregation and it was really like, I don't know if
5. because he said colored if it is far to say that he was racist.
6. **Anna:** So, for now, we won't hash this out any further. We're in chapter 7.
7. Let's say for now it's fair to leave it here. Maybe it's not fair to say that if they
8. used the word they are racist.

Jenna made a point about the historical context, which was legitimate to consider. Jenna and Rachel and Troy were engaged in a discussion about whether or not to consider Atticus as racist. To me, as I sat in the back of the classroom (where it is easy to make "backseat" judgments, of course), it seemed like a good opportunity for Anna to deepen students' understanding. However, Anna cut off the discussion instead. Perhaps she wanted to move on to another part of the lesson. Perhaps she wanted to avoid disagreement between

students. Perhaps she did not agree with Rachel and Troy's analysis. Researchers who have focuses on classroom discourse around racism in predominantly White contexts have acknowledged that White Educational Discourse (Haviland, 2008) or "White Talk" is often characterized by avoiding conflict, changing the topic, letting people off the hook, or distancing one's self and others from racism. Perhaps Anna's changing of the topic was representative of White Educational Discourse (Haviland, 2008).

In addition to "what is there," it is also useful to look for Whiteness in "what is not there." For example, Anna's unit went very smoothly overall. But maybe a little too smoothly? Multiculturalists point out that challenging students' assumptions can cause dissonance and discomfort, which often results in student resistance. In fact, many critical multiculturalists argue that critical multiculturalism probably is not critical multiculturalism if it does not cause some tension, or even pain (hooks, 1994). Anna's students did not push back much. They did not seem uncomfortable. They did not overtly resist. They did not get angry. Perhaps some students resisted through silence or non-participation. But, Haviland (2008) and McIntyre (1997) point out that silence, non-participation, and safe self-reflection are also features of White Educational Discourse.

There is a paradox inherent in disrupting Whiteness in White contexts. Basically, White teachers and students cannot avoid participating in Discourses of Whiteness even as they attempt to disrupt them. Anna's talent for leading whole-class discussions combined with her awareness of her own developing White racial consciousness meant that discussions in her classroom were productive and open. At the same time, Anna and her students participated in Discourses of Whiteness in the process of trying to disrupt them.

Assessing Students' Understanding of Multicultural Concepts

Anna formatively and summatively assessed students' understanding of the concept of institutional racism on several occasions throughout the unit. She asked them to take notes on the definition. As they listened to the La'Ron Williams story, she asked them to identify examples of institutional racism: "How did the actions of factory owners, realtors, and landlords affect the way that La'Ron's community lived? How might those actions still be affecting the way neighborhoods and communities are today?" After students worked on answering the questions like the one listed above, Anna asked her students to "share out" with the large group examples of institutional racism that they identified in the story:

1. **Diana:** How people were acting on TV.
2. **Martin:** The realtors and what they were doing.
3. **Kara:** What they are doing with the jobs.

Although they gave very clipped answers as the listed examples aloud, essentially Diana referred to Williams' example of watching his heroes on TV, including Cowboy Cody, and wondering where all of the Black people? Martin's answer refers to Williams' explanation of red lining. And, Kara's explanation refers to the actions of factory owners to under-employ a surplus of workers. It is not clear whether these students would be able to explain in more depth the ways these policies reflect racism. However, even these clipped answers demonstrate their ability to identify examples, and therefore reflect a preliminary and growing understanding of the concept.

Anna gave students multiple opportunities over time, not simply a one-shot lesson. A few days later, Anna showed the students a documentary called *Prom Night in Mississippi*. As they watched the video, students were asked to use a worksheet to categorize the examples of racism they witnessed in the film as interpersonal overt, interpersonal covert,

or institutional. Anna used that worksheet to assess whether students' could apply their understanding of institutional racism to identifying it. Anna, understanding how difficult a concept it can be to grasp, offered students several examples and several opportunities for practice. She did not use assessment to simply measure their mastery, she used it as a tool to gauge whether and to what extent students were processing the idea.

Finally, at the end of the unit, Anna summatively assessed students' understanding of the concept in an essay question on the test. She asked them to define institutional racism and to offer an example of it from the novel. Students demonstrated a range of levels of understanding. Rose was on the high level of understanding, writing:

Institutional racism is a very covert kind of racism that may be dismissed by people saying that that's just the way things go. An example of institutional racism would be the African Americans living out back in the forest near the dump. This isn't done intentionally by any one White person (or it isn't a written rule) but that is where they live. Another example would be the fact the main professions of the African American population is fieldworkers or house maids. In these two cases no one is coming right out and saying, "I don't like black people so they have to..." but instead racism is done very quietly and may go undetected.

Rose described institutional racism as "covert" and offered an example from the novel, as she was asked. She also went on to address the fact that institutional racism exists independent of "intention." She seemed to be using her own words to wrap her mind around the invisibility of institutional racism; how it works without many people recognizing it or understanding how. Jake's answer was more typical of students' responses:

Institutional racism is like racism that is built into society. Interpersonal racism is outwardly saying or doing something racist. One example of institutional racism in the book is that all of the black people live on the outskirts of town.

Jake understood that there is a difference between interpersonal and institutional racism. He understood that institutional racism “is built into society.” He identified an example of institutional racism in the novel. In this response, I see Jake beginning to understand complex concepts but not quite yet being able to articulate them in his own words. For the most part, Jake’s response mimicked the language and examples they had discussed as a large group in class.

I do not want to suggest that all students grasped the concept of institutional racism. Students understood the concept to greater and lesser extents. And some students did not really understand it at all. For example, Bethany wrote:

Institutional racism is judging someone by their color and interpersonal is judging someone based on how they act. Ex: When Tom was turned out guilty, that’s institutional because they based on his color that he was guilty and there was I think a lot of evidence showing he didn’t do it.

Although Bethany’s example of the guilty verdict did, in fact, accurately reflect institutional racism, her definitions of institutional and interpersonal racism indicated that she did not understand the difference between the two.

Assessing students’ understanding reflects critical multicultural goals in a few ways. First, the act of assessing was a symbolic; it sent a message to students that this content is important to understand. Second, although students’ reflected a range of understanding, Anna’s students knew that there is more than one kind of racism. They identified examples

of it in various scenarios. This level of understanding is relatively impressive for ninth graders and represents progress over the course of the unit.

Critics may bristle at the idea of assessing students' understanding of a multicultural concept. Assessing, as it is often understood, runs, in some ways, against the ways multicultural educators often think about multicultural "content." Multicultural education often entails helping students do personal work, like considering one's own cultural perspectives and interrogating one's own taken-for-granted assumptions. It can be hard for a teacher to tell whether students have "learned" such content. Teachers often aim to "plant seeds" that will send students on a journey of self-discovery that will take a lifetime.

On one hand, assessing students' understanding of multicultural concepts can serve as a learning tool for teachers in ways that can inform subsequent practice. I also think that the act of assessing students' understanding, which is a rare practice, raises multicultural concepts up to the status of other curricular objectives, holds students accountable for learning multicultural content, and sends a message that multicultural content is valued. However, I also agree that these findings should not be taken as an argument for reducing complex multicultural understanding down to a few concrete objectives to be objectively and summatively assessed. In fact, framing race or racism as an objective concept to be memorized and assessed risks distancing it from White students by making it less personal.

One Compelling Example

In Chapter 3 I explained that White English teacher who participated in this study reported using literature by White authors, often canonical literature, to address multicultural themes, often race and racism, in predominantly White contexts. At the close of Chapter 3, I posed several questions: what do English teachers mean by "address

multicultural themes? What would addressing multicultural themes through canonical literature look like? This chapter was designed to follow up on the last. With commitments to critical antiracist multiculturalism, I wondered, what practices support critical multicultural literature study? What practices support critical multicultural learning when using texts by White authors? What practices support critical multicultural learning in a predominantly White teaching context? To this point, the field has offered few examples of what critical multiculturalism looks like in the classroom. Moreover, given the dearth of research that explores multiculturalism as it relates to canonical literature, there are also few examples of what a critical multicultural approach to a canonical novel looks like. This chapter aims to offer one such model as an opportunity for imagining new possibilities.

I argue that Anna's approach to *To Kill a Mockingbird* was "critical antiracist multicultural" to the extent that it honored the voices of authors of color through supporting texts and counterstories; promoted open dialogue about race and racism; encouraged self-reflexivity by encouraging students to talk about their Whiteness; critiqued traditions of schooling by "reading against" a canonical text (to some extent); framed racism as institutional rather than interpersonal, and had the potential to contribute to social change through students' changed thinking (Au, 2009; May, 1998; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). Anna's literature unit reinforces the idea that multiculturalism is not simply a curricular issue; it is a pedagogical one. The question is not simply about which book a teacher selects; the question is also about the pedagogical approach a teacher takes to the book. In the past, studies have assumed that teachers apply a critical approach to literature that might already be characterized as "multicultural." This chapter challenges that assumption.

Promising Practices

Existing research has identified practices that are conducive to multicultural literature study in White contexts. In this chapter, I contributed to that body of research by identifying specific practices that stood out as being central to Anna's critical multicultural approach: she articulated clear objectives, planned several scaffolding lessons, incorporated supporting texts and counterstories, and formatively and summatively assessed students' understanding and growth. It is likely the constellation of many practices, not the individual practices themselves, was important.

Deliberate Planning. Informed by a critical orientation and a strong objective, Anna considered her students' prior knowledge and anticipated their needs. She designed multiple lessons to scaffold and deepen their understanding of institutional racism and White racial consciousness. She used formative and summative assessments to gauge students' learning over time. Of course, these practices are not new. In fact, these practices may seem almost too obvious, too mundane, to mention because they are so ubiquitous in education. However, I see the contribution in terms of the way Anna applied these practices to multicultural content. Some English teachers avoid multicultural content because they are uncertain of how to proceed. Perhaps utilizing the familiar framework of planning with objectives and assessments could offer teachers a clear sense of direction for proceeding. Literature in the field sometimes suggests—either implicitly or explicitly—that multicultural education happens in “teachable moments” that arise during literature discussions. Responding to complex issues spontaneously in teachable moments puts a lot of pressure on English teachers. If multicultural education works best under conditions of deliberate and sustained treatment, deliberate planning may enable teachers to more

thoughtfully and strategically navigate complicated work. (This is not to say that teachers should ignore teachable moments. Certainly, teachers need to address comments and questions as they arise in their classrooms. This is to say that doing so is often complicated work and that planning ahead may make that work more manageable).

Framing Concrete Objectives. Anna framed critical multicultural objectives in terms of a concrete goal, a concept to be learned rather than a belief or opinion to be changed. Research has pointed out that students do not reach deep multicultural understanding in an isolated course. What, then, can English teachers accomplish in the study of a novel in a single unit? Anna framed the objective as a concept that students could learn during the course of the unit. Perhaps framing multicultural goals in terms of concrete objectives may support English teachers with manageable goals.

Articulating such a concrete objective may run counter to the ways many multicultural educators think about “multicultural content.” Critical multicultural scholars may criticize my emphasis on concrete objectives as being too reductive. In other words, multiculturalists generally recognize that multicultural work often entails disrupting students’ long-held beliefs and assumptions. Such complex work is often characterized as a life-long, personal and often emotional process. Deep multicultural transformation requires students to question their own cultural assumptions or recognize their own White privilege. Certainly, I do not wish to argue that all multicultural content can be reduced to concrete concepts to be easily or quickly taught and assessed. I do wish to point out, however, that Anna’s framing of an objective in terms of a concept is not only a concrete, achievable goal; it also has the potential to lay the groundwork for subsequent multicultural work. In other words, if students walk away from the unit with a fuller

understanding of how racism actually operates, that understanding could lay the groundwork for additional work toward challenging their personal assumptions. Perhaps one could support the other.

Making Whiteness Visible. Critical pedagogy generally entails “making invisible visible,” of making the familiar strange, or questioning that which is taken-for-granted. As Anna suggested, critical multicultural work in White contexts means something different in predominantly White contexts than it does in culturally diverse contexts or in contexts with students of historically marginalized populations. Critical multicultural work in predominantly White contexts requires an examination of Whiteness. For Anna, sharing narratives that modeled her on-going efforts toward a more developed White racial consciousness worked to open spaces for her students to share narratives that had the potential to share similar narratives. The finding is consistent with Bolgatz (2005) finding that sharing narratives about experiences with race helped to create a more comfortable atmosphere for discussing race and racism.

I rely on Fecho’s (2004) words to caution that this case study is not meant to represent best practice. Anna’s approach is not meant to denote a model to be adopted wholesale. I especially want to note that this description of Anna’s pedagogy is not meant to represent a contrasting example of the other participating teachers in terms of the good versus bad, the right versus wrong. It is not meant to represent the solution to the problems presented in existing research or other data chapters or a prescription for other teachers to follow. Rather, this case study is meant to offer a useful example. It is meant to offer one promising example of an English teacher whose practices might offer ideas and inspiration to other teachers aspiring to do similar work.

Many critical educators warn again the “methods fetish” (Chavez Chavez & O’Donnell, 1998). Dressman (1998) suggests that we view case studies like Anna’s not as hard and fast rules but rather as rules of thumb. As Dressman (1998) suggests, educators might ask, “not Does it work (every time)” or Can I make it work for me? but What possibilities does it open for (re)humanizing modern classrooms? and by extension, How will this pedagogy (re)humanize me? (p. 126). The idea is not to trade “one’s old orthodoxy with new dogmatisms” (p. 125), but rather to think about how critical multicultural pedagogy might open up spaces for White students to begin to reflect on their culturally dominant positions and to recognize how those positions contribute to their cultural assumptions. Identifying the kinds of practices that are promising, but not prescriptive, may help other multicultural educators as they attempt to evolve their own critical pedagogy.

Pedagogical Borderland

Anna’s unit was critical to a certain extent. However, Anna’s pedagogy highlights several pedagogical tensions. For example, does framing racism as a concept rather than a belief distance the White students from Anna’s class from having to reflect on their implication in White supremacy and privilege? Does assessing students’ understanding of institutional racism as an educational concept give the impression that students can demonstrate the kind of transformation multicultural educators strive for? Can White teachers and students ever really disrupt Discourses of Whiteness without also participating in them? These questions raise difficult issues that critical teachers like Anna must weigh.

Anna's unit was neither wholly critical or uncritical. Rather, by merging traditional English goals with critical antiracist multicultural goals in a predominantly White context, Anna created a pedagogical borderland characterized, as usual, by tension and conflict. However, the conflicts and tensions are not obstacles to be avoided or resolved; rather, they are an important part of the process. In fact, borderland discourse is meant to encourage wrestling with tensions is generative, even necessary, for developing metacognitive understanding. Alsup (2006) argues, "reaching the in-between ground, the place of becoming, the space of ambiguity and reflection is the goal" (p. 9). Other multicultural scholars have argued that meaningful multicultural education happens in the struggle (hooks, 1994). Avoiding or overcoming conflict, tension, or contradiction is unlikely and is not even the goal. Rather, acknowledging conflict, recognizing tensions, and embracing contradictions is the essence of the work.

I am not arguing that Anna was consciously aware of her unit as a "borderland discourse," or that she consciously grappled with the pedagogical tensions I highlight above. She may have, or she may not have. I do not have the evidence to make a claim either way. What I am arguing is that Anna's decision to employ a critical multicultural approach to *To Kill a Mockingbird* generated several pedagogical tensions by bringing together competing Discourses of Whiteness, critical antiracist multicultural Discourses, and Discourses of traditional English education. In that way, her unit constitutes a pedagogical borderland.

CHAPTER 5: A BORDERLAND DISCOURSE: GRAPPLING WITH COMPETING PURPOSES FOR MULTICULTURALISM

When education is a practice of freedom, students are not the only ones who are asked to share, to confess. Engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower students. Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process. That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks” (hooks, 1994, p. 21).

In the last chapter, I focused on Anna and her critical approach to *To Kill a Mockingbird*, arguing that her unit offers an example of what might be possible. Although I attempted to highlight the complexities of Anna’s unit, I may have, in my effort to offer a compelling example, given the impression that Anna herself was, to use Alsup’s (2006) words, “already self-actualized, already emotionally and affectively prepared ... with few personal challenges left to face” (p. xv). Ellsworth (1989) argues that too much educational research in critical pedagogy “fails to examine the implications of the gendered, raced, and classed teacher” and doing so reinforces the “repressive myth” of the generic, emancipated critical pedagogue. Both Alsup (2006) and Ellsworth (1989) suggest that one-dimensional portrayals of teachers are repressive because they present images that are likely unattainable, even irrelevant. I am afraid that by focusing on Anna’s practice at the expense of focusing on Anna, I have painted a one-dimensional portrait of a White teacher who was already critical, who did not struggle with conflicts and tensions, and who did not bring the interests of her own social positions, including her own Whiteness. Ellsworth (1989) encourages, instead, portraits of critical pedagogy that grows out of the particulars of

context, that recognizes teachers' and students' identities and vested interests, and that examines the teacher holistically.

In an effort to present a holistic, multi-dimensional portrait of a White English teacher, this chapter introduces another English teacher, Rae, who is also White and who also aimed to address racism through a literature unit in a predominantly White context. Rae taught Advanced Placement Literature courses for high achieving students in a rural community in Michigan. Among her goals for preparing students for college was exposing them to perspectives that vary from the ones they typically encountered in their small provincial and predominantly White community. Rae's example helps to illustrate how White English teachers' complex identities relate to their purposes for multicultural literature study in predominantly White contexts. The following questions guide this study:

- What are White English teachers' purposes for engaging in multicultural literature study in predominantly White contexts?
- How does Whiteness shape White English teachers' purposes for multicultural literature study in predominantly White contexts?

To address these questions, I drew on data from surveys, interviews and literature unit studies to explore the ways Discourses associated with different aspects of Rae's identity competed with one another complicating her purposes for multicultural literature study.

Chapter-specific Data Analysis

As I read the data for themes, I noticed that English teachers participating in this study expressed several different "purposes of multicultural literature study in predominantly White teaching contexts," including "to expose students to multicultural perspectives," "to intervene in prejudice," "to emphasize universalism." I began to

recognize contradictions in the ways teachers talked about their purposes for multicultural literature study. For example, several interviewees characterized their teaching contexts as “not diverse” (and so the purpose of multicultural literature study was to “expose to diversity”) but also described their contexts as “more diverse than they used to be” or “diverse in terms of class but not race” (and so the purpose of multicultural literature study was to emphasize universalism). In other words, they described their contexts as both diverse and not diverse. Similarly, several interviewees characterized their students as both “prejudiced” (and so the purpose of multicultural literature study was to intervene in that prejudice) and “more culturally competent than we give them credit for” (and so the purpose of multicultural literature study was to celebrate difference and students’ acceptance of difference). In other words, they described their students as both prejudiced and not prejudiced. I began to intentionally pursue instances of contradiction because I felt that they would provide a rich direction for further study.

I identified contradictions in nearly every participant’s talk about the purpose of multicultural literature study. However, trying to address the contradictions across the data set proved to be too broad for meaningful discussion within the constraints of one data chapter. Rather than exploring contradictions more generally, I made the decision to select one participant and explore the contradictions in more depth. I selected Rae because her interview was rife with interesting contradictions, because she was a smart and thoughtful teacher, and because I observed her teaching during a literature unit study so I had additional data on which to draw.

Of course, the contradictions that Rae expressed were not the same contradictions that the other participants expressed. Rae is not representative. Rather, she offered a good

example of the kinds of contradictions teachers wrestled with and which I struggled to understand throughout the interview data. However, if I had selected a different participant for this phase of analysis, findings would have focused on different contradictions. Also, the contradictions Rae expressed were rooted in the particulars of her situated identities; understanding contradictions of other participants would depend on situating them in the particulars of their contexts as well.

Both Agent and Obstacle to Change

I drove to Wheatstone on a pretty spring day to talk with Rae, an experienced English teacher who had been gracious enough to agree to participate in an interview after the regular school day, even though she still had a long school bus ride to a debate competition ahead of her. I think she agreed to the interview, in part, because she too was a doctoral student and was therefore sympathetic to my call for interview participants. I was interested in interviewing her because she indicated in the survey that she taught her students about segregation among American cities, including the segregation between their own small town (the demographics of which were predominantly White) and a nearby city (the demographics of which were predominately African American), through their study of *A Raisin in the Sun*. She also indicated some level of interest in participating when she noted in the open-ended question on the survey, “I feel that I have much more to say but it is difficult in this survey with the time I currently have.”

Wheatstone High School (WHS) was a modern and tidy building. I arrived early so I waited in the front office and chatted with the secretaries until Rae met me and showed me to her room. As we walked through the empty hallways after school, we made small talk about the weather, like Midwesterners do. Once we settled down into student desks in her

classroom, I set up the digital recorder and we began the interview in earnest. I began by asking her to tell me a bit about Wheatstone. She described Wheatstone as:

... sort of your typical rural small town. Most people know each other. If you go to the grocery store, you see the parents and the kids and they have you over for dinner. You know, all of their families—all of the kids and siblings come through [school]. It's a really close-knit community. Many come back and teach here. It's just a very nice town. You know, it's a typical nice town.

Rae had lived and taught in Wheatstone for over a decade and spoke about their community with pride. She felt that their town was a unique place to live and raise her son. She noted that the community was “nice” because people of Wheatstone were friendly, family-oriented, and participated in each other’s lives. The schools were a point of pride for the entire community, and, in Rae’s opinion, parents and administrators respected the teachers of Wheatstone schools as professionals. In other words, although parents were involved in their students’ education, Rae said that she had never experienced any conflict with parents regarding literature selections, student behavior, or students’ grades. Whereas many English teachers report potential backlash from parents as a strong influence on literature selection (Stallworth et. al, 2004), Rae said, “I really don’t think about parents when making those decisions at all.” In fact, she could remember few instances when parents or administrators had questioned her professional judgment.

Although Rae had lived in Wheatstone for more than a decade, she had not grown up there; she grew up in a slightly bigger town down the road. But she described her hometown as similar to Wheatstone in terms of being culturally homogeneous:

We had almost 2000 kids in our school. And, it was like [one of the largest] school districts in the state, but our town was just segregated. I had 400 kids in my class.

There were like two African American students.

She made of point of emphasizing that the community and the high schools of her childhood were segregated. The “other school,” the high school she did not attend, was “racially diverse,” while the one she attended was “mostly White.” After completing her teacher education program she taught for a few years at the “other” school, an experience that made the segregation in the community visible to her. Prior to that experience, race was, she said, something that she “didn’t really think about.”

She told me that she experienced “culture shock” when she left home to attend a large university where she lived in a very diverse (in terms of race, culture, language, religion, and sexual orientation) environment. She described her new home away from home as:

Well, the hall where I lived my freshman year had Asian Americans, Jewish Americans, Black students. An Iranian person next door. It was probably the most liberal dorm. ... I picked it for the location—I had no idea. I was just like shocked. Total shell shock. I thought, “Oh my gosh.” I don’t think I’d ever met a Jewish person before, you know. I’m not really religious to the point where I would think anything bad about a Jewish person. I was just like “Whoa.” And I think to this day I think that was probably one of the best experiences I’ve ever had.

Living in a diverse dorm was, as she said, one of the best experiences she had ever had. It exposed her to things she had never experienced before. It also taught her about different cultural perspectives.

We all got together to play Pictionary and it was a disaster. You know, that Iranian—he was born in Iran—he didn’t know what Old Faithful was, and he was like “I don’t know what this is.”

Playing Pictionary with people who had different cultural backgrounds, experiences, and frames of reference helped her to see that her own cultural frame of reference was not the only possible one. She understood that Pictionary was a “disaster” because she and her new friends brought such different personal experiences and understandings to the game. Rae acknowledged that going away to a diverse college made her more aware of her Whiteness and the realities of multiple perspectives. It is possible that these personal experiences informed the multicultural goals she had for her students. For example, she remarked on more than one occasion that she did not want her students to experience the same “culture shock” that she experienced.

Both Traditional and Critical English Education

Rae taught Advanced Placement (AP) and pre-AP courses at WHS. As the AP teacher, Rae took a lot of pride in their rigorous curriculum. She described it as “one of the most rigorous in the state” in terms of both depth and breadth. She often started each class period with an activity focused on vocabulary, literary terms, or poetic devices that she thought students might encounter on the exam. She peppered her instruction with tips for the exam, making continual references to how what they were learning might be remembered and applied to the exam.

Although the literature curriculum at Wheatstone included a wide variety of challenging texts, Rae admitted that courses like American literature, for example, included very few multicultural titles: “Of course, in American literature it is all American authors

and we do do the classics. We do *The Scarlet Letter*, *Huck Finn*, Hemingway, Steinbeck, the dead white males.” Rae’s commentary on the American Literature curriculum reflected a traditional Discourse of English education. For example, her use of the phrase “of course” signaled to me the extent to which she took the selection of canonical literature for granted. She said “of course” as if no one would question the selection of *The Scarlet Letter* or *Huck Finn*. This interpretation is consistent with Caughlan’s (2004) finding that traditional Discourses of English education continue to dominate English teachers’ thinking about literature instruction despite progressive efforts toward curricular reform and even despite teachers’ desire to employ more progressive approaches to instruction. Rae seemed loyal to traditional approaches to literature instruction that she associated with rigor and cultural capital necessary for college.

Drawing on a traditional Discourse of English education, Rae she seemed to feel that World Literature was a more logical place for students to encounter multicultural perspectives. According to her logic, although she did not teach a lot of multicultural literature in American literature, she felt confident that students were exposed to multicultural literature in World Literature in twelfth grade: “We do more of that kind of thing in World Lit”. Although Rae seemed to value multicultural literature generally, her perspective reflected a narrow and ethnocentric view about what is “American” or what constitutes “American Literature,” ignoring the possibility that “multicultural literature” could also be American.

But, I do not want to paint a one-dimensional portrait of Rae either. At the same time, Rae also drew on more critical Discourses of English education, including Discourses of multiculturalism. For example, her use of the phrase “dead white males” signaled to me

that she was also aware of critiques of the traditional canon, which emphasize the political implications of excluding authors of color. She also critiqued common interpretations of multiculturalism, arguing that too many high school English teachers interpret “multiculturalism” too narrowly: “I think most high schools just do African American [literature]. I think we tend to forget about other groups—Hispanic, Asian.” Her observation reflected a familiar concern in the field of multiculturalism. She also questioned what it means to “do” multiculturalism, explaining that it is not enough to simply select a text by an author of color and “check it off the list.” Teachers need to, she said, be thoughtful about “what they decide to do with those texts.”

In sum, I found it difficult to characterize Rae’s perspective on literature and literature instruction as either traditional or critical. Rather, she drew on both traditional and critical Discourses of English.

The Purpose of Multicultural Education in White Contexts

As we talked about the multicultural literature titles included in the World Literature course, like *Things Fall Apart* and *The Kite Runner*, I asked Rae, “What is the purpose of multicultural literature study in a place like Wheatstone?” She explained:

I guess I want them to realize that there is a diverse world but that they have their own diversity to bring to it and of course to respect other groups. In World Literature we talk about political correctness also and that for them they need to be aware of things they say and do and how they may be construed. When we get into the slavery thing [during the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* unit], we read a couple things about the confederate flag and the “N” word. We show a great clip from an old TV show called “Boston Public.” I have the book called *Nigger* and we talk about

some of the court cases in it, like one was at [a nearby university]. I don't think our kids use that word, but I always say you need to be aware of where you are, your professors, your surroundings. We're never going to be able to understand that experience. I could marry a black man or have best friends who are black, but I could never know that experience, but I try to get them to at least that they need to be aware of that experience, and they need to know your experience. Which is why I think they do bring a diversity being from a small town. So I guess as a teacher I try to expose them to all different cultures. I don't expose them to enough cultures. Should we read more multiculturalism? Probably. But I guess it just goes back to the books I love to teach. It's not that I don't like to teach those books, it just goes back to, kind of, I really want them to know about Hemingway too. I think a lot of us, too, go chronologically and it's hard to fit it in.

Rae expressed contradictions about whether or not White students should be characterized as “diverse”; whether White students’ racist remarks were actually indicative of students’ racism or not; what the goals of multiculturalism are or should be and whether they are achievable at all; and whether and how multicultural goals fit within the traditional English curriculum.

Both Diverse and Not Diverse

Rae explained that one of the purposes of multicultural literature study in Wheatstone is to help students “realize that there is a diverse world. She pointed out on several occasions that their community and the student body of WHS are “not very diverse.” In fact, even before I asked a question about demographics, Rae emphasized the Whiteness of their small town, describing it as a “typically, rural small town,” “mostly

White” and “middle-class.” She described the racial demographics of the community as “I don’t know the percent, but mostly White.” From this perspective, Rae used the term “diverse” to refer to racial, cultural and religious diversity; this definition of “diverse” characterized WHS as “not diverse.” She noted that the homogeneity of the community contributed to the students sometimes seeming a bit naïve about the world.

They don’t venture far out from here. When I take them on trips, it is usually the first time they’ve gone anywhere. I took them to NYC. I took a group once to Chicago but now we go to NY every year and it is often the first time they’ve been out of the state. They’re just like ‘wow.’

Many students, and often their parents, do not travel far from home. So, not only did WHS lack diversity; individual students lacked experiences with diversity as well. Therefore, one purpose of multicultural literature study was to expose students to diversity through literature.

As I mentioned, since leaving her home town, Rae had attended a diverse university, lived in a diverse dorm, and taught in a racially and culturally diverse high school. Additionally, she had had opportunities to travel around the country and abroad. She valued travel as a way of learning about one’s self—and also about how one’s own experience is not the only one. As a result of her personal experiences, Rae considered herself to be “a certain kind of White person,” one who left her small town to experience diversity for herself. Having left her home town and lived in other more diverse places, Rae eventually realized how the lack of diversity in her hometown shaped her thinking about what was “normal.” From this perspective, she acknowledged Whiteness, highlighting the limitations of her and her students’ Whiteness. She experienced “total shell shock” when

she went to college. Looking back, Rae was able to talk about her transformational experience.

She brought perspectives from those personal experiences to her thinking about multicultural education at Wheatstone High School. Because going to a very diverse college was such a life-changing and eye-opening experience for her, Rae valued those kinds of experiences for her students. Her participation in a Discourse of being “a certain kind of White person,” informed her purpose for multicultural literature study with her White students. It is from this perspective that Rae wanted her students “to realize there is a diverse world,” to make her students’ cultural backgrounds and assumptions more visible to them. She hoped that reading literature and taking trips to cities would expose students to diverse perspectives.

At the same time, Rae also seemed reluctant to position her students as outsiders in relationship to multiculturalism. Although she described their town and “mostly White” and “not very diverse,” she also explained that her students “have their own diversity to bring to it [multicultural literature study].” She explained that “their diversity” comes from their being from a small town. In fact, later in the interview, she explained they are “minorities” too. She explained:

One of the biggest issues we have is when they are filling out their college applications and they ask you what diversity can you bring to the university and I try to tell them that they’re diversity is that they are from a small town and they are a minority because of that. I try to get them to think of that in their voice. We all then to think of the urban multicultural idea and we forget that these small little towns

also have a voice. I try to talk about that when we talk about their diversity and so they get some ideas about that.

Rae considered her students' experiences of growing up in a rural area, rather than an urban or suburban area, to be a unique experience that received little attention in popular media or in discussion of school reform. As such, Rae felt that being from a small and culturally homogeneous town put them at a disadvantage at times, such as when they needed to capitalize on "their diversity" in college application essays.

Characterizing her students' as "minorities" is problematic from a critical multicultural perspective because equating her students being from a small town trivializes the experiences of discrimination and oppression of individuals from historically marginalized populations by suggesting that her students' experiences are comparable. If Rae wanted to frame her students as insiders rather than outsiders in relationship to the purpose of multicultural literature study, she could have discussed their Whiteness. Instead, Rae did not seem to consider (in this excerpt or in any other observation or interview) the possibility for engaging students in a discussion of their Whiteness or the ways their majority status results in privilege.

While critiquing Rae's response is important for making colorblindness visible, it does not necessarily help to explain the Rae's contradictory thinking about her students being both diverse and not diverse. Critical Whiteness scholars (Lensmire, 2010; 2011; Lewis, 2004; Trainor, 2008), argue that it is important to go past documenting examples of racism (what Trainor (2008) calls the "gotcha" approach to analysis) to try to understand the emotional or persuasive appeal of racist discourse. Trainor (2008) explains,

I found that collecting examples of racism and reading about others' efforts at such collection—identifying, naming, labeling, and analyzing forms of racist talk in students—was a fascinating but ultimately somewhat unfruitful exercise. The examples only suggested more questions. It wasn't until I began to see racism in rhetorical and emotioned terms, rather than simply as a political phenomenon, that I began to get at the questions that most interested me" (p. 21).

Taking a cue from Trainor (2008), I have tried to understand how and why Rae, who draws on critical Discourses on one hand, ends up contradicting herself by drawing on uncritical Discourses on the other hand.

Exploring competing Discourses helps to shed some light. In the previous section, I made the argument that Rae drew on a Discourse of being "a certain kind of White person," one who has traveled, experienced diversity, and realized the limitations of her own White perspective to some extent. Informed by that Discourse, she positioned her students as not diverse. But, that is not the only Discourse on which Rae drew. She also drew on a Discourse of being a student centered teacher. In the social world of her classroom at WHS and from her position as a student-centered teacher, Rae valued alliances and relationship building. For example, Rae built close personal relationships with students. She took a protective stance, acting as their advocate. This student centered Discourse informed her purposes for multicultural literature study. From this perspective, rather than positioning students as outsiders to multicultural issues, she emphasized their experiences with being different to position them as insiders to conversations about multicultural issues. From this perspective, the purpose of multiculturalism was to emphasize the "diversity" students brought to literature study through universalism.

Student centered Discourse is also consistent with reader response, a common approach to literature instruction that supports students' engagement and comprehension of texts by relating aspects of the text to their own experiences. In this case, reader response, which validates students' experiences by making them central to the curriculum, may conflict with critical multicultural Discourse, which challenges White students to consider the curriculum from a perspective other than their own and/or to directly challenge what they assume about their own perspectives.

For Rae, her students were both diverse and not diverse, a contradiction that I interpret as an outgrowth of competing Discourses associated with different aspects of her identity. Specifically, her participation in a Discourse of being "a certain kind of White person" in which she valued the process of coming to realize the limitations of your own cultural perspective, competed with a student centered Discourse, which she prioritized students' needs and interests over multicultural objectives. In Alsup's research (2006), she explains that teachers often feel conflict between professional and personal aspects of their identities, which can lead to difficulty negotiating a holistic and satisfying teacher identity. In this study, personal and professional aspects of Rae's identity informed competing Discourses about diversity, complicating her purposes for multicultural literature study.

So, which is it? Are students of Wheatstone diverse or not diverse? Of course, both are true. On one hand, the student body of Wheatstone is racially and culturally homogeneous and individual students tend to lack experiences with diversity. However, even though the student body is predominantly White, Whiteness is not monolithic. Students of Wheatstone are not all White in the same way. And, the students of Wheatstone also have their own rich cultural backgrounds. It is a paradox that complicates

multicultural education. Rae contradictory thinking helps to shed light on the kinds of paradoxes that make multicultural education in predominantly White contexts so challenging.

Both Prejudiced and Not Prejudiced

Rae articulated another purpose for multicultural literature study: to teach students “to respect other groups” and “to learn “political correctness.” To recap for readers, Rae said:

To respect other groups. In World Literature we talk about political correctness also and that for them they need to be aware of things they say and do and how they may be construed. When we get into the slavery thing [during the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* unit], we read a couple things about the confederate flag and the “N” word. We show a great clip from an old TV show called “Boston Public.” I have the book called *Nigger* and we talk about some of the court cases in it, like one was at [a nearby university]. I don’t think our kids use that word, but I always say you need to be aware of where you are, your professors, your surroundings.

Rae expanded on what she meant by “to learn political correctness”: “In World Literature we talk about political correctness also and that for them they need to be aware of things they say and do and how they may be construed. ... I always say you need to be aware of where you are, your professors, your surroundings.” Although her reference in these lines was subtle, her warning “to be aware” of the things “they say and do” suggested that “the things that her students say and do” might be construed as prejudiced, especially outside their homogeneous community. Rae seemed concerned that growing up in an insular

community would result in students not knowing what they do not know, that they would go out in the world and be perceived as prejudiced.

In response, one purpose of multicultural literature study was to address students' behavior and assumptions. To those ends, she targeted specific lessons to raise students' awareness about racism. In the previous excerpt, she made reference to a lesson in which she showed an episode of a TV show about the "N word." She also shared examples with students from a book called *Nigger* that made reference to a racial incident that took place at a nearby university.

In the previous section, I argued that Rae considers herself to be a "certain kind of White person," one who has learned from personal experiences with diversity about the limitations of her own Whiteness. Her notion of herself as a "certain kind of White person" may also have been informed by her parents. For example, she had recently learned of her father's support of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960's. Rae explained:

Both of my parents are open-minded as well. My dad was in Alabama in the Airforce when Rosa Parks was doing the whole bus thing. And I just recently found letters that he wrote to my aunt saying how terrible it was. And I was really proud of that. From her perspective as a "certain kind of White person," Rae recognized racism in her students. Although she did not say so directly, it is possible that Rae's desire to address racism through multicultural education was informed by her consideration of her father as "a certain kind of White person," as well—one who supported antiracist efforts.

In addition to overt examples of individual racism, Rae said that she also addresses systemic racial inequality in their county. For example, she noted that Wheatstone, a

predominantly White and middle-class community, was located just minutes from Gaston, an economically depressed city with a racially diverse population.

I think [our] county, not too long ago, was one of the most segregated counties in the United States as far as housing. One of the teachers was doing a study in her master's class about it. [Wheatstone] and [Gaston] are very segregated. We talk about the segregation.

Rae worried that the racism in their county remained invisible to students because that is “just sort of the way things are” to those who grow up in that area. So, during the *A Raisin in the Sun* unit Rae said she addressed segregation, emphasizing to students that although they were reading a historical novel, racism was not a thing of the past, that “it’s still an issue.” In this instance, she acknowledged that racism not only continues to operate today, but it continues to operate in their immediate community. As such, they are all implicated through their White privilege in systemic racism.

From this perspective, Rae drew on Discourses of multiculturalism, valuing approaches to literature that put students in a position to reflect on their own racism. Rae’s purpose for multicultural literature instruction reflected critical antiracist multiculturalism to the extent that it went beyond universalism to also include goals for social change and to the extent that she acknowledged that racism is not simply interpersonal but also systemic.

At the same time, Rae reassured me several times throughout the interview that although her students might be “ignorant,” she would not “peg them as racists.” She distanced her students from racism, protected them from being construed as racists, explaining that, “Sometimes I think we’re too hard on kids. It’s really not their fault because they just don’t know anything except this town. They just don’t.” Later in the interview, she

went on to downplay the existence of racism in society more generally: “I think kids more and more are not racist because that is just our society now,” suggesting that racism is a thing of the past.

How can Rae acknowledge her students’ racism and also declare them to be “not racist”? How can she articulate the ways racism functions systemically in their own county and then contradict herself by saying that racism does not really exist in society today? In her discussion of purposes of multicultural education in her predominantly White teaching context, Rae drew on competing Discourses of Whiteness. Rae is not *just* “a certain kind of White person.” In fact, she draws on multiple Discourses of Whiteness, including White Educational Discourse (Haviland, 2004, 2008). Haviland (2008) explains that White people engage in White Educational Discourse as a way of simultaneously discussing race and racism and insulating themselves from being implicated in racism. It is a way of maintaining the status quo of White privilege while also protecting one’s self from being perceived as racist. Rae’s characterization of her students as “not racist” contradicted her characterization of them as people who say and do things that can be construed as racist, a contradiction that essentially let students off the hook. Letting one another off the hook, Haviland (2008) argues, is a common feature of Whiteness Educational Discourse.

Rae also participated in Discourses of Whiteness as a member of their small, predominantly White community. For example, Discourses of her “typical, nice town” include getting along, building relationships, and caring for one another. Of course, niceness and caring are desirable qualities in a community, however, Haviland (2008) argues that agreeing, supporting, and affirming sameness, other common features of White Educational Discourse, can also contribute to a culture of silence in which White people opt

to maintain the status quo rather than to acknowledge problems or conflict, such as racism. For a teacher like Rae, multicultural goals of confronting racism of the students and the community may create conflict where none existed before. In that way, Discourses of multiculturalism compete with Discourses of Whiteness in this small predominantly White community.

So, which is it? Are Rae's students prejudiced or not prejudiced? Racist or not racist? Once again, both are true. Even if Rae's students do not exhibit overt interpersonal racism, they are complicit in systemic racism by virtue of their White privilege. Although Rae's perspective on her students as both racist and not racist can be interpreted as problematic from a critical multicultural perspective, it is also important to acknowledge that this contradiction is a real issue that presents formidable challenges for teachers engaging in multicultural education in predominantly White contexts.

In fact, the contradiction may help to explain why Rae used hedging language to express the purpose of multicultural education in the first place. For example, Rae explained that one of the purposes was "to learn political correctness ... to be aware of the things they say and do." This language framed the purpose in terms of making students aware of how they might be construed rather than actually intervening in students' racism. What she did not say was that the purpose of multicultural literature study is to make students' aware of their own interpersonal racism, as well as their implication in institutional racism. Perhaps framing "to learn political correctness" was a way of framing the purpose in way that both implicates students' in racism and lets them off the hook for it. Haviland (2004, 2008) points out that Discourses of Whiteness work insidiously to maintain that status quo—even when White people state the expressed desire to do the

opposite. In other words, even when White people intend to talk about race with antiracist intentions, Discourses of Whiteness simultaneously operate to undermine those intentions.

Both Agent and Obstacle to Change

In addition to recognizing contradictions in Rae's talk about her purposes for multicultural literature study, I also saw evidence of those contradictions in her practice. In one classroom interaction, Rae shared an example of a racist cartoon with her students. Rae told me in the follow up interview that sharing political cartoons such as this one was meant to show students that racism continues to operate today, that it is not simply a thing of the past. She and a fellow teacher had found this cartoon and thought it would help them (in their respective classrooms) make their point. The cartoon depicted Obama as Bugs Bunny and John McCain and Sarah Palin as Elmer Fudds. The following transcript excerpt is from the whole class discussion Rae initiated to analyze the cartoon.

1. **Rae:** Speaking of Obama. This was a cartoon that showed up during the
2. campaign. Who are the Elmer Fudds?
3. **Students:** McCain and Palin.
4. **Rae:** McCain and Palin. Now look at this picture and think what is this picture
5. trying to say? And we may over analyze it but... Do you know the bugs bunny
6. cartoon?
7. **Molly:** Isn't it that bugs bunny is always like clever and fooling Elmer Fudd
8. and the other person. He fools the hunters all the time.
9. **Rae:** Yeah, they're supposed to be Elmer Fudd, who is the idiot who Bugs
10. Bunny always out wits, or whatever. I think we could definitely say that this
11. is negative about McCain and Palin, um, but why could it also be negative

12. about Obama. This is what Mr. Schneider would argue.

13. **Jason:** Trying to trick people.

14. **Rae:** Yeah, and there were often pictures of the African American trying to be

15. the trickster, um, you know, out witting people, being the sly one. And then,

16. um, it's also interesting that they end up in black face. What is black face?

17. Have you heard about that? When actors or comedians or dancers would put

18. black make up on their face when they were pretending to be, um, of African

19. American race and it was a very offensive thing. We were just in Key West,

20. this is so funny, we were just in Key West. We had the TV on and there was

21. this Cuban station on – and we love Cuba, you know. And so we were

22. watching – and if you ever watch those stations, they're like back into the 70s

23. it's really funny. There's this Cuban dance show and there were a couple

24. people in Black face and Mr. Schneider was "Oh my god, they're in black face."

25. You know, so sometimes it happens even today.

26. **Brandon:** I'm pretty sure they're in black face because of the gun powder.

27. **Rae:** Well, right, of course, but you could argue, what is that saying. It's

28. because of the gun powder of course.

29. **Brandon:** I know but like you can draw anything now and people will find a

30. way to think that it's racist.

31. **Rae:** Absolutely. You could look at this and argue that it's not racist because

32. they're the ones who look like idiots. You could take it either way.

Rae began this exchange with critical intentions. She shared this racist cartoon because she wanted to make the point that racism continues to exist today and to teach students about

blackface. At the same time, early on in the exchange, Rae undermined her own critical efforts when she said, “ we may over analyze it but...” By raising the possibility of over analysis, Rae essentially undermined her own critical multicultural efforts before students even had a chance to react. She further distanced herself from the analysis by attributing her upcoming argument about the cartoon to another teacher: “This is what Mr. Schneider would argue,” which was a way of not owning the critical stance. She went on to explain the racism of the cartoon, offering historical background on the “trickster” character and stereotype, as well as an example of blackface, although she did not seem convinced of the argument herself. In fact, the fact that she shared this cartoon with students and also distanced herself from it suggested to me that she felt ambivalent about the lesson.

Eventually, Brandon challenged the analysis of the cartoon saying, “I’m pretty sure they’re in black face because of the gun powder” and “you can draw anything now and people will find a way to think that it’s racist.” In response to Brandon, Rae quickly conceded that the blackface is because of the gun powder and that “you could argue it either way.” In recent research on multicultural literature study in White contexts, resistance is often attributed to students. In this case, it was Rae, the teacher, who resisted and ultimately undermined her own lesson.

It is easy to point out what is problematic about Rae’s practice here. The phrase “you can argue it either way” was picked up by Rae and the students and essentially suggested that whether something is racist is a matter of opinion, an opinion based on one’s own interpretation. Ultimately, Rae ended up letting her students “off the hook,” (Haviland, 2008) rather than holding them accountable for understanding racism in more complex

ways. It also reflects “White talk” (McIntyre, 1997) to the extent that Rae essentially evaded conflict rather than pushing her students to confront racism.

I argue that competing Discourses, which contributed to the contradictions about whether students were both diverse and not diverse, prejudiced and not prejudice, complicated Rae’s purposes for multicultural literature study. Ultimately, these contradictions were manifest in her practice, which was also contradictory in that it was both critical and uncritical. Rae both interrupted Discourses of Whiteness and participated in Discourses of Whiteness. As a White teacher in a predominately White context, Rae’s critical multicultural practice did not take place from outside Whiteness; rather it will always already come from within it. The point is not to “escape,” avoid, or deny Whiteness; it is to acknowledge it and grapple with it. I return to this idea and develop it in more depth and in relationship with data from the other chapters in the next chapter.

A Borderland Discourse

I have made the argument throughout this chapter that Rae’s purposes for multicultural literature instruction were informed by multiple and competing Discourses that resulted in contradictions. At times during the interview, Rae seemed to try to sort through tensions and contradictions herself. For example, when I asked her about the book-length works in the curriculum, she responded:

Should we read more multiculturalism? Probably. But I guess it just goes back to the books I love to teach. It’s not that I don’t like to teach those books, it just goes back to, kind of, I really want them to know about Hemingway too. I think a lot of us, too, go chronologically and it’s hard to fit it in.

In this instance, from her perspective as a multicultural educator, Rae valued critical multiculturalism for her students and acknowledged that she should and could teach more multicultural titles. However, drawing on more traditional Discourses of English education—in which American Literature is a stable body of canonical texts covered “chronologically” over the course of a semester—Rae felt reluctant to let go of canonical texts.

In her work with beginning teachers, Alsup (2006) discusses “borderland discourses” as spaces in which teachers become aware of and wrestle with tensions and conflicts of different Discourses. Wrestling with tensions and conflicts, she argues is a necessary and productive part of developing a satisfying teacher identity. In this case, the research interview seemed to be serving as a borderland discourse in which Rae wrestled with contradictions and tensions of teaching multicultural literature. In fact, on more than one occasion, Rae reflected critically on her responses even as she gave them:

But we just don't really have a lot of time. I mean we could substitute Hemingway for Amy Tan or something like that—so now I think why don't I do that? I don't know. I just love the books I teach so much I hate to give any of them up.

Rae began by offering an explanation for not selecting more multicultural texts, emphasizing that they do not have enough time. But she quickly acknowledged that time does not necessarily have to be a factor; she could simply replace a canonical text, like one written by Hemingway with a multicultural text like one written by Amy Tan, for example. Rae seemed to be working through a tension within the span of the interview. She wrestled back and forth with herself, explaining that they do not do enough multicultural literature and questioning why they do not. At one point, she asked herself, “Why don't I do that?” It

seemed that the interview provided a borderland space in which she was encouraged to acknowledge and reflect on some taken-for-granted assumptions about English curriculum and pedagogy. It called her attention to the dearth of multicultural texts, encouraging her to reflect on why she does not select more multicultural texts.

She seemed to value the experience of reflecting on her curricular choices during the span of the interview. She went so far as to say that she might incorporate a similar kind of question into her practice by asking her students what they thought about multiculturalism and whether they would like to read more multicultural literature.

... I think that's an interesting question that I will probably ask my kids now—and even share this [interview] experience. Like “What do you guys think?” And maybe asking them. I've never asked them. “What do you want to know?” I'm constantly thinking about what I am preparing them for. My AP kids I'm preparing them for college.

In sum, Discourses associated with Rae's multiple identities as English teacher, student-centered teacher, mother, community member, White woman, and interviewee competed with one another to complicate her purposes for multicultural literature study with her students who were also White. These competing Discourses contributed to contradictions about whether her students were diverse or not and whether her students were prejudiced or not. These contradictions played out in contradictions about the purpose of multicultural literature study and in actual practice. The interview, which foregrounded multiculturalism, seemed to offer Rae a borderland space in which to critically reflect on those contradictions.

A Borderland Discourse

Even when teachers espouse multicultural goals, teachers are not *just* multicultural educators. Rae was not only a multicultural educator; she was also a student-centered teacher, an AP English teacher, and a White woman in a small, close-knit, and predominantly White community. Rae negotiated different and sometimes competing Discourses about diversity and prejudice associated with aspects of her identity, which ultimately complicated her purposes for multicultural literature study. On one hand, her students were not diverse and so the purpose of multicultural literature study was to expose students to diversity. On the other hand, they were diverse so the purpose was to connect multicultural themes to students' lives, to emphasize universalism. On one hand, they were prejudiced so the purpose was to intervene in that prejudice. On the other hand they were not prejudiced, negating the need to intervene in their prejudice.

As I pointed out in the introduction, Ellsworth (1989) has raised concerns about research related to critical pedagogy and the tendency to portray teachers in one-dimensional and unproblematic terms. She calls into question "the emancipated teacher" acknowledging that:

No teacher is free of these learned and internalized oppressions. Nor are accounts of one group's suffering and struggle immune from reproducing narratives oppressive to another's... My understanding and experience of racism will always be constrained by my white skin and middle-class privilege ... the literature offers no sustained attempt to problematize this stance and confront the likelihood that the professor brings to social movements (including critical pedagogy) interests of her or his own race, class, ethnicity, gender, and other positions. S/he does not play the role of disinterested mediator on the side of the oppressed group. I have brought a

social subjectivity that has been constructed in such a way that I have not and can never participate unproblematically ..." (p. 99-100).

Consistent with Ellsworth's (1989) critique of critical pedagogy, this chapter contributes to countering the notion of the singular, critical, multicultural educator. Rae is not wholly critical, but she is not *not* critical either. Rae's purposes for multicultural literature study grow out of and are constrained by her situated identities and the competing Discourses associated with them.

By foregrounding multicultural Discourses, the research interview called attention to Rae's multiple identities and competing Discourses, creating a borderland discourse that encouraged Rae to grapple with some of the fundamental dichotomies in multicultural education, such as whether their students are diverse or not diverse, whether her students were prejudiced or not prejudiced, and whether she should make multiculturalism a more central part of the overall English curriculum or not. The interview highlighted tensions and offered Rae an opportunity to grapple with the contradictions in a productive way. During the interview, Rae engaged in critical reflection on the limitations of her curriculum and aspects of her pedagogy, why her literature curriculum did not include more multicultural literature, and why she had not given the lack of multicultural literature more thought in the past. The interview prompted her to reflect on otherwise taken-for-granted aspects of her curriculum and practice through the lens of multiculturalism.

CHAPTER 6: MULTICULTURAL BORDERLANDS: GRAPPLING WITH THE COMPLEXITY OF MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE STUDY IN PREDOMINANTLY WHITE CONTEXTS

In this chapter, I begin by offering summaries of the contributions of each data chapter. Next, I look across the data chapters to complicate the notion of “White contexts.” I revisit the concept of borderland discourses raised in Chapter 1 as a way to think about the contradictions and tensions inherent in White English teachers addressing themes of race and racism using canonical novels in White contexts. Finally, I end with implications for future research and teaching.

Chapter Summaries

In Chapter 1 I reviewed recent research related to secondary literature curriculum, multicultural literature pedagogy, White teachers’ engagement with multiculturalism. I argued that although existing research has made progress in terms of identifying both the challenges and promising practices related to multicultural literature study, it has also operated with a some assumptions that have prevented researchers from considering alternative ways of considering and studying multicultural literature study. I also described the theoretical framework at the foundation of this dissertation study, which is based on Critical Antiracist Multiculturalism and Critical Whiteness Studies.

In Chapter 2, I explicated assumptions of this project within the framework of critical educational research. I also described the multiple phases of data generation, including surveys, interviews, and literature studies. Finally, I described my framework for analysis, which included reading for themes, reading for critique, reading to believe, and reading for heat. Throughout the methodology chapter, and throughout this dissertation, I attempted to make my role as researcher explicit. Specifically, I viewed myself as both

researcher and participant in this research project, acknowledging that my own Whiteness works as both an affordance and constraint.

Chapter 3, the first data chapter, focused on curriculum. First, I documented that literature curriculum remains dominated by book-length works by White authors. This study makes a contribution by building on the tradition of survey studies documenting book-length works thereby drawing renewed attention to the taken-for-granted-ness of the canon. Second, data generated from the survey and interviews suggested that English teachers often use literature by White authors to address multicultural themes. Drawing on Toni Morrison's (1992) argument that literary Whiteness in American literature was invented in contrast to literary Blackness, I argued that canonical literature always already brings multiculturalism, often race and racism, into secondary literature curriculum. In other words, traditional English curriculum--either implicitly or explicitly--teaches students about race regardless of whether English teachers intend to address it or not. Existing research has not explored canonical literature in multicultural terms. In fact, previous research had interpreted similar findings as misunderstandings on the part of teachers. This study makes a contribution by chipping away at an assumption undergirding typical definitions of "multicultural literature," that literature is either canonical or multicultural. Instead, this chapter introduces the use of canonical literature for multicultural themes as a curricular borderland that raises generative questions for multicultural literature study.

Although Chapter 3 suggested that English teachers report often using canonical literature to address multicultural themes, it did not explore teachers' teaching with and against these texts. Chapter 4 followed up on the findings of Chapter 3 to offer a case study

of one White English teacher's critical multicultural approach to a canonical novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, in a predominantly White teaching context. Existing research had identified a set of promising practices conducive to multicultural work with White students. Anna's critical multicultural approach included a constellation of practices that included deliberate planning, concrete objectives, formative and summative assessments, making Whiteness visible, and the use of counterstories. The chapter findings contribute to the existing research on "promising practices" by adding specific practices to that list. At the same time, the case study constitutes a departure from existing research in a couple key ways. First, existing research often frames multiculturalism within English education as an either/or proposition in which English teachers must sacrifice traditional English curriculum and replace it with multicultural content (Burroughs, 1999). Chapter 4 suggests, however, that bringing together canonical literature and a critical multicultural approach constructs a pedagogical borderland that complicates the relationship between multiculturalism and English education and calls attention to the tensions and conflicts between the two fields. Second, existing research has often assumed that critical approaches would be applied to already "multicultural" literature. My findings put forth the possibility of reading against traditional or "non multicultural" literature. In fact, my study makes a contribution to the field by arguing that a critical multicultural approach to a canonical novel not only integrates multiculturalism in and around constraints but also has the potential to deepen literary analysis. The pedagogical borderland can make it possible for English teachers who to juggle multiple and sometimes competing goals within the English curriculum.

Chapters 3 and 4 both explore new possibilities for integrating multicultural curriculum into traditional English education. Chapter 5 looks at the issue from a slightly

different angle, shifting the focus onto the teacher. Specifically, Chapter 5 focuses on one White English teacher's multiple, dynamic identities and how they relate to her purposes of multicultural education in a predominantly White context. I show how Rae participated in multiple Discourses as an English teacher, White woman, student-centered teacher, community member, mother, and multicultural educator. These multiple Discourses sometimes competed with one another, complicating her notions of "diversity" and "prejudice," as well as her purposes for engaging multicultural literature study with her White students. Existing research focused on the teacher within multicultural literature study often characterizes the teacher as generic, as either an agent of change or an obstacle to it. This study makes a contribution by acknowledging that teachers likely do not fit easily into either of those categories. Rather, the role of "multicultural educator" is likely one of several situated identities that English teachers bring to multicultural literature study. Each situated identity evokes a Discourse, complete with responsibilities, pressures, and values that complicate purposes of multicultural literature study. This chapter suggests that a borderland discourse where teachers could acknowledge their situated identities and grapple with potential contradictions could be generative for embracing the complexity of multicultural literature study, especially in predominantly White contexts.

In the remainder of this chapter, I outline contributions across data chapters. I weave the limitations of this dissertation study within the discussion of the contributions. Finally, I present implications for theorizing, research, and teaching.

Complicating "White Contexts"

One of the questions this study sought to address was "How does Whiteness shape White English teachers' engagement of multicultural literature study in predominantly

White contexts?” As I explained in Chapter 1, I adapted Scheurich & Young’s (1997) framework for the levels of racism, including individual, institutional, societal, and epistemological, to identify Whiteness on different levels. As a reminder, I recap definitions of each level:

- *Individual*. Individual racism includes examples of overt and covert acts of prejudice that are racially based (p. 5).
- *Institutional*. Institutional racism exists when institutions or organizations, including educational ones, have standard operating procedures (intended or unintended) that hurt members of one or more races in relation to members of the dominant race. It also exists when institutional or organizational cultures, rules, or symbols have the same biasing effect (p. 5).
- *Societal*. Societal racism exists when prevailing cultural assumptions, norms, concepts, habits, and expectations favor one race over one or more other races (p. 6).
- *Epistemological*. Epistemological racism exists because ways of constructing knowledge arise out of the social history and culture of the dominant race and logically reflect and reinforce that social history and that racial group (while excluding the epistemologies of other races/cultures) with negative results for people of color in general and scholars of color in particular (p. 8).

Scheurich & Young’s (1997) hierarchy delineates the levels, making it easy to see how racism, or in this case Whiteness, operates on each discrete level. And much research interested in multiculturalism in White contexts focuses on one layer or the other. For example, at the individual level, a body of work focused on classroom discourse shows

White individuals sustain norms of Whiteness through “White talk” (McIntyre, 1997) or White Educational Discourse (Haviland, 2008). Such research aims to intervene at the individual level by promoting critical language awareness. At the institutional level, although he did not use the language of “White Discourse,” Applebee (1993) called attention to Whiteness by documenting the dearth of multicultural literature. At the societal level, Pollock (2004) explored how norms that inform when to speak about race or not contributed to “colormuteness” that affected everyday and policy discussions about achievement, discipline, curriculum, and achievement. At the epistemological level, Trainor (2008) reconceptualized racism, arguing that it is rooted not in prejudiced attitudes or beliefs but is reinforced by values and emotion. Others, mostly literary scholars and especially Morrison (1992), have pointed to Whiteness as central to the ways the field thinks about literature. Existing work has been valuable for pointing out how Whiteness and racism work at each of these levels.

Rather than identifying Whiteness on discrete levels, however, data chapters of this dissertation suggest that Discourses of Whiteness actually operate on several levels at once. For example, in Chapter 3 I noted that English teachers reported using literature by White authors to address multicultural themes. This pedagogical practice might be interpreted as Whiteness at the individual level, reflecting the ways White teachers participate in a Discourse of Whiteness that co-opts multiculturalism through White perspectives. But is it really the individual English teachers’? Their pedagogical practice was likely informed by their own experiences in English classes at the secondary and university levels where they were likely to encounter that old familiar literature in state- and district-sanctioned curriculum, as well as by their teacher preparation and

professional development. Although English teachers have reported many reasons to account for the fact that they do not individually select multicultural texts, research also tells us, as I noted in Chapter 3, that literature curriculum does evolve. In fact, what people mean by “classics” has actually changed over the past 40 years. But those “classics” continue to be works written by White authors. What counts as “quality literature” in English education is informed by Discourses of Whiteness at the epistemological level. In other words, generations of individual teachers have made literature selections that reflect the both the institutional and epistemological support of a notion of “quality” or “classic” or “capital L” literature as White. In this example it is actually quite difficult to separate out the Discourses of Whiteness at the different levels because they are all operating at once.

In the last example, I tried to illustrate that Discourses of Whiteness operated on several levels at once. In this next example, I will go one step further to flatten out the hierarchical framework to emphasize the relationships—the borderlands—between levels. For example, in Chapter 4, which focused on Anna’s unit, Discourses of Whiteness work at the epistemological level through literature. No matter how critical the approach, the fact remains that *To Kill a Mockingbird* was not only written by a White author but was told by a White character and was intended for White readers. At the societal level, Discourses of Whiteness operate to the extent that the novel builds on familiar stereotypes, or cultural models (taken for granted theories, master myths) of White saviors and Black victims. Anna and her students read the novel familiar with those cultural models. At the individual level, Anna and her students participated in “White Educational Discourse,” as they avoided conflict, engaged in safe self-reflection, and let one another off the hook. However, their

participation at the individual level reflects societal expectations about what is acceptable to talk about.

I began this study defining a “predominantly White context” as a context in which the student body was majority White. However, data chapters together, which suggest that Whiteness operates at several levels at once, complicate that notion of “White contexts.” The teacher is White. The students are White. The authors are White. The characters are White. Authors construct readers as White. The way of thinking about what constitutes quality literature is White. The dominant Discourse is White. In other words, as a result of this study I would argue that “White context” goes beyond the racial descriptors of the individuals in the classroom to include Whiteness at the individual, institutional, societal, and epistemological levels.

In the Prologue, I shared my own experiences as a White teacher addressing multicultural themes in literature with my students, who were also White. I described the frustrations and uncertainties I felt. Another one of the questions this study sought to explore was “what are the challenges teachers face?” By describing how Discourses of Whiteness work simultaneously on several levels at once, the data chapters make visible the extent to which disrupting Whiteness, which is a central goal of critical multicultural literature study, entails disrupting Whiteness on several levels at once. It is no wonder I struggled. In order to disrupt Whiteness, the White teacher faces several formidable challenges; he/she must do more than select quality multicultural literature, do more than employ a critical approach, do more than facilitate classroom discourse. Disrupting Whiteness means working against the current of Whiteness that operates at every level-- through the literature, through the classroom discourse, through cultural norms, through

what it means to teach English. This study emphasizes just how pervasive Whiteness is. Acknowledging the complexity of the problem respects the enormity of the challenge English teachers face in the classroom.

Emphasizing the challenges may make the task of disrupting Whiteness seem impossible. However, this dissertation study argues that resolving the complexity is not the point; *grappling* with it is. A borderland discourse that offers a space for grappling with complexity can be productive. Embracing complexity (rather than avoiding it) may offer generative opportunities for teachers as they engage critical multicultural literature study.

One goal of this dissertation study has been to attempt to explore the issue of White English teachers engaging multicultural literature study in predominantly White contexts in as much complexity as possible. This study only begins to scratch the surface. I explored a few layers of the overall problem. Researchers have explored other dimensions not addressed in this study. For example, Beach et al. (2008) explored the complexities that White students bring to multicultural literature study. Leer (2010) includes teachers' preparation and professional development (or lack thereof) as additional dimensions. Lewis & Ketter (2001) found that local politics and specific events also influenced teachers' decisions about multicultural literature instruction. This study did not include data about students or the local sociopolitical context. A more ethnographic study may have complicated its findings still further.

Implications

Research. This study contributes to an understanding of multicultural literature study as a dynamic, multi-layered, and context-specific issue. This study sheds light on the complexity of multicultural literature study for White teachers in White contexts in

particular. One potential line of inquiry might involve exploring similar questions as the ones that guided this study with teachers who do not identify as White and in a variety of different teaching contexts. What book-length works do teachers of color use? What book-length works do teacher use in racially and culturally diverse contexts? What challenges do English teachers face with multicultural literature study in culturally diverse contexts?

This study also contributes to illuminating the role of the English teacher in multicultural literature study. Another generative line of inquiry might follow up on the relationship between teachers' social contexts, situated identities, and their purposes for multicultural literature study. Findings in Chapter 5 suggest that Discourses associated with teachers' multiple and sometimes conflicting identities may complicate their purposes for multicultural literature study in predominantly White contexts. Once again, all participants in this study were White and taught in either rural or suburban contexts. It might be generative to explore teachers from different racial and cultural backgrounds and who teach in different teaching contexts.

This study suggests that borderland spaces, such as the one created by the research interview in Chapter 5, are generative for encouraging English teachers to reflect on conflicts and tensions related to multicultural literature study. It might be generative to study borderland discourses more explicitly, examining, among other things, teachers' openness to reflecting on their own identities in relationship to multicultural literature study.

This dissertation suggests that English teachers use canonical literature to address multicultural themes, including but not limited to racism. However, this study raises additional questions. How do English teachers address multicultural issues in canonical

literature? To what extent do English teachers address those themes? One implication of this study is a need for research to delve more deeply into what “addressing themes of multiculturalism and diversity” means to different teachers and what that pedagogy looks like in classrooms. What multicultural issues besides race and racism do they address?

As a researcher, my Whiteness factored into all aspects of this research, implicating me as a co-participant in Discourses of Whiteness. I would be pleased if this dissertation study, building on the dissertation studies of Haviland (2008) and McIntyre (1997), encouraged other White researchers studying Whiteness and/or multiculturalism, to be reflexive in their research methodology. As Patai (1991) argues, “being White educators, and having benefited from the present educational structure, we have to be careful not ‘to reproduce the very practices of domination that we seek to challenge’” (p. 147). Future research might explore questions such as, how do White researchers participate in Discourses of Whiteness during the research process?

Teaching and Teacher Education. In addition to future research, this dissertation study also raises possibilities for teaching. This study built on existing research to further document the stubbornness of the literary canon. Ultimately, this finding reaffirms the need for curricular change to include more book-length works by authors of color. By highlighting Discourses of Whiteness as they operate at several levels at once, this study suggests that reform might entail a multi-pronged effort to address obstacles at the individual, institutional, and epistemological levels. In other words, those interested in curricular reform might support the efforts of individual teachers with curricular policy, financial resources, or professional preparation at other levels.

Another implication might be for English educators to reconsider the ways they characterize literature. Books like *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* raise very complex ideas about race and racism. English teachers could capitalize on the complexities within the individual novels themselves by conceiving of them as Borderland spaces and emphasize the tensions, contradictions, and conflicts with which students could grapple to come to their own multicultural understandings. Reading against canonical novels might create borderland discourse that enables teachers and students to approach critical multicultural work through the engagement of tensions and conflicts.

Reading against literature to interrogate issues of power and oppression is not typical curriculum in English, and not easy work to do. Preparing for this complex work might require learning to “read against” texts in English teacher preparation programs. One possibility might be to engage English teacher candidates in critical multicultural readings of literature, including canonical literature, in their English literature and English methods courses. Modeling critical multicultural readings of literature, and offering English teacher candidates opportunities to grapple with discomfort, ambiguity, and tensions, may be generative.

This study suggests that teachers’ multiple and sometimes conflicting identities complicate purposes for multicultural literature study in predominantly White contexts. It also suggests that a borderland space might be a generative space for grappling with issues related to multicultural literature study. I could imagine several different kinds of potential applications. For example, English methods courses or professional development opportunities could provide borderland spaces so teachers can become aware of the ways

Discourses associated with multiple identities may compete with one another to complicate their purposes for multicultural literature study.

This study suggests that Whiteness is not simply one aspect of a White teacher's overall identity; rather it is related to many aspects of identity. For example, White woman, White teacher, member of a White community, etc. Teachers and teacher candidates might consider how their Whiteness affects their interpretations of multicultural literature, including the literature they would select (Ketter & Lewis, 2001). Because White people are often unable or unwilling to consider their Whiteness or White privilege (McIntyre, 1997; Sleeter, 1993) considering their Whiteness could take considerable support. Engaging English teachers in a consideration of their White identities is not likely something that will be achieved in the span of a semester or even a teacher education program. Work on Whiteness may be most effective throughout an entire teacher preparation program, in continuing education in master's programs or on-going professional development opportunities.

This dissertation study challenges assumptions under-girding existing research related to multicultural literature study, that literature is either canonical literature or multicultural, that pedagogy is applied to content that is already multicultural, that teachers are either critical or uncritical, either agents of change or obstacles to it. By deliberately shifting from either/or thinking to both/and thinking this dissertation study has opened up new possibilities for research and practice. Both/and thinking has ultimately contributed to painting a fuller picture of the complexity of critical multicultural literature study in predominantly White teaching contexts by bringing contradictions,

paradoxes, and tensions to the foreground. Ultimately this study suggests that resolving complexity is not the point; rather, embracing the conflicts, tensions, contradictions, and complexities is the point. Borderland Discourses offer White teachers and students space to do that important multicultural work.

Each chapter of this dissertation complicated one layer of the overall “problem.” Chapter 3 complicated typical thinking about “multicultural literature.” Chapter 4 complicated “critical multicultural literature study.” Chapter 5 complicated familiar images of the generic critical teacher. And Chapter 6 complicated “White contexts.” Taken together, the three data chapters taken together also complicate the relationship between English and multiculturalism. This study makes a contribution by bringing many dimensions together to paint a fuller picture of the problem. Overall, the study emphasizes that the “problem” of White teachers engaging multicultural literature study in predominantly White contexts is more complicated than previously appreciated.

I began this dissertation process with questions about my own struggle as a White English teacher using literature to address themes of race and racism with my White students. I wanted to understand why it was so difficult. I wanted to understand the challenges. If I’m honest, I wanted to come to some conclusions, to learn how to do better. However, ironically, I learned that the struggle is the answer. Tensions and conflicts of curriculum, pedagogy, and Whiteness are not burdens to be avoided or even obstacles overcome; rather, they make visible the ways Whiteness works on multiple levels through classroom discourse, through hidden and explicit curriculum, through classroom discourse and norms of interaction, through stereotypes and cultural models, and through literature

and the field of English education. As such, grappling with the tensions and conflicts represents the essence of the work, not obstacles to it.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: SURVEY

Survey of Michigan English Teachers

Purpose

Thank you for participating in my survey. The data you provide here will shed important light on curricular decisions being made, especially regarding book-length texts most frequently taught by middle and secondary English teachers in Michigan, as well as teachers' reasons for making those decisions. I believe this information is especially important and interesting given the changing role of the teacher in the current policy context.

Length

Out of respect for your precious time, there are just 14 quick questions, 8 of which are multiple choice and 1 of which is optional.

Questions

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this research study, you can contact Samantha Caughlan at caughlan@msu.edu or Carlin Borsheim at borsheim@msu.edu.

Consent

All data, including your identity, will remain anonymous and confidential. Participation is voluntary; you can withdraw participation or refuse to answer any particular questions at any time. You indicate your voluntary agreement to participate by beginning this survey.

1. In which region of Michigan do you teach?

Mid Michigan

Northern Michigan

Saginaw Bay

Southeast Michigan

Straits

Upper Peninsula

West Coast

2. How would you characterize your school community?

Urban

Suburban

Small Town

Rural

Other (please specify)

3. Which of the following descriptors best characterize the student population of your school? (Choose all that apply)

Predominantly White or Caucasian

Predominantly African American

Predominantly Latino/a

Racially and ethnically diverse

Culturally diverse

Culturally homogeneous

Socioeconomically diverse

Linguistically diverse

Other (please specify)

4. Which grade level do you teach?

Middle school

High school

Middle/High school

Post-secondary

Other (please specify)

5. In what type of school do you teach?

Public

Private (religious)

Private (non-religious)

Charter

Magnet

Alternative

Other (please specify)

6. How many years have you been teaching?

1-5 years

6-10 years

11-15 years

16-20 years

21-40 years

7. With which racial or ethnic description do you mostly closely identify?

Black or African American

White or Caucasian

American Indian or Alaska Native

Asian

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Hispanic or Latino

Biracial or multiracial

Other (please specify)

8. What level of education have you reached?

BS or BA

BA or BS +

MS, MA, or M.Ed

Ed.D or Ed.S

Ph.D

Other (please specify)

9. For each grade level or course you teach, please list the book-length course texts (novels, plays, non-fiction) you currently use. Example: 9th grade -To Kill a Mockingbird,

Romeo And Juliet, Nightjohn. 10th grade -Of Mice and Men, The Great Gatsby, The House on Mango Street. British Literature: The Canterbury Tales, Great Expectations.

10. Do you use any of these book-length works to address themes of multiculturalism or diversity? If so, please list the titles you use and the topics you address.

Example: [Title of Novel]: [Central themes or topics addressed]

11. Do you include selections by authors from diverse backgrounds and experiences and if so, how?

12. How much freedom do you feel you have to choose texts?

Complete freedom of choice

Must teach certain core selections

Free to choose from approved list

Can add at will to the core selections

Can ask to have additions selections approved

Some freedom

Little or no leeway in selections

Other (please specify)

13. As you look back at your list of course texts, what factors would you say most strongly influence your literature selections?

14. As an extension of this study, I am interested in conducting interviews and classroom observations around the state of Michigan. If you would be interested in participating in an extension of this study, please leave your name and contact information. Of course, participation is optional and completely confidential. Thank you so much for completing my survey. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the distribution or administration of this survey you may contact me at borsheim@msu.edu. Have a lovely school year!

APPENDIX B: TEACHER INTERVIEW

1. This is the first time I've been to [your town]. How would you describe this community?
2. Do you live here?
3. How would you describe the student population? The school?
4. How long have you been teaching? Have you taught anywhere else?
5. I remember from your survey that you teach [English 9]. What are the central goals of [English 9]?
6. I remember from your survey that your main course texts include [English 9: *Romeo and Juliet*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Lord of the Flies*, *The Bean Trees*, *The Odyssey*]. Why those texts? Why [*The Bean Trees*]?
7. If a teacher wants to teach a new book or text, how might he/she go about that?
8. Do you use any of these texts to address themes of multiculturalism?
9. How do you approach it? How did that go?
10. Are there activities, lessons or techniques you used to address those themes that have worked well?
11. One thing that I am interested in asking more about is multicultural education. One interesting dynamic here is that JHS is about 92% White. Do you feel like multicultural education relates to you and your students at JHS? Can you say a little be more about that?
12. How would you describe your goals of multicultural education here at JHS?
13. Do you think those goals are reflected in JHS more generally?

14. Do you approach multicultural literature differently than you would non-multicultural literature?
15. Do you use any of the other course texts to address themes of multiculturalism or diversity?
16. Do you feel like your own Whiteness plays into your thinking about multicultural education?
17. Did your teacher training program address multicultural education? In what ways?
18. Are there other life experiences that have helped you teach multicultural education?
19. Additional probing, follow up questions...
20. Are there other issues or topics that we didn't address today that we should touch on before we wrap up?

APPENDIX C: STUDENT INTERVIEW

Have you always lived here/gone to school here?

What kinds of things do you like to do or do you spend time doing outside of class?

Are you involved with any school activities?

How would you describe [your town] to a visitor?

How would you describe [your school]?

How would you describe [Mr./Ms./Mrs. X's] English class?

My students used to always ask me, "What is the point of English?" How would you answer that question?

Why do you think we read literature in English class?

So, I've been observing your class as you read [that book]. Why do you think you are reading that book?

You mentioned [something related to multiculturalism]. Why do you think Mrs. X focuses on that?

Do you study things like that in other classes?

How does that book compare with the other books you read this semester?

[Additional questions in response to observations in this particular classroom...]

APPENDIX D: THEMES

Themes from interview analysis

- book-length texts
- teachers' beliefs in the power of literature teachers' values
- reasons why teachers don't do multicultural education
- personal experiences with diversity professional experiences with multiculturalism
- student responses and resistance
- community
- specific experiences teaching multicultural literature
- pedagogical orientation
- specific practices
- goals for multicultural education
- Whiteness
- White Discourses
- multicultural themes
- purpose for multicultural pedagogy
- challenges of doing multiculturalism in White contexts
- teachers talking about talking about race with their students
- references to race
- do not indoctrinate
- blindspots
- warnings about the dangers of talking about race in the classroom

APPENDIX E: MY (RESEARCHER) PARTICIPATION IN WHITE EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSE

In her work on multicultural education in White contexts, Haviland (2004, 2008) identified several specific discourse moves White people make during discussions of race to subvert and divert those discussions. These discourse moves, which she refers to collectively as White Educational Discourse (WED), ultimately insulate White people from having to reflect on their own Whiteness and/or implicate themselves in racism. Features of WED include avoiding words, remaining silent, making jokes, changing the topic, affirming sameness, agreeing and supporting, praising and encouraging, and letting one another off the hook, to name a few. I intended to use WED as an analytical framework to examine the ways teachers and students participated in WED in the classroom, as well as to examine the ways teachers participated in WED during interviews. Although I knew on an intellectual level that I would also have to consider the ways my own Whiteness factored into the research process, I had not anticipate having to come to terms with the extent to which I, too, participated in WED despite my explicit efforts not to. As I progressed through data analysis, however, my own participation in WED became more and more apparent to me.

To illustrate my own participation in WED, I will share an excerpt from an interview with Rae that took place in her classroom following a lesson in her *A Raisin in the Sun* unit. On this day, Rae presented to her class a PowerPoint with examples of “racism today.” These examples included racist cartoons from popular media, documentation of recent controversy around President Obama’s citizenship, and statistics illustrating institutional racism in education, the justice system, and material wealth. About half way through the

presentation, Rae showed a graph that illustrated the discrepancy between incarceration rates of African American men and incarceration rates of White men. Rae's intention for showing the graph was to help students understand institutional racism in the legal system. Rae invited students to discuss their own theories for explaining the statistic. Students aired common misconceptions, stereotypes, and racist assumptions: African American men are incarcerated at higher rates because they commit more crimes, because they are more violent as a result of life in poverty, because they live in a culture where crimes and prison are more normal. Only one student suggested that African American men are arrested and incarcerated at higher rates due to an unjust legal system that includes racism on the part of police officers, judges, and juries.

The lesson and the whole group discussion made me very uncomfortable. Essentially, I felt that Rae had provided a platform for students to voice racist perspectives in a way that worked to potentially cement racist misconceptions. Throughout the lesson I jotted notes and drafted questions for Rae. What had her goal for this lesson been? Did she feel she achieved it? How did she feel about the execution of the lesson? How did she feel about students' comments? Basically, did she find students' racism as disturbing as I did? After the lesson, Rae and I sat down for an interview. A few minutes into the interview, after asking Rae about her goals for the lesson, I asked her about a student's comment. Here is an excerpt from the interview:

1. **Carlin:** It was interesting what Sean said today during the discussion. You said, "Do
2. you think African Americans just commit more crimes and he said, "Yeah." Like,
3. what did you think of that?
4. **Rae:** I think he probably answered that without thinking. I don't, I don't particularly

5. think he, when I look at, like comments he's made in the past, I wouldn't say he's, I
6. would not peg him as a racist student.
7. **Carlin:** Right.
8. **Rae:** I think he probably said that without thinking. But I, I think that many of them,
9. like many people see statistics like that and that's what they think.
10. **Carlin:** Well, that statistic makes you think that.
11. **Rae:** Right. Right.
12. **Carlin:** I didn't think of him necessarily as being a racist student but I thought...
13. **Rae:** They [students] don't know.
14. **Carlin:** When he looks at that bar graph, he thinks, "Yeah, of course, they commit
15. more crimes..."
16. **Rae:** I was more pleased by the other comments of people who did sort of get it. ...
17. **Carlin:** Right.

From the beginning, *Rae's* participation in WED was apparent to me. For example, when she said, "I think he probably answered that without thinking. ... I would not peg him as a racist student," I felt surprised and disappointed that Rae let Sean off the hook so easily. Perhaps she did not recognize his comment as racist. Perhaps she was protecting her student from being judged as a racist. Regardless, letting people off the hook is a typical feature of WED.

However, *Rae's* participation in WED is not the focus of this appendix. The focus of this appendix is my own participation in WED. As I looked across my responses—"Right. ... Well, that statistic makes you think that. ... I didn't think of him necessarily as being a racist student but I thought... ... When he looks at that bar graph, he thinks, 'Yeah, of course, they

commit more crimes...' ... Right."—I was equally surprised and disappointed at my silence. I remained completely silent about my concerns about students' racism and Rae's lesson. I did not ask the tough questions I could have asked. I did not raise difficult issues that I could have raised. I had been very troubled by the lesson and very motivated to engage Rae in a critical reflection on that lesson and yet I ended up giving the impression that I supported the lesson, as well as her interpretation of Sean as "not racist." Essentially, I let myself off the hook from having a difficult conversation with Rae about my concerns about her lesson. I opted to avoid an unpleasant conversation about racism, thereby protecting my White privilege and perpetuating racism.

This example illustrates just one instance of my participation in WED. There is no question that I participated in WED throughout the research process. Haviland (2008) acknowledges that WED is insidious; that White researchers, teachers, and students participate in WED even when they have stated the desire to do the opposite.

So what? What is the point of this confession? To alleviate myself of White guilt? I hope not. Rather, Haviland (2008) argues that making WED visible is a step toward understanding how WED impedes research in predominantly White contexts. In analysis of her own dissertation, Haviland (2004) felt that her participation in WED—she also found herself avoiding difficult conversations with a research participant—led to "an interpretation that was less nuanced and complete—less good research" (p. 222). She argues that by identifying features of WED, by acknowledging our complicity in it, White researchers raise self-awareness so we can take advantage of moments in which we can interrupt and challenge WED in the subsequent research.

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