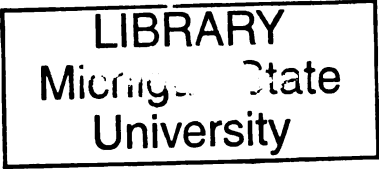


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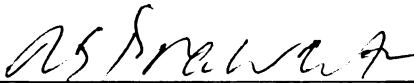
TO TELL A NEW STORY: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF
THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF CULTURALLY RELEVANT TEACHING

presented by

Jennifer Danridge Turner

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**TO TELL A NEW STORY: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF THE THEORY AND
PRACTICE OF CULTURALLY RELEVANT TEACHING**

VOLUME I

By

Jennifer Danridge Turner

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ABSTRACT

TO TELL A NEW STORY: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF CULTURALLY RELEVANT TEACHING

By

Jennifer Danridge Turner

Over the past several years, culturally relevant teaching has gained increasing attention as an instructional approach that is successful with African American elementary students. Within this body of literature, the traditional “story” of culturally relevant teaching has been told from the perspectives of researchers and has emphasized general pedagogical and classroom management strategies that are generally associated with “best practice.” This study, however, aims to “tell a new story” of culturally relevant teaching from the perspectives of three European American teachers who have earned the reputation of being successful with African American students. In this narrative inquiry, four questions were considered: (a) What do these teachers’ instructional and interpersonal responses to diversity look like? (b) What types of cultural perspectives do these teachers seem to draw upon in their classroom practices and why? (c) What kinds of stories do these teachers use to describe the nature of their work?, and (d) What is the nature of the relationship between the theory and practice of culturally relevant teaching? Narratives of these three European American teachers’ classroom practices were composed based upon observational and interview data, and were qualitatively analyzed for their thematic

content. From this narrative analysis, several “new” storylines of culturally relevant teaching emerged: (a) the presence of “diversity dilemmas” within the teachers’ practice and interactions with African American students, (b) the concept of “cultural hybridity” as a perspective that represented the teachers’ pedagogical and interpersonal responses to student diversity, and (c) the concept of “personalizing diversity” as a process through which personal and professional knowledge about diversity is developed. These storylines are significant because, taken together, they represent a different story about culturally relevant teaching-- one that uncovers the difficulties, frustrations, and conflicts that may arise as European American teachers teach and interact with African American and other culturally-diverse students. An important implication of this study is that European American teachers may enact culturally relevant teaching in multiple ways, and that through the telling of these “new” stories of classroom practice, instruction for African American and other culturally-diverse students may ultimately be transformed.

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DEDICATION

to Isaiah, Elijah, and Amani

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I'd like to give all praise and honor to God, for He made the way possible for me to come to Michigan State University, and through it all He was right there beside me. I firmly believe that God also sends people into our lives to provide support and encouragement when we need it most. During this dissertation journey, God sent these people into my life, and it made all the difference in the world:

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that helped me to clarify my thoughts—and again, for that I will be forever grateful. Heather Pleasants, my fellow educational psychologist, also read my dissertation drafts and provided useful comments and ideas. I thank Heather for giving me a copy of her dissertation, because it gave me a sense of where I wanted my own work to go, and how it could be presented in a clear and concise manner. Emotionally, Heather was also a wonderful source of support, particularly in terms of understanding what it is like to be the mother of a young child and a scholar. Her counsel and advice about life during, and after, the dissertation was extremely helpful. Other friends, such as Glenda Breaux, Gwen McMillon, Lisa Sensale, and Sapna Vyas all were part of my MSU experience and their friendship has meant the world to me.

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PROLOGUE

NARRATIVE BEGINNINGS

In her deeply moving Presidential Address, Susan Florio-Ruane (1996) issued a challenge to educators and educational researchers to tell new stories—about schooling, about themselves, and about culture. She argues that while personal narratives fundamentally represent who we are and the lives we lead, they also have the potential to “hem us in, preventing our own and others’ growth” (p. 158). Ultimately, Florio-Ruane suggests that we must have the courage to revise and critique our own stories-- as well as the stories of others—in order to construct narratives that build community, cross borders, and transform schooling. Knowing that the work of telling new stories is often painful and difficult, she urges, “in our scholarship and in our teaching, we must risk telling new stories in and by many voices. This is an act of hope” (p. 160).

As an African American researcher, I was surprised at how difficult the actual process of telling new stories could be. My stories of culturally relevant teaching were rooted within vivid memories of growing up in Philadelphia as a poor, Black girl who was bright but “at-risk” due to the social ills and economic devastation that plagued my community. For me, teachers who were “culturally relevant” were those who understood that I was proud of my African American heritage, and that I needed to be able to identify with other intellectual African Americans. I had carried around the “burden of acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986) for years, and I desperately searched for teachers who would ease that burden for me and assure me that African Americans could be smart and Black. I found this particular capacity to nurture my cultural and academic identities

within three African American teachers, and during my years in graduate school, as I participated in research projects and extensively read about “successful teaching” for diverse children, these African American teachers became the major characters in the story of culturally relevant teaching that I constructed.

This story was fairly easy for me to tell, because many educators and researchers believe that diverse children are more likely to have positive classroom experiences with teachers who look like them (Hollins, 1996; Nieto, 1996). Moreover, I had many European American teachers throughout my career as a student, and not one supported my cultural identity needs like the African American teachers. Yet, in the back of my mind, I always had a nagging suspicion that the story was too simplistic, that perhaps European American teachers could not provide this type of cultural support, but they still could be “culturally relevant” and foster the success of diverse children in other important ways. But that story was too difficult to tell because it raised questions that I didn’t want to address: If I, as an African American educator, told this type of story, would I be implying that European American teachers don’t need to worry about the cultural identities of diverse students? Would I be implicitly advocating a “colorblind” perspective for successful teaching? Would I be casting European American teachers as “saviors” of diverse children? These questions terrified me, and as I prepared to conduct my dissertation research, I resolved to tell the story of culturally relevant teaching that was comfortable and familiar to me.

But new stories have a way of coming to the light. During a conversation with my husband about favorite teachers, I suddenly found myself two European American teachers whom I vividly remembered because they helped me in math and science--two

subjects that I had never liked and therefore were extremely difficult for me. In eighth grade, I attended a predominantly-White, private Christian school, and because I had done well academically, I was invited to take algebra with the ninth graders. I was petrified, not only because I suspected that the older students wouldn't accept a lowly eighth grader in their class, but because math was one of my worst subjects, and I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to handle the work. To make matters worse, when I arrived the first day, I discovered that I was the only African American student in the class. I vividly remember that I felt sick and I wanted to get up and leave, but just as I was about to raise my hand, Mr. Mimm, our teacher, started talking about the course, and I was so fascinated by his discussion of equations that I remained riveted in my seat. Mr. Mimm bolstered my confidence in my own mathematical abilities because he loved math, and taught us multiple ways of conceptualizing and solving problems that drew upon our intuitive understanding of numbers rather than forcing us to completely rely upon the standard procedures in the textbook. Equally important, Mr. Mimm never singled me out or made me feel "different" because I was in eighth grade or because I was African American; he always treated me in accepting and respectful ways, and through those interactions, the other students learned to do the same. By the middle of the year, I felt completely comfortable in Mr. Mimm's algebra class, and I did extremely well.

As a freshman at the Philadelphia High School for Girls, a competitive magnet school, I was once again invited to be on the "fast track," this time in terms of science. The school counselors strongly encouraged me to take biology so that I would be eligible for honors and AP science classes in my junior and senior years, so my parents and I decided that I would take it. The feelings of loneliness and fear from the previous year

resurfaced as I entered the classroom that first day, knowing that most of the students in my biology class were in tenth grade, and seeing that there was only a handful of African American students taking the class. Mr. Mealey, a tall, thin balding man, walked into the room with a stern look on his face, and I remember thinking that the class was going to be painfully difficult. But after taking roll, he loosened up and started joking around and talking with us informally, and the tension that I felt seemed to melt away. After that first day, Mr. Mealey always smiled, and he told humorous stories that helped us to connect biology with our own lives; while introducing the concept of atoms, for example, he told us that atoms were “neutral and unhappy” and that they wanted to get “hooked up”—a term we used for dating at the time—with another atom that would “bond” with them and make them happy. Mr. Mealey’s jokes and humorous stories were always told with a greater purpose in mind: to teach us about the relationships between the physical lives and worlds of humans and animals. By drawing upon this “big idea” as the organizing theme of the course, Mr. Mealey made science seem less intimidating and abstract to me, and I was able to do everything—including the dissections!—because I was deeply intrigued by the concept that biology could be “relevant” to my personal life.

Long after my husband and I finished our conversation, my thoughts kept returning to Mr. Mimm and Mr. Mealey; unlike my African American teachers, they never discussed racial or cultural identity issues with me, and yet I thought they were two of the best teachers I ever had. Was it a fluke? I began reading the stories of successful African American adults, and discovered that it wasn’t; virtually all of them wrote poignantly about the European American teachers who had made a difference in their lives. For example, in her autobiography provocatively entitled *Project Girl*, Janet

McDonald (1999) describes the pivotal role that two European American educators played in her journey from living in a crowded Brooklyn housing project with her family to becoming an international lawyer in Paris. McDonald was smart and loved to read, and although she graduated from high school at age sixteen, she was not adequately prepared for college. Frustrated and lost, Janet enrolled at Harlem Prep, an alternative school directed by the Carpenters, a husband-and-wife team of European American educators. McDonald thrived intellectually and socially in the nurturing, familial atmosphere that the Carpenters created at the school, and with their encouragement and support, she applied to Vassar and was accepted. At Vassar, McDonald did extremely well, and eventually graduated from Columbia Law School and became an international lawyer.

In her memoir entitled Unafraid of the dark (1998), Rosemary Bray described the pivotal role that her European American teacher played in her experiences at all-White, upper-crust middle school. Bray, a poor girl who lived in a Chicago housing project, had few friends at her new school, and her social difficulties quickly escalated into severe behavioral and academic problems. Mr. Griffith, her eighth grade social studies teacher, recognized her potential and befriended her. Knowing of Bray's love of books, Mr. Griffith suggested books on topics that connected to her cultural interests, such as Margaret Walker's book about the atrocities of slavery, and was willing to discuss these books with Bray. Further, to help Bray regain the respect of her peers, Mr. Griffith cast her as the lead in a school play, and spent substantial time coaching her after school; after Bray's stellar performance, she was accepted by many of the students and faculty. Reflecting upon her middle school experiences and the positive impact that Mr. Griffith made on her life, Bray wrote,

Mr. Griffith did a lot more than show them what kind of person I was. He showed me what kind of person I was. Until then, I had remained ashamed of who I was...and all I could do was turn that shame into anger and silence...Mr. Griffith helped me to find my voice, glimpse my real self without shame...(p. 96).

Similarly, in Suskind's (1998) book A hope in the unseen, Cedric Jennings, an academically-talented African American boy from Washington, DC, makes it through his first two years at Brown University with the support of his Jewish benefactor, Dr. Korb. A Boston optometrist and contact lens inventor, Dr. Korb became interested in Cedric's academic success from an article that Suskind had written in the Wall Street Journal, and paid for periodic tutoring, school clothes, books, and other incidentals that Cedric needed at Brown. Although he did not have much money, the monthly stipend that Dr. Korb sent made Cedric feel as if he "fit in" with some of his more wealthy friends at Brown. Further, Dr. Korb tried to help Cedric navigate through the academic, cultural, and economical struggles that he encountered at Brown, by writing him little notes of encouragement, talking with Cedric openly and honestly, and doing special acts of kindness such as inviting Cedric to his house for Thanksgiving dinner. Cedric, who was a loner in high school and was trying to work through a myriad of social issues at Brown, genuinely enjoyed talking with Donald, and according to Suskind, Cedric "talked unselfconsciously with Donald. He liked Dr. Korb. The older man's relentless good works and attentiveness had provided him passage across Cedric's minefield of trust" (p. 254). Dr. Korb's generous financial and emotional support helped Cedric get through his first two years at Brown, and at the time his biography was published, Cedric was a junior math major with a B average.

Collectively, these success stories offer compelling evidence that European American teachers have been able to reach out to African American students in ways that profoundly changed their lives. The message of hope in these stories contradicts our conventional wisdom about the relationship between European American teachers and African American students. Sadly, our “traditional” stories of White teachers and Black students are replete with failure, given the persistence of African American underachievement in school and the substantial number of studies which have suggested that European American teachers have contributed to these students’ poor academic performance and social difficulties because they lack understanding about race/cultural diversity (King, 1991; McIntyre, 1997; Rubovitz & Maehr, 1973; Taylor, 1991). By presuming that many, if not all, European American teachers hold negative stereotypical views about African American students, lower their expectations of them, and tacitly accept the dominance of White norms and privileges, we have unintentionally perpetuated the mythical “story” that “White teachers can’t teach” African American children.

This myth is seriously challenged, however, when we consider the markedly different image of the European American teacher presented through the stories of high-achieving African Americans. Within these narratives, European American teachers who had a significant influence upon the academic lives of African American students were caring, nurturing, respectful, and seemed to have varying responses to the cultural diversity of their African American students; some teachers, like the Carpenters in McDonald’s story, tried to make African American students in their school feel welcomed but did not explicitly discuss issues of race and culture, while others, like Mr.

Griffith in Bray's story, particularly drew upon African American literature to forge personal relationships with African American students. Reading the success stories of African Americans, then, suggests that a new storyline for thinking about European American teachers and culturally relevant practices for African American students may be worth contemplating. Not all European American teachers will be like Mr. Griffith and enact culturally relevant practices in the same ways that African American teachers might, but that does not preclude them from taking student diversity into account and trying to bridge these differences in a sensitive and respectful way. Telling new stories about the culturally relevant practices of European American teachers raises a set of questions that are often unasked: When European American teachers are successful with African American students, what do their instructional and interpersonal responses to diversity look like? What types of cultural perspectives (e.g., colorblindness, antiracist) do these teachers seem to draw upon in their classroom practices and why? How do these teachers describe the nature of their work, particularly in terms of teaching culturally diverse students? Which personal and professional qualities do these teachers believe to be integral to their success with African American students, and more broadly, with culturally diverse students?

In this dissertation study, I address these questions by telling a "new story" of culturally relevant teaching through the practical experiences of successful three European American elementary teachers. The significance of sharing these teacher stories is twofold. First, by offering a "new story" based upon the practices of successful European American teachers, my research builds on, extends, and critiques the concept of culturally relevant teaching. The increasing scholarship on culturally relevant teaching

has provided important theoretical and practical insights, but Gay (1998) argues that much of the “operational” work, which involves making theory and practice more congruent, remains to be done. It is my hope that the “new story” of culturally relevant teaching told through this dissertation study will contribute to emergent scholarship that emphasizes the relationship between the theory and practice of culturally relevant teaching.

Second, my research brings the narratives of European American teachers who have been successful with African American children into the broader debate about effective pedagogy for culturally diverse children. Teacher voices have been glaringly absent from conversations about “successful practice” because researcher voices have traditionally been highlighted within this work (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993).

Complicating matters further, Howard (1999) contends that European American teachers are also extremely hesitant to join discussions about successful practice within the context of multicultural education, because they are oftentimes confused and insecure about their own beliefs and emotions about cultural diversity. But it precisely the voices of European American teachers that we need to pay particular attention to, given the fact that the teaching force is predominantly White, female, and middle-class, and the student population is growing increasingly diverse (Banks, 1999). Through the narratives presented in this study, I intentionally created a space for the voices of three European American teachers to be heard in discussions concerning what counts as “effective instruction” and what is meant by “affirming diversity” in multicultural classrooms.

In keeping with the theme of narrative, the dissertation itself is a series of stories that explore the theory of culturally relevant teaching and the practices of three European

American teachers who have earned the reputation of being “successful” with African American students. In Chapter One, I describe the research site, Burnett Elementary School, through stories of conflict and confrontation that have erupted between many European American teachers and African American students, and introduce the three European American teachers involved in this study who have successfully composed “alternative” stories of collaboration and hope with the African American students in their classrooms. Chapter Two presents a review of the literature pertinent to culturally relevant teaching, and provides a description of the methodological approach and research processes that occurred, in the form of a chronological “researcher’s tale.” The findings from the narrative analyses are presented in Chapters Three through Five. Each chapter represents an individual teacher’s classroom narrative that documents her culturally relevant practices by highlighting the literacy instructional pedagogy and classroom management practices that were effective with African American students. More specifically, the classroom narratives portray the complexities and complications regarding “student diversity” that arose throughout the year as the teachers enacted culturally relevant teaching, and illuminate the personal and professional resources that these teachers drew upon to craft appropriate pedagogical responses to issues of diversity. In Chapter Six, I construct a “new story” of culturally relevant teaching based upon the Burnett teachers’ classroom narratives told in the preceding chapters, explain themes and storylines within this alternative story and discuss its theoretical and practical implications. The dissertation concludes with a brief epilogue that explores “narrative possibilities” in terms of future directions for continued research.

CHAPTER ONE

CONFLICTING NARRATIVES: STORIES OF EUROPEAN AMERICAN TEACHERS AND AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS AT BURNETT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

It was a balmy afternoon in late April when Lydia, Rita, Jane and I met for our second Teacher Focus Group at Burnett Elementary School.¹ School had ended long ago, and without the children, the hallways and classrooms were eerily silent. But inside Rita's classroom, we were having a great time, laughing and talking and joking. A half-eaten box of Krispy Kreme doughnuts and a black tape recorder sat in the middle of the table, both seemingly forgotten in the midst of our conversation about their personal experiences and their professional work as teachers of African American students. Lydia, Jane, and Rita were masterful storytellers, and through rich and detailed stories they described incidents with African American students and parents that hurt them deeply, explored their friendships with African American colleagues who gave them insights about race and culture, and discussed how classroom life powerfully shaped their understandings of the challenges associated with helping students to acknowledge and accept cultural diversity. Although the conversation was quite painful and difficult at times, Lydia, Rita, and Jane were very forthcoming about their experiences with cultural diversity, and talked honestly about their shortcomings as European American teachers working with African American students as well as their triumphs. As the conversation began winding down, Jane suddenly turned and asked me, "Do you think from what

¹ All proper names appearing in this dissertation are pseudonyms.

you've been seeing and hearing that it's harder for White teachers to make a difference in the lives of Black students?"

Although I didn't know quite how to respond, it was clear that Jane's perceptive question reflected a concern that she, and her colleagues at Burnett Elementary, had been grappling with over the past several years. In this chapter, I share the story of Burnett Elementary School, and their struggle to "make a difference" in the educational lives of African American students.

Making a Difference: The Story of Burnett Elementary School

Ask any teacher or administrator in Winston County about Burnett Elementary School, and the discussion would immediately turn to the "striking differences" between students at the school. Within these conversations, diversity was often characterized along cultural and socioeconomic lines, and was particularly described through the contrasting images of the "haves" and the "have nots." The "haves" were students who lived nearby and walked to school; on many mornings, these children smiled and waved goodbye to their mothers standing in the doorways of half-million dollar homes, complete with professionally-manicured lawns and gardens, and two cars parked in the driveway. Almost every student who lived in these beautiful houses was European American, while nearly all of the faces in the school bus windows were African American and Hispanic. To the Burnett Elementary staff, the school bus seemed to be symbolic of the promise of "equal opportunity" that society made to culturally diverse children, and that the school was charged to keep; although those children were the "have nots," the Burnett Elementary faculty and administrators were determined to live up to

the characterization of public schools as Great Equalizers, where the children of the poor have the opportunity to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to compete with the rich, and children from diverse backgrounds have the chance to obtain the same education as European American children (Barber, 1992; Hale-Benson, 2001; Hollins, 1996).

Mrs. Matthews, the principal, took special pride in Burnett Elementary because she had been a part of its conception; she fondly remembered wearing her hard hat onto the construction site as the school was being built, and the hectic rush to order supplies for the classrooms that first year (Administrator Interview, 6/10/02). Mrs. Matthews believed that her sense of ownership also came with a tremendous responsibility to the students, parents, and the community served by Burnett Elementary. When it was time to name the school, Mrs. Matthews went to the community and asked for their suggestions. Making the name a matter of public debate was a precarious move, given the fact that the “haves” ultimately wanted control over the name and the school, and did not seem to care if the “have nots” felt excluded. With her sunny “California girl” personality, Mrs. Matthews was able to persuade the local community members to continue searching for a name that would be inclusive.

Mrs. Matthews was absolutely delighted when the community decided to name the school in honor of Burnett, a European American man who was a legend in Winston County. As a farmer who owned a substantial portion of land in the community, Burnett used his wealth to support educational opportunities, not only for his own children, but for all the children in the community. Burnett so strongly believed in the power of education that when the only school in the area burned down, he supplied the lumber to

rebuild the school from his own mill; to this day, no one knows if he was ever repaid. After the school was re-opened, Burnett realized that only children within walking distance or whose families who had their own transportation could come to school. Because he believed that every child should have the opportunity to learn, Burnett began picking up children in the community in his own truck and bringing them to school. As a local pioneer of “equal opportunity,” Burnett was fondly remembered as a selfless man who had single-handedly provided access to education by serving as “Winston County’s first transportation system” (Administrator Interview, 6/10/02).

Mrs. Matthews believed that Burnett’s legacy of educational equity was the mission of her new school and its staff. Assuming that the class differences that divided the community would be a challenge, Mrs. Matthews knew that the road to equity for all would be long and difficult, but she was optimistic that she and her staff would achieve this goal. However, the task became even more formidable as the numbers of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds began increasingly dramatically. While the teaching force at Burnett Elementary was over 85 percent European American, the school served nearly 900 K-6 students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds (see Table 1).

Table 1: Student Ethnicity at Burnett Elementary School, 2000-2001

Ethnicity	Number	Percent
Indian	7	.7
Asian	99	8.7
Hispanic	86	8.7
Black	236	25.2
White	462	49.3
Multiracial	52	5.5

Source: County Website, November 2002

The cultural diversity represented by Burnett Elementary students “stood out” in Winston County, which was a large, predominantly-White constellation of suburban schools. For example, Burnett Elementary was one of the few Winston County elementary schools with a percentage of African American students higher than 20 percent (See Table 2). As a result of this diversity, Burnett Elementary was considered to be a “tough school” for most European American teachers (Administrator Conversation, 3/21/02).

Table 2: African American Student Enrollment in Winston County (WC) Elementary Schools

Range of African American Students Enrolled (in percent)	Total Number of WC Elementary Schools	Percentage of Percentage of WC Elementary Schools
1.6 to 19	110	84
20 to 46.7	21*	16

*Burnett Elementary was in this particular group
Source: County Website, November 2002

Mrs. Matthews and her staff were particularly concerned about providing educational equity for the African American students at Burnett because their test scores were at the absolute bottom. In 1998, only 33 percent of third graders passed the state-wide exam, compared to 63 percent for European American students, 72 percent for Asian Americans, and 50 percent for Hispanics. Likewise, the percentages of African American fifth graders passing the reading and writing sections were significantly lower than their European American, Asian American, and Hispanic peers (Winston County

Statistics, 12/01). Three years after it opened, Burnett Elementary was considered an “at-risk” school by Winston County, and the staff was required to participate in a special program that would help them improve their test scores through school-wide reform.

Surprisingly, administrators and faculty at Burnett Elementary were not discouraged by their “at-risk” designation. Principal Matthews recalled that although she was personally “humiliated by the way that the papers published our scores,” she was delighted that the staff seemed to “take the whole thing as a challenge that they could work on together” and consequently “welcomed” the additional financial and programmatic support (e.g., Reading Recovery, smaller class sizes, longer school days) provided by the County (Administrator Interview, 6/10/02). The administrators and faculty rolled up their collective sleeves and after a few months, they developed an action plan which called for an examination of their test scores, assessment of curricular strengths and weakness, and alignment of instructional objectives and lessons with those represented on the state-wide, standardized exam. To provide additional support to the reform efforts, Mrs. Matthews also created a “Teacher Council” that involved teacher representatives from all grade levels and addressed classroom and professional concerns. Through this Council, teachers were empowered to make significant curricular and instructional decisions; for example, teachers were generally disappointed with the math textbooks they were currently using, and after presenting their concerns at the Council meetings, Mrs. Matthews adjusted the budget and provided funds to purchase new books. According to Mrs. Matthews and Mr. Williams, this Teachers’ Council was “an important part” of the reforms that were made because it contributed to the “culture of

open and honest communication” that they were trying to establish between the administration and the staff (Administrator Interview, 6/10/02).

In addition to promoting equal access to knowledge through school-wide instructional and curricular reform (Darling-Hammond, 1997), Burnett administrators and staff attempted to provide educational equity for African American students by ensuring equal access to school resources. They encouraged African American students to participate in the myriad of academic, athletic, and social programs during and after school. Through Winston County, Burnett Elementary offered free and reduced breakfast and lunch to them². And staff members like Mrs. Melville and Mrs. Phillips, the school counselors, were especially attuned to any financial needs that African American students had, and working on addressing them from the moment they enrolled at Burnett. “We have many new children that come in during the year, some from foster care and some from other situations, and they’ll come here with no supplies and no backpack. So we immediately give it to them, and they’re able to walk into class feeling good that they have everything they need,” explained Mrs. Melville (Counselor Interview, 5/8/02). Mrs. Phillips added that for one particular African American boy who was “constantly staring down at his shoes,” having a new book bag filled with his supplies “transformed him. He stood up tall, he smiled, his head up high and he walked into class and just because he felt like he was like everybody else” (Counselor Interview, 5/8/02). In addition to the school supplies, the school counselors also provided clothing items for students who needed new

² The exact percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch was considered “confidential” information and was known only by County officials; in fact, one secretary at Burnett assured me that even the principal was not privy to this information. During their interview, the school counselors estimated that 40% of Burnett students received free and reduced lunch, and that this figure was “very high” compared to other Winston County elementary schools. Indeed, County administrators acknowledged that Burnett Elementary had a “huge disparity” between “the haves and the have notes” (Meeting, 3/01).

shoes, clothing, or coats. Mrs. Melville vividly remembered how this gesture of kindness completely “overwhelmed” two African American twin girls who had gone “shopping” in the special room at the school and each went home with seven complete outfits for Christmas.

These collective efforts yielded extraordinary success for Burnett Elementary School. Within one year, they had successfully closed the gap between African American students and their European American peers by ten to fifteen percent (Conversation with Administrator, 3/21/02). They were commended by Winston County, and their “at-risk” designation was rescinded. Indeed, Mrs. Matthews and her staff had responded to the challenge to change, and in doing so proved that European American teachers can make a difference in the lives of African American children.

But after a few years, the scores began to plateau, and the school professionals at Burnett were once again haunted by Jane’s question. Had they truly made a difference, when, in spite of all their hard work and sacrifice, the academic experiences of African American students at Burnett Elementary remained “separate and unequal”? No one could ignore the fact that although African American students comprised about 25 percent of the student population, they were over-represented in the special education program and severely under-represented in the Gifted and Talented (GT) program. Mrs. Matthews was so disturbed by the lack of African American students in the GT program that she had personally taken home the list of GT kids and the scores of African American students to see if she could determine why there was such a significant gap. She was also deeply concerned because, despite massive curricular and instructional

reform, African American students continued to have the lowest percentages of passing scores compared to all other cultural groups (see Tables 3 and 4).

Table 3: Percent of Third Grade Students Passing State-Wide Reading Exam

Ethnicity	Test Year			
	1998	1999	2000	2001
American Indian	63	70	57	70
Asian	72	80	74	74
African American	33	42	42	46
Hispanic	50	59	49	53
Caucasian	64	69	69	73

Source: County Website, December 2001

Table 4: Percent of Fifth Grade Students Passing Reading and Writing State-Wide Exams

Ethnicity	<u>English (Reading)</u>				<u>English (Writing)</u>			
	Test Year				Test Year			
	1998	1999	2000	2001	1998	1999	2000	2001
American Indian	68	71	64	73	63	76	80	87
Asian	81	83	76	82	82	94	90	92
African American	47	48	47	55	45	67	67	74
Hispanic	64	64	57	63	62	80	73	78
Caucasian	76	78	77	80	72	86	86	89

Source: County Website, December 2001

Further, although Burnett administrators and teachers tried to make African American students feel comfortable in school through a variety of academic, athletic, and social programs, many African American students were experiencing significant social

difficulties that many have contributed to their academic underachievement. When asked how it felt to be one of a handful of African American students in his sixth grade class, Asad replied, “It kind of feels like you don’t have a lot of people that you can relate to...Other races don’t always know how it feels, like when someone uses a word (e.g., Black) in the wrong way, they don’t know how it feels” (Student Interview, 5/22/02). As Tatum (1997) observes, African American students can have difficulties making friends or “fitting in” to the social milieu of the classroom or the school, and as a result, they might experience severe psychological trauma and identity crises. This idea is represented in Lavita’s poignant description of her experiences as an African American sixth grader:

Last year, five White girls were my best friends and I was always hanging around them. And starting this year, people started saying, “Lavita, you act White.” And I was like, “I do? I didn’t know that.” And so now I’m hanging out with...all these Black people. And some of the white kids are saying, “You’ve changed, Lavita” and Tyler (a White boy) said to me that I changed and I said, “How?” and he said, “You hang out with your people more.” And I was like “What?!?”... And so some people are still saying that I’m acting white and I don’t know how I’m supposed to act. And I have to change my personality because I act one way with my White friends and one way with my Black friends, and so it gets confusing... And it’s hard to be myself because I don’t know what that is...(Student Interview, 5/22/02)

For some African American students, these internal conflicts became manifested externally as fighting. According to Winston County statistics, fighting was the leading reason for suspensions in elementary schools, with the highest number of suspensions given to African American boys, and the number of suspensions of African American girls being more than three times that of European American girls (Winston County website, 11/02).³ Clearly, African American students who were suspended from school

³ Winston County statistics do not report if the fighting incidents were inter-racial or intra-racial.

missed a substantial amount of instruction and assignments, and thus had an increased likelihood of academic difficulty.

Mrs. Matthews and her staff were greatly perplexed by the persistent disparity in the educational experiences and outcomes of African American students at Burnett Elementary, and over time, the sheer complexity of the situation began to discourage them. Doubting that they could really reach African American children, some began to sing old familiar songs about the “at-riskness” of African American students. It was difficult not to blame African American students when some many of the problems seemed to be directly caused by their families or their communities. To explain the dearth of African American students in the gifted program, for example, Mrs. Matthews theorized that African American students were not comfortable taking intellectual risks; therefore their scores tended to be “right on the cusp” but were never high enough to gain entry into the program. She noticed that African American boys were particularly afraid of “being smart” in school, and Mr. Williams, the African American assistant principal, explained that many African American students were “really discouraged” from being smart and doing well in school because they were teased by African American kids on the bus and in their neighborhoods, and that the strong “pull of the community” lured these kids into drugs, violence, crime, and other negative activities (Administrator Interview, 6/5/02). While the administrators sought to make sense of the complex reasons why African American students underachieved through their “folk theories” (Bruner, 1996), they also implied that African American students themselves, not the gifted test or the program itself, were at fault.

Further, the administrators and teachers were having problems communicating with some of the African American parents, particularly around the issue of transience. According to Winston County statistics, nearly 28 percent of the entire population of African American students moved at least once during the school year, with the majority of these transitions occurring during the elementary school years (Winston County Statistics, 11/02). At Burnett Elementary, almost 19 percent of their total student population had moved, with African American students accounting for much of the mobility. School administrators and teachers constantly spoke with African American parents about issues of mobility and academic achievement, and many seemed to be frustrated by responses from parents which they felt were overwhelmingly “unsupportive.” It was difficult for many European American educators to understand and relate to these parents, and Mr. Williams, the African American assistant principal, mentioned that their negative reactions to parents only made matters worse. As a mediator, he empathized with African American parents and understood that most of them had “about thirty years of negative memories and experience in school,” yet he was also deeply troubled by their attitude that it was “the school’s job” to educate their children and did not want to become actively involved in the process (Administrator Conversation, 3/21/02).

Every staff member and administrator was acutely aware of these statistics, they knew that many of the circumstances that African American students were challenging, and they might have unanimously adopted this explanation of “at-riskness” in African American students had it not been for one indisputable fact: there was a small group of teachers who achieved extraordinary success with the “at-risk” African American

students in their classrooms. This group of teachers was following the same literacy curriculum and instructional guidelines as their colleagues, yet their results with African American students were dramatically different. The African American students in these teachers' classes were learning to read and write, they were testing well, and they were more likely to be sitting in class than in the principal's office. These teachers were making a difference with African American students in spite of all the "risk" factors—and a good number were European American.

Lydia Browning, Jane Smith, and Rita Lucent were exemplary members of this successful group, and they were considered to be "Burnett's finest" (Administrator Interview, 6/10/02). All three were highly educated and certified⁴, but interestingly, their teaching experience varied greatly; Rita was a beginning teacher, Lydia was an experienced, and Jane was a veteran teacher (see Table 5).

Table 5: Teacher Information

Name	Grade Level	Educational Level	Area of Certification	Total Years Teaching Exp.	Total Years Teaching at Burnett
Rita Lucent	3	BA & M.Ed	Elementary Education (Grades 1-6)	5	4
Lydia Browning	6	BA & M.Ed	Elementary Education	12* *she returned to teaching after raising her children	7
Jane Smith	3	BA & M. Ed	Elementary Education (Grades 1-7)	30+	7

⁴ At Burnett Elementary, virtually all of the teachers had bachelor's degrees, and many were working on their master's. Those who were not attending graduate school were taking continuing education courses as required by Winston County.

Lydia, Jane, and Rita were considered successful by Burnett administrators because they were deeply committed teachers; Principal Matthews characterized them as “teachers who always stayed late after school, working until 5 or even 6pm, and even came in during the summer to prepare for the next year” and was genuinely inspired by their tireless dedication to improving their teaching (Administrator Interview, 6/10/02). Most importantly, school administrators believed Lydia, Jane, and Rita were successful because they achieved some sense of “parity” for African American students socially and academically. Despite a high number of children with behavioral issues in their classrooms, this group of teachers had very few discipline problems that resulted in suspensions or other severe penalties, and were highly commended because they chose to address any behavioral issues in their classrooms rather than constantly sending African American children to the office. According to the principal, the teaching effectiveness of this group of teachers was particularly demonstrated by the fact that the “gap” between African American and European American students on the state-mandated reading and math tests was virtually nonexistent for students in their classrooms (Administrator Interview, 6/10/02).

In addition to Burnett administrators, various school professionals thought that these three teachers were exemplary as well.⁵ Both counselors echoed this high praise for these three teachers, and to their recollection, had never received any complaints from African American students in their classrooms. Lydia, Jane, and Rita were also well-respected by Winston County administrators; out of thousands of elementary school

⁵ As explained in Appendix A, the process that was used to elicit nominations for this group of successful teachers involved County administrators, school administrators, and a former African American student and his parent. Opinions expressed here by the counselors and by African American students and parents who currently attend Burnett Elementary School were elicited at the end of the year.

teachers in the County, an administrator noted that these three teachers especially had “hearts of gold” and were effective with “every student in the class.” (Meeting with Winston County Administrators, 3/01). In addition to these verbal accolades, Jane, Rita and Lydia received public recognition from Winston County officials and Burnett Elementary administrators as well; Jane was selected to be a mentor in the County’s highly-acclaimed mentoring program for beginning teachers, and all three teachers were constantly asked to serve as “mentor teachers” for student interns and to be representatives of “excellent teaching” for various professional groups visiting the school and observing classrooms.

Perhaps the most significant evidence of the success of these three teachers was the praise from African American children and their parents. Lavita, who had Jane for second and third grades and Lydia for fifth and sixth grades, described them both as “favorite teachers” because they were “good teachers, they were hard graders and made you learn, and they knew personal stuff so they were more like friends than teachers” (Student Interview, 5/22/02). Similarly, Asad noted that Lydia was his “best teacher” at Burnett Elementary School because she “helped me with my math... when most other teachers only know how to teach one way that’s hard and complicated, she can think of easy ways to help you remember and it’s always simple the way she teaches” (Student Interview, 5/22/02), and Vivica thought that the hands-on activities that Lydia designed that “made social studies much more interesting and math easier to understand” (Student Interview, 6/28/02). Several African American students in Jane and Rita’s third grade classroom said that they “loved school” this year because their “teachers were nice and they made reading and writing and doing science really fun” (Fieldnotes, 6/5/02, 6/6/02).

African American parents generally echoed their children's positive sentiments about these teachers and their instructional methods and believed that these teachers "made a difference" in the lives of their children. For example, one mother said that her son was "more interested" in school because Lydia took a "real interest in him...and took the time to see if he had any weaknesses and any areas like reading and she was there to help him and it made him want to work a little harder" (Parent Interview, 6/14/02), and another mother felt that these teachers helped her daughter to "have a much better experience in school than I had" (Parent Interview, 6/28/02). From the perspectives of these African American students and parents, it seemed apparent that Jane, Rita, and Lydia were teachers who held high academic expectations for students, knew how to make coursework interesting, and had a sincere and caring attitude about students as individuals and toward students' learning in particular.

The exceptional success of teachers like Lydia, Rita, Jane, caused the Burnett administrators to reconsider some of their explanations for the persistent disparity in the educational outcomes of African American students. By raising questions about several European American teachers who were having difficulties with African American students, they made a startling discovery: the European American teachers themselves, not the "risk factors" in the lives of African American students, that were greatly contributing to these students' academic and social difficulties. Quietly, the administrators began to speculate that many of the European American teachers did not know how to relate to or communicate with African American students in their classrooms. According to Mr. Williams, many European American teachers were "locked into a power struggle" with African American students, and as a result, they relied on

disciplinary measures to assert their authority and to enforce strict conformity to the rules (Informal Conversation, 8/02). This adversarial relationship between European American teachers and African American students was best described by Marquet, an African American student in sixth grade who was labeled as a “problem student”:

Most White teachers yell at me and they think I’m bad so they don’t even give me a chance to explain, they just send me out of the room or down to the office. It makes me feel really bad when that happens and I try to act like it doesn’t bother me but it does. Usually, I’m talking or something not really doing anything bad. And there are other people talking but teachers always say something to me. They will warn other students [about talking] but they usually kick me out (Student Interview, 5/22/02)

This perception that European American teachers unfairly treated African American students and targeted them in class was shared by other African American students like Asad:

Some teachers yell a lot and they get frustrated easily so if you don’t get something right away, they start yelling. And they might think that you’re not paying attention and start yelling about that when all you’re doing is looking away. I think some teachers, for some reason, they just pick on one person as if that is the only person that is doing something wrong in the class. And they just pick on every little itty bitty thing that you do. (Student Interview, 5/22/02)

Derek, a former Burnett Elementary student, vividly described his classroom experience with one European American sixth grade teacher as “being in jail or a juvenile detention center. You did things the way he wanted it” (Student Interview, 6/14/02). For African American boys like Derek, Asad, and Marquet, there were dire consequences for noncompliance. In the 1999-2000 academic year, African American boys received the highest number of suspensions for “disruptive behavior” such as disobedience or defiance (Winston County Statistics, 11/02). Furthermore, the severity of the disciplinary actions sharply increased for African American males; according to Winston County statistics,

African American males were nearly three times as likely to receive a three-day suspension as European American male students and almost four times as likely to receive a four-day suspension as Hispanic male students.

Mrs. Melville and Mrs. Phillips, the school counselors, also confirmed the high numbers of African American students experiencing problems with European American teachers during class. In their assessment of the situation, they believed that many European American teachers had good intentions, but simply did not know how to effectively relate to African American students. Consequently, African American students felt that the teacher was treating them “differently” because he/she did not like them (Counselor Interview, 5/8/02). As Asad explained,

I think there are some teachers who don't like certain kids in their class because of their race. And they hate having certain kids in their classroom, and they try to hide it, and they don't say that they are racist because they don't want to show it to other people or other teachers, but it always comes out to the students. We know when teachers don't like us because we are Black (Student Interview, 5/22/02)

As counselors, Mrs. Melville and Mrs. Phillips understood the emotional and psychological implications of these perceptions, and tried to mediate between the teacher and student as much as possible. Based upon their professional opinions, however, both counselors agreed that African American students' complaints (e.g., “she never calls on Black students,” “she always yells at me”) were oftentimes accurate, which left them in the uncomfortable position of challenging the teacher. They reported that oftentimes, calling teachers' attention to certain behaviors and procedures in class that African American students perceived as unfair cleared up the situation, but there was a growing number of incidences where African American students had to be removed from the

classroom because they “simply could not live with things they felt were unfair or unjust” (Counselor Interview, 5/8/02).

Based upon these opinions, it seemed that a new “folk theory” explaining the educational disparity of African American students was slowly emerging. Although Mrs. Matthews and her staff had actively engaged in school-wide curricular and instructional reform, it was becoming increasingly clear that classroom life, particularly the relationships and interactions between European American teachers and African American students, also needed to be transformed. The dawning of the realization that European American teachers could make a difference with African American children, in spite of all the “risk factors” in their lives, was coming slowly, but surely, to Burnett Elementary School.

Conclusion

Jane’s perceptive question, “Do White teachers have a harder time making a difference in the lives of Black students?” was one that the entire staff at Burnett Elementary School had been grappling with since the school opened its doors in September 1994. For Jane and her colleagues at Burnett Elementary, this question was not simply a matter of rhetoric; “making a difference” for African American students required the difficult work of change—change in beliefs about African American students and their intellectual and social capacities, change in teachers’ instructional and personal responses to these students, and changes in their feelings about cultural diversity in general. And the reality that change requires a substantial amount of patience, persistence, and courage, gave the impression to many European American teachers at

Burnett that making a difference in the lives of African American students was not only harder, it was nearly impossible. Further, it was very possible that many European American teachers at Burnett were uncertain about what they needed to change and did not know how to make the necessary changes, and thus their good intentions turned to frustration and resentment over the years. In any case, the fact that many European American teachers at Burnett Elementary seemed to believe that it was indeed harder for them to be successful with African American students created a “setting” ripe for narratives of conflict and tension to emerge within many classrooms. These conflicting and confrontational stories of relationships between some European American teachers and African American students were told by several Burnett administrators and staff members, and most poignantly, by current and former African American students. Through these stories, it became apparent that African American students were not “at-risk” due to inherent deficiencies within themselves, their families, and their communities; rather, the instructional and affective responses of some of the European American teachers to these differences were inappropriate and ineffective, thus exacerbating the academic and social issues that African American students often encounter as a “minority” in a racially-integrated school (Boykin, 1983; Nieto, 1996; Reglin, 1995).

Yet there was a small group of European American teachers who were successfully teaching African American students, and Rita, Lydia, and Jane were three such exemplary professionals at Burnett Elementary School. Rita and her colleagues were highly-regarded amongst Winston County and Burnett School administrators, Burnett staff, and African American students and parents, and were committed to “making a

difference” in the lives of African American students, no matter how difficult the road became. For any researcher interested in understanding culturally relevant teaching, these three European American teachers would be the ideal participants, and so I was very excited to meet them and talk with them about my project. I thought that they would be the “perfect” participants, the type of teachers who enacted culturally relevant teaching exactly how it was described in the theoretical literature. But they weren’t the “perfect” participants, and I was so devastated that I nearly abandoned the entire study. How I picked up the pieces, redesigned the study, and learned much more than I ever dreamed about culturally relevant teaching from my three “imperfect” participants, is the story that I tell in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

A RESEARCHERS' TALE: STORIES OF THEORY AND METHODOLOGY IN THE INQUIRY

Amia Lieblich, Rivka Tuval-Mashiach, and Tamar Zilber (1998) write that narrative research is “interpretive, and an interpretation is always personal, partial, and dynamic. Therefore, narrative research is suitable for scholars who are, to a certain degree, comfortable with ambiguity” (p. 10). This ambiguity does not reflect incompetence or inexperience on the part of the narrative inquirer; rather, it represents the shifting nature of the inquiry, as most researchers “come to narrative” through the tensions, conflicts, dilemmas, and questions that arise in working with participants within the field (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Consequently, the story of how a narrative researcher addresses these ambiguities, and attempts to resolve them through narrative research, is essential for understanding the inquiry process.

In this chapter, I share my theoretical and methodological “ambiguities” through a series of reflective stories. The first narrative traces the conceptual contours of my search for deeper understanding about “successful teaching of African American students.” Specifically, I develop a framework anchored in culturally relevant teaching, a concept which integrates research on successful teaching for African American students from a wide variety of educational literature (e.g., educational psychology, teacher education, and multicultural education). Within this discussion, I also highlight the theory of cultural compatibility as a critical frame for explaining how culturally relevant teaching “works” in classroom settings. The second narrative shifts from a theoretical to practical context, with the plotline centering on my initial meeting with Jane, Rita, and

Lydia. In this story, the “plot thickens” as the disconnections between the theory of culturally relevant teaching in the literature, and the practices of the three Burnett teachers, introduces a sense of uncertainty and doubt within the study. This plotline is ultimately revised in the third narrative, which describes my experience of “coming to narrative” and explicates the resulting epistemological and methodological changes that resolved initial ambiguities-- and simultaneously raised new ones!--in the inquiry. Finally, the fourth narrative is a “methodological story” that provides a detailed explanation of the procedures for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the “stories of culturally relevant practice” told by Jane, Rita, and Lydia.

My Search for Conceptual Understanding

In March 2001, when I first heard the stories about Burnett Elementary, especially those concerning Jane, Lydia, Rita and their extraordinary success with African American students, I was quite intrigued: What exactly was going on in these classrooms that yielded such different results with African American students? What types of classroom practices were they implementing and why were these particular practices so successful with “at-risk” African American students? What types of methods were they using to teach literacy and how did their instruction promote literacy development for African American students? And what was it about their style of teaching and relating in classrooms that engendered a sense of “cultural relevance” for African American students?

These initial questions served as broad, tangible guides for my study, and were of primary importance as I began to develop a conceptual framework. As Livingston (1999)

suggests, my relationship to the literature could be best described as a “conversation” with important concepts rather than just a simple “review” of them. Through this dialogue, I wove together constructs from three bodies of educational literature as a means for thinking about what the Burnett teachers’ literacy instruction looked like and how they were achieving such great success with African American students. The concepts and literatures that I integrated were a) at-riskness, b) resilience, and c) multicultural education, and in the following section I explain how they formed the basis of my conceptual understanding.

The literature on at-riskness

Because ideas concerning the “at-riskness” of African American students were so pervasive at Burnett Elementary School, I read widely from this body of educational literature to better understand this term. At-riskness is a term that was applied with increasing frequency to African American students to explain their disproportionate school failure (McDill, Natriello, & Pallas, 1986; Winfield, 1993), and has replaced other labels such “culturally deprived,” “culturally disadvantaged,” and “educationally disadvantaged” (Edwards, Pleasants, & Franklin, 1999; Pearson, 1991). A common indicator of school failure is the dropout rate, and in inner-city high schools, the rates for African American students often exceed 45 percent, and climb as high as 72 percent for African American males (Haynes & Comer, 1990). African American students who decide to stay in school also tend to fare badly; statistics show that while African American students comprise 16 percent of the public school student population, they make up almost 40 percent of those who are classified as “mentally retarded, disabled, or

otherwise deficient” (Hacker, 1995, p. 168), and many more African American students are consigned to lower academic tracks in general education (Nieto, 1996; Reglin, 1995).

African American students labeled “at-risk” tend to have had significant exposure to a variety of “risk factors” that typically increase the likelihood of academic problems and/or educational failure. The factors associated with academic risk are so well-established in educational theory and research (McDill, Natriello, & Pallas, 1986; Pearson, 1991; Richardson, Casanova, Placier, & Guilfoyle, 1988; Slavin, 1989) that many teachers, administrators and other school professionals consistently use the term “at-risk” to describe African American (and other) children who are not performing well in school and to provide an explanation for that poor performance (Edwards, Danridge, & Pleasants, 1998). These “risk” factors include:

- Membership in a culturally, ethnically, or linguistically diverse group;
- Membership in a single-parent household;
- Membership in a family with low socioeconomic status;
- Membership in a family with low maternal and/or parental educational attainment
- Living in an impoverished community (e.g., inner-city, rural)
- Attending an impoverished school

Recently, there has been a backlash against the use of the term “at-riskness” on grounds that it ultimately blames victims (i.e. students, their families, and their communities) without considering the roles that schools, teachers, and society might play in school failure, and has shifting meanings and definitions which diminish its effectiveness as an informative educational designation (Pearson, 1991; Winfield, 1993). Although these criticisms have caused some educators and researchers to abandon the term, it is still used as a psychoeducational label in many schools (Edwards, Pleasants, & Franklin, 1999).

The literature on resilience

Interestingly, the literature on “at-riskness” guided me to the theory of resilience. Resilience is a psychological construct generally defined as “successful adaptation in the context of adversity” (Luthar, Cichetti, & Becker, 2000). In other words, resilience is the “flip side” of the “risk” coin; whereas the concept of at-riskness explains the deficits and weaknesses of individuals that result from “adverse” factors, resilience acknowledges the presence of these adverse factors, but describes the strengths that individuals possess that ultimately mediate the negative effects (Winfield, 1993).

In classroom settings, student resilience is demonstrated by successful adaptation on four categories of developmental tasks: (1) academic, where achievement is evidenced by high marks on report cards and/or good scores on standardized tests; (2) social, where competence is displayed by peer acceptance and the presence of friendships; (3) behavioral, meaning appropriate behavior when interacting with teacher and peers; and, (4) moral, meaning that behavior conforms to rules established by the school and other social organizations (e.g., no stealing, cheating, swearing). Resilient students generally have a well-developed repertoire of adaptive psychosocial strategies that enable them to achieve against the odds, including:

- An optimistic outlook on life and hope for the future;
- Easy-goingness and affability;
- Cooperativeness;
- Goal-directed behavior;
- High self-determination;
- Good intellectual skills and intrinsic motivation to learn; and,
- Good problem-solving skills (Gordon & Song, 1994; Masten, 1994)

In this study, I used this list of characteristics as basic evidence of “resilience” in the African American students that Lydia, Jane, and Rita taught. However, given the high

levels of social and interpersonal “risks” that African American students experienced at Burnett Elementary, particularly when interacting with European American teachers and peers, I adopted Corno’s (1989) concept of “classroom literacy” as a working definition of student resilience. Corno contends that students who know about the roles that teachers and students play in classrooms, understand the norms and behaviors associated with success in school, and do what is implicitly expected of them (e.g., raising your hand before speaking, working quietly, staying in your seat) are more likely to be successful in the classroom. Consequently, my concept of student resilience emphasizes appropriate social and behavioral skills more than traditional criteria for achievement such as high grades and test scores.⁶

Equally important, resilience research offered an explanatory framework for how teachers could moderate the negative effects of the academic and social “risks” for African American students. According to resilience theory, teachers serve as an important source of protection against the adverse effects of risk and foster resilience by enhancing student self-esteem and identity, and facilitating various opportunities for success (Rutter, 1987; Werner & Smith, 1992). Specifically, teachers enhance students’ resilience through the development of close, personal relationships that provide sustained emotional support, encouragement, and guidance (Bernard, 1997; Masten, 1994; Rutter, 1987). In their groundbreaking longitudinal study that followed children exposed to significant risk into adulthood, Werner and Smith (1992) concluded that among the most frequently

⁶ The faculty and administration were very sensitive about student data and were hesitant to provide access to student grades and test scores. Rather than relying on these measures of progress, I worked with African American students during class as much as possible, I read with them individually during sustained silent reading, and constructed careful fieldnotes about their work habits and their oral and written responses to questions in class. When possible, I also talked with the group of teachers about their impressions of particular students’ progress in reading and writing.

encountered positive role models in the lives of resilient children, outside of the family circle, was a favorite teacher who became a confidant and positive role model. More recent research (Bernard, 1995; Bondy & McKenzie, 1999; Floyd, 1996; Gordon & Song, 1994; Masten, 1994) has also suggested that teachers who develop personal relationships with African American students foster resilience because they provide critical academic, psychosocial, and emotional support by:

- Making the student feel worthwhile and valued through consistent nurturance, respect, and trust
- Providing information and access to knowledge.
- Giving advice and support for students as they undertake new challenges
- Providing opportunities for competence and confidence building experiences
- Acting as an advocate for the student.
- Coaching competent behavior for the student by providing guidance and constructive feedback. (Masten, 1994, p. 14)

Perhaps the most compelling sources of evidence of the transformative nature of teacher-student relationships are the autobiographical and biographical texts of African Americans who “beat the odds” and achieved school success, such as Janet McDonald’s (1999) Project Girl, Rosemary Bray’s (1998) Unafraid of the Dark, and Ron Suskind’s (1998) A hope in the unseen. These powerful testimonies of African American success, coupled with the literature on resilience, clearly suggest that teachers who develop strong relationships with African American students are likely to provide the academic and emotional support that is essential for successful learning (i.e. intellectual and social achievement) in classrooms. In her book *The Right to Learn*, Linda Darling-Hammond (1997) elegantly summarizes this perspective:

Relationships matter for learning. Students’ trust in their teachers helps them develop the commitment and motivation needed to tackle challenging learning tasks. Teachers’ connection to and understanding of their students helps those students develop the commitment and capacity

to surmount the hurdles that accompany ambitious learning...success depends as much on the strength of these relationships...as on knowledge of students' learning styles and technical skills. (p. 134)

While it seemed apparent that teachers who develop personal relationships with African American students would be able to foster resilience, or school success, I had a nagging suspicion that these types of relationships, particularly those portrayed in the stories of successful African Americans, did not account for the exceptional successes of the three Burnett teachers. Given the fact that most teachers do not have the time, energy, or personal resources to sustain intensive mentoring relationships with every student outside of class, I argued that Lydia, Jane, and Rita were successful because they developed and nurtured relationships with African American students in class, particularly through literacy instruction. In other words, I believed that the three Burnett teachers were outstanding because they used the context of teaching and learning literacy as a foundation for establishing classroom relationships with all students that ultimately fostered resilience (or school success), not just the few who obviously had “special potential.”

The literature on multicultural education

I ultimately discovered that the literature on multicultural education provided the philosophical and pedagogical perspectives on “successful instruction” that I had been searching for. Multicultural education has been hailed as a promising approach for successfully teaching African American and other groups of culturally diverse students (Banks, 1991; Diamond, 2001; Nieto, 1996; Sleeter, 1991). As an outgrowth of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and 1970s, multicultural education has consistently

emphasized the teaching of cultural pluralism, the elimination of racism and discriminatory practices in schools, and the provision of educational equity for all students (Banks, 1999; Diamond, 2001). As such, multicultural educators advance classroom practices that consider the talents, skills, and experiences of students as valid starting points for learning and promote fairness, and in so doing, provide the opportunity for all students to become critical and productive members in a democratic society (Nieto, 1996).

Creating a Framework Through The Concept of Culturally Relevant Teaching

I used the concept of culturally relevant teaching to anchor this study because it seemed to link the theories of at-riskness, resilience, and multicultural education together in an organized and comprehensive way, as illustrated by Figure 1 below.

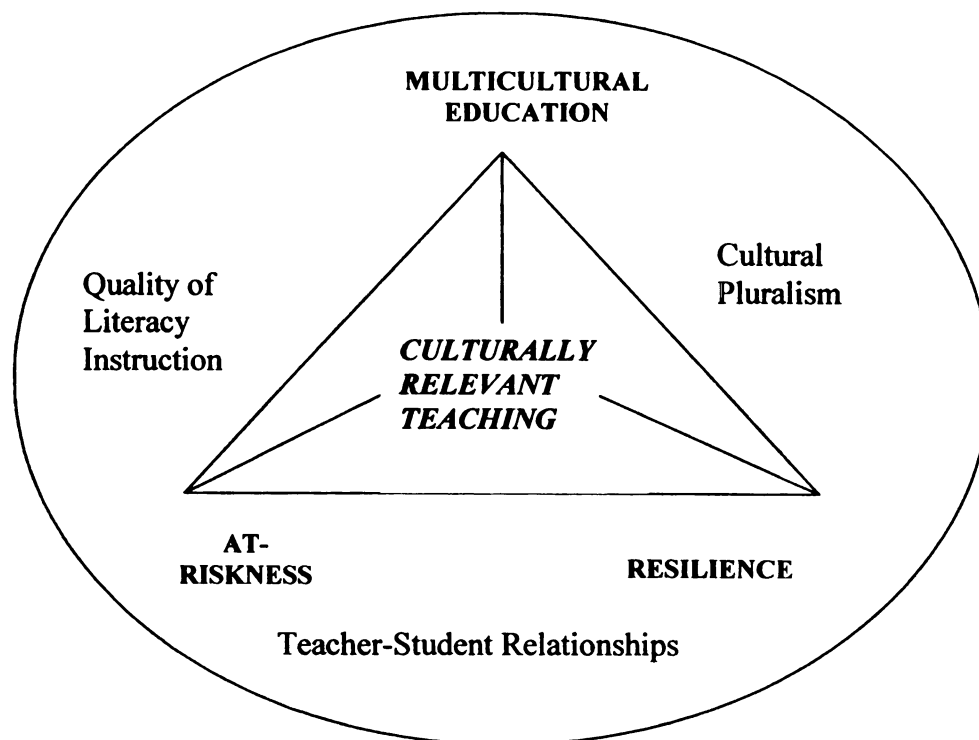


Figure 1: Graphic Representation of the Conceptual Framework

This figure demonstrates how the ideal of “culturally relevant teaching” can be formed from conceptual linkages within three interrelated bodies of literature. A fundamental premise of culturally relevant teaching is that all students can learn if teachers provide high quality instruction for every child (Lipman, 1995). Thus, culturally relevant teaching promotes literacy development for “at-risk” African American students and can significantly mediate adverse effects from other factors (e.g., school poverty) through “effective” classroom instructional and relational practices (Edwards, Danridge, & Pleasants, 1999; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Further, culturally relevant teaching emphasizes the importance of close personal relationships between teachers and students (Foster, 1991), making it highly compatible with the centrality of relationships in the theory of resilience. By illuminating the “human side of education” (Edwards, Pleasants, & Franklin, 1999), culturally relevant teaching accentuates the social and emotional contexts that powerfully shape learning (e.g. caring interactions, cooperative learning) and build student resilience.

Culturally Relevant Teaching and the Theory of Cultural Compatibility

Most importantly, culturally relevant teaching is deeply rooted within a perspective that moves beyond the “deficit” and “difference” approaches to cultural pluralism and schooling and is highly advocated by multicultural educators (Banks, 1991; Nieto, 1996; Portes, 1996). Shade, Kelly, and Oberg (1997) broadly characterize this theoretical perspective as “cultural compatibility,” which emphasizes the accommodation of cultural differences through culture-specific modification of classroom instruction. Hollins (1996) contends that there are various levels of cultural compatibility in

instruction, ranging from the highest level of “culturally mediated instruction” that enacts curricular content through the ways of knowing, learning, and communicating employed in a particular culture and requires teachers and students to share a common cultural background, to lower levels of culturally-congruent instruction that involve the use of isolated cultural aspects, such as speech patterns, participation structures, or interactional styles, to facilitate learning in situations where teachers and students do not share the same culture.

Culturally relevant teaching, then, is grounded within the theory of cultural compatibility and represents the highest levels of accommodation of student diversity through culturally-mediated instruction. Defined as “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 18), culturally relevant teaching not only uses “student culture” as a means for bridging or explaining the dominant culture, it actually places their cultural knowledges, practices, and experiences at the center of curriculum and instruction. Janice Hale-Benson (1982), Barbara Shade and her associates (1997), and other multicultural educators contend that culturally relevant teaching for African American students should emphasize practices, principles, and values specifically associated with African and African American culture, such as: a) high spontaneity and improvisation; b) high expressiveness through kinesthetic movement, affect, the arts, and personal style (e.g., clothing, language); c) high levels of socialization and cooperativeness; and d) communicative patterns such as “call and response” that encourage active listener participation. In so doing, culturally relevant

teaching enables African American students to successfully acquire the practices of the “dominant culture” while maintaining a positive African American cultural identity.

Based upon the presumption that the highest levels of cultural compatibility require teachers and students to share a common cultural background, much of the literature on culturally relevant teaching has centered on the classroom practices and personal lives of African American teachers who are successful with African American students (Foster, 1991, 1997; Howard, 1999; King, 1990, 1991; Lipman, 1995). Recently, a body of work examining the classroom practices of European American teachers who are successful with African American students has emerged, and interestingly, these studies suggest that European American teachers also craft culturally-relevant instruction by “sharing” an African American cultural background. In Gloria Ladson-Billings’ (1994) study, three of eight “culturally relevant” teachers of African American students were European American, but because they had lived with and/or intimately socialized with African American people for years, they were nearly as conversant in African American culture as their African American colleagues. In fact, Ladson-Billings identified one European American as having a “bicultural” culture of reference, meaning that she was comfortable moving in both Black and White worlds, and another as having an “African American” culture of reference that signified that her friends and contacts outside of school were almost exclusively African American. Only one European American teacher had a “White” cultural frame of reference, but Ladson-Billings noted that she was a relatively new teacher to the district and over the course of the study, she had developed close friendships with African American colleagues at the school.

Because these European American teachers closely identified with the African American cultural group, they had the capacity to adapt the literacy curriculum in ways that made information and learning more “relevant” to the cultural lives and interests of African American students, and their instructional practices were strikingly similar to those of African American teachers. For example, one sixth grade European American teacher guided her students on a month-long, inquiry-based study of the Egyptian civilization around the question, “Were the ancient Egyptians Black?,” and promoted the ideals of scholarship by providing additional books and other resources to facilitate more in-depth research and by engaging her students in intellectual debates about their work. Another European American teacher raised critical questions about the concept of “discovery” and discussed the social and cultural implications of European exploration upon various groups of people (e.g. Native Americans, African Americans). These teachers also had extensive knowledge of African Americans who had made significant contributions to society besides “traditional heroes” like Martin L. King, Jr., Harriet Tubman, and Rosa Parks, and constantly incorporated the lessons from their lives into the standard, monocultural curriculum.

Equally important, the three European American teachers in Ladson-Billings’ study understood the sociopolitical context of education, and were well-known advocates for social justice and “anti-racism” (Nieto, 1996) at school and in the community. During class, they spoke openly about issues concerning freedom, fairness, and discrimination with their African American students, and tried to help them “understand the game” by explaining how society worked (e.g., telling them that societal expectations for them were low) and implementing activities and having discussions (e.g., talking about the fact

that minorities were over-represented in the Vietnam War, conversing about Nelson Mandela and South African apartheid and connections to broader issues of freedom and equality, making cranes to symbolize opposition to the Gulf War) that challenged the status quo and demonstrated the power of collective struggle.

Similarly, the European American teacher in my study (Danridge, 2000) was “culturally-relevant” because he grounded his literacy instructional practices within “local” cultural ideals and values enacted by his urban African American students. Mr. Andrews regularly watched popular television programs and movies such as Soul Food, listened to urban radio stations, and read trendy hip-hop magazines because his students were interested in them and he wanted to be able to build what he called “cultural connections” with them. He also visited each student’s home at the beginning of the school year in order to gain insights into their “home cultural practices” and to begin building partnerships with their families. In many of his literacy activities, particularly those which emphasized the connection between oral and written language such as shared writing and guided writing activities, Mr. Andrews drew upon his knowledge of African American culture to support students as they constructed meaning about their daily experiences and interests and crafted oral and written texts about those experiences. In her self-reflective study, Diller (1999), a European American teacher, also believed that this type of “local knowledge” about African American culture from African American parents (e.g., behavioral expectations, disciplinary techniques), friends, and colleagues provided important insights about issues of culture, language, and learning that ultimately made her instruction more successful with African American students.

Collectively, these studies affirm the “cultural compatibility theory” that teachers who “share” the same cultural background as their students will most likely have the capacity to practice the highest levels of culturally-mediated instruction. Specifically, these findings suggest that European American teachers who practice culturally relevant teaching must also “share” an African American cultural background because this pedagogical approach is deeply rooted within African American culture and community. But if European American teachers are not born into the African American cultural group, how do they come to acquire this cultural background? Hollins (1996) offers this suggestion: non-members of African American culture can acquire the extensive knowledge necessary for culturally relevant teaching through “cultural apprenticeships” with members of the African American community. Indeed, theories on White racial identity formation (Helms, 1990,1992, 1994; Tatum, 1992, 1996) and multicultural development (Bennett, 1993; Howard, 1999) support the idea that powerful experiences of “contact” with culturally-diverse people, particularly interactions that are sustained and develop into more intimate relationships, provide opportunities for European American to acknowledge cultural differences and question their assumptions about race/culture, racism and Whiteness, and racial inequity/injustice.

As a result of these intensive cultural apprenticeships, European Americans acquire the type of authentic cultural knowledge, values, and norms that form the basis of culturally relevant teaching. The cases of “culturally relevant” European American teachers portrayed in the research literature suggest that their sustained and intimate socialization with African American friends, colleagues, church members, parents, and neighbors provided a “cultural apprenticeship” through which extensive knowledge and

deep understanding of African American culture is developed. These European American teachers were successful as culturally-relevant teachers because they had a high level of “culturally compatibility” and were able construct meaning of African American culture through “local” definitions that are legitimated by African American people and are grounded within ethnically-based customs, practices, and traditions (Grant, 1994; Pattnaik, 2001; Shade, Kelly, & Oberg, 1997).

These intensive apprenticeships in African American culture not only supports the “cultural compatibility” of European American teachers and enhances the enactment of culturally relevant teaching practices, they fundamentally transform the cultural identity of European American teachers. European Americans who are cultural apprentices often become “external-insiders” (Banks, 1998) within the African American community. External-insiders are people who were socialized within their primary culture, but through sustained and intimate socialization with another culture, have become an “adopted” member of the second culture. In order to be accepted, external-insiders oftentimes reject the values, norms, and beliefs of their primary cultural community in favor of those validated by their new “adoptive” communities (Banks, 1998).

As external-insiders within the African American community, culturally-relevant European American teachers, have, in effect, opted to “see” African American culture in ways that are affirmed by African Americans and have rejected their innate sense of “colorblindness.” This represents a major shift in European American cultural identity, because, according to multicultural advocates, colorblindness is the result of unconsciously internalized racist ideologies and values that make White dominance and privilege a “natural” reality for European Americans and essentially “blinds” them to the

fundamental existence of cultural plurality in American society (Hollins, 1996; Howard, 1999; McIntyre, 1997; Nieto, 1996). Colorblindness is enacted through strong ethnocentrism; it represents a “low” level of affective and behavioral response to cultural difference, hostile or defensive reactions towards issues of diversity, and legitimization of White dominance through the perception that their “mainstream” beliefs are normal and accepted by everyone (Bennett, 1993; Howard, 1999).

For most European American teachers, colorblindness is an extremely difficult cultural perspective to challenge because it is cloaked by “good intentions” to be “fair to everyone” or by the desire to “save” culturally-diverse students from their “tragic” personal lives and family/community environments (McIntyre, 1997; Howard, 1999; Nieto, 1996). Consequently, colorblind European American teachers strongly believe that they are helping African American students, yet they ultimately locate “problems” within students rather than “seeing” the gross inequities that are embedded within the system of public schooling and thus enact an Eurocentric approach to teaching, expecting students to conform to White behaviors and values and punishing nonconformity, and resisting curricular and pedagogical reforms that embrace pluralist views of curriculum and instruction.

Thus, the transformation of European American cultural identity from colorblindness to cultural compatibility is at the heart of culturally relevant teaching. Multicultural development models developed by Milton Bennett (1993) and Gary Howard (1999) portray this profound cultural identity change as movement into more advanced stages of “nonracist” or “antiracist” White identity characterized by deep self-interrogation of Whiteness, a well-developed understanding of racism and other societal

forms of oppression, a sensitivity and empathy towards those who are oppressed, and an active resistance to White dominance. These transformed European American identities are integral to the dispositions and skills (e.g., cross-cultural competency, inter-cultural sensitivity) that support culturally-compatibility and culturally-relevant practices in schooling (McAllister & Irvine, 2001; McIntyre, 1997).

Colorblind Vision: Disconnections Between the Theory and Practice of Culturally Relevant Teaching

On a scorching afternoon in August 2001, I had my first meeting with Lydia, Jane, and Rita, so I went to Burnett Elementary School with visions of culturally relevant teaching dancing in my head. I anticipated that these three European American teachers would be exactly like the “dream keepers” in Ladson-Billings’ study: they would have high levels of “cultural compatibility” and would articulate how they centered their literacy instruction within an African American cultural context. Further, I believed that these teachers would describe how they used African American cultural principles and values to build the type of strong personal relationships with students that foster resilience and create nurturing social and emotional classroom settings that support ambitious learning. Finally, I was convinced that these teachers would discuss cultural accommodations in their classrooms with terms that expressed their “adopted membership” into the African American community and demonstrated the growth of their new (multi)cultural identities. As Kvale (1996) aptly put it, I was a “miner,” searching for the “golden story” about culturally relevant teaching that is traditionally told in multicultural education and trying to unearth the knowledge of my participants, just as a miner pans for gold.

Our introductory meeting started out wonderfully. Jane, a woman in her fifties with salt-and-pepper hair and dark twinkling eyes, pushed desks together to form a working table for us, and apologized profusely for her “messy classroom.” A veteran teacher with over thirty years of experience, Jane was the “leader” of the group and was highly respected by Rita and Lydia. Lydia, who was in her early sixties, had returned to teaching after raising the five children that she and her husband adopted. Unlike Jane and Rita, Lydia taught sixth grade and joked about the fact that she had been “banished from the main building” and would be teaching in a portable classroom this year. Rita, the youngest of the three, was a pretty raven-haired woman in her mid-twenties, the type that many young boys dream of having as their teacher. Although Rita had only been teaching for five years, she already had distinguished herself as a “rising star” at Burnett Elementary. After introducing ourselves, the formality of the meeting seemed to vanish as we began sharing funny stories about school experiences, laughing and joking about student antics, and munching on Krispy Kreme doughnuts.

But when I asked Jane, Rita, and Lydia to discuss how they thought culture played a role in their teaching of African American students, Lydia stopped me cold in my tracks and stated emphatically, “You know, I really don’t see color. I treat my African American kids just like my White kids or my Hispanic kids or anyone else.” Jane and Rita were silent but nodded their heads in agreement. I was stunned. Lydia went on to say that she tried to work with students “according to their specific needs, not based on race” and Jane and Rita echoed this sentiment that “all children have needs” by offering examples of children from various racial/ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds who

were having difficulties in school. At one point, one of the teachers even mentioned that race did not seem to play a “big role” in their classroom teaching practices.

My vision of Lydia, Jane, and Rita as “perfect culturally relevant teachers” completely shattered, and by the end of the meeting, I was in a state of crisis. The disconnections between the theory of culturally relevant teaching and the practices that Lydia, Rita, and Jane described were glaringly obvious; the image of culturally relevant teaching as “culturally compatible” with student culture supported by the theoretical literature stood in sharp contrast to the Burnett teachers’ descriptions of instructional practices that were essentially “colorblind.” As I headed home, I decided that I had two options: I could continue to pursue to the “golden story” of culturally relevant teaching and invite new teachers to join my study, or I could continue the project with Jane, Lydia, and Rita and think more critically about what these disconnections between theory and practice might reveal about the nature of culturally relevant teaching.

After a few days, I decided to continue the project with Lydia, Rita, and Jane because I wanted to understand what their teaching practices were and why they so successful with African American students if they were not culturally compatible. Through the autumn months, as I visited the teachers and their students each week, participated in various classroom activities and events, and spent time talking with them informally about instructional and relational issues, it became increasingly clear to me that the current theory of culturally relevant teaching would not provide an accurate representation of their successful classroom practices. After completing the first analysis cycle in November and December 2001, I knew that the disconnections between the theory of culturally relevant teaching and the Burnett teachers’ practices were indeed

significant, and that I needed an approach that allowed me to make sense of instruction through the lens of personal experience and interpretation.

Embarking on a New Journey: Studying Culturally Relative Teaching as Narrative

In seeking an alternative perspective for understanding the culturally relevant teaching of the three Burnett Elementary teachers, I “came to narrative” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I started reading widely from the literature on narrative theory, particularly the works of Jerome Bruner, Donald Polkinghorne, Robert Coles, and others who have pioneered the study of psychological phenomena through narrative. Within this tradition, stories are not simple “tales” that people tell; rather story, or narrative, is one of the most fundamental ways of knowing the world and constructing reality (Bruner, 1996). Hinchman and Hinchman (1997) broadly define narrative as “discourses with a clear sequential order that connect events in a meaningful way for a definite audience, and thus offer insights about the world and/or people’s experience of it” (p. xvi). More specifically, narratives are organized around the construction of meaning through temporality, context, and language (Bruner, 1996; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Meaning through temporality and context. Narratives typically represent experience temporally, and it is through this sequencing of events into beginning, middle, and end that meaning is represented and can be inferred (Labov, 1975; Reissman, 1993). Polkinghorne (1988) writes that “the experience and interpretation of time is a basic and dominant theme of human reality. Narrative is able to structure and organize time according to hermeneutic principles and to present time through multiple levels of

interpretation” (p. 127). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) add that a fundamental aspect of temporality is context, for it is through the change of places, people, and actions that experience is interpreted. Thus, in bringing together chronological events, and the contextual circumstances attached to them, people construct “meaningful stories” which come to present and represent what they do and why they do it.

Meaning through language. Narratives construct meaning in an individual’s experience through language “by drawing together descriptions of states of affairs contained in individual sentences into a particular type of discourse....that discloses relationships among the states of affair” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 36). In other words, language serves as the organizational scheme through which the purposes and direction of human activity are inferred and understood (Polkinghorne, 1988). Further, Bruner (1996) contends that narrators tell their stories from their own subjective perspectives within particular social and cultural contexts. Thus, through the “language activities” of constructing and telling narratives, people convey the sociocultural meanings and values of the communities in which they participate (Cole, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978).

Understanding culturally relevant teaching through narrative represented a significant epistemological and methodological shift in my study. Rather than using pre-determined categories (e.g., cultural compatibility) to frame explanations of successful teaching for African American students, a narrative approach to culturally relevant teaching places the “lived experience” of the teachers at the center of inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Although I was still primarily concerned with examining the literacy instructional practices of three Burnett teachers who were successful with African

American students, the teachers' narrative constructions and interpretations of their own experiences of enacting culturally relevant literacy instruction would serve as the foundation of the inquiry. Additionally, I was more aware that concepts such as "colorblindness" and "cultural compatibility" could have multiple meanings represented by teachers' practical experiences that converged or even conflicted with those embedded within the theory of culturally relevant teaching (Phillion, 2002).

My methodological approach to this inquiry was also dramatically transformed by narrative.⁷ According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative research is a systematic attempt to listen to and understand the "stories lived and stories told" (p. 20) by individuals. In studying people and their behaviors from a narrative perspective, researchers pay particular attention to fundamental elements of narrative, such as time, setting, characters and plot, in order to construct a research text which portrays the complexities of the participants' experiences and conveys the significance and meanings that they give to those experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Riessman, 1993). Conducting narrative inquiry required giving up my search for the perfect "golden" story of culturally relevant teaching as a "miner," and embarking upon a new journey with Lydia, Jane, and Rita as a "traveler" who qualitatively reports what is heard, seen, and experienced through stories (Kvale, 1996).

As a researcher-"traveler," I was determined to emphasize the practice of culturally relevant teaching, based upon the narrative experiences of the teachers, rather than making the theoretical storyline the center of the inquiry. Like Phillion (2002), I drew upon narrative theory and research to quell some of fears and uncertainties about highlighting practice rather than theory in a study of successful teaching for culturally

diverse students. Interestingly, however, new ambiguities emerged in the midst of the narrative inquiry, because the stories that the researcher hears and tells are related to a research puzzle rather than to particular problems. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) assert that “problems carry with them qualities of clear definability and the expectation of solutions, but narrative inquiry carries...more of a sense of continual reformulation of an inquiry” (p. 124). Indeed, my narrative inquiry was a puzzle, and as my understandings of “successful practice” shifted from the discrete concepts of at-riskness, resilience, and multicultural education, to a theoretical framework anchored by the concepts of culturally relevant teaching and cultural compatibility, and finally to the Burnett teachers’ narratives of classroom experience, I had the sense that the inquiry was qualitatively different than the study of culturally relevant teaching I had intended to conduct. Specifically, through these conceptual, epistemological, and methodological changes, it became increasingly clear to me that the disconnections between theory and practice in my study represented an enduring theme in the educational “grand narrative” concerning the relationship between theory and practice (cf. Cobb & Bowers, 1999; Nuthall, 1996). The practical experiences of the Burnett teachers were still the central focus of my narrative research, but the implications of these practices were situated in a much broader conversation about the differences between theory and practice and what those differences suggest about the nature of their relationship: Why were the Burnett teachers’ stories of practice so different that the theoretical story of culturally relevant teaching? Did these disconnections between theory and practice indicate incommensurability, or simply that the theory needed to be revised? These questions provoked new

⁷ For a more detailed account of the methodology, please refer to Appendix A.

“ambiguities,” but they were important because they pushed my thinking about these issues and deepened my awareness of the social significance of the inquiry.

Narrative Methodology: Collecting, Analyzing, and Interpreting Teachers’ Stories of Practice

Collecting teachers’ practical stories

In order to gain interpretive insights into the culturally relevant practices, I collected narrative data based upon past and present classroom experiences of the three Burnett teachers involved in this study. Narratives of practices were constructed from two specific types of stories: stories “lived” and stories “told” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). To collect these types of stories, classroom observations and teacher interviews were used as methodological tools.

Classroom observations. In terms of the teachers’ “lived” stories, I wanted to capture the experience of culturally relevant teaching as it was enacted within pedagogical and management strategies and through interactions with African American students. Thus, I visited each teacher’s classroom as a participant observer (Merriam, 1998), a role which centralizes the researcher’s activities as an information gatherer but allows for some participation in the group. Because I was particularly interested in the teachers’ literacy instruction and its cultural relevance to African American students, I specifically visited during language arts/literacy instruction, which typically lasted from one to two hours and generally consisted of reading, writing, and speaking activities such as Writing Workshop, Book Club or reading workshop, read alouds, whole group lessons, and small group projects. Oftentimes, I would spend the entire day at Burnett Elementary,

visiting either Rita or Jane in the morning when the third graders were involved in literacy activities, then observing Lydia during the afternoons when her sixth graders were engaged in reading and writing. After the observations, raw notes taken in the field were processed and used to construct more detailed fieldnotes that captured the actual events and happenings in the classroom and reported reflected my impressions, questions, and ideas as they emerged in situ.

Teacher interviews. In order to collect the stories that the Burnett teachers told about their classroom practices, I conducted a series of individual and Focus Group interviews with the three participating teachers. Using interviews as a method of collecting the stories that teachers tell about their experiences was a necessity, because, according to Rubin and Rubin (1995), “qualitative interviewing is a way of finding out what others feel and think about their worlds. Through qualitative interviews you can understand experiences and reconstruct events in which you did not participate” (p. 1).

The five individual teacher interviews were conducted throughout the year and were scheduled at the convenience of the teacher. The interviews lasted for thirty to forty-five minutes, and were usually held in the teacher’s classroom at times when her students were involved in other types of “outside” activities (e.g., lunch, art, music, gym). Initially, I thought that it would be more efficient to interview the third grade teachers simultaneously, since their students were on similar schedules and their “free time” often coincided. After conducting a joint interview with Rita and Jane in October 2001, however, I realized that the highly personal stories that I wanted to collect were not being told within this shared interview setting. Consequently, I conducted an additional

individual interview with each teacher to “replace” the joint interview, and conducted the remaining interviews individually to achieve a total number of five individual teacher interviews.

Designed as semi-structured, phenomenological conversations (Kvale, 1996), the five individual interviews covered a broad range of personal and professional topics and issues associated with “successful teaching of African American students,” including: a) teaching philosophies; b) beliefs about classroom management/discipline; c) pedagogical knowledge about literacy teaching and learning; d) beliefs and knowledge about cultural diversity and specifically about African American culture; e) professional experiences related to the preparation of teachers (e.g., student teaching, college/graduate training, professional development opportunities); and, f) personal experiences that teachers considered to be related to their lives as teachers (e.g., experiences in school, with family and/friends).

Although interview protocols were not piloted, I attempted to create questions that elicited narratives by drawing upon those asked in studies of successful practice and/or culturally relevant teaching; for example, numerous open-ended questions that specifically related to pedagogy, discipline, and cultural diversity were adopted from Ladson-Billings’ (1994) work on culturally relevant teachers and teaching, while questions that pertained to the personal and professional experiences of teachers were based upon Foster’s (1997) narrative study of Black teachers.

Focus Group interviews. Two Focus Group interviews were conducted during the inquiry; one was held at the beginning of the year and another was held at the end. Unlike

the individual teacher interviews, which were designed to elicit the deeply personal stories that teachers tell about their classroom practices and philosophies, the purpose of the Focus Group interviews was to attain more general stories about classroom teaching. During both conversations, teachers explored a wide range of teaching-related topics, including: a) general impressions and thoughts about working at Burnett Elementary (e.g., administrative support, reform efforts, professional development opportunities); b) assessment issues (e.g., high-stakes testing); c) general issues around teaching diverse children; and d) building partnerships with parents. Like the individual teacher interviews, all Focus Group data were audiotaped and transcribed in their entirety.

Analyzing and interpreting teachers' practical stories

Although narratives are stories that can be collected through observational and/or verbal accounts, they have no inherent meanings because they are merely representations of experience (Riessman, 1993). Meaning, then, is constructed through the analytic and interpretive processes in which the narrative researcher is engaged (Lieblich et. al, 1998). According to Polkinghorne (1988), analytic processes are central to the generation of interpretive accounts that are both descriptive and explanatory in nature, and thus form the basis of the interpretive understandings that we construct through reading. In this narrative inquiry, three specific analytical strategies were employed to produce the interpretive accounts of the teachers' classroom practices: a) analytic memoing, b) holistic-content analysis, and c) categorical-content analysis.

Developing narrative themes through analytic memos. This first phase of analysis was designed to uncover and examine general themes about culturally relevant teaching in the observational and interview data. Glaser (1978) provides a classic definition of memoing as “the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationship as they strike the analyst while coding” (p. 83). On a monthly basis, I read narrative data, shifting through the observational and interview notes for recurring patterns and themes (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Next, I constructed analytic memos that explored these patterns and themes and tentatively explained “key linkages” amongst them (Erickson, 1986). I also jotted down spontaneous ideas and questions in a more informal form of memoing that I kept in a special notebook based upon a suggestion by Miles and Huberman (1984).

After these tentative themes were identified, I conducted a member check (Merriam, 1998) in order to ascertain the relevancy and accuracy of my interpretive work. In late April 2002, I organized a meeting with the three teachers and shared with them my impressionistic findings in their classrooms, specifically focusing upon the themes that I had developed in the analytic memos (See Appendix A for more details). Each teacher was invited to provide feedback about the themes I mentioned, and to make suggestions about alternative ideas, metaphors, images, etc. that more strongly resonated with their perceptions of their teaching. In general, all of the teachers felt that the impressionistic findings that I shared were very accurate, and were satisfied with the ways in which they were portrayed.

Developing individual stories of practice through holistic-content analysis. Once all of the narrative data had been collected, I employed holistic-content analysis (Lieblich

et al., 1998) to create “classroom stories” or “stories of practice” for each individual teacher. Lieblich and her colleagues characterize this analytic technique as “a mode of reading that uses the complete story of an individual and focuses on the content presented by it” (p. 13), and generally describe the process of reading for content as follows:

- (1) Reading the data multiple times until a pattern emerges, usually in the form of foci of the entire story (e.g., images, metaphors). Lieblich and her colleagues note that “there are no clear directions for this stage” (p. 62), encouraging the interpreter to read “carefully, empathically, with an open mind” (p. 62) and to allow the meaning of the text to gradually come forth.
- (2) Writing global impressions of the story and noting exceptions of the general impression as well as unusual features of the story; and,
- (3) Deciding on special foci of content that are of particular import or interest, and following those foci throughout the story as it evolves from beginning to end. Lieblich and her colleagues define special foci as “frequently distinguished by the space devoted to the theme in the text, its repetitive nature and the number of details the teller provides about it” (p. 63), and they suggest marking these foci within the story, paying attention to the context.

As suggested by this general description, this second phase of analysis entailed constructing a story of practice, primarily from meanings derived from the content of the observational and interview data. In order to develop a sense of time and movement within the narrative, I ordered the data chronologically according to the date, then read the entire corps of data as a “story” of culturally relevant teaching that occurred from September 2001 until June 2002. Using the narrative themes developed in the analytic memo as initial foci, I read and reread the data, and through a process that involved confirming and refining themes, or disconfirming and discarding these themes and developing new ones, I developed more mature “storylines” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) that represented the broadest meanings within each teacher’s narrative.

Developing a “practical story” about culturally relevant teaching through categorical-content analysis. Although I had constructed narrative accounts of the classroom practices of Jane, Lydia, and Rita, I was also interested in describing and explaining the phenomenon of culturally relevant teaching across these three stories. To accomplish this goal, content analysis is particularly useful because it identifies themes or patterns that facilitate cross-case analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this inquiry, I used a variation of categorical-content analytic technique described by Lieblich and her colleagues (1998). During this phase, the narrative data of the three Burnett teachers were analyzed through a two-level process involving categories, or “various themes or perspectives that cut across the selected texts” (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 113). The primary goal of the analysis was to reduce the particularistic features of each story by highlighting the broad categories found across all three narratives, thus creating a more general “narrative model” (Miles & Huberman, 1994) of culturally relevant teaching based upon the practical experiences of the Burnett teachers.

Two types of categories were used during this analytic phase. At the first level, etic, or predetermined narrative categories, such as action, actors, context, and temporality, were used to code the teachers’ stories. At the second level, emic categories were used for coding, and the teachers’ stories were carefully combed to uncover salient categories that cut across all three narratives. Both types of codes were used to locate recurring themes within the teacher narratives through an iterative process of analysis and interpretation.

In the remaining chapters of the dissertation, we turn to the narrative findings that were synthesized from these three analytic strategies. Chapters 3-5 were written in the

form of “narrative accounts” of each teacher’s classroom, and were primarily developed based upon the analytic memoing and the holistic-content analysis. In Chapter 6, the final chapter of the dissertation, the results of the categorical-content analysis are presented as a general “narrative model” of culturally relevant teaching through experiential storylines and themes that cut across all three teacher narratives.

CHAPTER THREE

RITA LUCENT'S NARRATIVE: "LETTING GO OF THE OLD AND CREATING THE NEW"

In Rita Lucent's classroom, the sun pours in from a window above her desk, and a beautiful set of "paper dolls" dance along the long left wall. These twenty-three paper dolls stand out, because they are not the kind we typically see, with joined hands and similar facial expressions; rather, these dolls are strikingly individual, with hands outstretched but not touching, "dressed" in various styles of clothing from blue jeans to the tank tops that are popular for young girls, with faces in hues of yellow and brown and hair of black, brown, and blond. Rita's students made these dolls as "self portraits" on the first day of school, and the pride and care that went into making them was clearly evident in the smiles and references that students made to them. "That's me, right there with everybody else!" exclaimed Troy, an autistic African American student who had come from a special learning center and was being "mainstreamed" in Rita's class. It was the first day that I had visited Rita's class, and I spent a substantial amount of time with Troy because his outbursts had immediately caught my attention (Fieldnotes, 9/10/01). When I looked at the display, there was his doll was in the middle of others, smiling widely with a black shirt, "a silk shirt," Troy explained, "because my mom brought it for me so that I could be SHARP on the first day of school!" To Rita, the position of Troy's doll in the middle of the others symbolized their triumph in gaining the acceptance and respect of the learning community after many difficult days and weeks, and she was overjoyed that his "doll" was eventually perceived to be the same as all the others.

Other children also seemed to enjoy seeing their portraits on the wall. One sunny morning in June (Fieldnotes, 6/6/02), I was helping a group of three boys get ready for their “reader’s theater” production of “The Three Bill Goats Gruff”-- the fairytale that this guided reading group was currently working on--and amidst the commotion and the flurry of construction paper, cardboard and fabric, Austin suddenly said, “Hey where are you up there on the wall?” Solomon knew instantly what Austin meant, and pointed to a “doll” with brown skin and a large black bush of hair. “That’s me in the beginning of the year, when I had an Afro!” Solomon said proudly. “Yeah, I remember when you first got your hair cut! That’s so cool!,” said Grant. “And there I am, right next to Solomon, cause we’re friends!” Grant pointed out his portrait, dressed in a Black “Austin 3:16” shirt and spiked hair. “Where are you?” Solomon and Grant wanted to know, and as Austin pointed, they both exclaimed, “Oh, yeah, we see you!” There was Austin’s “doll” with a patch of brown hair and wearing glasses. The three boys stood, looking at the wall and laughing together, commenting on other portraits, noting sadly that Sherri and Stacey, two little African American girls, were “on the wall” but had left their classroom early in the year. For these boys, the portraits represented the memories that they shared amongst friends and peers in Rita’s classroom.

This display of paper dolls symbolized the kind of learning community that Rita aspired to create in her classroom—one in which an autistic African American boy could be successfully “mainstreamed” and accepted by his peers, and Black and White students could openly talk about their friendship and share memories of precious times together. Rita envisioned the learning community to be student-centered, and desired to make her classroom a space for student voices to be heard and for student interests to be honored

and valued. Though Rita was deeply committed to these student-centered principles, she struggled for four years to make her dreams of a learning community a reality:

When I started teaching four years ago, I was much more structured, and I guess my teaching was more like I was the center of the teaching. And now the kids are the center, I am just like a facilitator or a helper, I help kids to figure out things, and I do a lot of research to prepare activities for them. I mean, it's not like before I was a lecturer (laughing), I was never like that, but I can see that over the four years that I've been here, I can see that my teaching has changed by the fact that the kids have more say and they have choices. (Interview, 4/30/02)

In shifting from a teacher-centered to a student-centered approach to teaching, Rita was able to create a learning community in which all students have “more say and have choices.” As Rita removed herself from the center of the classroom, she began to represent her work as a teacher as “community-building.” Central to Rita’s approach to establishing and maintaining a successful community was the concept that all students should be welcomed into the community, provided with opportunities to succeed as a member, and should be treated fairly, regardless of individual differences. The sense of “coming together” in this group of paper dolls on the wall conveys the warmth, caring, and connectedness which envelopes the learning community, and creates a motivational environment for all students, but particularly African American students, to achieve academic and social success.

But the striking individuality of each paper doll revealed an underlying contradiction: student similarities and individual differences were present in the learning community. Students’ cultural differences, for example, were quite visible in Rita’s classroom; although the majority of the 21 children were European American, 6 were African American, 1 was Hispanic, and 1 was Asian. Yet Rita believed that it was best

for the community if culture and race were not mentioned, and she ultimately discouraged students, and herself, from even noticing these differences:

In this classroom, black kids can play with white kids, and they don't see it, and I just love the innocence of it... And in this classroom there's not a divide..., And I think it's really neat that these kids don't see it. And if they don't see it, I'm not gonna say anything. And I almost think it's a shame that as they get older, their friends start telling them things, or people in their community might start telling them things, and kids start to say, "Oh, we don't want to talk to them because they're whatever"...But in this class, they even play all together at recess time and it's really neat to see (Interview, 1/15/02)

Rita's comments suggest that she perceived cultural differences to be divisive to her learning community; thus, she adopted a "colorblind" perspective about issues of diversity and simply did not talk about the subject. Unfortunately, Rita believed so strongly in building a learning community via a "colorblind" approach that she had great difficulty discussing any type of student differences in an open and honest way. The conflict came to the surface as Rita tried to accommodate various student differences in the learning community, and in so doing, began to treat some students "differently." When other students in the learning community began to raise questions about Rita's treatment of these students, she found herself in facing a difficult dilemma that would ultimately determine the fate of their community.

This chapter presents Rita's narrative of fostering resilience for African American students as three sets of interconnected stories. The first set of stories highlight Rita's classroom practices, richly illustrating the learning community that she establishes and how she employs classroom management strategies and literacy instructional practices to promote positive and successful participation within it. These stories offer an intimate look into Rita's classroom and her philosophy of teaching as effecting student change

through motivation, and we discover that it is Rita's ability to "create" a motivational classroom community, and to support African American students' participation in this community, that enables her to foster student resilience. The second set of classroom stories focus on the crisis that arises from issues of diversity, and as these stories unfold, they capture Rita's struggles and frustrations in charting a course of action to save the learning community. Finally, the third set of stories describes how Rita ultimately resolves her dilemma and averts the crisis in the learning community.

Rita's Story of Classroom Practice: Creating a Motivational Classroom Community Through Classroom Management and Literacy Instruction

Motivation was a key concept in Rita's philosophy about African American students and their learning in schools. Rita believed that African American students were most successful when they were motivated in school, and she thought that parents had the most significant impact upon a student's motivation because "the support that parents give can totally change a child's outlook on education" (Interview, 1/15/02). To tap into this particularly critical source of motivation, one of Rita's primary strategies was to talk with African American parents and work towards an understanding of their children's motivation to learn, specifically focusing upon experiences that might enhance or decrease their inner motivational resources. For example, at Back to School Night, Hasan's mother told Rita that her son was dealing with his father's death. Rita characterized Hasan as "a very strong academic student, he's very motivated, you don't have to ask him twice to do anything, he will do it right away" but later in the year when Rita noticed that Hasan "wasn't feeling right," she felt that "it was very helpful for me to

know” about his situation because then she could use that as a starting point for understanding what was wrong (Interview, 1/23/02).

Rita also believed that teachers could play an integral role in stimulating and supporting African American students’ motivation. In taking a high level of personal responsibility for student motivation, Rita perceived her ideas about teachers and their ability to foster student motivation to be radically “different” than those of some of her colleagues:

Rita: I think a lot of times teachers see a type of kid and think that they are all the same...

Jen: Can you give me an example?

Rita: Um, like a kid with a behavior problem, and the teacher thinks that they are all the same, meaning that “they are going to behave that way despite what I do, so how can we manage it?” Not thinking that we can maybe change that behavior. And I think with kids, if they are motivated, you can help them to change their behaviors. I think some teachers see that certain type of kid, think they are going to behave that way, and then send them out of the room as soon as they do something. And I think that they almost make it somebody else’s problem, whereas Jane and I try to help kids: What can we do for you? How can I work for you? I’m here for you. You know, how can I help you to learn? (Interview, 1/15/02)

Clearly, motivation was such an essential component of Rita’s instructional program because she conceptualized successful student learning as “change.” For Rita, this concept of “student change” resonated well with her “colorblind” philosophy for the learning community because it emphasized change regardless of student differences; African American students needed to change for the better just as much as European American students or students in special education. Consequently, when Rita discussed student who needed to change, she tended to focus explicitly on their social or academic behavior rather than categorical descriptors (e.g., race, culture, SES):

You know there are quite a few students in my classroom that have some discipline problems, you know, they tend to shout out or wander around the room... I find that some of these kids are difficult because they not only affect their own learning but they are affecting the learning of other kids. Like shouting out: we were just talking about that right here. [I said,] "You know, when you shout out, you steal other kids' thinking." So really getting them to change those behaviors is important. It's hard though, it's really hard. Because you know for eight years they have behaving this way, and it's really hard (Interview, 1/15/02).

During an informal conversation, Rita told me that she believed that any third grade student exhibiting these kinds of behaviors needed to change them because they were expected to do these things automatically in fourth grade, when the academic work and social expectations became more demanding. In preparation for fourth grade, Rita tried to help students change their attitudes towards academic work, particularly with regard to homework assignments:

It's hard, it's hard, too, because they are used to doing things a certain way, like not turning in their homework. I have to say, there are a few kids in this classroom who STILL don't do these things, and we've had conversations about it, and I've talked to their parents, and I don't know what else to do. And it's almost like you feel, "What more can I do?" But you have to find those interesting ways, and sometimes it might take awhile. (Interview, 1/23/02)

Rita also encouraged students to change dispositions and behaviors that did not communicate patience, respect, and civility towards others:

You do have to teach those attitudes, too, like patience, for example. You know, I was saying to Solomon the other day, I can't even remember what he was saying, but he said it in such a nasty voice, and I said, "Solomon, if someone asked you to do what you just asked that person to do in a voice like that, would you move?" "No" I said, "Well, you have to do the same thing, then. You know if you want someone to ask you nicely, then you need to ask them nicely." And then they'll do it! If you say, 'Would you please move?' "Sure!" If you say, 'Move it!!!' that's not gonna work.

By emphasizing the need for academic, behavioral, and attitudinal change for all students in her classroom, Rita wanted to create a learning community in her classroom where

everyone was working on some aspect of themselves in order to become more productive and successful members. To elicit these positive responses, Rita employed motivational strategies in two specific areas to emphasize social relatedness, intrinsic motivation to learn, and self-regulation of academic and social behaviors: classroom management structures and policies, and literacy instructional practices.

Classroom management strategies

One of Rita's primary goals this year was to create a learning community in which all students, including African Americans, would feel welcome. Consequently, Rita arranged the classroom in a way that invited students to work and learn together. To maximize collaboration during seatwork, Rita grouped desks together into five teams, with four to five children in a team. In the front of the classroom, there was a large rug, perfect for whole-group activities such as storybook reading. There were other cozy areas in the room that serve as "centers" for small groups of students throughout the day, such as a listening center in a corner, a row of computers along the back wall, and an Author's Center, with books by a featured author filling the low bookcases along the front of the room.

To facilitate the spirit of community within the classroom, Rita used "verbal immediacy" (Brophy, 1998) as a way to reinforce cooperation and teamwork. Rita expected students to help their team function appropriately in the classroom, and much of flow of the classroom depended upon the teams. For example, Rita looked to "see which teams are ready" to select students to line up for lunch or for recess, and at times, she called on children to answer questions according to team (e.g., "I haven't heard from

anyone on Team 3. Would any of you like to share your answer?") (Fieldnotes 9/10/01).

Rita also used terms like "we" and "us" when she referred to their classroom community, and talked explicitly about working together as a team:

It is approximately 10:45am. Rita tells the kids that there will be a substitute at noon because she is going to Ms. Noonan's room to learn more about teaching reading. "If I get a good report, you have a possibility of earning up to 45 minutes. So how good the report is will depend—I mean, the time will decrease depending on how many kids she needs to talk to. If you work as a team, make it a team effort, then you can earn all your minutes. Make sure you all work together to get a good report." Shortly before noon, Rita reminds the kids that their sub is coming and that "we need to work together as a team. If you see someone talking then you might say, Tamara let's earn our minutes. Although I said Tamara, I almost never have to say that to Tamara because she is always quiet and listening when she is supposed to. So we use a gentle reminder and we ask someone nicely to stop talking, we don't scream or yell at them because when we ask nicely the other person will probably decide to do what we ask." (Fieldnotes, 10/4/01).

As the learning community began to come together, Rita offered various types of rewards to express appreciation for their hard work and effort. Every so often, Rita used "material" rewards (Brophy, 1998), such as candy, Popsicles, or other treats. However, Rita's primary reward strategy was intangible, and related directly to the academic and social goals that she had for her students:

You know, I think rewards are a great motivator for some kids. And it doesn't have to be...I'm not talking about, "Oh, here's a sticker" or "Here's a present." But I mean even educational presents, like their PAT time. The kids work all week for PAT time, and I have to tell you, it's something that we would do normally, I just put it under the label "PAT" time so that they think it's different, but it's like a math game or something that we would normally do in school. (Interview, 1/15/02)

As an "activity" reward (Brophy, 1998), students earned PAT time (or Preferred Activity Time) during transitional times, typically when they moved from "individual" work at their seats to "whole group" activities on the rug:

Rita is sitting in the director's chair at the front of the room and the students are seated on the rug. Once they are settled, Rita reminds them about earning PAT time, and asked for students "to explain PAT time to Mrs. Turner." Several students raised their hands, and Rita called on Solomon, an African American boy, and Jack, to explain. They turn to face me, and then explain that PAT time is the Preferred Activity Time, and if they move to activities in a timely manner and more quickly than the time Rita allots, then they earn PAT time for that day. PAT time is added up for the week, and on a special day that Rita announces, they are allowed to play computer games or other games during the PAT time that they have earned. However, they can also lose PAT time if they take too long to transition. Rita then reminds them that they "just earned a little PAT time" because when she called them over to the rug, she set the timer for 90 seconds, and it took 80 seconds for them to all find a seat on the rug and to get quiet. So they had earned 10 seconds that time, but Rita assures them they could "earn much more if they come quickly and quietly" when they are called. (Fieldnotes, 9/10/01)

In addition material and activity rewards, Rita also used praise as a form of reward in her classroom. Rather than repeatedly focusing on students who were misbehaving (e.g., Troy, you need to sit down. Jack, stop playing with your pencil), Rita offered compliments to students behaving appropriately. She particularly used this approach with Troy, one of the autistic African American boys in the class. Troy would frequently call out answers during whole group activities, even after Rita would remind him several times to raise his hand. On one particular day, Rita commented, "I liked the way you raised your hand, Troy" after he gave his answer, as a note of praise for remembering not to call out his answers (Fieldnotes, 10/17/01). Further, Rita would

compliment the entire class for their efforts to work quietly, noting, for example, “this has been such a wonderful writing workshop today! Everyone is working so nicely, I am proud of all of you!” (Fieldnotes, 10/11/01).

While these various rewards greatly facilitated the process of community-building, Rita discovered that one of the most critical “motivational” elements was emotional safety. To facilitate the kind of “ambitiousness” necessary for risk-taking and mastery learning, Rita realized she had to acknowledge and address African American students’ emotional and psychological needs:

At the beginning of the year....we don’t dive right into curriculum stuff because I think it is important for them to feel comfortable and safe...I mean, this can be scary; this is a big school and just walking in the hallways can be scary. So I think a lot of kids need the feeling of being safe. A lot of the kids will come in the morning and give me a hug and some teachers don’t hug and some teachers do, and it’s up to them, but I think some of these kids need that... some of the kids walk in the morning and they need that hug right away...to say, “I feel safe here, I feel comfortable here, I can share ideas and opinions, thoughts.”

Rita further explained that the need for emotional safety in her classroom intensified in light of the tragedy on September 11, 2001:

So I think the need to feel safe and secure and comfortable is important, because it’s a scary world out there. Especially with the events of September 11th, I mean...(pause)...Hasan was really affected by that...I mean it was to the point where he didn’t want his mom to leave the house, he didn’t want to let her go, and I think this was a place where he felt safe. You know, a lot of parents when it happened, that day, they came to school, and they looked in on their children, and they left them here. A lot of parents took their kids home, but some of them looked in on them, knew that they were safe, and thought maybe it was better that they stayed here and maintained their normal day, and left them here. And I think that’s really important. (Interview, 1/23/02)

Rita’s comments reveal a deep insight about effective teaching for African American students: in order to promote successful learning, teachers must be as concerned with creating a positive and supportive socioemotional classroom environment as they are

about making subject matter comprehensible. By meeting the psychological and affective needs of African American students on multiple levels—particularly after such a traumatic experience as September 11th - Rita was, in effect, reaching out and inviting them to learn within a supportive, caring community. For Hasan and other African American students, this kind of “human connection” with Rita reassured them that they would be “safe” to ask questions, to express their opinions, to make mistakes, and to grow in her classroom.

Literacy instructional practices

Rita developed a variety of literacy experiences through which to teach reading and writing skills in ways that motivated African American students to learn and reinforced the spirit of classroom community. In September, Rita initiated a series of shared writing activities that Rita called “trust building activities” to support students’ relationships with other community members:

Rita: And in the beginning of the year, we do a lot of trust building activities where the kids get to know each other, and I also get to know more about them.

Jen: What kinds of activities?

Rita: You know, writings like “What do you like to do?” “What are your favorite things?” We interview each other, you know, like “tell us about your family” “tell us what your interests are.” And then we do pair shares when we would say, “This is my friend Mrs. Turner and she likes this and this” and then we pair up with someone who likes the same sport as they do so you have to be a good listener, but it also gets you to see what interests you have that are similar with other people in the classroom that you might not even know. So it is also a way for me to get to know them. (Interview, 1/23/02)

Rita devoted the entire month of September to these kinds of writing activities. A favorite of the African American children seemed to be “My Story”; students filled in the blanks of a “prepared story” with appropriate information about themselves (e.g., neat/messy, favorite foods for breakfast, lunch, dinner, left/right handed, favorite inside and outside activities). After writing the brief story, students were encouraged to illustrate their text with pictures of themselves and their families or friends doing various activities, and were instructed make a cover for their story. Students shared their story with a partner, during which Solomon, a struggling reader, laughed and smiled as he shared that he was “proud” of the fact that he was left-handed, and Taylor, an advanced reader, smiled as she shared that her favorite indoor activity was dance and talked about a dance camp she attended during the summer (Fieldnotes, 9/14/01).

The cornerstone of Rita’s guided reading program was the “Book Club” experience, during which a small group of three to five children met with Rita or Mrs. Branigen, the special education teacher, to discuss texts. Children were given time in class to read the story individually or with a member of their group, and were expected to complete a worksheet on the story which covered comprehension-type questions about characters, setting, and plot. Students were often given “stickies” to mark places in the text where they had questions, did not know vocabulary words, or to highlight a point of interest.

The guided reading “Book Clubs” were designed as flexible ability groups. Rita felt the ability grouping aspect of the Book Club was important for student motivation because, “everyone is reading at their own level. So that’s a way that you are motivating everyone. I mean, the highest group is motivated as well as the lowest group, they are just

motivated at their own levels” (Interview, 1/23/02). Rita tried to take as much care as possible to help all students feel good about their group by having children of all abilities reading books on similar themes. For example, in early October, all the Book Clubs were reading nonfiction texts on animals, but the text difficulty was noticeably different; the lowest reading group was reading about frogs, and their text had more pictures, shorter sentences and easier words (e.g., “ Some frogs live in trees.”), while the highest reading group was reading about crocodilians, with words like “species” and “ancestors” and actually had the Latin word for the species in the text (Fieldnotes, 10/4/01). Though the groups were based upon ability, Rita considered the groups to be fairly “flexible” because she believed that students should be able to “move” up into higher groups depending upon their progress (Fieldnotes, 10/4/01). Rita wanted her African American students to make gains in their reading ability, and her willingness to move them into higher Clubs was not “just talk.” For instance, Tamara, one of the African American girls in a lower group, did “move up” in Book Club; she was reading in the lowest group at the beginning of the year, and had progressed to a higher-level Club by the end of the year (Fieldnotes, 6/6/02).

In addition to Book Club, Rita designed a variety of other “shared reading” activities that promoted literacy development and a sense of community for African American students. Read aloud was a favorite of Rita and her class, so Rita set aside time everyday for the students to gather on the rug in the front of her classroom for a book that they could read and share together. Oftentimes, the books Rita selected encouraged interaction between reader and audience, and thus elicited a high level of engagement:

It is around 11:30am, and Rita and the class have just finished adding up their PAT time because today is the day that the students will have the

chance to use their PAT time minutes. The class has earned a total of 22 minutes and 42 seconds of PAT time, and lots of kids are smiling and clapping each other's hands and saying "YESSS!" because they have so much time. Rita announces that because they have so much PAT time, they will change the schedule around and do the read aloud now, and have PAT time after lunch. She settles the students down again, then holds up the book, reads the title, and generates excitement by telling the students "this is a FUN book to read." The story, set in the jungle, describes how the snake got its long shape and its hissing sound. As she reads, Rita asks the class to participate (e.g., "Show me a snake hiss." "Do the motions with me: Up up up. Around and around and around. Puff puff puff"). While Rita reads, most of the students are listening intently and they enjoy making the sounds. By the end of the story, all the students are up on their feet, doing the motions with Rita as she reads. Rita laughs and smiles as she reads the book, seeming to enjoy her students' reactions. Rita also tries to make personal connections to the text as well (e.g., "Jasmine we would like those bananas like the monkey because we love our bananas, right?" "Oh, Solomon, here's the part about the frogs, one of your favorite animals.") (Fieldnotes, 9/14/01).

During read aloud, Rita sometimes selected books that integrated key concepts from other subjects, such as math or science. Particularly for math, Rita chose books with basic mathematical concepts as a way to stimulate their motivation to do math:

Especially with some kids, creating...situations where they are interested in doing math it is important. Like yesterday, I read a book to them, and we were looking at a menu. "Well what would you order?" Well, adding those numbers together was actually FUN! It was like, real world, "I'm going to a restaurant by myself, I don't have to check with my parents on what to order." So creating situations where they are excited, too, is a great motivator for every child, because a lot of kids in my classroom just don't like math. (Interview, 1/15/02)

By connecting math to reading in a natural and meaningful way, Rita used the read aloud activity to generate excitement about math and to review basic mathematical concepts like addition in the "real-world" setting of a restaurant. For African American students like Tamara and Troy who had some difficulty in math, these activities provided the opportunity for them to do math in a context that was informal and fun.

One excellent example of Rita's ability to facilitate comprehension and to develop understanding of "big ideas" by integrating science was the discussion the class had before, during, and after Rita read a book on hibernating and migrating animals:

Rita called the students to the rug, and once they were seated, she began to read the book Animals in Winter. Before reading it, she emphasized the purpose of their read aloud by mentioning that she wanted them to "have a better understanding of what hibernation and migration are" and she activated their prior knowledge by asking, "What animals do you know that migrate during winter?" One student mentioned trumpeter swans because the class had just read a book on trumpeter swans. Jasmine mentioned butterflies because they had just learned about butterflies in science, and Rita reminded them that they learned that not every butterfly migrates. She asked, "What kind of butterflies migrate because not all of them do? Jasmine is quiet and she doesn't know. Rita asks, "Can you describe it?" When Jasmine said that it had orange and black wings, one student raised his hand and said that it was a Monarch butterfly. Rita asked about hibernation, and Troy said that is when animals like bears gather food for the winter. Hasan added that they sleep for the winter. Rita showed them the cover of the book which had a fox on it. She asked the kids to "raise your hands if you think a fox migrates? Hibernates?" About half of the class raises their hands for both. As Rita read the book, she called their attention to the illustrations (e.g., how many of you have noticed the earth looks like this now? The leaves are falling and the trees are bare. Later she pointed out the different chambers that a groundhog builds underground, a sleeping chamber and a toilet chamber). She also asked other kinds of prior knowledge questions while reading:

Rita: Who remembers where birds migrate to?

Student: The south

Rita: Like where?

Student 1: Texas

Student 2: New Mexico

Student 3: Florida

Student 4: Regular Mexico (Meaning the country of Mexico)

Student 5: South America

Rita: What other animals do you know that hibernate?

Student 1: Frogs

Student 2: Snakes

Student 3: Squirrels (Leticia said that, and Rita. said, "I don't know if they hibernate but they sure do gather their nuts for the winter. Let's find out if they hibernate)

Student 4: Grizzly bear
Student 5: Black bears

Rita: Why do animals need to eat and eat and eat before they hibernate?
Student: They need to be fat so they can sleep all winter and not need to eat.

The book gave several suggestions for feeding the animals throughout the winter, and Rita reminded the children that if they started leaving berries and food for the animals that they needed to continue throughout the entire winter because they were depending upon them.

After reading the book, Rita checked comprehension through questioning:

Rita: Who can tell me one way animals behave for winter?

Troy: Some animals hibernate, which means that they sleep and they gather food before they sleep to get fat

Student 2: Some animals gather food and eat it all winter like squirrels

Student 3: Some animals eat during the winter and search for food

Rita: Right they still hunt during the winter.

Solomon: some animals steal farmers' food

Rita: Yes, they do because they have very little food to eat in the winter. But what is the other thing that some animals do?

Duane: Some animals migrate.

(Fieldnotes, 11/12/01)

This discussion is representative of the intensive “Read Aloud” experiences that Rita designed which not only fostered a love of reading for African American students, but also enabled them to make connections to topics in other content areas in meaningful and authentic ways. This strategy was even successful for African American readers in lower-level reading groups, like Troy and Solomon, who were able to comprehend this fairly advanced science book and respond correctly to Rita’s questions during the class discussion.

African American students like Tamara, Troy, and Solomon who experienced some difficulties greatly benefited from another “shared reading” activity that enhanced their reading skills and their confidence in themselves as readers. On Monday mornings,

Rita and her third graders teamed up with a class of first graders for a “Buddy Reading.” The third graders and first graders were paired up by Rita and Christy, the first grade teacher, and students were paired based upon cultural similarities, thus several African American third grade and first grade students were paired together. Rita speculated that this kind of pairing was important for the students, and that the smiles and laughter that the pairs shared as they read and worked together, seemed, at least in part, to come from the “fact that they can easily relate to each other because they have something in common” (Fieldnotes, 11/12/01).

For about twenty minutes, the pairs would read their books and work together on an activity. The pairs read a wide variety of literary texts. Sometimes, the third graders would bring books with them that they had read or were currently reading in their own Book Clubs; for example, Rita encouraged her students to bring a Gail Gibbons book with them when they were studying her as a featured author for the month of November (Fieldnotes, 11/12/01). At other times, the first graders selected the books that they had in their classroom, and they read to the third graders. Rita believed that the shared reading with the first graders made a difference in her third graders’ reading ability, and during an informal conversation, she told me that several students who did not seem very interested in reading, even in their Book Clubs, blossomed when they went to read with their first grade buddies (Fieldnotes, 1/8/02). At the end of the year, Rita also noticed that Hasan and some of her other African American students were especially proud of their first grade buddies and that they felt like they played a part in their reading achievements:

The Buddy Reading is good...I mean it’s good for my children...because they get practice reading with a 1st grader. But it’s good for them to see where they [the first graders] have come from. And they have noticed...you know Hasan came up to me and said, “Can you believe how

my buddy can read?!?”. So from the beginning of the year to the end of the year they have noticed that change. And it’s really exciting...they get excited because they feel like they have had a part in it, you know even though we only read probably once a week for 15 or 20 minutes, they feel like, “They’re reading with me and they have grown because I helped them.” So they feel like they’re teaching too. So I think it’s pretty neat. (Interview, 6/17/02)

What was also “neat” about Rita’s third graders was their love of writing. Rita often remarked that this year’s class “loves writing; they would rather write than do than anything else” (Second Focus Group, 4/30/02), and she attributed the students’ strong positive feelings about writing to the Writing Workshop model that she had enacted this year. Through Writing Workshop, Rita supported African American and all other students to become writers in their learning community by using the process to engage students in writing their own books.

The phases of the writing process were taught explicitly as part of the third grade curriculum because they comprised a few questions on the high-stakes state test given in April (Fieldnotes, 3/21/02). However, Rita’s approach to teaching the process was fundamentally action-oriented; she completely immersed her students in the process of writing because she deeply believed that students “learned by doing. They don’t learn by sitting back, and listening to me!” (Interview, 6/17/02). To increase student familiarity with the model, the Writing Process was written on a magnetic board near the back of the room, with each phase in bold letters; small magnetic strips with each student’s name on it were placed on the board, and students were encouraged to place their name according to whatever phase of the writing process they were in. The high visibility of the Writing Process board enabled Rita to see where students were at a quick glance, and to assess the kind of help that would be needed (e.g., We have a few students waiting for teacher

conferences, so Mrs. Turner, would you like to help out today? Who is in Jack's group? He needs his peer conference today). For students, seeing their names on the board created great anticipation for hearing the stories of those who had finished their texts and were sharing at the "Author's Chair." The "Author's Chair" was probably the most critical aspect of the Writing Workshop experience because it gave students the opportunity to bask in the glow of their accomplishment; students were invited to read their work and to show their illustrations while sitting in "the teacher's chair." The audience was then asked to give the author complements on his or her work, and then the floor was open for any questions they wanted to pose to the author. Questions were generally very thoughtful and specific; after Grant's story entitled "Squids and Octopuses," for example, a member of the audience asked how long it took him to research the information, while another asked him if he found writing nonfiction to be harder than writing fiction (Fieldnotes, 1/23/02).

For the African American students in Rita's classroom, Writer's Workshop seemed to be a very effective approach for literacy development. For Hasan and Taylor who were "star readers" in the highest reading Book Clubs, the workshop gave them the opportunity to write creatively; during Taylor's Author Share, for example, she read her story about her sister's birthday party, filled with exciting twists and turns in the plot and ending with a co-ed sleepover that stirred up some controversy amongst her peers (Fieldnotes, 4/3/02). For struggling readers like Troy, Tamara, and Solomon, Writer's Workshop supported their development of reading and writing skills by connecting to their personal interests; for example, Solomon was writing a story of a boy who discovers a new species of frogs in the rain forest, and he mentioned to his writing group that he

had done “some research on frogs in order to make his new species more realistic” and the other members seemed impressed (Fieldnotes, 10/11/01).

Perhaps the most compelling story of an African American student whose academic and social competence was enhanced through writing, and particularly through the experience of sharing his text during the Author’s Chair, centers on the experiences of an autistic boy named Duane. Though Duane was one of the few African American students who placed into the gifted and talented math class this year, he had some difficulty in writing. Rita knew of Duane’s struggle to write, but was equally concerned with his extreme shyness and his inability to share his ideas in class. Beginning with that crisp October morning when she introduced Writing Workshop, Rita tried to include him in the discussion so that he would feel more comfortable with writing and sharing his ideas in class:

At 11:00am, the students have just finished voting for their class representative: Zack W. won, and Taylor, an African American girl, was selected as the alternate. Some of the students are still talking about the elections amongst themselves, but most are quiet and waiting for Rita to begin the next activity. Rita announces, “We are going to start Writing Workshop today and we are going to do brainstorming. When I dismiss you, please turn your chair around and face the front of the room.” She dismisses the children, calling them by “teams,” rises from her chair, and stands up at the front of the room. She begins with a brief review: “Last week we made a list of ideas of things we wanted to write about. Raise your hands if you remember what we called this list of ideas in the back of your journals?” Scanning the room, she calls on Emily, who answers, “Brainstorming.” “Yes, we called it brainstorming,” Rita says, taking a few minutes to talk about the word and its meaning (e.g., “It’s a compound word made up of what two words?” “Why would we call thinking of ideas a ‘storm’?”). Next, Rita tells the class that she wants to practice brainstorming, and she’d like to have an idea for a story that one of them has. Though several students raise their hands, Rita selects Duane, a shy African American boy sitting in the front, who squirms in his seat when she called on him, and never looks up. A few seconds pass. “Duane,” Rita asks more quietly and gently, “do you have an idea that you wrote that you want to share? I know that you wrote some great ideas in your journal.”

Duane answers in a quiet, halting voice that he wants to write about a “car tournament,” which Rita writes on the overhead as “car race.” She explains that in brainstorming, they take a “great idea” like Duane’s and they “begin to think about anything and everything that could happen.” One student suggests that one of the cars might have a wreck because it slammed into the wall, another that the race is taking place on a “professional track.” Duane raises his hand, and asks, “What type of race cars are we talking about?” “That’s a GOOD question!” Rita says excitedly. It’s always good when you are brainstorming to ask yourself questions because then you will be able to write more about the ideas that are important to you.” Rita then introduces the “who-what-when-where-why” series of questions as “good ones to ask yourself while you are brainstorming,” and continuing with Duane’s example of the car race, she and the class generated possible plots and characters for his story (Fieldnotes, 10/2/01).

The next week, Rita continued to use Duane’s story as a model for writing, and “read” the text that she and the class have composed during a demonstration of the “Writing Group” phase with Hasan:

Rita, pretending to be a member of the writing group, read her story about Duane and the car race of the millennium to Hasan. The story stopped in the middle, so Rita asked Hasan if he had any suggestions. Hasan suggested that Duane was in third place, then moved up to second and then first place, and though he had a crash, he still made it to first place. Then Rita asked for other suggestions: Keelan said that he became a professional racer when he grows up, while Duane said that once he becomes a professional racer he switches cars. After a few more ideas, Rita told them that they have given her “great ideas and now I can come up with my own or I can use any of these that my writing group has given me.” She reiterated that the writing group is there to “help you come up with ideas for your story.” (Fieldnotes, 10/11/02)

By continuing to use Duane’s car race topic from the previous week, Rita helped Duane and others in the class, understand how to build upon ideas and to incorporate them into their writing. Drawing on Duane’s writing topic also seemed to give him a sense of confidence in his ideas, and he was able to share them with the class and participate more openly than the previous week. Additionally, Rita might have fostered resilience for Duane by using Hasan, an African American boy who was a strong writer, as a model

during her demonstration, because this nice “cultural connection” between might have reinforced the idea that Duane could also become a good writer if he continued to try.

Rita also tried to encourage Duane and other writers in the community by sharing some of her personal writing experiences. During one particular afternoon, she openly talked about taking a writing class during the summer, and how difficult it was for her to write and to share her writing (Fieldnotes, 10/11/01). She shared her own experiences in a writing workshop class to help students understand the need for respect, gentleness and praise, particularly at times when they were working with or listening to other’s writing, like for peer conference or Author’s Circle. By sharing this very personal story of her own feelings of fear and anxiety as a writer, Rita validated some of the experiences and feelings of students like Duane, and more importantly, assured them that they could become good writers despite these fears and doubts. For African American students like Taylor and Hasan, and others who were strong writers, Rita’s stories reminded them to be patient and respectful of those who were struggling when they wrote and talked together.

Later in the school year, I happened to be observing Rita’s class on a day when Duane did his Author’s Share, and I witnessed the powerful change that had occurred in his writing and in his ability to share:

For Writing Workshop today, Duane read his story for Author’s Share, and though it might not have been the first time that he shared, it was the first time that I had heard him read anything in front of the class. I was completely amazed at his transformation. He was so excited to be sharing his work with the class; he was grinning from ear to ear as he sat down in the chair. Rita reminded “the audience” that they needed to listen quietly, and once everyone was settled, she told Duane that he could begin. He started reading the title in a small voice, but Rita stopped and told him, “Duane, we all would really love to hear your story, but we can’t when you read in such a quiet voice. We know that you are proud of your story, so read it in a proud voice.” Duane smiled, cleared his throat, and began again, this time with a strong, clear voice. The title of his story was “Test Track #1: The New-Built Track,” and it was about three racing cars preparing to

race on a new track. The story was action-packed, and even featured Duane and several of his classmates as drivers and mechanics! I felt tears springing to my eyes while listening to his story, because this was such a special triumph for him. The class attentively listened to his story, and when Duane mentioned that the story was “To Be Continued,” some of the students began making predictions about the plot. At the very end of Duane’s Author Share, we all clapped thunderously and some of the kids even cheered! He stood up and took a bow! I was as proud of him as if he were my own son (Fieldnotes, 4/10/02).

Duane’s “Author Share” experience was a compelling example of the kind of personal transformation that writing can have upon a student. The nature of the Writing Workshop that Rita had organized was so empowering to many of the students, including Duane, because it gave them a space to be creative and to explore their own interests as producers of their own texts. Their success was in their ability to not only produce a story, with characters, setting and plot, but also in their ability to read their work, with expression, emotion, and interest. Duane conveyed all of those qualities as he read his story, and his success was illustrative of African American and other students in the classroom who became successful writers and readers through Rita’s Writing Workshop.

Through these various literacy activities, and the classroom management strategies, Rita created a learning community that welcomed for African American students, stimulated and supported their intrinsic motivation to learn and to change in significant ways (e.g., behaviors, dispositions), and successfully facilitated their literacy development. Importantly, Rita aspired for her learning community to be inclusive for everyone, and to that end, she adopted a “colorblind” stance towards individual differences. In other words, Rita wanted African American and all of her students to realize their potential, to be self-motivated, to grow, and to be successful learners in the community. Though this particular aspect of “colorblindness” as expressed by Rita’s strong belief that all students can learn and succeed, coupled with her deep commitment

to provide the instructional support and management practices necessary for this kind of success was perhaps the most compelling explanation for her ability to foster the resilience of African American students, there was a deep conflict lurking beneath the surface of this “colorblind” philosophy that threatened to mitigate her students’ success and ultimately destroy her entire learning community. We turn now to that story of conflict and crisis.

Crisis in the Community: Rita’s Dilemma about Student Relationships and Differences

As the spirit of the community became stronger, Rita decided to spend more time and energy on developing personal relationships with her students. She believed that these relationships were extremely worthwhile because they gave her the opportunity to know her students better, to get a sense of their lives and experiences outside of school, and they provided her with insights about the interests that students had that could potentially serve as motivational rewards (e.g., computer games, books).

As a teacher, Rita felt responsible for initiating the relationship and slowly began to “get to know” students by talking with them at various times:

I find that one of the best ways to get to know them is to sit with them and talk with them. And one of the times, you know, that I find is convenient is at lunchtime. And you really get to know what they like to do at home, what they do on the weekends, what they do when they go home at night—you know, is there anyone around at home, all of those kinds of things. You really get to see what is really interesting to them. And I find that lunchtime is a great time to talk with them. So I’ll have a group of maybe four or five kids, and we’ll just talk over eating lunch. It is hard to get to know them in a classroom because most of your time is instruction, so you have to choose a time to talk to them. Sometimes I’ll choose recess. Sometimes I do pull them if there’s something that’s bothering them, I’ll pull them out into the hallway for a private conversation or something like that. But I try not to disrupt their day.... (Interview, 1/23/02).

Rita's comments express her deep commitment to "getting to know" students and developing personal relationships with them in spite of the additional time and energy that they required. Rita thought that the concept of "getting to know" students was such a powerful and important part of her classroom that she considered it to be the key to her success with African American students in the learning community:

Jen: Why do you think you are so successful with African American students?

Rita: I think the key is really getting to know children. And like I've said before I don't really see African American children versus White children, I see them as children first of all. And I think that getting to know them is really the key to helping them to succeed" (Interview, 1/15/02).

Clearly, Rita wanted to personally know every student, and in describing her philosophy about teacher-student relationships and interactions as "colorblind," she suggested that she wanted to see her students as "children" rather than "social categories" (e.g., culture, race, SES). This was particularly true for Solomon and Troy, two African American boys with varying degrees of behavioral issues; rather than sending these two to the office, punishing them for inappropriate behavior, or simply assuming "that's how African American boys act" and ignoring their behavior, Rita crafted her personal relationship with them as a conversational space in which she could talk to them in a caring and non-threatening way about their behavior and work with them to change it. In Solomon's case, Rita was able to chart a course of action after only a few conversations:

With Solomon, we have actually just started a new behavior program because he was doing really well at the beginning of the year, and then there was a time period and it was almost right before the holidays in December and right after the holidays, his behavior was getting worse; he was shouting out, he was making jokes, throwing conversations off, discussions off, and so we've decided to do a behavior plan with him. And already in a week I can see an improvement. And just in talking with him: "What would you want to work for? What are you interested in? We can

arrange things. If you really want to get on the computer, we can do that.” And already in a week I can see a real improvement in his behavior. And he checks his own behavior...So, like I said, just getting to know students, I think is really the key (Interview, 1/15/02)

For Solomon, the personal relationship that Rita had begun to develop by talking with him periodically about his interests and the activities that he wanted to do, and helping him to monitor his own behavior through a chart, supported positive changes in his behavior. Through the second half of the year, the transformation was evident; Solomon was behaving appropriately and eagerly participating in class discussions. For example, during a group discussion of an upcoming biography project, Solomon offered Martin L. King, Jr. as a person whose life was significant to our world. His comments about King lead to an impromptu discussion about King’s life and his accomplishments that several other students thoughtfully participated in (Fieldnotes, 4/3/02).

Similarly, Rita developed a personal relationship with Troy, who was also autistic, in order to help him become a successful member of the learning community. After the first few weeks of school, Rita discovered that Troy’s team was not working well with him; they had difficulty relating to him, and became increasingly resentful of his behavior because it caused negative consequences for the team:

Troy was wandering around while the rest of his team sat quietly, ready to line up. “Can’t you sit down and shut up so that we can line up first for a change?” one of his team members said. “You always make us last,” another chimed in. Troy looked at them, and he sat down, but he took out a pencil and began to roll it on the desk. Rita has already called all the other teams, and told Troy’s team, Team 5, that she is “still waiting for everyone to get ready.” Sighing deeply, Troy put the pencil away and finally folded his hands, and Rita called their Team to line up. “Thanks a lot, Troy,” one of the boys said sarcastically as he grabbed his lunch and walked to the end of the line (Fieldnotes, 9/19/01)

Realizing that this team situation was not successful for Troy, Rita allowed him to sit where he wanted for the next few weeks, and Troy chose to work at a space on the computer table. By the middle of October, Troy had become a member of Team 1 in the front of the class, and he was a completely different student:

Troy was in a new seat today with Team 1, and he really seemed to like it there. He was smiling so much more, and he stayed in his seat to work much more consistently. In fact, today was the first day that I ever saw his team line up first for lunch. After the class finished cleaning up and Rita announced that she would begin to call "teams who are ready to line up," Troy immediately came to his seat. Tamara was smiling at him and folded her hands, and Troy did the same. When Rita looked around, Team 1 was ready first and they got to line up! Team 1 members pushed in their chairs and quietly said, "YESSSS!" with bright smile at Troy. As they walked over to the line, Hasan and Troy give each other a high five. (Fieldnotes, 10/17/01)

Rita, too, noticed Troy's transformation, and explained how developing a relationship with him played a key role in determining which team he should join:

In just talking with him, I found out that things weren't going well at the other team. So he asked to sit there [by himself at the computer table] and he wanted to sit there. And as we talked more, then I found the motivator, and I said to him, "If you could join any team, if you could be a part of any team in the classroom, which one would you join?" So he worked towards that, and he really wanted to join with those kids [at Team 1]...Now when I say, "I'm looking for the first team who's ready" then they'll be like, "Come on, Troy, and they'll encourage him" and it just helps him. And when they get to go first, they're like, "Yes, Troy, excellent." And that really encourages him. He's been doing really well there (Interview, 1/15/02)

For African American students like Solomon and Troy, the time that Rita spent talking with them and trying to develop a relationship in an effort to help them become more responsive to the behavioral expectations in the classroom community was invaluable. These personal teacher-student relationships communicated warmth, respect, and trust that is critical for the successful learning of African American students, and ultimately

provided the support needed for students like Solomon and Troy to become accepted members of the learning community.

But these personal teacher-student relationships placed Rita in an uncomfortable and difficult position: in learning more about the specific learning needs of individual students like Troy and Solomon, and responding to those needs in ways she believed would support their success, she had begun to make accommodations for them that the other students in the learning community perceived as “unfair” or “different treatment.” When students in the community noticed, for example, that Troy was allowed to do something that they were not, they began raising these issues of differential treatment with Rita. Rita felt she needed to make those adjustments to support Troy’s success in the community, but she felt she could not adequately explain her reasons because she was uncertain about how to talk openly and honestly with the other students about his learning differences and his needs as an autistic child:

It’s difficult because I’ve never worked with an autistic child.... So at first it was really hard to say [to the others] that sometimes Troy just needs to walk around the room; he just needs to be moving sometimes. And if I say, “For five minutes, if you work, you can take a trip around the room”....And while he’s walking all around the room, you know, I’ll monitor him and say, “ You have one minute to get back to your seat and you need to get to work and if you need another break again, then that’s fine.” But it is hard to get that balance, because some of the others kids came up and said, “Well why can’t I walk around, too?” and I try to say “Well, you can if you get it done, but if it’s a distraction, then you need to do what’s best for you.” But it’s hard for me to say that because I don’t want all the kids walking around! (Interview, 1/15/02)

The concept of “balance” that Rita perceives to be somewhat elusive in this situation is perhaps the heart of her dilemma in her classroom learning community; Rita hoped to build a community by taking a “colorblind” perspective that emphasized equal treatment of all students, regardless of their individual differences. Yet as she developed

personal relationships with her students, Rita realized that some students like Troy did have special needs that made his learning “different” than the others, and to support his achievement in the community, she had to make some adjustments to the rules. Although Rita recognized that Troy might have needed to walk around to help him focus more effectively on his schoolwork, she really did not want to make this a “community policy” because the other students could sit at their seats and complete their work, and yet, she felt as if she were treating Troy “differently” than the others. Faced with this difficult dilemma, Rita tried to avoid a conflict by making the policy seem more “equal” for everyone and allowed students to walk around if they truly thought it was “best for them.”

Incidents like these continued to crop up throughout the early months of school because Rita’s students were very perceptive, and were not afraid to question why some rules were different for particular students. Hasan, for example, asked Rita why he was not allowed to have a behavior plan like Solomon and Troy through which he could earn special rewards and privileges, and Rita tried to explain to him that “he didn’t need it” because he was a well-behaved student and was a successful member of the learning community (Interview, 1/15/02). Rita wanted desperately to believe that Hasan’s respect for Troy and Solomon, and the fact that they were “probably his best friends and he doesn’t treat them any differently,” meant that he understood why the rules needed to be different. But her tone suggested that she thought that her explanations were unconvincing because they dodged the “real” issue of student differences, and that she suspected these dishonest explanations actually exacerbated the conflicts rather than prevented them. Rita’s intuitions were seemingly confirmed as the number of incidents

increased steadily, and were no longer limited to questions about students with “behavior issues.” In one particular situation with Joshua, a European American boy whose infant brother died tragically of SIDS, Rita found herself grappling with how to help him cope in a way that other students perceived to be fair:

I think was really hard for me with Joshua, because I think that was the first time that one of my students had a crisis like that. And the first week that he was back he wanted to have his stuffed animal with him. And I thought that if that was going to help him get through it, that was fine. And I noticed the other day that he brought the stuffed animal, and I was thinking to myself, “How do I deal with this? I allowed him to bring it before, but it’s two months later and we need to do our jobs...” And it was really hard for me to figure out what that good balance was. And I was having lunch with him, and the other kids were like, “Why aren’t you having lunch with me!?!?” and “Why can’t we bring in a stuffed animal?” and it was really difficult to balance those things...(Interview, 1/15/02)

Rita’s comments convey the tremendous struggle of trying to find “good balance” between equality and equity in her classroom community. In the midst of a very emotional situation with Joshua, and trying to create a supportive space for him to grieve in a way that was appropriate for school, Rita was forced to admit that she was inadvertently creating a small rift in a community not accustomed to dealing openly and honestly with student differences. By making special accommodations for Joshua that she believed would help him to be successful despite such a horrible personal tragedy—her goal of equity that all students should be successful members of the community-- she had to sacrifice some the “equality,” or the similar treatment, that she also believed was essential for the community. Rita was caught at the crossroads, torn between the contradictory goals of equity and equality, with her students and their learning community hanging in the balance.

Rita's Resolution: Learning to Address Issues of Student Differences in the Learning Community

Rita ultimately resolved the dilemma in an unconventional way; rather than making significant changes to the curriculum, instruction, or to the learning community, Rita initiated change within herself as a teacher. In other words, Rita began to challenge some of her deeply-held conceptions about colorblindness and community, and in “letting go” of these old ideas, she became more open to new possibilities for discussing individual differences in a way that was more attuned to students’ questions about and perceptions of them. Rita knew that this kind of profound change was difficult because “...it’s risky, and it takes a brave person to say, ‘I’m gonna try doing this a different way’” (Interview, 1/15/02), however, she was willing to try for the sake of her students and their learning community.

In the process of professional change, there seems to be an interesting parallel between professional and personal dilemmas, such that a teacher who understands the origins of an inner personal conflict could find that information useful in solving a difficult practical dilemma in her classroom (Lampert, 1985; Palmer, 1998). In Rita’s case, she had been deeply committed to a “colorblind” approach for the past four years as a teacher at Burnett Elementary, not because it was something that she had learned in a teacher education class or a professional development workshop, but because it was intricately connected to her own life experiences, wrapped within memories of herself as a student in school, and woven into her efforts to become the kind of teacher who made a difference in the lives of diverse students. Thus, the classroom was not the primary source of her dilemma and the discomfort she felt about talking honestly and openly

about student differences; rather, it was her own personal experiences with diversity and community that had profoundly shaped her classroom practices.

Rita's early childhood memories reveal the deep roots of her philosophy about colorblindness. Growing up in a fairly diverse community in the southeast, Rita speculated that her inability to "see color" came from her parents and their "openness" about her playing with African American or other diverse children, and having friends come over to the house (Interview, 1/15/02). Rita did not remember her parents ever talking about cultural differences, or any other kinds of difference with her or her sister. But Rita knew about "difference" from firsthand experience; as a twin, she felt that she was a complete "opposite" of her popular sister:

Rita: Yeah, my sister is my partner in crime (laughing). Well, it's actually hard for me to be by myself because she growing up with her, we were always the best of friends growing up.... And we played soccer together, we went to the same college, we joined the same sorority, and these were all things we said we wouldn't do, but we did! (laughing) because we enjoyed the same things and we are actually very different from each other.

Jen: Really, how so?

Rita: Our personalities are different. She's more outgoing...I don't know I would say outgoing.... I would say she's more outgoing than me. It takes people a long time to get to know me, I guess. I don't know. I think it's because I've always had her. And I was always very shy growing up, very shy, like hiding in between my mother's legs, not talking to anyone, hiding. (Interview, 5/8/02)

As a young girl in school, Rita often compared herself to her sister and perceived herself to be quite "different." In kindergarten, Rita remembered having a good time because her sister was there, and laughing ruefully, she noted that "all my friends were really my sister's friends" (Interview, 5/8/02). But in first grade, when she and her sister were separated, and Rita perceived her "differences" to be a source of loneliness, and she was

very scared in her new classroom. Rita vividly remembered being alone in the classroom, and sadly, her first grade teacher never helped her to “fit in” with her classmates or helped her to make friends; in fact, her teacher made the situation worse by isolating Rita:

In the first grade, my mom walked into a parent conference and she saw my desk separated from everyone else's. And she asked the teacher, “Well, why is my daughter's desk separated from everyone else's?” and she said, “Well, because you're daughter is shy.” And my mother said, “Well why would you create a situation where she won't talk to anyone?” And I just remembering having a really hard time then (Interview, 1/15/02)

This experience was so difficult for Rita that while telling this story, her brown eyes immediately filled with pain, and her colleagues reached out for her hand in a gesture of comfort (Second Teacher Focus Group, 4/30/02). The traumatic impact that this experience had is clearly conveyed by this comment:

We have stories [about school] that we come back to...you know, in first grade, I was sitting at a table by myself. I mean (pause) that can affect you! I mean, the fact that I even remember twenty years later, it's (pause). I mean, it's not scarred me, but the fact that I remember it...means it did something to me (Interview, 4/3/02).

In stark contrast to her first grade teacher, a nameless, shadowy figure in Rita's story, Rita had fond memories of her third grade teacher, Mrs. Nelson:

Mrs. Nelson just let us explore things that we were interested in....You know it was not an authoritative [style of] teaching where she was up at the front of the classroom (does her hands like lecturing); we just explored all these different things, and we learned as a group. And we learned at our own paces. She never singled anyone out. Another reason why I think I also liked that year was because you know I had two buddies in that class. And instead of getting on us all the time, she would make a joke out of it. She was like “Oh there's the three musketeers!” You know that's what she called the three of us. And you know instead of being withdrawn, which I have always been really shy, I think that was kind of was my year to shine. And I was making these new friendships, you know really getting away from my sister and you know...it was really a good year for me. (Interview, 6/17/02)

Unlike Rita's first grade teacher, who accentuated Rita's social "differences" and essentially made her an outcast in the classroom, Mrs. Nelson tried to support Rita as she made new friends, and tried to be as responsive as possible to her "need" to be social. And although some teachers would have discouraged Rita and her two friends from playing together out of concern that they were too cliquish, Mrs. Nelson had a good-natured, humorous perspective about their close friendship. By accepting Rita into her classroom community and "not singling her out," and embracing her budding friendships, Mrs. Nelson helped Rita to overcome her extreme shyness. By fifth grade, Rita was cast as a lead in a school play, an accomplishment that no one, not even she, could not even have imagined when she was a first grader:

It was just so exciting...that I was a lead in a play. Whereas before if you were going to say that in first grade to my mom she would say, "No way would Rita get up on stage! In front of parents and kids and talk!?!?! There is no way this child, who hides behind my legs and never talks to anyone else but her sister or I is going to do that." But I did! (Interview, 6/17/02)

This juxtaposition of Rita's two elementary teachers, based upon her vivid memories of student experiences, signifies the basis of her "colorblind" philosophy. In first grade, the "differences" that Rita had always noticed in comparison to her twin sister were highlighted by her teacher. To Rita, the first grade teacher isolated her because she was "different" and that meant that she was somehow bad or wrong, and the experience of sitting alone seemed to make her feel ashamed of who she was. As a young child, Rita learned that differences are bad and that when a teacher notices them, they are likely to treat them in a negative way. In contrast, Mrs. Nelson did not draw attention to Rita's differences, although she probably knew that they were there, which made Rita feel accepted and valued. Rita remembered Mrs. Nelson's approach to be fairly "colorblind"

in the sense that she did not talk about Rita's shyness openly, nor did she treat Rita any differently than other students, yet she also took Rita's "social" needs into account and tried to help her overcome them. It seemed that the inclusiveness and equality that Mrs. Nelson employed in her classroom was very similar to what Rita wanted for her community, and consequently, traces of Mrs. Nelson's "colorblindness" are quite visible in Rita's ability to tune into what African American students like Duane or Solomon were struggling with, to quietly acknowledge those differences, and to provide support that would enable them to overcome their "issues" and exceed their own expectations of themselves.

Rita's preservice teaching experiences reinforced her "colorblind" philosophy of teaching. She attended George Mason University for undergraduate school, and during her fourth year of college, her work in an inclusion class inspired her to become a teacher:

I had an internship out of school, actually my last year in college. I went once or twice a week there, and we were like an aid to the teacher, I just supported the teacher. And I worked with all different types of kids due to the inclusion in that school. I worked a lot with this one girl. She had Cerebral Palsy and could only move her toes. So she wrote with her toes, she typed. She had a special computer, she typed with her toes. She was absolutely amazing, inspiring to all the other kids. So I think it was at that point-it wasn't until my fourth year in college that I actually made a commitment to it. (Interview, 6/17/02).

Rita's comments suggest that this experience in working with a student with "special needs" greatly affirmed her ideas about an inclusive classroom in which student differences did not limit potential to achieve. After being accepted into a teacher preparation program at Boston College, Rita did her student teaching in an inclusion class; there were several children who had special needs in Nancy's second grade class, and Rita remembered that Nancy "...never treated those kids differently. She was very

welcoming” (Interview, 4/17/02). These student teaching experiences in Nancy’s second grade classroom seemed to deepen Rita’s understanding of learning communities, and the types of teacher dispositions that effectively foster inclusiveness, such as acceptance, respect, and compassion.

Taken together, Rita’s pretraining and preservice experiences provided a model for teaching from a “colorblind” perspective that profoundly shaped her image of successful learning communities for diverse students. As a student, and later as a teacher-in-training, Rita was deeply moved by the power of inclusion and the success that students with “differences” could achieve when teachers quietly acknowledged those students and their differences, yet treated them as if they were the same as the other community members. Overall, the lessons learned from teachers like Mrs. Nelson and Nancy served Rita well, for they took root and blossomed into the principles of teaching that Rita was deeply committed to: success for all students despite differences, the importance of developing an inclusive learning community for students, the responsibility that teachers must take in providing the emotional, academic, and behavioral support necessary for some students’ success in the community.

However, the lessons that Rita desperately needed this year, in the midst of the crisis in her third grade learning community, were ones that she never learned. Because the modeling of a “colorblind” perspective occurred during an “apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie, 1975), Rita was not privy to the “inner world” of teachers and their strategies for dealing with the tensions and conflicts that this “colorblind” philosophy could create in the complicated world of teaching and learning. Therefore, she never learned how Mrs. Nelson and Nancy addressed individual student differences in their

learning communities, and since Rita could not remember ever talking about differences in an open and honest way during those experiences, she believed that the best way to handle these differences was not to talk openly about them with students. In the past, this silence about differences seemed to work well, but this year, her students were raising questions about the differences they saw, hoping to break that wall of silence and open the doors of dialogue.

Rita's new horizons and gradual changes: Learning to address student diversity

In opening the doors of dialogue about student differences, Rita seemed to realize that she needed to rethink her conception of “colorblindness”; for many months, she had deeply believed that her students did not see color, that the fact that they played together on the playground meant that they were unaware of differences in students, and accepted others for “being human” (Interview, 1/15/02). Yet the questions about “fair treatment” which students were raising suggested that they did see differences, and that they wanted to understand more about them and how they affected their learning community. While these incidents were important, probably the “turning point” for Rita occurred one day when she sat down with Emma, a European American student, during Drop Everything And Read (DEAR) time:

I pulled up next to Emma and she was reading a book on Jackie Robinson, and I said, “Well, why did you choose this book?” and she said she was interested in learning more about African American people. And I thought, “Well, that was really interesting!” No one had forced her to pick that book, but it was something that she was interested in, interested in learning more about. (Interview, 1/23/02).

Rita was fairly surprised that Emma had selected the book about Jackie Robinson because DEAR time was a time where students could read any book they wished, so the

fact that Emma was reading that book signified her personal interest in African Americans. Yet Rita was also very pleased that Emma had chosen this book, and it seemed that for the first time, Rita realized that a student like Emma who apparently “saw differences” was interested in learning more about those differences, not in an effort to make others feel ashamed or devalued, but because she thought they were unique. In talking with Emma, Rita discovered that students are genuinely curious about differences that they see, and given the appropriate context, they could learn about differences in a way that fostered acceptance, respect, and affirmation.

As Rita began to consider some of the positive implications of openly talking about student differences in the learning community, she was still uncertain if these differences were truly worth discussing. In March, after attending an in-service workshop on diversity, Rita articulated just how significant these differences were to her teaching:

We had this in-service workshop in March, and that was about diversity in the schools. And they had a panel of women who were each from a different culture and [one of the things] they talked about was...eye contact. And that's one of the things I demand from the children; when I'm talking I would like you look at me. But in some cultures children are taught to look down when they're being reprimanded or when an adult is speaking to them. And it really got me to think about how I treated different cultures, different kids in my classroom. And I remembered having said, 'Duane you need to look at me when I'm talking.' And I thought, 'Well maybe at home his parents don't want to look at him when he's talking to an adult.' So, when I went back into the classroom, it really caused me to think. I thought, 'Well, maybe I should not ask students to give me eye contact when I'm talking. If they're listening they can show me that they're listening by responding appropriately or something like that.' (Interview, 4/17/02)

Rita's comments reveal the powerful introspective perspective that Rita took towards her own practice as a result of the diversity workshop. Listening to panelists openly discussing their cultural differences, and the impacts of these differences upon

everyday behaviors like making eye contact, affirmed to Rita that she should indeed acknowledge these differences and make appropriate accommodations for them. More important, Rita seemed to recognize the importance of talking honestly and directly about differences as a way to provide insightful information and to express pride in one's identity.

A few weeks later, John, a European American student was diagnosed with Tourette's Syndrome, and he was having some difficulties adjusting because "some of the kids were coming up to him and asking him, 'Why are you doing this or that?' and it always seemed to be about his ticks" (Interview, 5/8/02). A few days later, John and his mother asked Rita if they could share with the class about his condition, and although Rita had several reservations, she allowed John and his mother to talk about it with the class. In reflecting upon the experience, Rita explains the invaluable lessons she learned about openly and honestly addressing student differences:

...It was hard at the beginning because John had outbursts, and the kids kind of didn't know how to treat him. And so I had to accept him for who he was, and I had to teach about those differences. So, with John, talking about the Tourette's with everyone was important....[And] I guess in the past, I just did not talk about those things because I thought, "You know, maybe the kids don't want it to be known that they are different." And when Mrs. Bissell, John's mom, said, "John would really like to talk about it," I was like, "Humm, I'm not sure that's a good idea." But after they came in and talked about it,the kids were more accepting of him...so in the end, no one ever makes fun of anyone else;...there are occasional times when kids make fun of people, but for the most part, kids are very accepting of those differences (Interview, 5/8/02)

For Rita, the diversity workshop and her experience with John's Tourette's Syndrome represented two "critical moments" in Rita's development as a teacher who aspires to be successful with diverse students. By providing new information and new perspectives about addressing individual student differences, these two experiences

caused Rita to think deeply and critically about her teaching and her learning community. In her reflections of her practice, Rita used the new information she learned from these experiences to challenge her old conceptions of “colorblindness” as a perspective of “silence” about individual differences, and decided to solve the crisis in the community by breaking this silence and trying to address student differences more directly and honest way.

For the remainder of the year, Rita actively pursued new avenues for talking about student differences with the learning community. For example, she invited Mrs. Pulliam, the counselor, to do a workshop to teach her students that “everyone is different from everyone else, and though we might share the same color our backgrounds are completely different from one another” (Interview, 4/17/02). Further, Rita was more willing to openly discuss student differences of members of the learning community, and in so doing, reinforced the kinds of dispositions that were essential for creating an inclusive community, such as acceptance, warmth, and patience; particularly, Rita discovered that her students were more tolerant of Troy when she spoke directly about his unique learning needs as an autistic student:

I found that a lot of the kids are very accepting of Troy, even though he is different from them and he’s very impulsive and it’s difficult for him to sit on the rug [during whole group activities]. But at the beginning of the year, people were having a hard time with his outbursts and things like that...So I had to show that I accepted kids with different needs, and I had to teach about those differences....I told them that we all learn in different ways, and some of Troy’s spontaneity, or his outbursts, is just the way he responds to what’s being taught, that’s kind of his way to say, “I understand” ...[But I found] I had to teach those things like patience and acceptance (Interview, 5/8/02)

As Rita began to discuss student differences more openly, she realized that the questions and issues her students raised no longer created tension or conflict in the community; in fact, these questions became invaluable “teachable moments” for Rita and her students:

We were talking about the explorer Juan Ponce de Leon the other day. And the kids were like “Oh! His name is so weird.” And I said, “Why is his name weird?” And we started talking about the fact that he’s from Spain, and that may be a common name for someone who is from Spain. So we don’t say that it’s weird, it’s different from what we know in our culture; but it’s not strange, and we can’t say that. So the next day we were on our field trip, and some of the kids said, “Look at the way that person’s dressed. That person’s dressed kind of weird.” And I said, “Remember what we talked about yesterday, it’s not really weird, it’s different from what we know....In their culture...they may think that we dress strangely! So we need to get in the habit of saying that it’s not strange, it’s different from what we’re used to but we have to accept it.” And so we’ve actually been talking about that a lot in our classroom...(Interview, 4/17/02)

Earlier in the year, Rita probably would not have had this kind of conversation with her students because she would have been uncomfortable talking about student differences. By April, Rita was able to not only listen and respond to her students and their reactions to difference, she actually engaged her students in this kind of discussion. As she and her students contemplated differences and the world around them, they were able to better understand that individual differences were not limited to culture or behavior or learning styles; their vision of difference expanded to include everyone, a perspective that Rita nicely summarized:

Well, I think everyone in this classroom brings with them a different background. I mean even two white children would bring a different background.... But everyone in this school is different. Some kids may be religious and some people may be opening talking about God and what he means to them, and some kids are not religious. So I feel like everyone in the classroom is different from one another. So I think that’s important to...teach the kids to respect that....(Interview, 4/17/02).

At the end of the year, it was clear that Rita had averted a community crisis by making a few significant changes to her philosophy on teaching and building community with diverse students. Although she was still “colorblind” in the sense that she wanted to create an inclusive community in which students were successful regardless of their individual student differences, she was no longer “silent” on the subject of individual differences. In creating a space in the classroom community to talking more openly about student differences, she supported the students’ natural curiosity about difference, and provided the opportunity for them to learn new information and to develop positive attitudes towards individual differences.

Perhaps the most compelling example of Rita’s progress occurred during a warm, sunny day in the first week of June (Fieldnotes, 6/6/02). The “Meet the Author” bookshelf, located at the front of the classroom, was overflowing with books. The covers of these books depicted a wide range of interests, from fictional stories about African Americans, European Americans, or Hispanic characters, to nonfiction books about animals, reptiles and insects, and each book had a little yellow sticky with a student’s name. Rita explained that they were the kids’ favorite books and that she had asked them to write their names on the stickies so that other students would know who recommended that particular book. She said that for the past few days during DEAR time, the students had been reading books recommended by other students; for example, Emily and Hasan were reading nonfiction books that Luke recommended because all of them were interested in dogs. Unlike most students who would want to do as little reading as possible in June, Rita’s students were eager to read their friends’ favorite books, and the swapping and sharing of books within the community created such a high level of

enthusiasm and excitement that Rita decided to use these books as the basis of her summer reading list rather than the one provided by the school system.

What pleased Rita and her students most of all was the fact that the book display had been the idea of two community members: Duane, one of the autistic African American boys, and Rick, a European American boy. Rita happened to be walking down the hall with Duane and Rick, and asked what they could do about that center since Rita had returned all the books by the featured authors to the library. The boys suggested that everyone bring in their favorite books and recommend them to others, an idea that Rita instantly loved, and she asked Duane and Rick to share their suggestion in the front of the class. The learning community also thought it was a wonderful idea, so they brought in their books and wrote their names on the books that they recommended.

The book display symbolized the tremendous growth of Rita and her learning community, for they had struggled together to talk more openly and honestly about student differences in a way that still accepted and respected those differences. As a result, Rita and her students seemed to celebrate differences amongst students more openly. Consequently, children recommended books about the topics that they loved and which made them unique: Taylor, a lithe African American girl who loves to dance recommended Amazing Grace, and Rosario, a Hispanic American girl recommended a book called A Chair for My Mother about a Hispanic family, while other students like Solomon and Luke recommended a nonfiction book about animals. But in watching Rita's children that sunny morning, giggling at the silly pictures in a book, or pointing to a species they didn't know existed, or smiling as they made new friendships with characters of books they had just discovered, there was a sense that the joy of reading had

become the community's greatest similarity, that students could unite around a common love of literacy and the success of a community. For Rita and her students, perhaps that was the true beauty of being "colorblind."

Conclusion

Mrs. Matthews, the principal, once described Rita as a "fine beginning teacher," and indeed in her four years at Burnett Elementary, Rita has earned the reputation as a teacher who is hard-working and deeply committed to the success of all students. Central to Rita's effectiveness with African American students was her ability to build a motivational learning community that supported student change. Unlike teachers who blame lack of motivation on African American children and parents, Rita strongly believed that teachers can play an integral role in motivating students to learn, and to that end, she stimulated and reinforced students' intrinsic motivation by (a) using a "positive" approach to discipline through material and activity rewards (e.g., treats, PAT time) and by praising students for their accomplishments, (b) promoting social collaboration and cooperative learning and acknowledging and addressing students' physical, emotional, and academic need for safety, and (c) planning and implementing a wide variety of reading and writing activities in small (e.g., Book Club, centers) and whole group (e.g., read alouds, Writing Workshop) formats which provide multiple opportunities for successful literacy development. Rita's practices effectively support motivation for African American students because they promote the kind of social and collaborative learning environments which increase engagement in classroom activities while decreasing the risks typically associated with public performance (Brophy, 1998; Hale-

Benson, 1988). Further, teachers like Rita who take a more “social constructivist” approach to literacy, as evidenced through shared reading/writing activities such as Read Alouds, Writing Workshop, and Book Clubs, are likely to effectively facilitate African American students’ literacy development because these activities create authentic contexts in which students read and write for multiple purposes, and provide opportunities for students to construct their own meanings from texts (Routman, 1994).

While the classroom management strategies and instructional practices played an integral role in the resilience-building of African American students by supporting and stimulating intrinsic motivation, perhaps the most critical aspect of Rita’s learning community was its inclusiveness. By welcoming all students, despite their individual academic, social, or behavioral “differences,” making necessary accommodations and adjustments for students’ individual needs, and providing multiple opportunities for mastery learning, African American students were able to thrive and succeed. This year of “inclusive” success was particularly important for African American students like Tamara and Troy who were struggling readers, or Duane who was a struggling writer, because it reinforced the idea that they just as good as everyone else, and that if they worked hard and believed in themselves, they could overcome their “academic difficulties” and exceed their own expectations.

What was most intriguing about Rita’s approach to building an inclusive learning community was her deep commitment to “colorblindness.” Sonia Nieto (1994, 1996), Crenshaw (1997), Bonilla-Silva (2001) and other proponents of multicultural education argue that colorblindness is a perspective that may actually be detrimental to African American and other culturally-diverse students because it renders the “differences” of

these students invisible, ultimately devaluing and disaffirming the cultural identities and experiences of these children. Why, then, was Rita's colorblind philosophy quite successful with African American students? One possible reason is that Rita's philosophy of colorblindness expressed a strong belief in equal and fair treatment for all students that went far beyond the "good intentions" that many European American teachers have. To support all students' success, Rita actively tried to acknowledge and address individual student differences in terms of academic, behavior, or social issues; rather than "seeing color" (i.e. race or culture) as a "difference" stereotypical or prejudicial terms, and in so doing, she was able to avoid some of the prejudicial ideas about African American children that researchers like Hale-Benson (1988), Ladson-Billings, (1994), and Reglin (1995) contend are potentially devastating to the educational lives of these children. Thus, Rita's "colorblindness" protected her from making the assumption that Solomon's misbehavior was "typical since Black boys are hyper and they have problems controlling themselves," or from taking Duane's or Tamara's literacy difficulties as a strong indication that "most African American kids have low literacy skills." Rather than seeing these "differences" as "culturally-based" and feeling uncertain about how to help these African American students, Rita perceived these differences to be based upon academic, social, and behavioral issues, and believed that as a teacher, she could motivate them to make changes that would be beneficial for their academic careers. For some European American teachers like Rita, perhaps colorblindness might be an important source of protection that could prevent the kinds of incorrect assumptions or prejudicial statements about diverse students based upon negative stereotypes of various cultural and/or racial groups, and could empower teachers to believe that they can make a difference in the

lives of these students by helping them to make changes and become successful learners in school without feeling like they are “blaming” or “devaluing” the cultural or home experiences of these children.

Rita’s narrative raises another interesting issue that is generally overlooked in discussions about “colorblindness.” Multicultural educators like Sonia Nieto (1994, 1996) contend that colorblindness often results from acceptance of the dominant culture as the norm, thus European American teachers who claim that they “don’t see color” do so because they have difficulty with accepting student differences. In other words, colorblind European American teachers are likely to perceive student differences as deficits or deficiencies that are a result of their backgrounds while imaging themselves as the “standard” in society.

However, Rita’s conception of colorblindness suggests that European American teachers might not have difficulty accepting student difference, they might not know how to openly talk about the differences that they see. In Rita’s case, she clearly “saw” the differences in her students, and in fact, she tried to accommodate their needs within the learning community, but she did not how to address these issues with the students in her learning community; thus, when students began raising questions about the special accommodations that she was making for students like Troy or Joshua, Rita was uncertain how to answer them, because like many other European American teachers, she was extremely uncomfortable talking openly and honestly about these differences. Further. Rita was very hesitant to discuss the special learning needs that of an autistic student like Troy, or one who had Tourette’s Syndrome like John because she believed that talking directly about student differences might cause students to become less

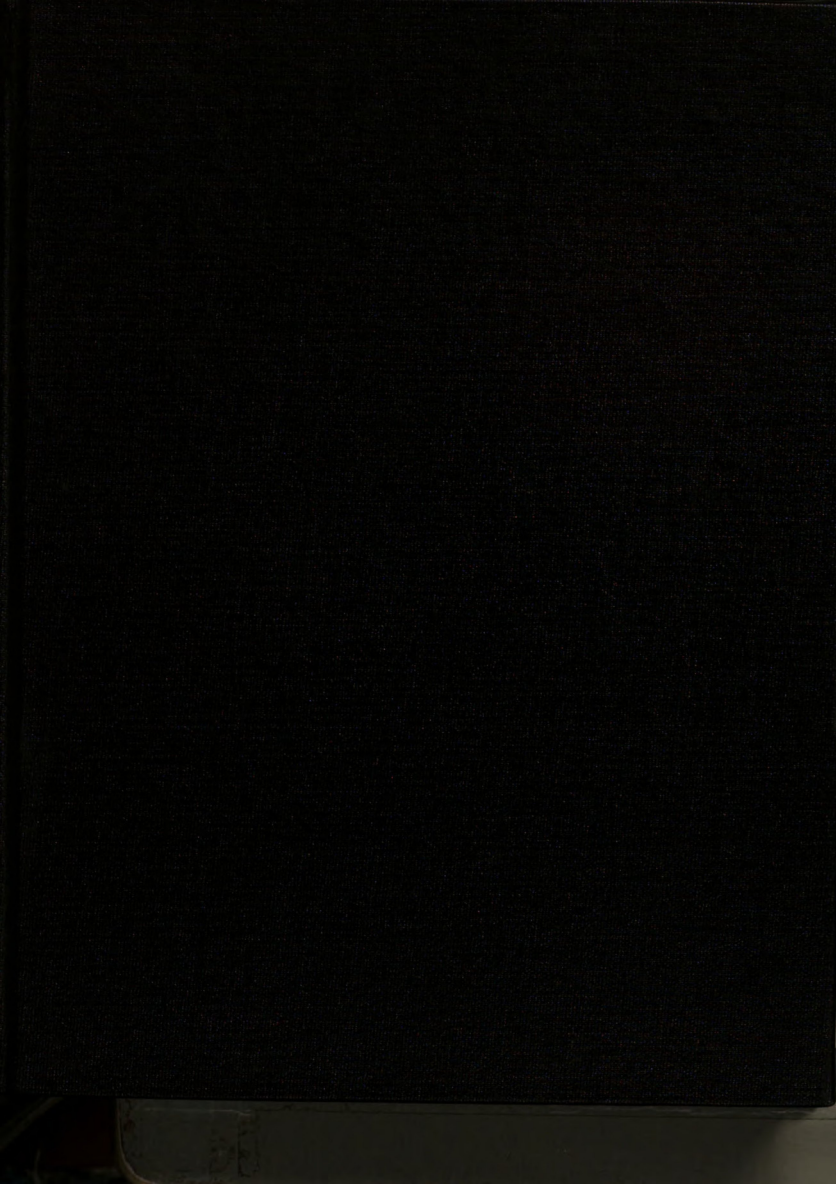
respectful and accepting of others. Rita's apprehensiveness towards openly and directly addressing student differences in the classroom strongly resonates with findings from recent studies of European American teachers by Lewis (2001) and Schmidt (1998, 2001): these teachers espoused a "colorblind" philosophy, not because they did not "see" and acknowledge student differences, but to mask their fear of talking about difference in the "wrong way" or of being perceived by others as being racist or prejudiced. Rita's experiences also suggest that "colorblindness" can be a deeply-personal philosophy, rooted in European American teachers' memories of an experience in their lives when they felt "different" that was both negative and traumatic, and as a result, these teachers might be even less inclined to talk about differences for fear of "singling kids out" and making them feel as inferior or devalued as they once felt.

In revealing the complexities of a European American teacher who at once sees difference but aspires to treat students in a "colorblind" manner, Rita's narrative offers a more nuanced understanding of colorblindness. Much of what we know about colorblindness has been presented on a "moral soapbox," such that many European American teachers have been made to feel as if they were ineffective professionals, or even worse, "bad people" if they used this term to describe themselves or their practice. Colorblindness, from this perspective, is an ideological tool of European Americans as members of the "dominant culture" designed to stigmatize attempts to raise questions about racial inequality and legitimate the status quo (Crenshaw, 1997). Rita's story offers a very different interpretation of colorblindness as a perspective that conveys genuine sense of uncertainty and anxiety in trying to work with African American children in a way that is both equitable and equal. By approaching her community-

building from a colorblind perspective, Rita had hoped to resolve the acute tensions and conflicts arising in the classroom from these contradictory goals of wanting every student to success while treating each student in a fair and objective manner. For European American teachers like Rita who “see differences” and attempt to accommodate them in ways that promote success for all students, the tension between conflicting social goals like equity and equality can create daunting practical problems, potentially threatening the existence of the learning community and compromising the achievements of its members. Therefore, rather than using “colorblindness” as an ideological tool for legitimating the dominant culture, rather, European American teachers like Rita might be using this philosophy as a “first step” in an attempt to solve practical issues associated with the paradox between equity and equality in “dealing with differences” in the classroom.

Perhaps the most significant contribution that Rita’s narrative makes to our understanding of colorblindness comes from tracing her path in solving her community crisis. Rita’s struggle to change her approach to addressing student difference in the community is characterized by Cohen’s (1988) contention that educational reform begins with teachers who are willing to do the difficult work of simultaneously “letting go of the old and creating the new.” Letting go of her fear of talking openly about student difference was undoubtedly difficult because it was so deeply rooted in her own early life experiences and school memories, yet Rita was bravely taking steps to break the “silence” around student differences. In “creating the new,” Rita found herself in search of a voice that could speak honestly about student differences while still conveying warmth, respect and acceptance of those differences. Rita slowly developed this voice by

critically reflecting on her practice, learning new information about cultural diversity from in-service workshops, inviting parents and the school counselor to talk with the class, and taking risks to open discussions about differences in class, and these changes in self and practice caused a shift in Rita's voice that was both distinct and dramatic. By the end of the year, Rita had begun to talk with more confidence about difference, even offering her own ideas about the various kinds of differences amongst students in her class. And through her development of a different voice to talk about differences, Rita became more to the voices of her students as they questioned and wondered about the similarities and differences that they saw. It was these "new" voices of Rita and her students, their willingness to deeply engage with a paradox of similarity and difference that make us all human, and their ability to speak of the similarities without dishonesty and differences without derision, that capture the essence of "colorblindness" in a learning community.



TO TELL

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**TO TELL A NEW STORY: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF THE THEORY AND
PRACTICE OF CULTURALLY RELEVANT TEACHING**

VOLUME II

By

Jennifer Danridge Turner

A DISSERTATION

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Department of Counseling, Educational Psychology and Special Education

2003

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CHAPTER FOUR

LYDIA BROWNING'S NARRATIVE: "JOY IN THE STRUGGLE"

"There you are! You! Come here right now!!" demanded an angry voice from the back of the library annex. Lydia, who was complimenting her sixth grade class on the engaging literature discussion group they had just had, stopped mid-sentence. Several students jumped in their seats, startled by the unfamiliar voice. As if in a trance, we all turned around slowly, and there in the doorway stood a tall man with black hair, dressed in a white shirt with a black tie, and a dark scowl on his face. He was peering over at Eric, a tall, lanky African American boy, who slowly stood up and trudged towards the irate man standing in the doorway.

Scowling, Mr. Cordello pointed at Eric with a long, thin finger. "This young man's behavior was completely inappropriate as he was walking into the library. He was singing and making loud noises, and when I told him to stop, he was very rude to me!" Looking expectantly at Lydia, the man folded his arms tightly across his chest and waited for her to reprimand Eric.

Standing quietly at the front of the small room, Lydia listened patiently to Mr. Cordello's complaints. She often brought her sixth grade class here to the library annex when she wanted to "spread out" and do the kinds of group activities that simply weren't feasible in their small portable classroom. Lately, however, Lydia had a nagging feeling that she and her class were not welcome here, that some teachers thought her children were not well-behaved enough to come over to use the facilities in the "main building." For a few moments, Lydia looked around the room, and her gaze fell upon Eric, standing

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next to Mr. Cordello. Though Eric was new to her class this year, she had quickly learned that she reached him most effectively when she searched for the “right words,” the kind of words that penetrated the wall that he erected around himself. Lydia seemed to instinctively know that she needed to calm him down because his flashing eyes, the rocking back and forth on his heels, and the stony look on his face meant that he was preparing for battle with Mr. Cordello. In a quiet and soothing voice, Lydia tried to quell the storm by appealing to his sense of integrity: “Eric, what would be the right thing to say to Mr. Cordello at this point?”

“Sorry,” Eric smirked.

Frowning, Lydia said, “Eric, that didn’t sound sincere, and I would not accept that apology.”

“And I am NOT going to accept that apology, either!” Mr. Cordello shouted, clearly agitated by Eric’s disrespectful manner.

The tension in the room was explosive. Several students shifted uncomfortably in their seats, uncertain, wondering what would happen. The room was deathly silent, and even some of the girls who talked incessantly during class were ominously quiet. Sighing deeply, Lydia knew that the situation required an even more delicate approach than she had initially thought. She knew she needed to reach Eric, to touch him, before matters became worse. Lydia took several small steps towards Eric, not in a confrontational stance, but as a gesture that communicated that she was “on his side.” Leaning in towards him, she smiled slightly, saying, “You know, Eric, you have excellent manners, and you usually take great pride in them. It’s a shame that you are not showing them to Mr.

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Cordello right now. How would he know that you can be one of the most well-mannered boys in my class?"

Eric looked at Lydia for a few moments, then turned towards Mr. Cordello. "Mr. Cordello, I am sorry for being rude and disrespectful towards you in the library. I apologize." Eric said, this time with sincere remorse.

"Well, at least he knows the right things to say. That's half the battle," Mr. Cordello huffed, and quickly stormed away.

Upset and embarrassed by the scene, Eric exploded. "That man has PROBLEMS!!! It wasn't me making all that noise in the library, it was some other boy walking behind me, and Mr. Cordello didn't even listen when I tried to tell him!! He just started blaming me." He slumped down in his seat, covering his head in his long arms, desperately trying to hide the tears in his eyes.

Lydia walked towards Eric, and calmly said, "Look at me, Eric." She waited until his eyes met hers, then she smiled and continued: "Eric, at this point, it's over. Your story might be right, and his might be wrong. Sometimes teachers do make mistakes. We all do; we're human. But Mr. Cordello is still an adult, and he deserves respect. So next time, share your feelings about an adult with me privately rather than commenting about him in front of the entire class, OK?" Eric nodded his head in agreement, and Lydia turned the attention of her sixth grade class back to their literature discussion group.

Scenes like this one are played out in elementary schools across the country. Though it may appear that the incident is simply about student misbehavior, the depth of emotions shown by the European American teachers and African American students involved suggest that much more is at stake. The fundamental issue is one of authority,

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and the ways that it is acquired and expressed in teacher-student interactions. When African American students misbehave, European American teachers often believe that they possess the appropriate authority to demand that students change their behavior and make appropriate amends (e.g., apologize) because they are in a hierarchical position over students (Darling-Hammond, 1997). If African American students do not change their behavior or demonstrate the proper “respect,” many European American teachers perceive this as a direct challenge to their authority as a teacher and an adult (Hale-Benson, 1982). Consequently, some teachers might feel frustrated, irritated, or even somewhat defensive in these kinds of situations.

African American students also have a strong affective response to this kind of encounter with their European American teachers. Whether they have misbehaved or not, African American students like Eric believe that their teachers must earn their position of authority and power. Because African American people often view issues of power and authority different than people from “mainstream” European American backgrounds, they expect authority “to be earned by personal efforts and exhibited by personal characteristics” (Delpit, 1995, p. 35) rather than being acquired through social position. Trouble arises when African American students perceive teachers to be exerting authority and power that they have not “personally” earned, and in situations like the one between Eric and Mr. Cordello, they might feel aggrieved because they think they have been treated unfairly, and they may not follow these teachers’ directive at all because they see them as “weak” or “ineffectual” (Delpit, 1995; Hale-Benson, 1994).

What was most remarkable about this incident was the way that Lydia responded to Eric and ultimately resolved the conflict. In contrast to the authority derived from

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“social” power that Mr. Cordello seemed to draw upon, Lydia used a very different kind of power as the basis of her interactions with Eric. Her power was not rooted within the hierarchal power vested in her social position as a “teacher”; rather, she called upon the authority and respect that she earned through her capacity to develop close relationships with African American students that were both affective and instructional. In other words, Lydia used her “personal” power as a means of establishing authority, and by calling Eric’s attention to their close relationship and demonstrating her willingness to protect him, Lydia was able to successfully persuade him to apologize to Mr. Cordello.

This chapter presents the story of Lydia and her struggle to develop personal relationships with her African American students and to enact “personal power” in ways that foster their resilience. Her story begins with a description of the struggle of teaching upper elementary African American students, and the negative images of teaching that some teachers at Burnett have enacted as a means of establishing and maintaining control. Next, the development of Lydia’s “personal” power in relating to African American students is traced through a series of significant personal and professional experiences. Finally, Lydia describes two complementary images of teaching that are enacted through her sense of “personal” power and serve as a foundation for her classroom management and literacy instructional practices.

The Struggle to Teach Upper Elementary African American Students

There was no doubt that the upper elementary teachers at Burnett Elementary School had a difficult job. Developmentally, the fifth and sixth grade students were at the stage where they wanted to assert their independence and were beginning to rebel. Lydia

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noted that the sixth graders could be particularly “mouthy,” especially towards the end of the year when they “started to get too big for their britches because they are going into seventh grade” (Interview, 4/9/02). During these years, hormones kicked into high gear, and teachers discovered that students paid more attention to the opposite sex than to their books. Though most of this attraction was harmless, there were incidents where the school counselors had to intervene because fifth and sixth grade students seemed to be inappropriately “sexually” advanced (Counselor Interview, 5/8/02). Physically, the students were developing at a rapid rate; the boys were growing taller and were more prone to fighting and being “macho,” while the girls were becoming more “womanly.” Mrs. Melville and Mrs. Phillips, the school counselors, thought that the African American girls were particularly maturing more quickly than the others, which lead to some “relational” problems with boys who were attracted to them, and resulted in petty “cat fights” and other social problems with other girls (Counselor Interview, 5/8/02).

As an upper elementary teacher, Lydia had additional instructional challenges. Since there was not enough space in the main building for all the classes, Lydia and a few of the other sixth grade teachers had their classrooms in the portable trailers parked adjacent to the playgrounds. This year, Lydia had thirty students, and there was barely enough room for desks and chairs for all of them. Unlike classrooms in the main building which had space and seating for small-group instruction, Lydia had to crowd her students and their chairs in the small space near the door for guided reading groups. Throughout the year, Lydia arranged and rearranged her room, desperately trying to make more space; in early fall, desks were arranged in small work groups, by winter they were lined up in three long horizontal rows, and by June, the desks were replaced by small tables

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that sat three or four students (Fieldnotes, 6/4/02). Lydia changed the seating seasonally, perhaps because the air conditioner had to be kept running year-round, and on chilly days when Lydia encouraged students to wear their heavy winter coats to keep warm, the room seemed to literally shrink.

Lydia also had an extremely “diverse” student population. In terms of cultural diversity, 7 out of 30 students were African American, 1 was bicultural (African American and European American), 1 was Jewish, and at least 5 spoke Spanish or Korean as their first language and knew very little English. Lydia was greatly concerned that her ESL students would be “lost” in this kind of classroom, and she wondered if they would be able to make friends with the others. Of the seven African American students, four were boys, three of whom had the reputation of having “behavior problems” by other teachers in the school, while the other boy was in a “pull-out” special education class for most of the day. Eric, the boy who had the problem with Mr. Cordello, was known to have particularly difficult behavioral issues and had a “terrible time” in fifth grade, yet Lydia went to the administration and requested that he be placed in her class because she saw “something special” in him. However, she was still quite uncertain about how things would turn out, and she wondered if Eric would have some difficulties fitting in with her other three African American boys who had “looped” together in fifth grade (Interview, 10/24/01). While Lydia generally considered the “looping effect,” or staying with a group of students for two or more years, was an asset, she was always concerned about new students like Eric who would need to find their “place” within the classroom community (Interview, 10/24/01).

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Finally, Lydia had to deal with some difficult health issues this year. As a woman in her early sixties, Lydia was hard of hearing, and had some difficulty moving around because of arthritis. She also had a painful eye problem, which required surgery on both her eyes this year. Lydia hated to miss school, but her doctors told her that the surgery could not wait. After the surgery, Lydia's eyesight began to improve, but she still had some blurriness of vision (Interview, 5/21/02).

Given these multiple changes, Lydia, as well as her upper elementary colleagues, often struggled to find ways to effectively manage the African American and other students in their classrooms, and at the heart of this struggle was the issue of authority. While Lydia agreed that teachers need authority in order to teach and successfully guide their students, she was alarmed by the means some of her colleagues used to acquire that power. Lydia was convinced that too many upper elementary teachers at Burnett derived their authority by perceiving teaching and learning to be a serious "business," and as a result, their students were suffering emotionally and academically.

Lydia first noticed that teaching, and school in general, had become a "business" while traveling through the hallways at Burnett Elementary. She saw so many teachers with sour faces, snapping at the students as they stood in line for the bathroom or for a drink of water, never once smiling or laughing (Interview, 1/23/02). Based upon her observations, Lydia speculated that many teachers had lost their love for children, and at some point in their careers had begun to perceive the profession of teaching as a "business" in which learning "profits" were earned by those teachers who were strictest with students. Most of these teachers were not intentionally being cruel towards students; they simply assumed that being a teacher meant taking students and learning very

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“seriously.” However, Lydia thought it unfortunate that some teachers took the “business” metaphor of schooling a bit too far: “Sometimes we can be so businesslike in our instruction,” Lydia lamented during one interview, “that we can forget that our students are people with real feelings and thoughts, and it’s our students who suffer so much” (Interview, 4/9/02).

Lydia was particularly concerned for African American students because her European American colleagues seemed to treat them in an especially “negative” manner (Interview, 1/23/02). She noted that several upper elementary teachers “were always so negative, and it was always against African American students. They never said “African American,” they would always describe the child himself, but you knew that they were African American” (Interview, 1/23/02). To further elaborate upon the concept of “negative treatment,” Lydia related an incident that she witnessed in which a fifth grade European American teacher terrorized an African American student:

I won’t say their names, but I am appalled at the ways some of these teachers talk to kids...And I saw one teacher last year-- Etta and I were standing there-- and she completely lost her temper with an African American student, and she got right down in the child’s face and screamed at him. She said, “Are you calling me a liar?!?” and the poor kid was standing there like this ((Lydia’s eyes were wide, her hands were covering her face, and she was trembling)). And I kind of diffused the whole thing by saying, “I don’t think this is the time that we really need to discuss this out here in the hallway. I think we need to think about what happened...” And it was just bad. And walking away I put my arms around the child and said, “Sometimes adults lose control.” I felt so bad for that student...that teacher could have cleared those rules up in the classroom rather than standing there in a student’s face screaming at him (Interview, 10/24/01)

Lydia’s words and tone clearly conveyed the sadness and outrage that she experienced after hearing a colleague speak to a child in that manner. Lydia was so upset that she and Etta talked about the incident at length, and she even considered reporting

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this colleague to the administration. Though Lydia ultimately decided not to mention this incident to the administration, she was deeply troubled by this kind of authority and power that could make an African American student tremble in fear.

In her heart, Lydia believed that the colleagues who treated African American students in this way were not malicious or evil people, and in fact, they probably had good intentions. Lydia's theory was that these colleagues "relished in the idea that they have power" (Interview, 4/9/02) without even being consciously aware of it. Yet she also thought that some European American teachers particularly felt that they needed to draw upon their "social" power, which Lydia described as the "forced presence to make students do something," as a means of teaching African American students because they believed that firm control yields successful learning (Interview, 4/9/02). As a result, these teachers enacted images of teaching that so greatly exaggerated their hierarchal "social" power that they became obsessed with their authority and ultimately turned tyrannical. Lydia believed this to be true of Mr. Cordello, the teacher who confronted Eric in the library, and the image of teaching that he enacted in his classroom:

[Mr. Cordello] is a sixth grade teacher who rules his class with an iron fist. Like this ((Lydia tightly clenched her fist and banged it on the table)). His kids are like this ((Lydia's eyes are wide, she has a nervous, frightened look on her face, then bows her head)).... During Family Life Education [their sex education class], he was one of the teachers...and I mean the kids couldn't even sneeze... There were some things that they were discussing and the kids got all excited about, and he scratched it right away.....He wouldn't even give them a chance to breathe. I had to sit in there, because on Monday he kicked Marquet and Eric ((two African American boys in Lydia's class)) out, and he kicked them out of class on Tuesday and Wednesday. So on Thursday and Friday, I went in there to protect my boys (Interview, 4/9/02)

Lydia's impressions are both vivid and disturbing. Her description of a teacher who desires absolute control over student behavior—even their most basic physiological

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functions like sneezing and breathing-- characterizes the “dictatorial” image of teaching that is made possible by exaggerated hierarchal “social” power. In wielding this tremendous power over students, even teachers with the best intentions can quickly become full of their own sense of authority. Lydia believed that European American teachers like Mr. Cordello who drew upon this kind of power viewed teaching and learning as a struggle between themselves and African American students. Mr. Cordello seemed to envision the classroom as a battleground upon which the “war of learning” was won by the most powerful, thus he constantly battled against African American students, knowing all the while that the hierarchal positioning of teachers and students gave him an advantage. With the power vested in his hierarchal position as a teacher, Mr. Cordello could defeat the African American students (e.g. kicking them out of class), and use his authority to dominate and ultimately oppress them.

Lydia understood that upper elementary teachers faced a difficult challenge: they were expected to compete with the hormones, the petty fighting, the gossip and the incessant chatter, for the attention of their fifth and sixth graders. Yet she did not want to be viewed as a “tyrant” or a “dictator” by using authoritarian power to control her African American students because that was not the type of person that she wanted to be. Describing herself as a “nurturing person...who believes in contact with kids,...and who believes in putting my arm around them and sharing our energy together” (Interview, 5/21/02), Lydia was firmly committed to teaching and relating to African American students in such a way that she could remain “true to herself.” Consequently, Lydia’s perspective on authority and classroom management was strikingly different than those of her fifth and sixth grade colleagues. The type of power and authority that Lydia

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aspired to use was rooted with her own personal qualities, namely, her nurturing personality and her highly affective relational style, and through this power, Lydia hoped to reach out to African American students and connect with them in ways that created a loving and caring classroom environment. Lydia envisioned her classroom to be a “second home” for her African American students, a place where they could laugh, and talk, and learn together, rather than a battleground. Unlike many of her colleagues, Lydia was willing to earn the respect of African American students, and in calling forth her own “personal” power, she was able to teach with authority rooted within a sense of personal integrity and moral responsibility. But what exactly was Lydia’s “personal” power and where did it come from? And more importantly, how did it enhance her ability to successfully teach African American students? We answer these questions by turning to the story of Lydia’s “personal” power as a source of authority for fostering resilience for African American students.

Developing “Personal” Power

Lydia believed that her “personal” power emanated from her ability to instantly connect with people in a way that makes them feel comfortable, and to develop these connections into close, affective relationships. She described herself as a person who “has never met a stranger. I always find some way to connect” (Interview, 1/23/02). She attributed her warm rapport with others as a gift from her father, whom she described as “very outward and boisterous, and fun, and laughed all the time” (Interview, 4/18/02). In reminiscing about the many good times she shared with her father, Lydia noted that he had a great sense of humor and therefore “never had an unhappy day in his life,” and it

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was this ability to put people at ease, to laugh and joke and enjoy life with others, that Lydia believed she received from him. Lydia also had vivid memories of her grandfather and her great-aunt; both had hearts full of generosity and love for those who were less fortunate, and they instilled their spirit of compassion and empathy within her at an early age.

Clearly, Lydia believed that her family had a tradition of “personal” power that enabled them to connect with anyone they met. However, Lydia’s family, particularly her parents, had a difficult time connecting with African American people. As a child, Lydia lived with her family in a small town outside of Louisville, Kentucky, and her family hired an African American maid named Mamie. Lydia recalled that her family’s relationship with Hattie seemed warm, but in reality was quite distant:

Hattie was a maid that came, we loved Mamie, and she was my first remembrances of an African American person. I mean, my mother used to go to her house, and take her baby, and baby-sit her baby, and this is kind of why I was like, shocked, and when I got older...[and] I realized that my parents were a little biased (Interview, 1/23/02)

Lydia believed that this “distance” between themselves and Hattie was a result of her parents’ bias, which she described as “...a status thing, [a way of saying] ‘this is my place and this is their place’” (Interview, 1/23/02). Though Lydia did not think that her parents were intensely hateful or bitter towards African American people, her memories of her parents and their bias were quite painful for her. Lydia described one particular conversation with her father and its devastating impact:

I remember when I found out that my father was a wee bit prejudiced. We were talking and I can remember this is when it came about, I can remember exactly! We sat at the kitchen table eating dinner and I was talking about...my friend from Jamaica. And we were talking and...Dad said to me “Is she Black?” and I said “Oh, yeah!” and Dad said, “You don’t sit down there and eat at the same table with her do you?” and I said

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“Of course I do!” And he said “Gee, I don’t know if I could do that.” Oh my gosh, I almost, I just ... I absolutely went into a panic! And I said, “Daddy, I can’t believe you’d say that.”...And Dad said it like it was more of an observation on his part that “ I don’t know if I could do that.” And I think, I think it really crushed me because you have a picture of your father as being perfect...And I found a little crack. That was very hard to take. But I loved him anyway. (Interview, 4/18/02)

By the time Lydia finished this story, her face was wet with tears, and the anguish she felt in knowing that her father felt this way about African American people was painfully obvious. While drying her tears, Lydia said that, years later, she came to respect her mother and father because they were able to raise her “without bias”:

We were never privy to any of my parents’ bias. And I asked my mother later in life, I asked her about their feelings, and she said, “Lydia, we grew up in a different age, and this is the way we learned things. Down deep I didn’t think it was right. But it was hard to change because it was embedded in us. But we left it up to you kids, to follow your own instincts.” And now I think that’s a wonderful role model! (Interview, 4/18/02)

Lydia deeply admired her parents because they allowed their children to develop their own opinions and beliefs about African American people, and as a result, she happily reported that none of her siblings “believed what my parents believed” (Interview, 4/18/02). In fact, Lydia developed strong feelings that were exactly opposite of her parents: she believed that European American and African American people should be able to work, live, and socialize with one another as they pleased, rather than living lives of separation and limitation in the “spaces” that society set up for them. These feelings were so intensive that Lydia felt compelled to “advocate” for African Americans and their right to equality. The first time Lydia stood up for her beliefs occurred during her senior year in high school:

In our high school, a Catholic girls' school, we had an African American. This was in 1958, and she went to our school all four years and we never

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Lydia's impassioned sense of advocacy intensified in college. As a math major, Lydia became good friends with "Afro-Caribbean" girls and found their personal experiences with social injustice to be extremely powerful:

When I got to college, and I had a lot of friends from Haiti, and their fathers were Prime ministers and they were rich. One of my best friends was a math major from Jamaica. Her father was in the government, real high in the government in Jamaica. And she said to me, "You know people here treat me so different!" ((Lydia laughs, slightly embarrassed)). And we had long talks about bias, and we talked about race a lot, because they couldn't understand how they were considered first-class citizens at home and when they got our country they weren't...and I was very interested in these girls and their experiences (Interview, 4/18/02)

These Afro-Caribbean girls and their stories moved Lydia deeply, for they seemed to make social inequity and injustice even more tangible. Because these girls were close friends, Lydia was able to talk about serious issues like race and prejudice in a way that allowed her to empathize with the pain they had experienced in this country. After talking about these issues and hearing their stories, Lydia became even more determined to eradicate such injustice within society in whatever way she could. Though she recognized that she was not called to be a great leader "like Martin Luther King, Jr." Lydia expressed a serious commitment to advocacy even in the "small situations" of her own life:

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couple--we were all newlyweds--- and we went to the beach. As we were coming home, and we stopped at a restaurant. We were in the south, we were in South Carolina, and we stopped at a restaurant and there were no prices on the menu. And we said to the waitress, "Why aren't there any prices?" She said, "We don't have anyone come in whom we don't want, we just jack the prices up." We all folded our menus up and got up and we walked out. And we went home hungry. But we were making a statement. [There] was no fistfight, no yelling; we just got up and we left. And we all felt the same way about things (Interview, 4/18/02)

Collectively, these incidents are illustrative of Lydia's intense feelings about advocacy for African American people. As a European American person, Lydia wanted to relate to African American people on equal terms, just as she did with her Afro-Caribbean friends from college. Rather than becoming pessimistic about change because her own parents were biased, Lydia felt passionately that she could make change for African American people happen, even if it was on a very small scale, and she was willing to make personal sacrifices to stand up for her beliefs. Consequently, these incidents also revealed the extent to which Lydia's "personal" power had been transformed; though her family's legacy of sociability was at its core, Lydia's "personal" power had progressed beyond their biases, and enabled her to connect with African American people through a keen interest in their experiences, a willingness to talk about issues of race, and an impassioned concern for social justice.

Lydia's professional experiences marked new milestones in the development of her "personal" power with African American students. Although Lydia graduated from her teacher education program in Denver, Colorado with very limited experience teaching African American students, her first teaching job proved to be an invaluable learning opportunity. After returning to her hometown, Lydia accepted a position teaching African American students at an elementary school in Louisville:

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I first started teaching in 1962, and it was an area of town that had “white flight”-- everyone left and all of a sudden it was all African American. It was kind of a poor area; some would call it a ghetto. And the school had the second-worst reputation in all of Louisville. Most teachers came in one year and left; I stayed there for five years because I loved the area and I loved the kids. (Interview, 5/21/02)

It was at this school that Lydia first began to draw upon her “personal” power in a professional capacity. During her five years as a teacher at a predominantly African American school, Lydia never wavered in her belief that developing close relationships with her students was the key to successfully teaching them. Because she thought that relationships with African American students were supported by strong home-school partnerships, Lydia initially connected with parents by visiting them in their homes. These home visits were a critical part of her teaching because Lydia contended that if she “was going to teach these kids and know them, I had to know what they did and what their home life was like” (Interview, 4/9/02). During these home visits, Lydia recalled walking in and “seeing garbage spewing out from the sink and dirty dishes spilling over and the cockroaches,” yet she also believed that “some of the finest mothering in the world came from some of those homes” (Interview, 1/23/02).

To elaborate further, Lydia told a story about an African American boy in her fifth grade class named Wayne Owens. Lydia described Wayne as a “cute little boy and he was round and so cute” who was from a family of seven children. The family could only afford to give each child one present for Christmas and Wayne had a difficult time choosing between a basketball and a walkie-talkie. He chose the basketball, and brought it to school on a special day when Lydia allowed all of the children to talk about their Christmas gifts in class. The little girl next to him had a walkie-talkie, and it disappeared. Lydia and her students searched the classroom, and Wayne found the walkie talkie and

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returned it to the girl; Lydia did not think anymore about the incident because she simply assumed that the girl had misplaced it. After school, Mrs. Owens, Wayne's mother, called Lydia and asked her to come by her house because she discovered that her son had taken the walkie-talkie. The conversation that Lydia had with Ms. Owens was so moving that it still brought tears to her eyes:

When I got there, I sat down, and of course I was offered something to drink right away, and Ms. Owens said, "I've only gone to the sixth grade. That's the highest of my education." And I looked at her and I said, "Well my father only went to ninth grade." So we were talking, and although she had no teeth up here ((Lydia points to the top row of teeth in her mouth)), I remember that she was a lovely woman, gracious. And said, "Ms. Browning, now this is what I plan to do." She said, "Wayne was wrong in taking that, and if Wayne really wants that walkie talkie, he needs to work for it." Do you know his mother went out and got him a job at the drugstore sweeping out the drugstore, for ten cents a day, until he had enough money to buy that walkie talkie? Boy was that powerful! I mean, was that a lesson for me? I mean that was really a lesson for me. Good mothering. It was simply good mothering ((Lydia was silently crying)). I mean, I get tears in my eyes every time I think about it.... I learned so much from talking to the parents, their hopes, their dreams, their goals for their children were just like everyone else's...(Interview, 1/23/02)

This story of Wayne Owens and his mother powerfully illustrated Lydia's ability to connect with African American people in a sensitive and respectful way. When Ms. Owens mentioned that she had only completed the sixth grade, Lydia immediately shared that her father also had not had much formal education as a way to reach out to Ms. Owens and establish a rapport with her. In so doing, Lydia created a more comfortable conversational space for Ms. Owens to express her disappointment in her son's behavior and to describe her plan of action.

By responding to Ms. Owens in such a respectful way, Lydia opened her mind and heart to a valuable lesson about African American parents: they were just like any other parents whom wanted a better life for their children. Lydia truly admired Ms.

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Owens' values, and her willingness to instill these high moral standards within her son by making him earn the money to buy his walkie talkie. Rather than being judgmental because their homes might not have been in the best condition, Lydia considered these African American parents to be "good parents" with values about family and schooling similar to her own:

I saw African American parents, two parents struggling because they wanted something better for their kids. There were hard-working families, two parents, mother and father working hard just to make it a little better for their children. I saw those qualities that I grew up with and valued, and the responsibilities that I valued, in these parents. [For example], these parents all said they wanted something better for their children, and they backed me up as a teacher and said "whatever you do, whatever you say, we'll be there to back you 100%!" and I really appreciated that support from them (Interview, 5/21/02)

These interactions with African American parents in their homes gave Lydia the opportunity to develop a new dimension of "personal" power in relating to African American people: the concept of "colorblindness." Lydia had become a strong advocate for African American people because, through her relationships with them, she had become extremely conscious of the differences between the experiences of African American and European American people, and she thought these differences were unjust and immoral. In other words, Lydia's close friendships with African American people, like the girls she met at college, had given her the chance to see the world as they saw it, and through this "insider's perspective" Lydia had begun to "see color"; she understood that society mistreated and discriminated against African Americans simply because they were the "wrong color." Now, by visiting and laughing and talking with African American parents, Lydia had come to realize that there were powerful similarities between European American and African American people, for their thoughts about

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parenting, and their hopes and dreams for their children, were similar to those that she cherished. For Lydia, these first home visits highlighted the commonalities between herself and those African American parents; they related to each other, not as people of particular cultural groups, but as humans, who, as parents and teachers, were very concerned about the well-being and achievement of their children.

While teaching in Louisville, Lydia gradually began to incorporate a “colorblind” perspective within her “personal” power as evidenced by her instructional practices. In her classroom, Lydia sought to treat her African American children fairly, and adamantly believed that she saw “children and what was inside of them and the potential that they can be” rather than “seeing the color of someone’s skin” (Interview, 1/23/02). Thus, Lydia believed that effective teaching practices should be fair for all students, regardless of cultural background. When Lydia took a group of students from the public library to choose books for their class because their school did not have a library, she took European American and African American with her, in spite of the ugly comments that some people made about her “mixed group,” because she wanted books that were representative of all of their interests (Interview, 5/21/02). In terms of strategies for disciplining her students, Lydia commented that she “did the same thing for African American students as White students (Interview, 5/21/02), because she thought that discipline should be based upon student misbehavior rather than race or culture. Though Lydia only had a few White students in her classroom, she also attempted to develop close relationships with them just as she did her African American students. She remembered Tommy, a European American boy who had failed a few times and was

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seemingly incorrigible. By getting to know him and his mother, Lydia was able to reach out to him and “helped him to pass that year” (Interview, 5/21/02).

After teaching in Louisville, Lydia married, and she and her husband moved to the southeast region of the country. She “returned” to teaching in 1995, after raising her five adopted children, and accepted a position at Burnett Elementary School. Burnett was a newly-built school, and Lydia remembered that first year as being “fun....because everything was new, the building was new, the kids were new, we had a blast,...it was like living in a college dorm!” (Interview, 6/4/02). One of Lydia’s fifth grade colleagues was an African American named Cheryl. Lydia’s professional relationship with Cheryl evolved into a deep friendship; they “talked on the phone every Sunday evening from about 7to 10pm!” and went out to dinner together, and thought of themselves as “sisters” (Interview, 6/4/02). They had many good times together, both in and out of the classroom, and Lydia deeply cherished those memories.

Importantly, Lydia’s relationship with Cheryl tremendously shaped her “personal” power with African American people and particularly with her students. Lydia had two seemingly conflicting perspectives on relating to African American people: on one hand, Lydia was “color conscious” in ways that led her to recognize racist treatment and to become an advocate for their social justice, and on the other, Lydia wanted to connect to African Americans in a “humanistic” or “colorblind” manner. Many European Americans have difficulty with these divergent philosophies because they don’t know which one to draw upon when they interact with African American people (Howard, 1999). Through her relationship with Cheryl, Lydia was able to discern which perspective

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was most helpful in a given situation, and thus had an even more effective type of “personal” power for relating to African American people, and especially to her students.

Lydia’s relationship with Cheryl was grounded within a sense of “colorblindness” because the similarities that they shared as “people” were much greater than their cultural differences. Lydia recalled feeling drawn to Cheryl and liking her immensely, even after their first meeting (Interview, 6/4/02). Lydia and Cheryl bonded instantly because of their faith; both were devout Christians, and although Lydia was Catholic and Cheryl was Baptist, Lydia contended that they both “shared the same love for God” (Interview, 6/4/02). Both women believed that faith was demonstrated through deeds rather than by words, thus they were actively involved in several ministries at their respective churches (Interview, 6/4/02). This sharing of faith helped Lydia to realize that she wanted her relationships with her African American students to be rooted in the same kind of “action-oriented” compassion, love, and acceptance that she and Cheryl shared in their religious faith, and she strongly believed that being a “good Christian” included reaching out and connecting with her all students in a kindhearted way (Interview, 6/4/02).

Lydia and Cheryl also shared a commitment to teaching and a “love for children” (Interview, 6/4/02). Professionally, both desired to become more effective teachers by improving an area of weakness: Lydia had taken several courses in language arts but was still not comfortable with the subject matter, and Cheryl had never taught math. Over time, Lydia and Cheryl were able to share their aspirations for improvement with each other, and worked together as a team to achieve their goals. One of the most important sources of inspiration for Lydia was the hours she and Cheryl spent together planning lessons after school:

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I was strong in the math and I told Cheryl, "You can do this!" And she wanted me to teach the math, but I told her, "You can do this!" and we would sit down every afternoon, and she would help me with my language arts, and I would help her with the math. Cheryl and I used to sit down and brainstorm, and sit and talk and that time was so important because that's when you have the best ideas, that's when you go "Oh! Let's do this! Let's plan this!" (Second Focus Interview, 4/30/02)

This collegiality between Lydia and Cheryl was particularly important because although the upper grade teachers formed a "team," they were more interested in sharing copies of tests and homework pages than seriously talking about the intricacies of classroom practice (Second Focus Group, 4/30/02). Lydia lamented that other "teachers were willing to share the papers they had on the Civil War," but they did not want to plan a unit on the War together, nor did they want to talk about what types of instruction would be effective for such a lesson. By providing mutual support and engaging in thoughtful discussions about pedagogy, Lydia and Cheryl were able to reform their instructional practices and grow professionally.

Though the bonds of her personal and professional relationship with Cheryl were grounded within the concept of "colorblind" similarities, Lydia also drew upon her "personal" power, in terms of her "color consciousness" in a concerned, sensitive, and respectful manner, to acknowledge their cultural differences. For example, as a faithful Baptist affiliated with the largest religious denomination in the African American community, Cheryl was prohibited to drink alcohol, and did not want to be in the presence of people who were drinking. Lydia also did not drink, but she attended professional functions, such as the annual Christmas party, where alcohol was served. Although she didn't quite understand Cheryl's perspective, Lydia respected her decision to avoid these parties because "she didn't feel comfortable doing that," and actually

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Also, Lydia noted that she was able to talk openly about issues of race and culture with Cheryl, and that she had first discussed the concept of "colorblindness" with her (Interview, 1/23/02). She also told Cheryl about her early experiences as an "advocate," and Cheryl strongly encouraged her to share those stories with the students in the classroom. Based upon Cheryl's advice, Lydia did begin to tell those stories to the students in her classroom, and discovered that they were "full of questions" about those times before the Civil Rights Movement and what people had done to make a difference (Interview, 1/23/02).

Through her friendship with Cheryl, Lydia once again became an "advocate." After five years of teaching together, Lydia "pushed" Cheryl to become a teacher in the Gifted and Talented (GT) program. By this time, Cheryl had received a master's in math, and Lydia believed that she would be a successful GT Teacher:

When Cheryl had the time and had the opportunity to become a Gifted and Talented teacher and I pushed her. I said to her, "We need an African American teacher in the GT program. You have got to become an advocate for your African American students." And I kept saying to her, "Cheryl, you need to go. You really need to go! I'll miss you, I don't want you to go, but...I want what's best for the children (Second Focus Group Interview, 4/30/02).

Although Lydia did not want Cheryl to leave Burnett Elementary, she was willing to make that sacrifice because she believed it was more important for African American GT students to have a teacher like Cheryl. Cheryl become the first African American Gifted and Talented teacher in their entire school-wide system, and to Lydia's knowledge, she was still the only African American teacher in the program (Interview,

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6/4/02). Lydia reported that Cheryl had been doing “a wonderful job” as a GT for the past two years, and that she was successful with students of all cultural backgrounds in the school where she worked (Second Focus Group Interview, 4/30/02).

All of these personal and professional experiences cultivated a profound sense of “personal” power for Lydia. Her special gift was the ability to connect with people and establish an easy rapport with them that made them feel comfortable with her. As a European American person, Lydia seemed to have an extraordinary gift for relating to African American people; she was able to instantly bond with African Americans by emphasizing their similarities to European American people while simultaneously acknowledging their cultural differences. By being both “colorblind” and “color conscious,” Lydia was able to see and relate to African Americans from two distinct vantage points; she could appreciate the similarities that they shared as “people,” but she also was keenly aware of the differences, in terms of specific cultural practices, and also in terms of the ways that their life experiences might have been negatively affected by societal racism and discrimination. This sense of “double vision,” the ability to see both similarity and difference in African American people, was at the heart of Lydia’s “personal” power, and became the source of her authority as a teacher of African American students.

Enacting Alternative Images for Teaching African American Students Through “Personal” Power

In September 2000, the new school year began with significant changes. Lydia had a new fifth grade class whom she was “looping” with, and she was very excited because they would all be together for fifth and sixth grades. But after meeting some of

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the students, Lydia recalled wondering how things would work out. She vividly remembered the first day of school when Marquet, an African American boy who had spent “the entire fourth grade in the office,” came into her classroom:

The very first day of school, Marquet walked in, he sat down, and he had his arms crossed slouched in his seat with his face like a thunderclap because he did not get Cheryl, he got me, and...he really wanted Cheryl, but she had moved on...And I couldn't coax him [that it was going to be a good year], and even his dad couldn't coax him, and I thought, ‘This is the one I am going to really have to work with’ (Interview, 4/9/02)

Lydia also had to “work with” several other African American students, like Amara, a tall, outspoken girl who had a “unique gift” in terms of her writing ability but was not performing well academically, and Asad, a boy who was new to the school and had become a member of Lydia’s class after “running away” from another fifth grade teacher’s class (Parent Interview, 6/20/02).

Moreover, with Cheryl gone, Lydia was responsible for teaching the entire fifth and sixth grade literacy and social studies curriculum for the first time since she arrived at Burnett Elementary. Lydia tremendously missed the co-planning sessions that she and Cheryl had after school, as well as Cheryl’s instructional insights in language arts and social studies. Although she had taught for several years, Lydia discovered that she was a “beginning teacher” in literacy-related content areas, encountering the same types of pedagogical issues and instructional changes that new teachers often struggle with.

In the midst of all these changes, Lydia remained steadfast in her “personal” power. Just as she did in Louisville, Lydia centered her teaching upon her ability to develop close relationships with African American students. In trying to remain true to herself and to the kind of teacher that she aspired to be, Lydia worked tirelessly to earn the authority and power to reach and teach African American students through these

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personal relationships. In so doing, Lydia crafted a pair of teaching images that illustrate her approach to working with and relating to African American students, and over the past two years, she has enacted these images in her classroom. Specifically, the “mother” and the “cheerleader” images of teaching that Lydia has crafted and enacted are manifested by particular affective orientations, interactional patterns, and instructional practices that foster successful learning and resilience for African American students in her classroom.

The “mother” image of teaching

Lydia talked passionately about her classroom using the discourse of “family” through which the images of family and school, mother and teacher, were intricately linked. As a teacher, Lydia wanted her relationships with her students to be as strongly affective and as personal as those she established in her own family:

I just feel like this classroom is an extension of what my family is.... And I feel like the way I run my classroom is like the way I run my home....I always felt like I should be there for my students, and I get miffed at my students just as a mother gets miffed and I praise them just like a mother praises them and I’m proud of them just like a mother is proud of them.
(Interview, 10/24/01)

By evoking the metaphor of “mother” to describe her work as a teacher, Lydia emphasized the kind of close affective relationships that she wanted to develop with her African American students. It was important to Lydia that her relationships with African American students could express a wide range of emotions, from frustration and annoyance to pride, not as a means of placing her own feelings at the center, but to communicate a genuine sense of caring to her students.

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Caring gestures. Just as a caring mother soothes a crying child by holding him close, or kisses her child's scraped knee, Lydia demonstrated her caring for her students through loving gestures, particularly those involving some kind of physical contact:

I've often said if I can't put my arm around a child and hug them-- if we were no longer allowed to do that—I'd have to quit teaching because that's part of me. And my girls give me a hug, sometimes even my little boys come up and want to give me a hug, you know. And there are other children in this room, young men too, and you put your arm around them and they just melt into you, and you think to yourself, "They are so needy. They need a loving hand" (Interview, 10/24/01)

Lydia's image of a "loving hand" nicely characterizes the kinds of affectionate gestures that were part of her daily interactions with African American students and others in the classroom "family." There were many times when Lydia put her arms around Amara's shoulders as a way to gently refocus her attention (Fieldnotes, 10/18/01), or lightly patted Asad on the back for working hard and correctly answering a math problem (Fieldnotes, 5/21/02). These gestures were both genuine and spontaneous, and students often responded with bright smiles (Fieldnotes, 10/18/01). Lydia also took time at the end of each day to personally say good-bye to each student, by hugging them or shaking their hands, and wishing them safe travel to their homes and "good evenings" with their own families (Fieldnotes, 9/19/01). Lydia believed that these contacts were brief, but powerful, because they allowed her and her African American students to "share our energy together" (Interview, 1/23/02).

All of the African American students seemed to respond positively to this physical form of caring. One afternoon, for example, Amara made a card on the computer proclaiming Lydia as "the snuggliest hugger" and thanking her for her love; Lydia was so touched by the card that her eyes filled with, and hugging Amara tightly, she said that she

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would show it to her husband “the minute I get home” (Fieldnotes, 10/10/01). And Lavita, a safety patrol, always waited for her hug from Lydia at the end of the day, even if it meant nearly being late for her post (Fieldnotes, 11/14/01). Even Marquet, one of the “toughest” boys in the class, responded positively to the warmth and closeness conveyed by Lydia’s gestures:

When I first had Marquet last year, there was a lot of anger there...and if I put my arm on his shoulder or my hand on his arm, he would wrench away. And he doesn’t do that anymore. So I know that in some way, some part of me has made a connection with him (Interview, 10/24/01)

Though Lydia oftentimes used physical gestures, she also conveyed her caring by doing special things for students that were “above and beyond the call of duty.” For example, Lydia willingly gave Eric money to buy lunch when he forgot his own at home (Fieldnotes, 3/21/02). On the day the class was taking pictures, Vivica was the only student who was not taking pictures, and she began crying. Although Lydia was hesitant to pay for Vivica because she had not paid Lydia back for the desk that she messed up and the Scholastic books she had purchased the previous year, Lydia felt so badly for her that she wrote a check and paid for her pictures (Fieldnotes, 10/9/01). Lydia also took time with Marquet, Asad, Eric, and several boys in her classroom to check their homework books and to help them get organized (Fieldnotes, 10/10/01, 10/18/01, 11/7/01). At the end of the day, Lydia would let each boy know that she was “coming to take care of you,” and would personally come and sit at his desk, cleaning the papers out and reorganizing his notebooks. Lydia expended a substantial amount of time and energy cleaning with these boys, but she was so concerned about their academic progress that she was willing to make those sacrifices if it helped them to complete their homework and be prepared for class.

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Family values and “colorblindness”. In enacting a “mother” image in the classroom, Lydia believed her primary responsibility was to teach “family values.” Lydia cherished the ideals that her parents taught her, and strived to instill these values within her African American students by sharing stories about her family. Oftentimes, Lydia told family stories to give students a better understanding of her personal convictions and standards; before a field trip in late October, one African American student asked if Lydia would carry his belongings since he could not leave them on the bus, and Lydia responded with a story about her own children and the lesson that they had to learn about taking responsibility for themselves (Fieldnotes, 10/30/01). Compassion was another principle that Lydia talked openly about with her students; while reading aloud a story called The Wreck of the Ethie in which a Newfoundlander dog rescues a family from a shipwrecked boat, Lydia mentioned that her son brought home animals that were hurt so that they could try to save them, and other students began to share experiences they had of helping someone in need (Fieldnotes, 5/21/02).

Respect was an especially important “family value” that Lydia explicitly talked about and modeled in the classroom. Lydia strongly believed that good manners communicated respect for others, thus she encouraged African American students and the entire classroom family to use them in the classroom. In so doing, Lydia and her students were able to create a pleasant environment despite severe space limitations in the trailer:

The trailer was an extremely tight space for Lydia and thirty students, but they all seemed to make the best of it. Few students complained about being so close to their neighbors and when students did bump into each other, which seemed to be quite often, they said “excuse me” or “sorry.” Generally, those who were bumped would respond, “That’s OK” and some even pulled in their seats to make it easier to get by; only once or twice did I see a student become irritated. Lydia also said “pardon me” to students as she waded into the sea of desks, trying to reach the stapler or

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the paper clips on her desk at the back of the room. And one point, Lydia smiled and said as she looked around the room, “You know, you all are so patient with me, and even though it’s a new year and I haven’t figured out all the logistics yet, I am just impressed that you all have just gone on without one complaint.” Though they were busy at work, most students looked up from their papers and returned her smile. (Fieldnotes, 9/11/01).

As a teacher, “respect” was particularly important family value for Lydia because through it she was able to draw upon her “personal” power of relating to African American students in a very specific way: by emphasizing respect of everyone, despite racial or cultural differences, Lydia created a strong sense of kinship amongst her students. Importantly, this sense of kinship was grounded within Lydia’s “colorblind” perspective, or her ability to acknowledge the similarities that African American students shared with others in their classroom. Lydia was extremely pleased when students “did not see differences” and were able to cross cultural boundaries and reach out to each other as “human beings,” thus she spoke highly of the close friendship between Lavita, an African American girl, and Jamie, a European American girl, who had been friends since kindergarten, and bragged about the basketball lessons that Asad, an African American student, gave to Duckwoo, an ESL student from Korea who was interested in learning to play. Lydia believed that this colorblind perspective was critical to their classroom family because it supported an ethic of care and justice in which all students-- African American or otherwise—would be treated fairly and would be included. The motto that Lydia wrote, entitled “Our Job Here,” reflects the spirit of colorblindness and care that she aspired to enact through the “mother” image: Our job here in school is to learn. Hopefully we will become lifelong learners. In that process we will try to take care very much for each other” (Fieldnotes, 9/24/01).

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A critical aspect of Lydia's principle of "colorblind" respect was taking responsibility for self and others, and by drawing upon the imagery and language of "family," Lydia fostered a shared sense of responsibility amongst all students. For example, Lydia referred to activities of the classroom as "family business" which generated a sense of collective effort and achievement (Interview, 10/24/01). She often used the term "neighborhood" to describe the small areas where students sat and worked in the classroom, often asking the student closest to the mess to please clean up your neighborhood because the property value of your home is going way down." Interestingly, by describing the area as a "neighborhood," that student, as well as two or three other "neighbors," were instantly motivated to pick up their trash and straighten up their desks (Fieldnotes, 4/9/02). Lydia believed that creating a spirit of "family" in her classroom was more effective than nagging students or threatening them to clean, because it helped them to understand how their actions (e.g., being sloppy, helping to clean) affected those around them (Interview, 10/24/01).

Lydia also fostered a feeling of "family" by inviting students to take an active role in its development. A powerful example of a "family-building" activity was the writing of their classroom credo. Rather than setting the classroom rules and announcing them the first day of school, Lydia collaborated with her students for nearly two weeks in an effort to create a set of classroom rules that "we all can live by." After reading and responding to Robert Fulghum's personal credo entitled "All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten," the students decided that that they wanted to create a classroom credo. Lydia engaged the students in a discussion of several broad rules that were essential for learning and working in their classroom, then divided the students into

smaller groups and gave each group to rules in order to facilitate a more in-depth discussion about specific behaviors and norms (Fieldnotes, 10/10/01). During the whole group discussion, each group presented the appropriate behaviors associated with their broad rules and Lydia asked for feedback from the other students. What was striking about this process was the level of honesty that it engendered; Amara and Eric, two African American students, raised their hands to admit that there were rules in the credo that they “couldn’t live with,” and rather than reprimanding or ignoring them, Lydia talked through each of their concerns and assured them that “we all are a work in progress, so we might not be doing everything on this list right now, but we are going to use them to change any behaviors that we need to” (Fieldnotes, 10/10/01). By the end of October, Lydia and her students had written the classroom credo on chart paper, signed it, and hung it on the front blackboard as a symbol of the collaborative effort that created their classroom family.

Life lessons. Finally, in enacting a “mother” image, Lydia believed that the most effective teaching was instruction that helped all students achieve in the present and prepared them for success in the future:

I want my kids to enjoy learning, but I’ve also got to get them ready for life. And I seriously down deep feel that way. I think about them and I say, “How is this child going to cope later in life?” Because as you now know there are lots of pitfalls and lots of things that can happen and I always say, “There are two ways that you can go through life. You can go through life with a smile on your face or with a frown. And you decide which one you want to want to look in the mirror and see in the morning.” (Interview, 10/24/01)

Lydia’s comments suggest that she was just as concerned with “school learning” as she was about “life learning,” just as any mother who loved her children and wanted

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the best for them would be. She encouraged her students to learn and use proper manners because she felt that social skills “count a lot, especially when you go out to get a job” (Interview, 5/21/02). Moreover, Lydia believed that a critical part of “social skills” was attitude, thus she often talked with her class about the benefits of having a cheerful and optimistic disposition, particularly when things were difficult (Fieldnotes, 1/23/02).

One of the most important life lessons that Lydia aspired to teach her students was that making mistakes is part of the process of achieving success. She often poked fun of her own mistakes in class, particularly her spelling blunders, because she wanted her students to know that “even teachers like me make mistakes all the time, and it’s alright. And I’m still walking around and I’m still doing OK!” (Interview, 10/24/01). By laughing at her own mistakes, Lydia believed that she could effectively “model” how students could achieve “joy in the struggle” of becoming successful learners and better people (Interview, 1/23/02).

Modeling this type of “joy in the struggle” also required Lydia to be honest about her mistakes, and to show students how she tried to rectify them. Lydia would openly apologize for little mistakes she made in her classroom, such as leaving a stapler on a student’s desk or calling students by the wrong name (Fieldnotes, 10/18/01). When Lydia made a significant error in judgment, she would seek out that person, whether child or adult, and apologize in private. Lydia vividly remembered an incident in which she felt she had to ask for a student’s forgiveness for her behavior:

I have to be careful sometimes the words I say, I mean I’m not perfect and sometimes I say things and I think, “Oh I shouldn’t have said that.” In fact I apologized to a little girl today. I saw something in the cafeteria...and I fussed at her in front of the whole table, and she’s a really good girl, she never gets into any trouble, and she was crying. And then I found out from the hostess that I didn’t see the first part, I only saw the last part. So I

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called this little girl over, and I said, “I really apologize. I didn’t realize what happened. I am really sorry. I know I hurt you. Will you accept my apology?” And she said, “Yes.” And when she left the playground today, she waved to me. So I knew she’d forgiven me. (Interview, 4/18/02)

Although this apology occurred in private, Lydia briefly mentioned the incident to her students and explained why she needed to apologize (Fieldnotes, 4/18/02). Unlike some of her other colleagues, Lydia believed that teachers should apologize to students because she believed that children have feelings, and adults should be honest enough to admit when they have hurt them (Interview, 1/23/02). Like a mother who is sensitive to her children’s emotional states, Lydia was acutely aware of students’ feelings, and she always tried to make certain that she responded to them in a thoughtful manner.

The “cheerleader” image of teaching

The cheerleader image represented Lydia’s positive approach to classroom management, and characterized her perspective on the academic and behavioral needs of African American students in particular. Lydia once described African American students as “loud and boisterous” (Interview, 1/23/02), and one could argue that this is an extremely stereotypical image. However, Lydia did not think of loudness as a negative trait because she herself “came from a loud family, we were always loud at home, we were always laughing and joking and when we went to restaurants, we stuck out like sore thumbs because we were not a quiet family” (Interview, 1/23/02). Because Lydia sincerely believed that African American people “loved life” and that their boisterousness represented their joy and fullness of living, Lydia did not spend a substantial amount of time trying to control her students’ high levels of energy; rather, she designed her classroom to be a learning environment that would compliment, and ultimately enhance,

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her students' natural vibrancy and enthusiasm. Just as a cheerleader motivates the players by cheering and "revving up" the crowd, Lydia supported African American students' learning and helped them to manage their behavior by maximizing the energy and activity in her classroom.

Literacy instruction. Lydia's literacy instruction centered on fast-paced, engaging activities in both whole-group and small-group settings. For example, to introduce a social studies unit on Native Americans, Lydia organized an activity called "Quick Book Look," where students were divided into small groups, and each group was given a pile of books. Each member of the group would look at a book, writing down any interesting facts on a sheet of paper. When Lydia called "Time!", the books were passed around the group until everyone had seen the book once. The variety of books, as well as the time limit, made the activity exciting and fun, particularly for Asad, Marquet, and other African American students who didn't like reading (Fieldnotes, 10/10/01). Also, Lydia spent about fifteen minutes each day playing word games and brainteasers with her students; "plexers" (see Figure 2) and "mysteries," where students had to guess what happened and who did it using only "yes" or "no" questions, were among their favorites. African American students who rarely volunteered answers in class, like Marquet and Vivica, were animated during these mental exercises, and they were so good at them that they generally knew the answers to the most difficult puzzles (Fieldnotes, 9/11/02).



Figure 2: Two Examples of “Plexers” From Lydia’s Literacy Instruction

Lydia also designed reading and writing activities that accentuated African American students’ sense of creativity and intellectual energy. In social studies, when the class discussed how Native American used origin stories in their tribal cultures, Lydia allocated several days for the students to write their own origin stories. This kind of activity particularly showcased the creativity of the African American students; Eric was working on a story about how the cat got its meow, Amara wrote a story set in ancient Africa about how once-hairy bald eagles gave us the color of the rainbow, and Lavita was writing a story about how the ancient gods gave women makeup. Even more “reluctant” writers like Marquet and Vivica were extremely engaged in writing their stories, and both set theirs in contemporary times to reflect their own passions about basketball (Fieldnotes, 10/30/01). Later in the year, other activities that fostered African American students’ expressionism, such as “invent your own insect” and “design the perfect hideaway” also motivated those who did not like reading or writing to take more of an interest in literacy (Fieldnotes, 3/21/02).

Additionally, Lydia designed numerous activities that intricately connected literacy to the strong affective orientations of African American students. Lydia loved to read nonfiction and fiction stories aloud to her students, and when she read, her tone of voice always conveyed her feelings. For example, while reading a speech by Chief

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Seattle in Brother Eagle, Sister Sky, Lydia's voice was serious and quiet, as if to capture the quiet dignity of the Chief (Fieldnotes, 11/7/01). On another occasion, Lydia was reading a book about the Exxon-Valdez oil spill, and while reading about the thousands of birds, fish, and other wildlife that were destroyed, Lydia's voice was low and her face was sad (Fieldnotes, 10/18/01). During these read-alouds, the African American students, as well as their peers, were mesmerized by Lydia's voice and the rich beauty of the stories she told; even boys like Asad and Marquet, who generally became antsy after a few minutes, sat completely still with their eyes riveted upon Lydia for the entire read-aloud (Fieldnotes, 10/18/01).

Lydia's approach for checking comprehension also required students to think deeply about their affective responses to the text. Questions such as "What did the author do to get you interested in the book?", "What was surprising or puzzling to you?", "Which character did you feel most connected to and why?", and "How did you feel after reading this story?" were some of Lydia's personal favorites because she felt they helped students form more critical opinions about the text (Fieldnotes, 9/19/01, 1/10/02). Lydia not only asked that students write out their answers to these questions as part of their reading group assignments, she also encouraged them to share their responses with the other members of their group in a special format called "Literature Seminar." During these Seminars, students were responsible for leading their own discussion about the book, and often drew upon ideas or observations that they made in their written responses. African American students seemed to shine during these discussions, because shy students like Vivica felt more comfortable sharing in small-group settings, and

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students like Lavita, Eric, and Amara, all of whom were very opinionated, relished the opportunity to talk about their own interpretations of the text (Fieldnotes, 1/23/02).

Behavior management strategies. Lydia's approach to classroom management could be aptly summarized by the phrase "Don't sweat the small stuff!" In fact, Lydia attributed her success with African American students to her ability to focus on what is important:

One of the reasons I think I am successful is that I am not a nitpicker; I don't just pick away, pick away, pick away. I choose which battle I am going to fight with them. If there is something that I want the whole class to work on, I can ignore other things that are going on and concentrate only on this one thing that I want the kids to work one...and then you don't have the constant nagging; I don't want to be a nagger. And sometimes I say to the children, "You know, I've had to say your name three times this morning and you know what I feel? I feel like I am nagging you, and I hate that." And usually they'll stop because they don't like it any more than I do (Interview, 10/24/01)

Lydia considered herself as "nagger" if she constantly commented about "small things," such as Marquet getting up out of his seat and moving around the classroom, or Asad coming up to her and asking questions every ten minutes, or Amara quietly humming a song as she worked, because those were behaviors that she could tolerate. If the entire class was behaving this way, however, it could ultimately turn into a "big thing" that Lydia would ultimately need to address. However, she did not nag, or yell, or threaten her students; rather, Lydia generally used spontaneity as a strategy for getting students' attention and refocusing their behavior:

The students are preparing to write an entry in their Family Connections journal since it is about 2:30pm and almost time to go home. Lydia calls on several students to give examples of the kinds of activities that they could write about in their entry (e.g. went to library to work on Indian projects, read mysteries, began to work on newspaper, factorization in

math). Lydia begins to review their homework assignments, but by this time, the noise level has become unbearable. A few girls and boys are sitting quietly and listening to Lydia, but most of the kids are talking to their neighbors; one or two girls are giggling and comparing lip glosses, a group of three boys are in the back of the room playing an imaginary game of basketball, and someone has even started singing a song. Suddenly, Lydia looks around the room, holds up her hands, and begins to clap: CLAP! CLAP! CLAP, CLAP, CLAP! in a rhythm of two long claps followed by three short staccato claps. Instantly the room quiets, and the students clap to the rhythm with Lydia. As the clapping dissipates, the room is completely silent, and the students' eyes are riveted on Lydia. In a quiet and calm voice, Lydia says, "Everyone should be back in their seats and ready to write their journal entry. When you're done your Family Connections, you can read or do other work. I'd like it to be quiet so that everyone can end the day with their best work." The students quietly take their seats, get out their Family Connections journals, and begin to write for the last fifteen minutes of the day. (Fieldnotes, 11/7/01)

At times when the students were so energetic that the "clap strategy" did not work, Lydia would suddenly yell "Simon Says stand up!!" into the chaos, and immediately everyone would stand up and follow Lydia as she shouted directions faster and faster (Fieldnotes, 10/9/01). After about five to ten minutes, Lydia would ask that the students take their seats so that they could complete their work. Both strategies enabled Lydia to use spontaneity in much the same way as a cheerleader who selects the right cheer that recharges the players and gets them back into the game, and for African American boys like Eric, Asad, and Marquet, it allowed them to release enough of their energy so that they could continue working.

In supporting changes in the behavior of individual African American students, Lydia was equally thoughtful. She often thought of one important behavior that she wanted each student to work on, and she focused all of her time and energy into facilitating that specific change:

You cannot have a child who has twenty problems and expect them to work on all twenty problems. Like Marquet, when Marquet came

in, the first thing I had to teach him was to sit in his seat. And I ignored everything else. I ignored his homework, I ignored everything else. And I focused on that one thing until he could do it. And other teachers [may say], “Well, I saw Marquet and he was dancing in the hallways and he wasn’t in line with the rest of them.” And I say to them, “But that’s not I’m working on right now. And so I ignored all of that.” And then I am not constantly after him, nit picking him for every little thing that he does. And that’s what I do (Interview, 10/24/01)

Lydia also sought to support behavior changes by honoring the close, affective relationships that she had with her African American students. By using her sense of humor to “keep things light” and by carefully phrasing her words so that she did not “challenge” a student, Lydia was able to simultaneously sustain their relationships while promoting change in African American students, like Marquet, Eric, and Amara—a group that was considered to be “trouble” by other teachers (Interview, 1/23/02). For example, when Lydia wanted Marquet to stop talking, she would address him as “Sweet Cakes” or “Honeybun” because it was a humorous way of asking him not to talk, and since he was embarrassed by these terms of endearment, he always laughed and quietly returned to his work (Fieldnotes, 1/23/02). Lydia often called Eric a “ladies’ man” when she saw him talking with various girls in the classroom, and although he usually laughed and responded with a comment like, “Yeah, I am the MAN!!” which made the class laugh even harder, after everyone settled down, Eric typically got quiet and returned to his work (Fieldnotes, 9/19/01). Lydia also appealed to Amara’s sense of humor when she needed to ask them to change their behaviors, and rather than being annoyed by them, she was often “tickled” by their banter. On one particular day, the students were very noisy, and Amara and some of her friends had been clowning around for most of the afternoon. Lydia looked around the room and said with a smile, “You all are really making me work hard for my money today!” Amara replied, “Well, if I was on the school board, I would

just give teachers more money!” Lydia laughed and said, “Amara, you are too much!! What am I going to do with you? I don’t need the money but I do need you to please sit down and get to work!” and Amara and her buddies returned to their seats (Fieldnotes, 10/9/02). These examples illustrate Lydia’s capacity to truly enact a “cheerleader” image in her classroom. Just as the ideal cheerleader has a sparkling personality, Lydia, too, used a combination of wit, charm, and grace to persuade students to behave appropriately.

Motivational practices. Like a cheerleader who would perform the most difficult cheers just to demonstrate her team spirit, Lydia strongly felt that her primary goal as a teacher was to motivate her students in whatever ways she could. To Lydia, “winning” in the “game” of school was about the amount of effort that students put into their work rather than their performance on tests or grades:

I’ll be honest with you; I just hate grades. I love effort grades, I love effort grades. Those are my favorite and that’s why I tell the kids those are the ones I really focus on. Because I was a student, when I went to school there were kids who could go to class twice for the whole semester and come out with an A or B on a paper or you know their test. And I would go to every single class and I would study and I maybe had to fight every tooth and nail for that B.... [And] in the classroom it’s the same thing, too. Some of these kids it’s effortless for them... and others are...testing above the 50th percentile....[but] they are working their little hearts out (Interview, 5/21/02)

As a teacher, Lydia believed that she should set high academic and social goals for her students, and as a “cheerleader,” provide the socioemotional support and encouragement to help them achieve those goals:

And the thing that I want the children to do is, I want them to be risk takers; I want them to have a go at it. It might not be the right answer, but by golly, when students put some force and effort and their doing some thinking, you have got to notice that and mention it! And I’m kind of like

a cheerleader...I feel like I have that good rapport, and I can cheer the kids on. And I try to recognize when they are doing the right thing...I always try to catch them being good. (Interview, 10/24/01)

To “cheer students on,” Lydia used various strategies to motivate students to continue working hard and improving. For instance, Lydia talked explicitly about academic success and how it is achieved. Lydia described success as the ability to “use your resources” to find out information. During class, Lydia would often encourage students to use their dictionaries if they didn’t know the meaning of a word, or to use their computer time to do research on the Internet, reminding students that “smart people don’t know everything, but they know where to find information” (Fieldnotes, 10/18/01). Importantly, Lydia practiced what she preached. One afternoon, she and the class were discussing a text that described the second and third dimensions, and Eric asked what the first dimension was. Lydia honestly answered that she didn’t know, but she would call her brother, who was a nuclear physicist, to find out (Fieldnotes, 9/24/01). Lydia kept her word, and reported to the class that her brother said the first dimension is a straight line, and reiterated the fact that “smart people may not know all of the answers, but they aren’t afraid of asking questions and using their resources to find the answers” (Fieldnotes, 10/9/01). For Eric and the other African American students, Lydia hoped that these lessons became the foundation for their success in school and in life.

Lydia also motivated her students by clearly and consistently explaining why they needed to complete various learning tasks. She often explained to her students that the reason why she required them to read thirty to forty minutes every night was because she believed that “practice makes perfect. You won’t become a good reader through osmosis, you have to read and keep reading if you want to become a better reader” (Fieldnotes,

11/14/01). In fact, to encourage students to become avid readers, Lydia organized a voluntary literacy discussion group called the “Big Ten Club,” in which students read ten books (or 1,000 pages) each grading period, and talked about them during dinner at a nearby restaurant (Fieldnotes, 9/20/01). Similarly, Lydia told the class that the “real” purpose of having spelling lists was not to take tests, but to build a vocabulary so that they could communicate more effectively in their writing and speaking (Fieldnotes, 10/24/01). Lydia hoped that sharing her thoughts about the importance of reading and spelling would inspire African American students like Asad, who had dreams of becoming a doctor but was not a strong academic student, to become more serious about his studies.

Socially, Lydia provided “material rewards” (Brophy, 1998) as student incentives. Sometimes she had treats for the students at the end of the day to encourage them to “pick up three pieces of trash on the floor” or as a reminder for students to put their homework books in their bag (Fieldnotes, 10/10/01). Lydia also welcomed others to bring in special treats for her students as a way to say “job well done,” and on several occasions, parents brought in ice cream or other snacks (Fieldnotes, 10/30/01, 3/21/02). Lydia thought that these kinds of treats worked particularly well with African American boys like Marquet, Eric, and Asad, who oftentimes needed that “extra nudge” to do what was expected of them (Interview, 1/23/02). Sometimes Lydia would also take students in special outings after school or on the weekends if they accomplished something significant like Amara did:

Last year, I said to Amara, ‘If you do this, this, this, and this, then I will take you to a movie or lunch or something and you can bring one friend with you.’ And she did it! And so I took her and her

friend out to a movie and to lunch one Saturday afternoon and we had a lovely time. (Interview, 1/23/02)

One of the most creative ways that Lydia “cheered” for students was with a concept that she described as “caught you being good”:

We’ve started this thing now where I give out those little slips that say “I’ve caught you being good.” And when they get 10 of them, they get to go through the treasure box. And it’s just got junk in it, and you would think it is gold and this is dollar store stuff! But it’s just the idea... (Interview, 10/24/01)

African American students, and the other sixth graders in Lydia’s classroom, responded very positively to the “caught you being good” idea, and whenever Lydia announced that she had “caught someone” and gave him or her the paper, the other students immediately settled down in hopes of also receiving a paper (Fieldnotes, 10/9/01). By the end of the year, all of the students had earned enough to select a prize from the box at least once, and Lydia considered the strategy an overwhelming success (Fieldnotes, 6/4/02).

Advocacy. Finally, in enacting a “cheerleader” image, Lydia felt it was her responsibility to “cheer” for African American students when they could not defend themselves. Lydia took her role as an advocate for African American seriously because she thought that “upper class white people, or upper class people in general, are more knowledgeable and can be advocates for their kids. But parents from a lower socioeconomic group who are striving to make ends meet, don’t have the time, and sometimes it’s that they don’t even have the understanding of things. And we as teachers need to be the advocates for these children” (Interview, 4/9/02).

As an advocate, Lydia was devoted to ensuring that African American students had equal access to academic opportunities. She was very concerned about the low

percentages of African American students in the Gifted and Talented program at Burnett, and pushed hard for excellent students to take the placement test. Previously, Lydia had encouraged an African American girl to take the test, which she subsequently passed and was admitted into the GT program. Lydia was particularly proud of this former student because she had also placed into a GT program when she went on to middle school (Second Focus Group, 4/30/02). Last year, Lydia recognized Lavita's unique intellectual ability, and talked with her mother several times about the GT program. Lavita placed into the program, and was doing extremely well this year, and Lydia hoped that she could continue her academic career in GT in middle and high school.

Lydia desperately wanted some of her other African American students to be in GT, but she had great difficulty building a case for their admittance because their test scores and their grades were too low. Though the GT program was a touchy subject at Burnett Elementary, Lydia took a professional "risk" and argued that the true intellectual capacity of her African American students were not reflected by these normative measures. To exemplify her point, Lydia referred to her perceptions of Eric:

Eric is talented...and sometimes I just want to sit and shake it out of him. And sometimes I do think that it will come out. He's smart. He says, "I'm not smart." And I say, 'Eric, you are smart. Why would I say that if you're not?' Last year, in another teacher's class, Eric did not do any work, but he passed his SOLs ((the state mandated test)). But this year, I have had to give him I's ((Incompletes)) on his report card because I refuse to give a smart child good grades if he does not complete the work (Interview, 4/9/02).

Lydia did not succeed in placing more of her African American students in the GT program, but she continued fighting for their admittance by raising African American parents' awareness of their children's intellectual potential:

This grading period, I told Amara's mom, I said, "Amara is probably smart enough to go to Thomas Jefferson ((an elite GT school in the system)). Now in math she's gonna struggle and she will need some work in that." And her mom said, "What?!?" And I said, "She's bright enough to do that! Her language arts skills and her knowledge, her background knowledge are phenomenal, I think. But she just doesn't apply herself." So she has really worked hard this grading period, and I've been really pleased to see that. Whether she makes it or not, to even think that you can be there...to think that you can reach for that, I think is important. You've got to set those goals.... (Interview, 1/23/02)

Lydia was equally concerned about fighting for "social equality" for African American students. She wanted to ensure that her African American students, particularly her boys, were being treated fairly, even if it meant "taking on" some of her colleagues. In the beginning of the year, Lydia had a disagreement with the gym teacher because he had thrown Marquet out of class. When she asked why, the gym teacher told her that Marquet would not sit cross-legged as he had instructed. Lydia asked the teacher if he had considered the idea that Marquet might not have been able to sit like that, and explained that as a child, she had difficulty crossing her legs due to poor circulation. Lydia recalled being extremely frustrated; she did not want to excuse Marquet's behavior, yet she did not think that the gym teacher was treating him fairly. She felt that the gym teacher could have given been more "flexible" and given Marquet "the benefit of the doubt" rather than sending him to the office and getting him into deeper trouble (Fieldnotes, 9/24/01). And when other incidents arose, such as the problem with Mr. Cordello kicking Marquet and Eric out of his class, Lydia had no qualms whatsoever about handling the situation and "protecting" her boys (Interview, 4/9/02).

Perhaps these comments most aptly convey Lydia's deep commitment to advocacy for African American students at Burnett:

Last year, they had the “Three Strikes You’re Out” rule, and the only kids that missed the Valentine’s Day party were 14 African American children. And I looked out there, and I saw them all sitting out there, and I did say something, I said something to Mrs. Matthews ((the principal)), I said, ‘Mary, you know that there are times when I am very vocal about these things, and I say what’s on my mind and you always know what I’m thinking...I was NOT happy when I looked out there and saw that.’ And maybe it was legitimate, but fourteen ((Lydia sighs deeply)). And I told Mr. Williams ((the assistant principal)), ‘It really does not make me happy to see this. We need to do something differently.’ And as I told you before, I don’t see color. I see color when I see fourteen kids sitting out from a Valentine’s Party. But in my classroom I don’t see that. But I guess in a way I am aware of it, and I want, I want what’s there for ALL the kids here. And I want what’s fair for my African American students, too.
(Interview, 4/9/02)

Conclusion

In the complicated and chaotic world of upper elementary teaching and learning, very few teachers achieve success. Children at that age are going through preadolescent identity crises, and are already beginning to be much more interested in their friends, their crushes, and their hormones, than in math or reading. As students attempt to assert their independence, they are more likely to challenge teachers by “copping attitudes” or even “mouthing off.” Moreover, many students have lost their cute “childishness,” and as their bodies begin to mature, teachers may perceive them as being more menacing and uncontrollable. Kunjuufu (1985), a noted African American scholar, contends that European American teachers are likely to view African American students, particularly boys, are more threatening and less academically and socially competent after fourth grade, and these negative teacher expectations and perceptions, coupled with the intensive developmental and social issues that these students are facing, and the increasing demands of the curriculum and academic work, make African American

students especially vulnerable to academic underachievement and failure as they progress into the upper elementary grades.

In response to these additional strains and pressures, many European American teachers draw upon their hierarchal “social” power as a means of establishing and maintaining control over their fifth and sixth grade African American students; they perceive themselves to be either “at war” with their students, embroiled in a battle for respect and control over student behavior and classroom learning, or they think of school as a “business” in which the most powerful have control of the “profits.” Lydia was deeply saddened that many of her colleagues seemed to evoke this kind of imagery in their talk about their classrooms and during their interactions, particularly with African American students. To Lydia, her colleagues’ images of teaching were extremely negative and tyrannical in their obsession with absolute domination and control, thus she felt that she needed to protect her African American students—as well as herself-- from their oppressive force. Lydia discovered that many of these same colleagues also perceived her to be “the enemy” because she did not agree with their approach to teaching, and she was the object of their severe criticism, gossip, and backstabbing.

Importantly, Lydia’s narrative offers unique insights into Delpit’s (1995) concept of “personal” power and why it is a more legitimate form of teacher authority in the eyes of African American students. Though Delpit argues cogently that African American students expect teachers to earn a sense of authority based upon their own personal qualities and traits, she does not describe what this “personal” power looks like nor how it is specifically enacted by European American teachers in the classroom. The story that Lydia told about her “personal” power, in terms of its nature, its development, and its

enactment as specific images of teaching provides readers with a deeper understanding of this power and its significant effects upon the academic success and resilience of African American students.

Although it is likely that each European American teacher will have his or her own special “personal” power, it is likely that some type of ability to develop and sustain close relationships with African American students would be essential, for research suggests that personal relationships which communicate respect, trust, and warmth support, and even enhance, the academic achievement of African American students (Hale-Benson, 1982; Reglin, 1995). Lydia’s “personal” power was particularly unique because its dual nature enabled Lydia to be both “colorblind” and “color conscious” in her relationships with African Americans. Her duality was an important asset because many European Americans use a dichotomous approach, using “colorblindness” or “color consciousness” to connect with African American people, and as a result, they become frustrated by their limited responses to and understanding of the cultural experiences and practices of African American people. European Americans who are completely “color conscious” may perceive African American people to be so different than themselves that they begin to narrowly define culture in terms of “us” versus “them,” which in turn could actually reinforce negative stereotypes of African American people, while those who are “colorblind” may recognize the similarities between themselves and African Americans, but ignore the existence of cultural differences and the racist and discriminatory practices that society endorses based upon those differences (Nieto, 1996). European American teachers find it especially difficult to relate to African American students with this dichotomous approach, and although they may want to redefine their relationships with

their African American students, the uncertainty that emerges from trying to “say and do the right thing” can be so overwhelming that they resort to more traditional images of teaching rooted in hierarchical “social” power.

For Lydia, developing this dual nature of “colorblindness” and “color consciousness” was indeed a struggle. Though her capacity to bond quickly with others was her family legacy, her ability to connect to African Americans was not. Lydia used the various personal and professional experiences and relationships in her life to learn how to connect with African American people in a way that was respectful and sensitive to their cultural differences and similarities. Her relationships with African American people, her friendships with the girls she met in college and with Cheryl, and the home visits she did in Louisville, all enriched her perspective of African American people, giving her an “insider’s” view through which she saw the pain and agony of social injustice as well as the celebration of cultural tradition, and through her own “outsider” perspective as an European American she witnessed the beauty of human connection and cultural “universals” like parenting that transcended particular groups of people. Once Lydia began to develop this “double vision” aspect of her personal power, her mission was to continue to develop it and to use it in a way that resonated with the kind of person and teacher that she wanted to be.

Though Lydia recognized this to be a great struggle, she also saw the “joy” within it. Lydia wanted to make a difference in the lives of her African American students, even if meant being ostracized by her colleagues, and having to make personal and professional sacrifices. She aspired to have close relationships with her African American students because the relationships that she had with teachers, like Sister Marietta, with

whom she corresponded until she passed away at the age of 95, were ones that she deeply cherished. Although Lydia admitted that sometimes it was difficult to “keep things light” as a cheerleader would, or speak to students in a kindly and thoughtful manner, or be as emotionally-attuned to students as a mother would be, she continued to enact the “mother” and “cheerleader” images because that was the type of teacher that she wanted to be. She hoped that through this pair of images she could connect closely with her African American students, and that her capacity to be both “colorblind” and “color conscious” would enable her to provide instruction that celebrated their creative energy and their emotionality, motivated those who were disinterested in literacy to read and write more, instilled important morals and values for living, modeled academic and social “success,” advocated for equal access to academic and social opportunities for African American students, and exemplified a love of life. Though she thought that there were “finer teachers” than herself, Lydia believed that she was, in her own way, successful with African American students because she sought to teach with the authority and “personal” power that comes from living “the joy in the struggle.”

CHAPTER FIVE

JANE SMITH'S NARRATIVE: "THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF A BORDER CROSSER"

The old saying, "A picture is worth a thousand words" is especially true of pictures of children. Along the long, white wall outside of Jane Smith's classroom, a colorful display of personal timelines brought to life the stories and experiences of 23 third graders. Some children highlighted the magic of their early years; Carmen and Maria, two Hispanic students, both started their timelines at infancy with photographs taken at their First Baptisms, while Joy and Kia, two African American girls, captured their development from infancy to childhood through a series of professional pictures. Other children emphasized their unique life experiences. Faraz drew pictures of himself as an infant and his mother on the "long plane ride to America" from Pakistan; both he and his mother had deep eyes that conveyed a longing to return home and a hope for a better life. On her display, Lanay, an African American girl, shared pictures herself smiling and waving from the gleaming deck of a cruise ship taken during a family vacation to the Bahamas and St. Maarten, while Halle, a European American girl, captured the fun and adventure of growing up as a triplet through family photos.

The pictures that the children drew of themselves in school were particularly revealing. For their first days of kindergarten, most children drew themselves laughing and waving as they walked into the school or as they stepped onto the bus; photographs taken by proud parents captured their children holding hands with their kindergarten teachers and smiling. As the children moved into first and second grade, however, the nature of the school pictures dramatically changed. The joyful and excited faces of the

children as kindergarteners grew increasingly somber in first and second grades, and unlike the kindergarten teachers who were shown holding hands with students, the first and second grade teachers were shown standing and talking at the front of the room. Already, these third graders knew that their teachers were at the “center” of their classroom experience, and their dark piercing eyes and stern expressions conveyed the sense that school had become more formal and serious.

In the children’s illustrations of their third grade experiences, Jane was often shown sitting at the front of the class with a blackboard and flag behind her, but her face was always round and open, and her eyes were always bright. In striking contrast to the first and second grade teachers who seemed to be robotic lecturers, students portrayed Jane as a teacher who was actively involved with her students and their learning. Some students like Joy and Sakina drew Jane happily reading a book to the class as they sat at their desks; in these pictures, students often had eyes that were wide with wonder and excitement. Others illustrated entire scenes based upon a classroom experience that they absolutely loved; Faraz, for example, based his scene upon a recent science experiment that the class conducted, and captured Jane holding a small container that read “powder” and pouring it into small cups, while he and several classmates stood in line waiting for their materials and smiling broadly with anticipation.

But one scene with Jane was especially poignant. Tamyra, an extremely shy African American girl, had drawn a scene that realistically captured their classroom setting; the American flag hung from a pole near the blackboard, the colorful monthly calendar was in its place along the left wall, and the desks were arranged in the same small cooperative groupings. Tamyra drew Jane seated in her “teacher’s chair” at the

front of the room, and drew herself standing at her desk; both she and Jane had outstretched arms, as though they were about to embrace, and they were smiling brightly. Unlike traditional classroom scenes in which teachers and students are extremely disconnected, Tamyra's picture evoked strong feelings of warmth and intimacy between herself and Jane; in fact, it was difficult to tell if Jane was reaching out to bring Tamyra closer to her, or if Tamyra was reaching out and pulling Jane closer to her. And yet their hands were not touching; there was an empty space between them, a gulf that needed to be crossed. To make contact, it seemed that both Jane and Tamyra would need to actually move towards one another and take a few steps into an unfamiliar and uncharted land.

The picture that Tamyra drew vividly portrays the experiences of African American students and European American teachers in classrooms around the country. Gay (1998) contends that the "essence of challenge of ethnic and cultural diversity in education is crossing borders and traveling within largely uncharted terrains" (p. 2), and indeed, Tamyra's scene with Jane powerfully illustrates that challenge for both students and teachers. African American students like Tamyra are expected to "cross the borders" into "school culture," a set of discursive practices, values, norms, and literacies that are legitimated by mainstream (i.e. middle-class, European American) institutions and communities (Bruner, 1996; Gee, 1990). For many African American students, "school culture" represents an unknown land where the appropriate norms, behaviors, and language are unfamiliar, and are nearly inaccessible without substantial support and explicit instruction from a cultural "expert." As a result, the crossing of the border into this strange land of "school culture" is generally difficult for African American students,

filled with the uncertainties, conflicts, and tensions that arise from traveling betwixt and between the borders of two cultural worlds (Diamond, 2001).

European American teachers who are concerned about the achievement and well-being of African American students often try to help these students “cross” into school culture in whatever ways they can. Jane considered herself to be a teacher in this group, and aspired to “guide children in the right direction” by “doing for each child what’s best for him or her” (Interview, 5/9/02). Based upon Tamyra’s illustration of their classroom experience, it seemed that Jane had been an important source of support and guidance for Tamyra as she “crossed borders” into “school culture.” The journey into a new land seemed to have been positive for Tamyra, primarily because Jane’s warm smile and her outstretched arms welcomed her into the culture of school. Tamyra’s picture also demonstrated that she had successfully acquired enough school discourse to understand the meaning and functions of “cultural tools,” such as the calendar, the flag, and the arrangement of the desks, within a classroom setting, and it seemed clear that Tamyra felt that Jane was an integral part of her successful participation in this new and exciting world.

But in this scene, Tamyra’s arms were also extended, as if she wanted to bring Jane closer to her world. Tamyra seemed to envision “border crossing” as a shared experience in which students and teachers jointly move across borders towards one another; thus Tamyra’s embrace was an invitation for Jane to visit her African American “homeland.” This mutual “border crossing” experience between European American teachers and African American students is particularly critical for the success of these students because they are profoundly affected by the nature of the teacher-student

relationship (Hale-Benson, 1982; Reglin, 1995). Hence, journeying with European American teachers to unknown lands may develop relationships that foster the connectedness, caring, trust, nurturance, and respect that African American students need to thrive academically (Giroux, 1997). Jane also understood the importance of “crossing the borders” towards African American students and developing personal relationships with them, and she desired to “reach out and make connections with kids through similarities and then build on that” (Interview, 5/9/02). Yet Jane readily admitted that “cross cultures is hard” (Interview, 6/20/02), and she struggled to make these personal connections with her African American students. Gary Howard (1999), a European American multicultural educator, contends that this type of cultural “border crossing” is particularly difficult for European American teachers because they are afraid of the unknown; they are uncertain about the journey and what it might entail, and are deeply concerned about the personal insecurities and vulnerabilities that may be exposed as they meet and interact with “strangers in a new land.” Consequently, many European American teachers gladly extend their support to African American students as they “cross borders” into the culture of school, but they are unwilling or unable to take the “next step” and journey into the world of these students.

In Tamyra’s picture, two pairs of outstretched arms, in contrasting hues of brown, embody the courage, dedication, and resilience of Jane and her African American students as they embarked upon an incredible journey across various cultural, social, and psychological borders this year. Despite complex academic and social issues that arose in the classroom, Jane was determined to create the type of border crossing experience that Tamyra had envisioned in which she and her African American students reached out

towards one another and moved bravely into the “unknown” in order to embrace. For Jane, this journey was filled with uncertainties about culture and its impact on school and fear of talking openly about cultural diversity in the classroom. Yet Jane was willing to learn about these issues, grapple with them, and confront some of her own perceptions and assumptions because she wanted to know more about African Americans and desired to become a more effective teacher for African American students. This chapter presents Jane’s border crossing experiences, both as a teacher of African American students and a learner of African American culture.

Learning to Become a Border Crosser

Jane’s imagery of teaching and learning as “border crossing” was deeply grounded in two early life experiences in which she crossed significant borders. The first “border experience” occurred when she was in grade school and in desperate need of help:

It was seventh grade and I was going through some emotional things at home. We had moved; I had gone from a catholic school to a public school, and you know sixth grade is a hard age to move in. And I had moved into a sixth grade classroom, and I just remember the teacher being a real hard nose. And I don’t remember it being a positive experience at all; I mean, I didn’t have many friends. I had just moved to a new town, I had come from the city, this was the country, and the people were more like, “money people” because my family had stepped up a little bit, and it was just a whole new world. So my sixth grade, when you look back at the records it probably was a disaster, I remember my report card being bad, I don’t remember ever being punished, but I must have gone on to seventh grade with a record of “this child doesn’t do well.” And I remember in the seventh grade we were divided by levels, you know, you were tracked. and I must have gotten into a lower track, ... and it must have been that they didn’t think I was college material (Jane laughs with slight embarrassment) or whatever (Interview, 5/9/02)

Jane's first "border experience" brought her into contact with "a whole new world"; she and her family moved to a community in an affluent suburb, and were living out the "American Dream" of upward social and economic mobility. But for Jane, this American Dream was more like a nightmare because it had turned her world upside down. She was suddenly meeting "money people" whose lives of privilege seemed to make her feel inferior and "different." Jane's school life dramatically changed as well; she moved away from the familiarity of her friends at her parochial school to a public school where she felt rejected by her teacher and her classmates. Like many students wandering between the borders, Jane was smart, but was too overwhelmed to concentrate on her studies. Her academic performance suffered so severely in sixth grade that she was labeled as a "poor student" and was placed into a lower academic "track" in seventh grade.

Though Jane had physically "crossed the border" into a new community and a new school, the psychological and social transitions were painfully difficult. Jane described herself during that time as being a "lost soul" (Interview, 4/9/02), wandering aimlessly in a strange land. Her loneliness and hopelessness were compounded by the fact that even her parents could not guide her; they did not know about academic "tracking" to recognize that their daughter had been placed into a lower-level group, and even if they had, Jane explained that her parents would not have argued with the "wisdom" of her teachers because "...my father was older, and there were a lot of teachers in my family, so if the teacher said you were a certain way, that's the way you were" (Interview, 5/9/02).

Jane strongly believed that she would have gone completely astray had it not been for one special seventh grade teacher who reached out and ultimately “saved” her:

This teacher, she taught English and social studies....[and] I really remember [her] being warm, and concerned; I can remember her helping me during studying halls. She really got me involved in language arts and reading and she knew of my interests. And so it was more that I was beginning to regain my confidence so when I went to eighth grade, I think I was moved out of that [lower] group for whatever reason, I mean I was never privy to that information, but I can remember that I was with a different group of kids. So I look at her and I say, “Gosh, I wonder what would have happened if she hadn’t taken that time with me?” I mean, I probably would have gotten off track. So I feel like it was this teacher who made a difference (Interview, 5/9/02)

Jane fondly remembered this teacher because she cared enough to reach out and help her cross the academic and psychological “borders” at her new school. Clearly, this teacher saw something “special” in Jane, and wanted to work with Jane in the hope that her intellectual “talent” would one day be revealed. Importantly, this teacher developed a relationship with Jane that intricately linked the “emotional” and the “intellectual” spheres of learning, and by taking the time to individually work with Jane during study halls, connecting her interests to literacy, and interacting with Jane in a warm and concerned manner, she was able to provide the academic and psychological support necessary for Jane to cross the borders at her new school and regain her confidence in herself and her intellectual ability.

Jane’s second “border experience” occurred in college, where, for the first time in her life, Jane was encountering racial and ethnic borders. Growing up in several Connecticut communities that were extremely homogeneous had limited Jane’s opportunities to live and interact with people from different backgrounds; therefore, her campus life, as well as her student teaching experiences, served as an introduction to

racial and ethnic diversity. During her senior year, she interned at a small elementary school outside of New Haven that she described as “middle-class with some minorities,” and it was the first time she had worked with children of Hispanic migrant farmers. Jane’s remembrances of the racial tension at the school were conflicted; she described the racial tension at the school as being “sort of not there” because people “just kind of ignored it.” The ambivalence in Jane’s comments suggested that there was some kind of racial tension at this school, but that it was viewed as the “dirty little secret” that no one wanted to talk about. Consequently, Jane vividly remembered feeling fortunate that she was able to sort out her feelings about race, culture, and schooling with an African American friend who lived in her dorm:

Back at the college, there was beginning of talk, “What to do [about racial tension]?” and how it was affecting our school system, and I can remember our dorm mates, Gladys, she was a Black American, and having many discussions with her, because I was basically living with her, and I had never lived with someone of another race before. So we had a lot of discussions, and I was very curious, and accepting. You know, I just never put myself in that situation of being difficult and I guess she kind of opened up some with me, she was a very nice gal, she was a lot of fun, I can remember doing stuff together. I remember one time she went to the beach and she wore a watch and when she came back she said, “Look I got a tan.” And we thought that was kind of funny and she said, “You know, you didn’t think that Black people got tan.” (Jane laughs a bit uncomfortably) And I said, ‘Well, no, I never thought of it.’ And so it was in a “back door” sort of way, I became very comfortable talking about things, and she was very open and I was, too, and I would say, ‘Oh, gosh, I never thought of it that way.’ And it was kind of like a smooth way into a discussion of things that perhaps other people would have been uncomfortable talking about. I can remember that being an eye-opening experience for me, like, ‘Oh, yeah, I need to think of these things.’ (Interview, 4/18/02)

Like many European Americans, Jane was fairly unaware of the “differences” in the lives and experiences of people from other ethnic and racial groups because her personal interactions with them had been very limited. And although she was student teaching

during the sixties, a time when the nation was becoming particularly aware of racial and gender differences, it was obvious that it was still a very uncomfortable and controversial topic at many schools. Jane's relationship with Gladys was extremely important, for it created a "safe space" in which she could openly and honestly talk differences with someone from a diverse background. By spending time, going places, and sharing her own experiences as a young African American woman, Gladys heightened Jane's awareness of these cultural differences and provided critical guidance and support as Jane learned to cross racial and ethnic borders.

These personal border crossing experiences profoundly shaped Jane's professional identity and her image of teaching; she aspired to be the type of elementary teacher who crossed borders and reached out to students, just like her seventh grade teacher, and she wanted to be respectful of and sensitive about cultural differences, just as she had learned from Gladys. Surprisingly, Jane had the chance to enact this professional image at her first teaching position in an elementary school in an "upper-crust neighborhood" in Simsbury, CT (Interview, 4/18/02). Although the school district, the board, the administrators and faculty were "all White," Jane recalled that they "felt as a town that they wanted to do something," so they developed Project Concern, an initiative through which fifty to sixty African American students from inner-city Hartford were selected and bused to two schools in Simsbury. Jane was working at one of the schools involved with Project Concern, and was one of several teachers who actually had African American children in her classroom. In reflecting upon her experience, Jane had mixed feelings about Project Concern and its outcome. Overall, she thought that the experience was positive and successful for everyone involved:

There was a lot of discussion about how to integrate these kids into the school, because basically a bus arrived with all-Black children and they walked into an all-white school, and I can't remember that we had any minority teachers; that doesn't stand out to me. But it was a very smooth experience. And I ended up having about six black children in my class, and they just kind of fit right in, in fact, I can remember the name of one of them, Leroy, and you know, you usually don't remember that of all the names! But he stood out as a very nice little boy. And we made sure that they had all of their school supplies ...we had lots of opportunities to get supplies for them and things that they needed and I think that lunch was given to them, so we tried to make them feel comfortable and it was very smooth experience for the kids (Interview, 4/18/02)

From a professional standpoint, Jane felt that Project Concern was effective because it facilitated the "border crossing" of these African American children. Because the school compensated for their limited financial resources by providing supplies and lunches, Jane believed that this enabled the African American students to "fit right in" to her classroom; they could feel more "comfortable" knowing that, at least in some ways, they were "just like everyone else."

Equally important, Jane felt that Project Concern was also a critical component of her own "border crossing" because the experience made her more aware of the tragic reality of educational inequality in the schooling of African American children:

Until Project Concern, I had never thought about racial differences before and how important it is for all children to have equal opportunity.... [Simsbury] was an area where it was very beautiful and we all had the materials, and the schools that the [Black] children had come from had a hard time with pencils and books and things (Interview, 1/14/02)

Project Concern was a powerful experience for Jane because it raised her awareness of the "separate and unequal" education that African American students were receiving in their community schools, and gave her the feeling that even as a European American teacher, she could do something to "level the playing field" for these students. In other words, Project Concern enabled Jane to transform her concern for African

American children into action, and she felt good about her role in supporting the “border crossing” experiences of the African American students in her classroom and at their school.

Yet Jane was troubled by the images of “border crossing” that Project Concern members enacted at the school and in the community:

I don't think there were a lot of problems because they didn't bring the [African American] families in. I think it was like a one-way street; these kids came, they got off the bus, they went to school, at the end of the day, they got back on the bus, and they left. ... I can't remember any protests at the school, the community was very accepting, I think because they got on the bus and went home (Jane chuckles a little sarcastically). But I think it was enough of a feeling that they felt they were doing something to help, and it was a beginning, that they realized they needed to do something (Interview, 4/18/02)

Jane's insightful metaphor of border crossing as a “one-way street” suggests that Project Concern members wanted to support the African American students at their school, but they did not want to travel into these students' world. In this regard, the school was a “gatekeeper” of knowledge and power within their community, and though Project Concern members aimed to provide “equal” access for the African American students, they also wanted to maintain “control” and protect their status of privilege and power; therefore, they never invited the families of the African American students into their school or their community. This “one-way” image of border crossing concerned Jane, particularly because it conflicted with the image of “joint travel” that she crafted based upon her personal experiences as a border crosser. As Jane thought about Project Concern, she sadly wondered if their lack of interest in the world of the African American students and their families ultimately undermined the success of the “border crossing” experience for their children:

I guess what I got out of Simsbury was that sure those kids were learning in school, but there wasn't really any interaction with their families. And I wonder now if it made any difference. You know, we were giving the kids a good education but did it make a difference? And I'm kind of hopeful that it did (Interview, 4/18/02)

Jane took her dream of “making a difference” in the border crossing experiences of African American students when she and her husband moved to Memphis, TN in 1972. Although Jane was trying to “cross borders” towards African American children, she quickly discovered that many other European Americans in Memphis were “crossing borders” to move away from the newly-integrated schools. Jane recalled that that most school districts weren't hiring teachers because most of the White students transferred to private schools, and this “White Flight” dramatically reduced the student population. So she decided to become a substitute teacher, and she was frequently assigned to the Memphis city schools—a world that was both shocking and strange:

I'd get there and there would be mostly all Black students in the classrooms, and a lot of the schools were very old, and the teachers were very strict. In fact, I can remember being shocked that they ate lunch in the cafeteria in rows, and they weren't allowed to talk, and the teachers went up and down the aisles with sticks. And I was just like totally shocked. and the materials were old, ... to me, it was just crowded. In the elementary schools they had the one-arm desks, they were uncomfortable for kids....And they were just kind of “warehousing” these kids, and I had some difficulty accepting the ways that kids on the whole were being treated, in addition to the fact that the materials were very old, the textbooks were old, and the libraries were not really equipped (Interview, 4/18/02)

Jane's experiences in the Memphis schools were particularly disturbing because she was aware of educational inequity, but she had never before witnessed the atrocities of such a system on the lives and souls of African American children. She was horrified that African American students were expected to learn in schools that were dilapidated and crowded, lacked books and other basic resources, and were staffed by teachers who

were extremely “strict” (Interview, 1/14/02). Jane remembered thinking at the time that “this is not the way education should be” (Interview, 1/14/02), and hoping that someone—a parent, a teacher, an administrator—would protest; she wanted to “say something,” but she felt her voice would not make much difference because she was just a substitute teacher (Interview, 4/18/02). To her knowledge, no one ever said anything, and Jane left Memphis a few years later because she could not tolerate “their way” of schooling (Interview, 1/14/02).

Jane and her husband settled in a community in the southeastern region of the country, and she continued to teach in a variety of public elementary schools. Jane never forgot the lessons that Project Concern and Memphis taught her, and her commitment to educational equity for African American children continued to be a fundamental concept in her philosophy of teaching. Jane deeply believed that one of the primary ways that she could help African American students “cross” into “school culture” was to design her classroom and instructional practices so that they would be treated fairly, and to hold “equally” high expectations for school success for all students. To accomplish this goal, Jane strongly advocated a culturally “colorblind” approach to “equality”:

When a child comes in my classroom, I don’t picture color. And I know that’s a cliché when people say that, but I really don’t. I look from a child’s strengths and work from there. And I think that [approach] cuts across all kinds of kids, from the most wealthy families to the ones who are having difficulty just surviving from paycheck to paycheck. And that’s what I focus on: where [students’] needs are and where their strengths are and I build from there... I think sometimes that teachers have expectations set up. Like “Oh, they’re from that neighborhood, and maybe they are not going to be able to do well.” And you set yourself up because if you think that the child is not going to do well, they don’t do well. And so that’s why I try to look at each child’s needs and strengths, and that’s where I begin (Interview, 1/14/02)

Jane's commitment to a "colorblind" perspective to teaching seems quite unusual because she had learned so much about "color" and how race-based educational inequality could devastate the academic careers of African American children. Although Project Concern and Memphis significantly raised Jane's awareness of these issues, they did not offer an effective professional model for teaching African American students. Neither Project Concern members nor Memphis teachers wanted to take the time to "cross over" into the world of African American students, to talk with them about their families and their community, and to listen to the stories of their lives and culture; consequently, Jane never learned how to become a teacher who could effectively "cross the borders" into the world of African American students. As a teacher, Jane felt it was her responsibility to provide the type of instruction that could facilitate successful learning for a wide variety of students and would be flexible enough to adjust to individual differences, but given her limited understanding of cultural diversity, she did not feel comfortable using a cultural perspective to guide her teaching. As Jane's comments suggested, she turned to the concept of "learning styles" because it was more familiar than "culture," and she thought it would be a useful tool for understanding the individual learning needs and strengths of her students and creating an inclusive classroom environment where fair treatment and "equally" high expectations could be realized.

Moreover, Jane seemed convinced that a "colorblind" perspective on teaching would enhance equality and fair treatment of all students because the difficulties she encountered on her journey into "school culture" resulted from a mismatch in learning style rather than cultural conflict:

When I went to [grade] school, you didn't have a lot of "hands-on" [instruction]; it was mostly teacher-directed, discussion, or dictator "You will do this" and lots of paperwork. And so I think as a child it was hard for me because the style and the way I was taught did not make it easy for me to learn. So I spent a lot of time studying, you know, reading over and over, and making notes and not really knowing how to go about helping myself... And then in college I realized that there were other styles of learning and that there wasn't something wrong with me. [I realized] that "Oh you could do hands-on!" and that you didn't always have to make a list of things,...but I never really had a name for it...But as we moved through our study of kids and all, then I became more aware of the different styles and global learning and the format style and that really made sense to me: "Oh, yeah, I have to hands-on instruction" so I realized that I was a global learner (Interview, 4/9/02)

Interestingly, Jane's educational experiences had also been "unequal," not because of her cultural background, but because her style of learning was "different." Because Jane had grown up thinking that her "learning differences" made her a "problem," she was very sensitive to variations in approaches to learning and aspired to accommodate these differences within her teaching as much as possible:

I know that not all children are going to look at things the same way I do. I tend to look at things globally, and I learn best by doing things hands-on, and I know there are kids who need that. But I also know that there are some kids who can look at a list and memorize it and have it down... There isn't any one way to learn something, and if you're expectation is that you want your kids to learn, then you have to provide that, otherwise they are not going to learn...[for] teachers who are concerned with success for all children, it does not matter what nationality the teachers are, the kids all have different challenges, and they try to meet their needs (Interview, 1/14/02)

Based upon her own schooling experiences and her beliefs about "colorblind" equality, Jane decided to use her insights into student learning styles as a strategy for "crossing the border" into the world of African American students. To expand her knowledge base, Jane took several graduate courses and attended as many workshops as she could on "all different kinds of kids and their learning (Interview, 4/9/02) and was

particularly fascinated by gifted students and struggling learners. Although she did not use specific learning style terminology to label her students or to identify specific learning needs, Jane developed a set of highly complex and richly textured teaching practices centered in the concept of “learning styles” that she used to support the successful border crossings of students from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

It was not until the early 1990s that Jane began seriously grappling with issues of cultural diversity and their implications for “crossing borders” into the lives of African American students. She began working in a newly-opened elementary school where she met Kim, a young African American woman who had just earned a master’s degree and was a brand-new third grade teacher:

Kim and I taught third grade right next door, and we were there usually until the late hours. She wasn’t a morning person, like me (Jane laughs) so we usually were working and developing units until late. It was brand-new and we had to make materials because the first year of school you don’t have everything you need, and of course she didn’t have anything to fall back on... So we were really starting fresh, and so we spent a lot of time planning and organizing and talking about kids. And they didn’t have a mentor program then, and so, she would kind of come to me, just for advice, and then we just spent so much time together and got to know one another and really developed as friends even before the year was out (Interview, 6/20/02)

Although Jane thought of herself as Kim’s “unofficial” mentor because she was a highly experienced teacher, she was delighted to find a significant source of inspiration and support in Kim, especially since there was little collegiality amongst the third grade teachers at their school:

There were three of us teaching third grade, but really Kim and I worked together. There was no third grade “team” there... The other gal was really more independent and she did some things with us, but Kim and I really spent a lot of time planning lessons and looking at books and talking, like,

“What are you going to do?” “Well, this is what I’m going to do.” And we had...a relationship [where] we could bounce ideas off of one another and then you develop something. And if Kim said something, I’d say, “Oh, that’s a good idea” and then we’d talk about it. And that’s really what I think good teaching is, you have to look at it with more than one pair of eyes and if you can work with someone who is a little bit different than you, and then you are attacking it from different ends. So Kim and I ...became really good friends, not only because we worked together but also because we enjoyed being around each other and ...we spent a lot of time together (Interview, 6/20/02)

As Jane and Kim worked together more closely, they became more comfortable with each other, and soon began talking about more personal issues in their lives. Jane believed that their friendship became strong because “we could handle each other’s quirks or non-quirks, we got along well, and we respected each other and we knew that we were going to have some bad days and some good days” (Interview, 6/20/02). Over time, the professional relationship that Jane and Kim had developed based on mutual respect, trust, and a desire to be effective teachers, began to deepen into a close personal friendship, and Jane discovered that they shared many similarities, and their interest in literacy and their love of learning were especially important:

[Kim] loved poetry, and I love children’s books, I collect them...and she did, too. And we would go to authors’ conferences... and we would go there together and you know we just always had books to talk about. And I don’t know a lot about her upbringing, but I know that her mother read to her a lot, because we talked about it, and her dad used to play word games a lot. And we would talk about my upbringing, and I remembered reading with my aunt and she read with her aunt. She played word games, and I played them too as a child. And she has always been interested in books, and she said that in the summer they used to go to the library; well, in the summers I did, too. And she even remembered her first book, and I did, too, so we spent a lot of time talking about our first books... [Kim] just has always been interested in books, and I was interested in children’s books and authors, too, and so that was a connection that we made (Interview, 6/20/02)

These similarities allowed Jane and Kim to bond through their common family and educational experiences and gave them a sense that they were “kindred spirits”; in fact, when someone at Kim’s wedding thought that Jane was her aunt, Jane remembered feeling warmed by the thought (Interview, 6/5/02). As a result, Jane expressed a strong belief in seeing and understanding people from diverse backgrounds through the lens of “similarity”:

I think that acceptance of cultures starts with curiosity and then when you really wonder about some else’s experiences and culture, it makes me think how much we are really all the same. I mean maybe there are people at the extremes like Bill Gates [who are different]...But you know when you look across the board, we’re all the same. No matter what culture, everybody wants the same things out of life: happiness, success. And people spend a lot of time and energy trying to separate themselves based on culture, and I can’t imagine living like that, day in and day out. You know, I just think it is fascinating to learn about different cultures...And I think that once you get past that color or nationality and you get to know someone, and you accept them and like them, that to me is success. And you find out they want the same things out of life and their lives are the same; they worry about money, marital problems, family problems, you want to do well and have a house. I mean there are some people out there who don’t have those problems, but I’m never going to be like Bill Gates, so maybe those people don’t worry about those things. But basically, we all want the same things out of life. (Interview, 6/5/02)

Yet Jane also recognized that cultural differences were also an integral part of her relationship with Kim. For example, Kim “was really into poetry” and shared the books she liked with Jane. Jane vividly remembered that because of Kim’s influence, she “ended up spending more time poetry” in her own classroom instruction, and had developed a love for poetry as well (Interview, 6/20/02). Jane and Kim were also very “different” in other ways; Kim was a vegetarian and did not drink caffeine or alcohol because she was “deeply religious,” while Jane was not (Interview, 6/20/02). Rather than allowing these differences to separate them, Jane felt that she and Kim seemed to grow

closer because they openly acknowledged and talked about them, and at times, even joked about how different they were (Interview, 6/20/02).

Jane's relationship with Kim "opened up a whole new world" for her and offered her the opportunity to talk openly about culture, to ask questions, and to seek advice:

I can remember one time asking her about [African American] hair (Jane laughs with slight embarrassment) because I've always been a short-haired person and so the little girls now they're into all kind of stuff like the clips and barrettes and we would laugh about that and I would say, "I can't do hair, Kim!" but she would tell me how to do it and try to help me. She's given me a different perspective on Black culture because she had invited me to things that I probably would have never experienced otherwise, and we've gone a lot of places together. Like at her wedding she had her sorority there, and it was just really neat to see some of that. And her husband is Hispanic, and he asked if she had any White friends, and there I was! (Jane chuckles good-naturedly) So we laughed about that. It's hard to cross cultures, and we've talked about that. And we've talked about the friends we have in terms of preferences, like we've talked about her friends and why she has so many black friends...And we can talk about those kinds of issues because we're comfortable; she knows where I'm coming from and I know where she's coming from. (Interview, 6/5/02)

Through Kim's invitations to see and experience African American culture, Jane discovered that "crossing cultural borders" meant recognizing and acknowledging similarities and differences; as friends and colleagues, Jane was able to create connections through the similarities that she shared with Kim, yet their differences also made their relationship special. Jane found the "border crossing" experience with Kim to be so successful because they were traveling across borders together, sharing their deepest thoughts, feelings, and experiences, finding joy in their commonalities and their differences. Talking about Kim's experiences as an African American woman and teacher was particularly helpful to Jane because these conversations stimulated thoughts and questions about how culture might shape a student's success in school and in life:

We talk a lot about education and Black students and the way she feels about teaching. And we would talk about her family, because she and her three siblings grew up in a pretty rough neighborhood in Chicago, and I was always fascinated because she and her sister were successful but her two brothers were not. And we would talk about that, and we spent time talking about what made her successful and how we as teachers would help other students in similar situations. Kim was so interested in education because she felt it was important to her success, and then she would be dealing day-to-day with kids and she would get so frustrated with them, like, “Why aren’t they getting it?!?” because she was dealing with African American kids and those from other cultures, too. She feels that she is more stringent on her African American students because she wants them to do well and some parents complained about that. And we’ve talked about it (Interview, 6/5/02)

As Jane reflected upon her own ideas about culture, and talked with Kim about these issues, she began to challenge some of her beliefs about equity and equality for African American students. Jane previously thought that educational equity was effectively achieved by a sense of “colorblind” equality that treated African American students the same as European American students and provided them with “equal access” to the resources and instructional support necessary to help them successfully cross into school culture, but after talking to Kim and experiencing African American culture for herself, she felt very differently about those issues:

I think that...if you get to know people and you treat them as friends and helpful, then, maybe I’m just being naive, but I think we would all get along. I guess that is what equality is to me: maybe we are not all looking at something the same way but we are accepting of one another...being fair and being supportive of one another and you know interacting with different people is important. So I guess that’s what I think equality is, and I don’t see that happening in a lot of places today. I think we have kind of separated again and that scares me because I don’t want to live in a world like that. And I guess that’s what I try to do in my class: ...you can’t treat students all exactly the same because every child is different, but you want the equal end result, we want them to learn and meet their potential. (Interview, 4/18/02)

In Jane's new perspective about equity and equality, the theme of "fairness" still serves as the cornerstone, but she has considered "acceptance of diversity" as a means of achieving equality. Furthermore, Jane's statement about "not treating students all exactly the same" but still "wanting the equal end result" suggests that she has developed a more nuanced understanding of equity and equality: equity does not simply mean "equal treatment," but rather "achieving an equal outcome by accommodating the individual differences of each student." Jane still felt more comfortable centering her teaching on "learning style differences" than "cultural differences," but her new ideas about equity and equality certainly served as a starting point for incorporating cultural diversity into her practice. Perhaps the most important insight that Jane seemed to have gained from her experiences with Kim was that she needed to acknowledge and respect student differences—whether cultural, learning style, or otherwise—if she hoped to "cross borders" into new worlds and effectively teach her African American students. Because Jane did not want to re-enact the Project Concern experience in her classroom by expecting African American students to cross into school culture but refusing to travel into their world, she attempted to teach in a way that made "border crossing" a shared experience between herself and her African American students. As she and her students traveled together, she strongly desired to "do what's best for each child" (Interview, 5/9/02) and was deeply committed to seeking out new and creative ways of meeting the learning needs of all her students so that they could successfully cross into school culture. Developing this type of practice was long and difficult, and even after teaching more than thirty years, Jane still believed that she was "learning all the time" (Interview, 6/5/02) and felt that she was "working really hard, and I'm not always successful, but I'm trying"

(Interview, 1/14/02). The insights she has gained about border crossing and classroom practice, and the lessons she has yet to learn, are at the heart of the next section.

Teaching and Learning As Border Crossing: Jane's Classroom Practice

From Jane's perspective, African American students, as well as the rest of the third graders in her classroom, needed to have certain academic and social skills in order to "cross the border" into school culture (Third Grade Teachers' Interview, 10/23/01). For most elementary school teachers, these twin goals of developing academic skills and social competence essentially define the parameters of "student success" (Cooper 1993; Danridge, 2000b). But this year, Jane had an especially difficult time trying to accomplish her instructional and social objectives in her classroom.

First, Jane had an extremely ethnically and linguistically diverse student population; out of 22 children, 8 were African American, 7 were European American, 1 was biracial, 3 were Hispanic American, 2 were Middle Eastern, and 1 was Asian American. Early in the year, Jane discovered that there was a wide range of academic ability in her classroom, with students reading ability ranging anywhere from first to fourth grade (Fieldnotes, 10/3/01). Although the Hispanic students received ESL support from a special program, it was clear to Jane that all of her students needed additional guidance and support in order to "cross over" into the academic world. For example, several of her African American girls were bright, but painfully shy, and Jane wanted to help them become more comfortable sharing their opinions and responses in class because she believed that future teachers would likely miss the fact that they were "good students" if they did not talk much in class (Third Grade Teachers' Interview, 10/23/01).

Jane also thought that her students generally needed to develop their oral language skills and to overcome their fear of public speaking because she strongly believed that “it is an important part of growing up (Third Grade Teacher’s Interview, 10/23/01).

Of all her students, Jane was probably most concerned about John’s ability to successfully cross into the culture of school. As the only African American boy in her classroom, John had already been previously retained and his academic performance in third grade was low; he was a struggling reader, had difficulty working by himself and with others, and rarely completed assignments. To make matters worse, John’s behavioral “issues,” such as frequently getting out of his seat, yelling out inappropriately, and engaging in off-task behaviors, seemed to contribute to his academic difficulties. Jane felt she was “at a loss” (Interview, 1/14/02) with John, and she didn’t know what else to do for him; she suspected that “something was going on at home” since John often came to school hungry and extremely restless, and he frequently was absent from school. But after approaching John’s parents about the situation, she felt that her “hands were tied” because his father was extremely defensive and denied that his son had any academic or behavioral difficulties, and although his mother was sympathetic, she ultimately sided with John’s father (Interview, 1/14/02). By the middle of the year, Jane was frustrated by the situation and near the end of her rope:

John is not learning at the rate of other kids, and why is that? It drives me crazy, and I literally think, ‘What else can I do?’ I could just give him all F’s and let him fail, but I don’t want that to happen (Interview, 1/14/02)

Moreover, Jane was struggling with a particular social dynamic in her classroom that she hadn’t had to “deal with in a long time” (Second Focus Group, 4/30/02). Over the years Jane had taught many multiethnic classes, but this year’s class had an extremely

high number of African American students. In fact, African American was the cultural “majority” in Jane’s class; 7 out of 13 girls were African American, and with nearly one-third of the entire student population being African American, they were the largest cultural group in the classroom. Jane noticed that, in general, her students were having an extremely difficult time working together and accepting others, and she wondered how the large number of African American girls affected the social context of the classroom:

This year’s class, and I have quite a few Black girls, and I can’t put my finger on what it is (Jane pauses for about six seconds)...but there’s no embracing of the cultures. I mean, you’ve heard them even talk about it amongst themselves. And I think some of it is personality, and I have to try and get them past that, so that they can accept them and everyone else. Otherwise, we’re gonna have Black kids sitting over here, White kids sitting over here, Hispanic kids over here, Asian kids over here, all the time (Second Focus Group, 4/30/02).

Jane did not mind that the African American girls spent a significant amount of time playing and interacting amongst themselves, and in fact, she thought it was “cute” for pairs of African American girls, like Kia and Lanay, to be “best friends” and call each other on the phone in order to plan matching outfits or to talk about school. But Jane was deeply concerned when she saw that as a “group” these girls did not easily include others:

...they will help Maria, and Maria is really good about it, and they would help John,...but they don’t like to deal with Kiara ((Kiara is a biracial child)). There is always that comment about Kiara. And she didn’t know quite how she fit into this mix, and some of those girls were pretty rough on her....(Second Focus Group, 4/30/02)

Jane theorized that several African American girls had difficulty accepting others who seemed “different” because of their personalities. Of all the African American girls, Jane was most concerned about Jasmine because she thought Jasmine had an extremely domineering personality (Interview, 5/9/02). Jasmine was so bossy on the playground that Jane eventually began to discourage the African American girls from her class from

playing with those in another class at recess (Interview, 5/9/02). Jane also thought that Jasmine could be very challenging, and when asked to elaborate further, she recounted an incident between Jasmine and a substitute art teacher:

One day we had an Asian guy as the sub for the art teacher, and I could tell that he was scared to death. And he was calm and quiet and his approach was to “wait them out.” So when they were working and he wanted them to stop, he would say, “I’m waiting.” And Jasmine would keep write on working and he so he had to say this a few times. I could tell that he was getting mad but I didn’t want to butt in because then he wouldn’t have control of the class. So finally Jasmine looked up and I could tell that Jasmine was challenging him, but I left soon after she looked up because I thought she was going to pay attention. But when I returned, the kids all said that Jasmine kept right on working whenever she felt like it, and the Asian teacher was very upset (Interview, 5/9/02)

Since Jasmine was the leader of the African American girls, she often controlled the social scene by defining the groups that were “in” and “out.” For example, Jasmine, John, and Sakina had a discussion about the type of cars that their parents drove. Jasmine said that her parents had a BMW, and when John mentioned that his father drove a Volvo, Jasmine nodded her head in approval. But when Sakina said that her parents drove a Hyundai, Jasmine replied with a hint of disgust, “Ewwwww, that’s a cheap car! You can’t be with us!” (Fieldnotes, 10/3/01). Jasmine’s opinions about money, status, and popularity, mattered a great deal to the African American girls, and even the three European American girls seemed to want to be accepted by Jasmine and her friends. Jasmine was always dressed nicely in the latest designer clothing and sneakers, and once she told me that her mother brought her new sneakers every other month so that she “wouldn’t look poor” (Fieldnotes, 10/23/01). Although it was likely that European American and other students also talked about these social status issues amongst themselves, none of them dared to openly judge teachers or other adults by those

standards like Jasmine and one or two of the other African American girls did. Even Jane was subject to their critical gaze, and although they did offer compliments when they especially liked her clothing or shoes, when they did not approve, their whispering and laughing could be quite disruptive and disrespectful (Fieldnotes, 11/13/01). Sometimes Jasmine was bold enough to ask Jane about her choice of apparel; on one particularly balmy morning in April, Jasmine and several other African American girls were wearing sandals showing freshly-pedicured toes, and Jasmine went up to Jane and asked why she was “still wearing those winter shoes.” Jane seemed to be a little put-off by Jasmine’s snootiness, and in a quiet but firm voice she replied that she hadn’t had time to get a pedicure and let the matter drop (Fieldnotes, 4/18/02). Jane was “scared for Jasmine” because she felt that her personality might be “set,” and she was uncertain about what she could do to help her change it (Interview, 5/9/02).

Given this complex array of academic and social issues, some teachers might have opted to “take the easy way out”; Jane, however, was determined to “figure out” (Interview, 1/14/02) how to make her vision of “border crossing” a reality in her classroom practice. To that end, Jane aspired to support the “border crossing” of African American students as they traveled into the unknown land of “school culture” by acting as their guide to the strange world and providing “insider information” that would enable them to acquire these school-based ideologies and behaviors more easily. Moreover, Jane wanted to provide emotional and psychological support to her students by “crossing over” into their world and developing personal relationships with them, just as her seventh grade teacher had done for her. As the year unfolded, Jane’s classroom practices revealed a three-part process that engendered the “border crossing” experience of Jane

and her African American students: a) Understanding students as learners; b) Making personal connections with students; and c) Opening up a whole new world of literacy.

Understanding Students As Learners

In the first phase of border crossing, Jane believed it was critical for her to “cross borders” into the world of “student culture” in an effort to reach out to all students and invite them to take the journey into “school culture” with her. Initially, Jane used the concept of learning style to become familiar with students and their world. Throughout the early months of school, Jane spent a substantial amount of time trying to “get to know” students as learners by developing insights into students’ particular approaches to learning and assessing their strengths and needs:

I enjoy kids...I spend a lot of time just sitting and watching the kids, and that’s why I don’t get all of my testing done! I sit down with them, I talk to them to try and get a feel for them, and that’s why a lot of times I’m wandering around, because I like to hear how they approach things and I try to figure out what works with them. Do they give up so easily because they get frustrated? Do they need more time to figure things out? Those kinds of things are really important to understanding how a child learns (Second Focus Group Interview, 4/30/02)

Importantly, the concept of “learning style” was the foundation of Jane’s classroom practice and the essence of the border crossing experience because it embodied the ideals of equity and equality. In Jane’s vision of educational equity, students’ diverse learning interests and abilities would be equally acknowledged and represented in instruction. While many teachers tend to focus their energies upon students with the most severe learning difficulties, Jane used the concept of learning styles to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the particular learning issues of all her students. Her insights about a shy African American student named Kia exemplifies this point:

I think Kia is very bright but she doesn't like sharing at all. So whenever she raises her hand, I call on her....Sometimes I just wait her out and she comes up with an answer,...and to me it seems like I'm up there for ten minutes...but, you know, students like Kia have learned that they don't have to answer, if they're shy or for whatever reason, they learn that if they just wait long enough then teachers will move on and they won't have to answer. So I try to give her little hints like, "I'm gonna come to you in a little bit" so that she knows I am going to call on her....Or I say, "I'm coming back to you" or "When you have an answer, raise your hand" and that seems to work for her. But it's a fear to speak up but it's important too because Kia has a lot to offer, and I want her to feel like her opinion is important and that she can share...She's the kind of person a teacher would forget about very easily, and go all day and not say anything to, but I want to know what she's thinking (Third Grade Teachers' Interview, 10/23/01)

Understanding Kia's specific needs as a learner enabled Jane to adjust her pedagogical approach in a way that provided Kia with "equal access" into the culture of schooling. For example, during a math activity, Jane called on Kia as soon as she raised her hand because she knew that it took a great deal of courage for her to offer her answers publicly (Fieldnotes, 10/16/01). During another lesson, Jane extended the wait time for Kia so that she could think about the answer. Although several other students had their hands raised, Jane asked them to, "Give Kia time to think. She's a good thinker and she can figure out the answer." (Fieldnotes, 10/23/01). After a few moments, Kia did give the correct response, and Jane clearly supported her thinking by extending the wait time and publicly expressing her confidence in Kia's intellectual ability. By April, Kia's confidence had developed so much that she was raising her hand to voluntarily share her answers and thus did not need as much support to speak in class (Fieldnotes, 4/9/02).

One could argue that a learner-centered practice like Jane's ultimately exacerbates inequity, because some students seems to be unfairly "advantaged" based upon their learning styles; for instance, when Jane did not call on students who had their hands

raised, it might appear that these students' self-confidence and intellectual ability was "sacrificed" in order to support Kia's "introverted" learning style. In an attempt to compensate for these minor individual disparities, Jane sought to achieve equity and equality for the entire group by adapting her instruction in ways that accommodated a wide range of learning styles and supported the success of multiple children:

I have to be aware of what kind of learner each child is, and then I try to make sure that my day is balanced with different varieties of different methods. For example, we might have lots of coloring, or cut and paste or a lot of hands-on.... so I try to adapt every lesson,...maybe not every lesson right in a row, but that the child has had some success through the day in their learning style or in their own technique. You know, there's usually a lot going on in my room, and I don't mind talk because I think they need to talk. And so I try to look at, well if we've just sat down and just been quiet, then to balance that. I try to look at the kids, ...and I try to make sure that they have success during their day (Interview, 1/14/02)

For Jane, a "balanced approach" to teaching was the key to educational equity because it gave her the flexibility to provide instructional support for a broad range of learners. During language arts, for instance, Jane would generally present content in a "whole group" setting, followed by a combination of individual and small group activities that provided opportunities for practice and mastery learning. In one lesson, Jane read a book to the class about two friends, and led a group discussion about the similarities and differences between these two friends using a Venn Diagram. Afterwards, the students went back to their seats to write their predictions of what would happen to the two friends (Fieldnotes, 9/13/02). On another day, Jane emphasized oral language development through poetry. She asked several students to volunteer to come to the front of the room and say or read a poem that they had already discussed. Next, Jane introduced a new poem about bats, and after they practiced reading it chorally, they talked about specific poetic devices, such as rhythm, rhyme, and alliteration, and

reviewed relevant vocabulary words (e.g., mobile, mammal, myriad). Finally, Jane asked the students to work quietly at their desks to “illustrate” their bat poem (Fieldnotes, 10/29/01). This sequencing of cooperative and individual learning activities worked particularly well for African American students because it accommodated the learning preferences of students like Lanay, Dana and Sakina, who really enjoyed working with others, yet provided ample opportunities for students like Tamyra and Kia, who were shy, to quietly work by themselves.

Interestingly, this “balanced approach” to instruction enabled Jane to honor and validate students’ learning styles. During paired reading exercises, for example, Jane often paired strong readers with those who were struggling so that both students would feel a sense of accomplishment; the struggling reader would feel good about reading a more advanced book, and the stronger reader would feel good about helping someone to read (Fieldnotes, 10/3/01). Similarly, when Jane asked African American students who completed their work to help those who needed additional support, she often seemed to consider the compatibility of students’ “learning styles” so that the experience would be mutually rewarding. For instance, Jane specifically asked Tamyra, an African American girl, to help Jeff, a European American boy, with making his thermometer because he was having trouble (Fieldnotes, 9/17/01). Jane’s matching of Tamyra and Jeff seemed deliberate, for Tamyra was a shy and quiet girl who would be able to work well with Jeff, a boy whom Jane described as “smart” but had “some social issues” (Interview, 5/9/02). This pairing was very effective because Tamyra’s quiet and unassuming demeanor disarmed Jeff’s aggression, which enabled him to receive the support he needed to complete his work, and gave Tamyra the opportunity to talk and work with a classmate.

Making personal connections with students

Like the seventh grade teacher who “saved her,” Jane aspired to be a teacher whose genuine concern and caring made a significant difference in the lives of African American students and others who had difficulty “crossing” into school culture. In the first phase, Jane “crossed borders” into the world of her African American students through the concept of learning styles, but in second phase, she aimed to connect with them on a more personal level:

I think that as soon as children walk into our classrooms that they need to feel safe. And they need to feel that we are connected in some way to them...they need to feel that I care about what they are thinking--that they are valuable. Even if they give me a hard time, you know, if they're having some difficulty, the next day when they come they know that they're still gonna feel comfortable coming to me and we talk about what they did wrong....[and] they need to feel confident that I am not going to make fun of them, or ridicule them if they make a mistake. So I do think that a relationship is really important. (Third Grade Teachers' Interview, 10/23/01).

With a classroom of twenty-two students, it was quite difficult to make personal connections with each student, yet Jane attempted to “touch each child in some way during the day so that they know that I am aware of them” (Interview, 1/14/02). She strongly believed that talking and interacting with students on an individual basis was one of the most effective ways of reaching out and “touching” them:

I try very hard to talk to every student every day; Even if it's just at attendance, I'll try to ask a question so that they know I want to hear from them. Because oftentimes in the past I would look back on what I've done during the day and I'd realize that I'd gone all day without talking to the students...(Interview, 10/23/01)

Jane realized that, like most elementary teachers, she spent so much time and energy on instructing and managing a group of students that she had little very little to give to individual children. So Jane “got smart” about her time, and transformed routine

tasks, such as taking attendance and lining up for outside activities, into opportunities for personal interaction with each student. While taking attendance in the mornings, Jane made a concerted effort to interact with students in a way that made them feel successful. Oftentimes, Jane would ask students to spell various words from their weekly lists, and when Jane praised African American students like Joy and Sakina for spelling their “hard” words (e.g., magnify, microscope, and explode) correctly, they giggled with happiness (Fieldnotes, 10/23/01). Jane also asked students questions before they lined up for lunch and recess, sometimes asking them to solve a simple math problem, or to tell her something that they learned that week (Fieldnotes, 9/21/01). During whole group instruction, Jane consciously tried to “touch each student” so that they would not get lost in the group by eliciting responses from a wide variety of students and particularly encouraging students who were silent to share their ideas (Fieldnotes, 10/29/01, 1/14/02, 4/9/02).

Jane also developed personal connections with students by learning about their interests. She explained that as a teacher, “You want your students to learn and to feel successful, so you have to search out things that will pique their interest and help them to learn. So you have to find out where their interests are and get them involved in their own learning” (Interview, 4/9/02). One strategy that Jane used to facilitate her “border crossing” was to design “hands-on” classroom activities that highlighted student interests and preferences. An excellent example of this type of activity was an exercise that Jane organized as part of an integrated math and language arts unit on creating and interpreting graphs. Rather than using the math textbook to introduce the topic, Jane brought in a “Big Book” called Graph It by Jennifer Osbourne and read it aloud to the class. As she read

about the different types of graphs (e.g., pie graph, bar graph, pictograph), she pointed out their particular features, explained how they were constructed, and described how they represented information. After reading the book, Jane announced that they would be making their own graphs based upon “a question that you think is interesting.” For about ten minutes, Jane asked students to talk about topics that interested them (e.g., favorite sports, foods, colors, seasons), and explored the questions and choices that each elicited. Once all of the students had selected a topic, Jane gave them time to “collect information” from their peers that would be used to construct their graphs later that afternoon. Students’ questions spanned a wide range of topics, from favorite Pokemon to favorite candy to favorite movie and favorite candy. All of the students, including the African American students, eagerly asked and answered questions about their classmates’ interests and preferences, and they enjoyed this activity so much that they actually protested when they had to stop for lunch (Fieldnotes, 10/16/01). From Jane’s perspective, this graphing activity provided an opportunity for her to “cross” into the lives of her students by learning more about them and gleaning some specific information about their interests that may have been useful for planning future learning activities.

Jane also used reading and writing activities to learn more about student interests. She required her third graders to keep a “reading record sheet” which listed the title and pages that they read and described their weekly personal goals. After DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) time, Jane often asked students to record their independent reading on their sheets, then spent about fifteen to twenty minutes talking about the books that they read and/or the goals that they wanted to achieve. Through these causal conversations, and the “individual reading conferences” that students set up with Jane

after reading five books, Jane discovered that Dana enjoyed reading the Pee Wee Scouts series of books and encouraged her to read “the one about the bad, bad bunnies” (Fieldnotes, 10/16/01), noted that Joy liked reading Ramona Quimby books (Fieldnotes, 9/21/01), and learned that John played football and was interested in reading books about sports (Fieldnotes, 9/13/01). As a “border crosser,” Jane felt that this type of personal information was invaluable because it provided insights into their lives, particularly for African American students like John, whose literacy development had been delayed. Once Jane discovered that he enjoyed football, she searched for books about football and sports magazines to bring for John in an effort to improve his reading skills and to support his emergent interest in literacy.

Jane was an extraordinary border crosser because she was deeply committed to understanding African American students and their world, even if it meant traveling into the unknown land of “cultural diversity.” Based upon her experiences with Project Concern, and the insights that she learned from Kim, Jane recognized that border crossing experiences oftentimes cast the cultural “differences” of African American students in a negative light, and she did not want to make her students feel inferior or ashamed in any way. But she was afraid of talking about culture and cultural differences, particularly with her African American students, because did not know how to address these issues. For example, during an intense discussion that John and Jasmine had about using terms like “Black” or “brown” to signify race, Jane listened intently, but eventually asked them to “stop talking and finish working.” Later, she admitted that she was “fascinated” by their conversation, but she thought that she needed to end it because she did not know what to say (Fieldnotes, 11/9/02). But Jane did not let these minor setbacks

deter her from trying to understand the world of cultural diversity; in fact, she was quite willing to learn new things because she always wanted to improve her teaching:

The bottom line is that I want my kids to learn....I feel that that is my important job. And I will do whatever it takes for each child to be successful and I sometimes have to find things that I'm not familiar with, and I'll seek people that maybe have had success in getting a child to work or discipline or something. I'm not afraid of asking for help, you know, like, 'Hey, this is working, so how do I do that?' (Jane laughs). (Interview, 1/14/02)

Remarkably, Jane was not afraid of learning about cultural diversity from her African American students. For example, on one particular morning, Jane called the students to the rug for a guided discussion on Eve Bunting books, and when they were settled, she asked Tamyra to bring the book that she shared with her that morning (Fieldnotes, 11/13/01). Tamyra, who was usually shy and quiet, had brought an Eve Bunting book called The Memory String from home, and wanted to talk about it. Because Tamyra was so excited about the book, Jane gave time for her to do an impromptu "book share." Jane read the title, made certain that everyone understood what a memory was, and asked several students to make predictions about the story. After this brief introduction, Jane gave the floor to Tamyra, who proceeded to describe the characters and the main events in the story. Jane also asked Tamyra to share how she felt about the book, and to explain what the memory string was. The students were so fascinated by the story that they began talking about how people make memories, and Jane began asking the students how they made memories. Hands shot up in the air, and children from all ethnic backgrounds were eager to share. Billy, a European American boy, talked about the clothing his mother saved; Chuang, an Asian American boy, treasured old photographs of his family; Karen, a Euro American girl, collected special stickers from her relatives, and Lanay collected

shells from family vacations. By giving children the space to talk openly their families' memory-making practices, Jane entered into the world of "cultural diversity" in a very natural and meaningful way; through this dialogue with her students, Jane learned to honor the rich diversity of family cultural practices, and to value the commonalities of the "human experience" that these practices represented. Equally important, this experience reinforced the power of literacy as a tool for allowing children to "see themselves" and to "see others"; Eve Bunting was a European American woman, yet the African American and other culturally-diverse students in Jane's classrooms were able to connect to her story because it emphasized the emotions and experiences of being in a family. And yet her students seemed to also appreciate the differences in the ways that they made memories, and listened attentively as their peers fondly talked about their family traditions.

This lesson on the power of literacy was particularly helpful for Jane as she attempted to develop a relationship with Jasmine. For months, Jane had been concerned about Jasmine's domineering personality, and wondered how to address the issue. Oftentimes, Jane would approach a child's parents when she had concerns about a child, but she was uncertain about how to raise the issue with Jasmine's parents. Early in the year, Jane wrote comments on her report card praising Jasmine's leadership qualities and her intelligence, but didn't mention the bossiness because she was not sure how her parents would react. Jane also felt uneasy about speaking with her parents because she thought that her mother was "resistant." Jane explained that in one incident, Jasmine was nasty towards a substitute teacher, so she asked her to write a letter and explain her behavior to her mother, hoping that her mother would "read between the lines" and

realize that her daughter needed help changing her personality. But Jasmine's mother defended Jasmine's behavior and mentioned that she was extremely upset with the substitute teacher. Jane thought that Jasmine's mother was resistant because she was a White teacher, and because Jasmine and her family had recently moved into the area, Jane did not have the opportunity to build up much credibility as a "fair" teacher with her parents:

Sometimes [African American] parents initially think of me, "Oh, you're a White teacher" and there are already those barriers there. And I think that sometimes I have to get over that, and I have to build up enough of a reputation for them to know that, that I'm going to be fair, or whatever, and that's hard for me as a White teacher. You know, it's not any easier with a white family, either (Jane quietly chuckles), but you still have that trust. And many times, it's not so much now, but in my early years, Black parents had had negative experiences with White teachers and White schools, so it was an initial barrier that we had to break down. And I've had examples in my background no matter how hard I've worked hard for all the kids in my class, they [African American parents] didn't accept that because I was White. And that bothered me more than anything because I would search, I would think, "Uh oh, did I do something wrong?" and I would check myself, and I'm thinking back, but it's hard to know (Second Teachers' Focus Group, 4/30/02)

Jane's comments illuminate her struggle to understand how cultural differences shaped the relationships between herself and African American parents. Throughout her career, Jane had had few models of successful home-school connections with African American parents; even Project Concern, an initiative that Jane thought had been fairly effective, was extremely weak in this area. Because Jane did not know how to create a strong partnership with Jasmine's parents, she felt that she had to address this issue on her own.

Jane developed a relationship with Jasmine and as she did so, she discovered other factors that might have attributed to her dominant personality; for example, Jasmine was an only child, and because her father was in the military, her family moved often and

she already been to several new schools (Interview, 5/9/02). Jane was very sympathetic to Jasmine's school experience, and believed that Jasmine might have "come on so strong" with her friends and peers because "starting over" in so many new schools was so difficult. As their relationship grew stronger, Jane decided that she could talk about this personality issue openly with Jasmine. She searched for a book that she could read privately with Jasmine, and Jane eventually brought in an African American storybook about a Black girl who learned that empathy and caring towards others created beauty. She and Jasmine spent time reading the story and talking about the girl, and Jane mentioned to Jasmine that she might want to think about how she interacted with others. Though reading the book did not produce immediate changes, Jane felt that the experience had helped her to "turn the corner" in some ways, and she had noticed that Jasmine was indeed much calmer and had a better attitude than at the beginning of the year (Interview, 5/9/02).

The year with Jasmine proved to be a significant "border crossing" experience for Jane in several ways. Since she did not cover any African American authors in her curriculum, Jane had to cross into "unfamiliar territory" in order to select an appropriate book for Jasmine. Also, the fact that Jane consciously chose an African American book for Jasmine also suggests that she had begun to "cross borders" into the world of cultural diversity and had become more aware of the role that culture might play in the learning and development of African American students like Jasmine. Equally important, this situation inspired Jane to critically reflect upon her feelings about and perceptions of African American parents, and although she knew this issue would remain to be a

struggle, she seemed optimistic that her continued learning as a “border crosser” would enable her to develop more constructive relationships with these parents.

Clearly, Jane devoted to a substantial amount of time and effort to “crossing borders” into the world of her African American students. Though she felt an enormous amount of pressure to rush directly into teaching because her third graders took a high-stakes test at the end of the year, Jane believed that her students would be more likely to have the curiosity and desire to learn if she took time to make them feel safe and confident as learners (Third Grade Teachers’ Interview, 10/24/01). Essentially, Jane showed that she deeply cared about her students and was willing to go to any length to help them to succeed as “border crossers” by accommodating and affirming diversity in student learning styles through her pedagogy. As a result, all of her African American students, even those with fairly serious academic and behavioral issues like John, seemed excited about taking a journey into the new world of “school culture” with Jane.

Opening a whole new world to students

The third phase of the “border crossing” experience was one in which Jane helped her African American students to enter into and acquire the culture of school. During this phase, Jane sought to provide access to the “new world” of schooling and school-based literacy practices by “opening it up” for them:

My students learn by doing. And a lot of them haven’t had life experiences to build on.... So if you are talking about things, and they have never seen the tides, or ...like right now we are doing chemistry, and if they have never had the chance to get powders all over the kitchen and explore, it’s really like opening up a whole new world for them. (Interview, 4/9/02)

Jane's interpretation of her role as a teacher and border crosser is critical to the academic success of the African American students in her classroom. Rather than perceiving these students to be "at-risk" because they did not have the kind of life experiences that easily connected to "school culture," she envisioned her work as creating these important experiences and promoting academic skills and behaviors through innovative "hands-on" learning activities. For instance, to teach mathematical concepts like measurement (e.g., weight, volume) or percents and decimals, Jane brought in pumpkins and allowed students to weigh them, or filled up various-sized containers with water to teach about volume, or used "paper money" to talk about decimals rather than having the children merely read about these ideas in their math books (Interview, 6/20/02). In Jane's classroom practice, this type of "active" instructional stance seemed to be an extremely effective approach for teaching specific curricular concepts and topics, and more importantly, also served as a means for helping her African American students acquire the ideologies and behaviors associated with school culture.

"Bringing reason" to literacy learning. In her classroom, Jane strongly advocated an instructional approach that made the practices and literacies of "school culture" explicit and accessible for all her students:

I think that teachers need to let kids know that they have to learn the vocabulary of learning, and they have to know why they are doing something. You know, I just don't want to give them something and they have to do it because they have to do it... When we are practicing our spelling we talk about why, not so much because we want to spell words on the spelling test, but when we write we want our spelling to be correct. So I try to bring reason to why we are doing some things that perhaps are boring to some kids the same thing over and over, but I explain why we need to do them (Interview, 1/14/02)

Jane believed that her African American students, and the others in her classroom, would maximize their learning potential if she served as a navigator through school culture by “bringing reason” to the processes and strategies of higher-order cognition. Rather than “dumbing down” her speech, for instance, Jane tended to use more advanced vocabulary words and took time to explain them. During a lesson to introduce a unit on bats, Jane showed a few photographs of bats and mentioned that those we see are often taking of bats in captivity. She explained what captivity meant, then said that another photographer who worked “out in the field” began taking pictures of bats “in their natural habitat” and the bats were calm and almost smiling in his photos. By discussing the concepts of “captivity,” “habitat,” and “working out in the field,” Jane guided her students to understanding why there was such a significant difference in the photographs of the bats (Fieldnotes, 10/23/01). Some teachers would have not spent time talking about these concepts because they might have felt they were “too hard” for the diverse students in Jane’s classroom, or they might have used smaller words, such as “free” and “trapped,” to convey these ideas. But Jane used more advanced vocabulary in her teaching because she seemed confident that they could learn “the hard stuff.” To bolster their own sense of confidence in their academic abilities, Jane would oftentimes tell the students that they were “smart children” and what they were learning was “fifth grade stuff” or “hard stuff”:

It is approximately 9:15am, and Jane is ready to begin a new activity. She asks the class to clear their desks, and once everyone is settled, she explains, “Our objective today is to use numbers to tell time and we are going to make a clock. What kind of clock is this?” John says it is a cuckoo clock, and Jane replies that it is not, but that it was a “good guess.” She reminds the class that a guess is “when we use information and we think about a question and we take a chance to answer it.” Another boy says that it is not digital, and Jane commends him on using his information to “figure out what this clock is not to help you find out what it is.” After a few other students venture guesses, Sakina raises her hand and says that,

“It is just a clock.” Sensing their frustration, Jane explains that this clock “has a special name. It is an analog clock or a face clock.” She asks them to say the word analog with her, then begins joking with her students, telling them, “Now, don’t go home and tell Mom or Dad that I’m telling you hard fifth grade stuff.” She looks over at Tamyra, who is smiling broadly and says, “You’re going to go right home and tell aren’t you?” and Tamyra, Jane, and the rest of the class laugh merrily. (Fieldnotes, 9/13/01)

This lesson clearly illustrates Jane’s ability to “bring reason” to her students and to powerfully engage African American students. John’s response was especially significant, because although he was struggling with academic and behavioral issues, he was motivated enough to take a risk and try to Jane’s question. Jane’s explanation of the “objective” of the lesson, her praise for their efforts, and her playful way of letting them know that they had indeed learned “the hard stuff” all seemed to contribute to the feeling that John and his classmates had that they were intelligent learners, that they could understand and achieve if they followed the thinking process that Jane consistently emphasized in class.

Jane also “brought reason” to literacy learning through extensive cognitive modeling. Throughout the year, she explicitly described and enacted the process of becoming a “good reader” by demonstrating a variety of cognitive reading strategies. In September, Jane talked about making predictions:

Jane read a story to the class about friends called Amos and Boris by William Strank. After the first two pages, she stopped and said, “As we read, I’m wondering in my head, what’s going to happen next? I’m thinking to myself and I’m making a prediction. Who has a prediction that they want to make? That’s what a good reader does; they think about what might happen then read to see if they are right.” One student said that Boris the whale is going to eat Amos the mouse who is on his back because his boat is destroyed at sea. Jane smiled, and discussed how his prediction connected that to the story of the fox and the gingerbread man when the fox ate the gingerbread man on his back. She asked the class,

“Show me with your thumb up. How many of you think he is going to eat Amos?” Almost every thumb goes up (Fieldnotes, 9/13/01)

Later in the year, Jane modeled a technique that she called “visualizing”:

It is 10:30am, and the children are seated on the rug. Once everyone settled down, Jane begins to talk about the term “visualizing” and how they will use it when they listen to the story. She mentions that “good readers visualize when they are reading because it helps them to understand.” Jane asks the class to practice visualizing a recent story they read about Christopher Columbus: “When we read about Christopher Columbus, what picture do you get in your mind? What do visualize when I say Christopher Columbus?” Several students raise their hands, and offer their images of the three ships, Columbus meeting Queen Isabella, and meeting the Native Americans. As each student answers, she asks questions that elaborate on their visualization; for example, Jane asks Faraz, “How do you think Columbus felt meeting Queen Isabella?” Faraz replied, “Nervous,” and Jane asks why. For a few minutes, she and the class think about why Columbus would have been nervous, and she reminds the class that “visualizing helps us to understand.” She announces that they are going to begin reading a story about Native Americans called The Very First Americans, and she reminds the class to “visualize your own pictures in your head as I read the story.” (Fieldnotes, 4/18/02)

These two excerpts are representative of the types of cognitive scaffolding that Jane used to engage her students deeply within the process of reading. By modeling “active” cognitive strategies for reading, such as making predictions and visualization, and explicitly describing them as “habits of mind” associated with “good readers,” Jane supported students’ metacognitive awareness during reading activities and enhanced their ability to monitor their own reading comprehension. For African American students like John and Tamyra who were reading at lower levels, Jane’s cognitive modeling offered invaluable cognitive strategies that they applied while reading texts (e.g., “I think that the little girl is going to get lost in the forest and find a house like Goldilocks does”[Making predictions, John], “I see the picture of Abe Lincoln in my head to help me read this

biography” [Visualizing, Tamyra]) that may have fostered their literacy development (Fieldnotes, 1/9/02, 5/4/02).

Evoking emotional responses to literature. Jane intuitively understood that “border crossing” into “school culture” was an intellectual and emotional journey, perhaps as a result of her own learning difficulties in school. As a teacher, she felt that evoking affective responses to learning, particularly through literature, was essential to her teaching:

Teaching is a little bit of acting because you are showing emotions. Sometimes you are performing to get them involved... We do laugh, and they’ve seen me cry at books. You know, [with] Eve Bunting books I’m just dying... I read a couple of books last year, my kids would say, and I’d have Amy read the last page to the class because my throat catches and I can’t read it. So you know, they see a lot of emotion...(Interview, 10/23/01).

Recognizing that an aesthetic instructional stance should to be appropriate and meaningful for student learning, Jane most often displayed and evoked emotional responses through literature-based activities. For example, Jane read aloud a nonfiction book entitled Beacons of Light: Lighthouses by Gail Gibbons. She introduced it by mentioning that it was her “favorite Gail Gibbons books” because she loved to visit lighthouses—a statement that indicated her strong and intense emotional response to the book and to its subject matter. Although only a few students had ever been to a lighthouse, Jane maintained their interest in the book by reading with a voice filled with excitement and awe, explaining relevant vocabulary (e.g., hart, reflection, prisms), calling attention to the photographs (e.g., “Isn’t this lighthouse built high into the rocks? “Look at these birds. They are called puffins.”), and sharing personal memories of the

lighthouses she visited. Although the book was rather long, the students were completely mesmerized by Jane and her affective interpretation of it; they listened intently as Jane read, asked thoughtful questions about the book, and clamored to hear more of Jane's personal stories about visiting lighthouses (Fieldnotes, 9/17/01).

Similarly, Jane sought to evoke emotional responses to literature through a series of "book share" activities. During teacher book shares, Jane would generate enthusiasm and interest in a particular author's work by providing a brief synopsis of the plot and discussing her own personal reactions to the story. Jane designed teacher and student shared readings for authors throughout the year, such as Gail Gibbons and Tomie dePaola, but the sharing reading activities centered on Eve Bunting's work were possibly the most affectively-engaging. On a crisp Friday in November, Jane and her class spent the entire morning savoring the work of Eve Bunting. During her teacher share, Jane described three Eve Bunting books that she had brought in to add to their collection in the Author's Center. Because of the serious nature of these books, Jane spent a substantial amount of time talking through the emotions that a reader might feel. Rudi's Pond was one of the books Jane shared, and she explained how she felt "happy and sad" while reading it because it was about a boy and a girl who are friends, and the boy becomes sick and eventually dies, and the class listened in quiet somberness. When Jane discussed the parts that made her happy, such as the boy and girl building a birdhouse together because they both loved to watch hummingbirds, they began to open up, asking some questions about the characters and the action, to which Jane responded that they "could find out by choosing this book to read." As Jane introduced On Call Back Mountain, she explained that she would read it aloud because it was "so moving" but she could not do it

then because “I cry every time I read it.” Again, the rich story evoked a wide range of emotions in Jane, and she described her feelings as she talked about the man who lived in a tower high in the mountains to watch for fire in order to protect the town below. To maintain student attention, involvement, and participation in the discussion, Jane asked questions such as “Why do you think this man would need to go up in a tower in the mountains? How do you think this man helped the town?” and allowed students to freely respond. When Jane mentioned that “something happened to the man in the tower and it is very sad,” the students were so intrigued that they chorused, “What happened to him?!?!” and several African American students stood up and chanted, “Can we read it now???” (Fieldnotes, 11/9/01).

Clearly, this particular sharing of Eve Bunting books conveyed Jane’s strong affective responses to these texts in ways that stimulated her students’ curiosity and excitement about reading. However, not only were they were eager to read Eve Bunting books, they were also excited about sharing their own affective reactions with the class. To accommodate them, Jane set aside about forty-five minutes for “student book shares.” During this special time, Jane invited a student to stand at the front of the room and talk about their responses to a particular Eve Bunting book (Fieldnotes, 11/9/01). Based upon the idea that “all Eve Bunting books have problems” which they previously discussed, Jane asked each student to describe the problem in the book that they read and who was involved. To generate curiosity and suspense, Jane requested that students suggest students who might be interested in reading the book rather than explain how the problem was solved (e.g., “Carmen might like this book about sisters because she has a new baby sister at home). Outgoing African American students like Jasmine and Dana

were often the first to volunteer, and they skipped up front to share their books. Because these students were so verbal, Jane often encouraged them to give their responses without any direction from her, and the bright smiles on their faces as they walked back to their seats conveyed their pride. During book shares, Jane tried to make certain that even African American students who were more reserved were successful, so when Tamyra raised her hand to talk about a book called The Twinnies, Jane played a supportive role, gently asking questions to guide the discussion and encouraging her to elaborate on her responses. When the class asked her questions and laughed as she described her own reactions to the twin sisters in the story, Tamyra was “absolutely glowing” (Fieldnotes, 11/9/01).

Importantly, these student book shares also supported the literacy learning of struggling African American readers like John. John was reading at a first or second grade level, and he usually had great difficulty grasping the major points of a story and understanding the meaning of the text. Although he rarely volunteered his responses in class, John was very eager to share his book called Sunshine Home. Jane offered him substantial emotional support, first by putting her arm around him as he talked, then by emphasizing their shared reading in her introduction: “John and I read this book together and we tried not to cry.” Jane walked John through the book share experience step by step; she asked John to say the title of the book, and to talk about the grandmother and grandson, who were pictured on the front cover. John mentioned that the grandmother was going to Sunshine Home, a place for “old people” and rather than correcting him, Jane simply said, “Yes, the elderly.” Next, Jane asked John to describe the problem in the family, and he explained that the family didn’t share their feelings, and they didn’t want

to show that they were sad, so they “tried to keep it in and when they took the grandmother to Sunshine Home, the mother left and started crying outside on the street, and the grandmother was in her room crying, too.” At this point, John said that he was also “sad because they were sad,” and when he mentioned that “the end made him happy,” several students raised their hands to ask questions. Jane reminded John not to tell them how they solved the problem because “when we read it we want to be surprised” and she praised John for “doing such a great job sharing your book” (Fieldnotes, 11/9/01). For John, this book share was such a successful experience because Jane strongly encouraged him to connect affectively with the characters and to construct his own meaning of their actions through a wide range of emotional associations. In so doing, John was able to comprehend the plot, interpret the text, and effectively share his aesthetic interpretation with his peers.

Creating new social contexts for literacy learning. Because achieving social goals like “working well with others” and “making friends” are essential for successful acquisition of “school culture,” Jane strongly believed that all her students needed more opportunities to get to know others from “diverse” backgrounds:

Children need to feel that they are part of the class, that they are never excluded in the community of the feeling of the class. And I try to get the children in the class to be accepting of others.... And that’s why I do a lot of mixing up at the beginning of the year. We move seats around a lot. I encourage them to sit with someone that they don’t know, and often that requires children who perhaps don’t have a friend that’s different than themselves to sit next to someone new and accept each another (Third Grade Teachers’ Interview, 10/23/01)

For the first few months of school, Jane changed the seating chart every Friday. She admitted that it took her much longer to learn her students’ names because they were

always changing seats, but she was committed to giving the African American students, as well as her other students, the chance to seat with and talk to a variety of classmates. Moreover, Jane frequently transformed the entire layout of the classroom, so that there were always new configurations of desks and seating patterns for her students. By constantly changing the physical layout and seating in the classroom, Jane hoped to support students as they literally “crossed borders” into new social spaces with different classmates.

Although the seating arrangements were changed to promote socialization, Jane also carefully considered the educational needs of her students. Consequently, she often arranged students based upon their individual learning styles. For example, rather than placing her in seats facing sideways, Jane always moved Tamyra, a shy African American girl, to seats facing forward because “to do well she needed to see the board” (Interview, 1/23/02). Jasmine, the most talkative African American girls, was often seated next to Sakina, her best friend, because both girls were strong students, but they were not seated near any of the other African American girls in an effort to reduce the amount of chatter in the room. And although she tried to have other students sitting near John, for the most part remained in a seat in the front of the classroom and worked by himself because he “had a hard time doing paperwork” and thus was easily distracted by others (Interview, 1/14/02). When John’s academic performance began to improve, Jane began to pair him with another student more frequently (Interview, 4/9/02).

Throughout the year, Jane experimented with these different seating arrangements. She seemed less concerned about trying to get the “right” seating and was searching instead for an arrangement that gave most of the African American and other

students relatively easy access to their friends, yet also supported the development of new friendships. While some teachers would design the seating chart to decrease the socialization in the classroom, Jane wanted to create more opportunities for talk:

I think it's important that we give children a chance to talk. Oftentimes they go home to someone who is very busy and doesn't have time to talk, or there is no one at their house, or their lives are so filled with programmed activities, that sometimes you might hear a lot of chatting going on in my classroom in the morning especially. But if you listen to what they are saying, they're talking about what they did over the weekend, or their interests or whatever. So we're building conversations (Third Grade Teachers' Interview, 10/23/01)

In April, Jane and her students found a seating arrangement that worked well for them, and kept it for the remainder of the year (see Figure 3 below). The seating area in the center of the classroom worked well because these students were outgoing and, for the most part, they got along well with each other. Even those who were somewhat shy, like one of the Middle Eastern boys and the Asian boy, became more social with the African American girls by the end of the year (Fieldnotes, 4/9/02). For shy African American girls like Kia and Tamyra, the paired desks offered a space for close interaction with one other student, and through working and talking together, these girls became good friends with the Hispanic girls who sat next to them (Fieldnotes, 4/18/02, 5/9/02).

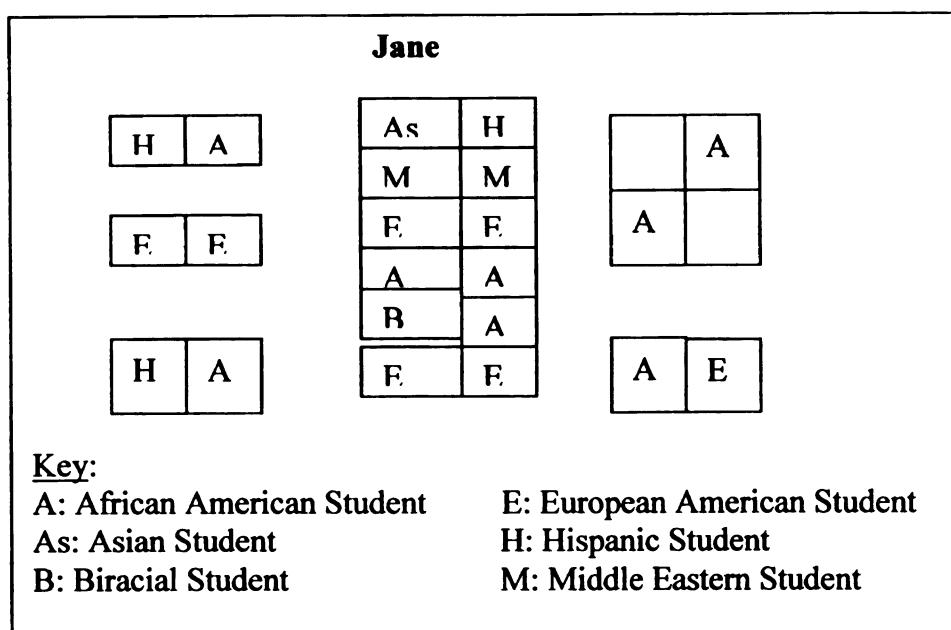


Figure 3: Jane's Seating Configuration in April 2002

Jane took advantage of the cross-cultural nature of the seating arrangements in designing collaborative learning activities. For example, to complement a lesson on the features of non-fiction books about mammals (e.g., glossary, labels, table of contents, index, magnified pictures), Jane paired the students for a Quick Book Look of books about bats. Nearly all of the pairs crossed cultural and gender lines, and the students worked so well together that Jane commented, "I am very impressed with your working. You used your time wisely, and that's what good partners do, they help each other and they work together to get the job done" (Fieldnotes, 10/23/01). Similarly, Jane used cross-cultural and cross-gender groupings for a science lesson that the class did on pumpkins, and though some students occasionally left to work with their friends in other groups, in general the groups seemed to work well; all of the groups completed their tasks (e.g., measuring and weighing the pumpkin, counting the number of seeds) in a timely

fashion, and the few disputes that erupted one or two groups were ultimately resolved without any intervention from Jane (Fieldnotes, 10/31/01).

The journey that Jane and her students embarked upon this year brought them together in a very intimate way; by the end of the year, the social divisions in Jane's classroom were almost nonexistent, and the intellectual environment was thriving. They had endured some bad times, like the tragic incident with John that ultimately resulted in a transfer in the middle of the year. Jane was absolutely heartbroken about the situation because she had been absent that particular day, and she blamed herself for not being there to prevent the incident. After John was transferred, Jane mentioned that she "shed many tears over him" because she felt as if she "had lost him," and as she spoke about John even then, her eyes became wet with tears (Interview, 4/9/02). Although a new African American boy came to Jane's classroom after John left, she seemed to really miss John, and she tried to make sure that she still connected with him when she saw him in the hallways with a gentle smile or a quick wink. For Jane and her third grade students, John's departure seemed to be a very difficult experience.

Yet the good times were part of the border crossing experience as well. Throughout their journey, Jane and her third graders had the opportunity to laugh, joke, and play together, and as their relationship deepened, the sunny warmth of their smiling faces and hearts slowly melted away the seriousness, fear, and uncertainty that darken the border crossing experiences of many European American teachers and African American students in school. Perhaps the experience that best represented this transformation occurred on a warm morning in June when Jane and her students were putting on a magic show (Fieldnotes, 6/5/02). After seeing a professional magic show a few days before, the

students were interested in learning their own magic tricks, so Jane brought in a wide variety of magic books and allowed the students to take them home so that they could learn to do a trick and perform it for the class. The show was a smashing success. All of the “magicians” performed amazing tricks; for example, Jasmine made a volcano magically “come to life,” Halle, a European American girl, made a blue ink spot switch hands, Joy made a magic wand disappear under the cloth, and Carmen, a Hispanic girl, made a piece of string magically pick up a piece of ice. During the show, it was obvious that the “social borders” in the classroom had been crossed, for no matter who the “magician” was or how they performed, students in the audience clapped and cheered thunderously when each performance was over. Also, the fact that many “magicians” selected volunteers from the audience that crossed racial and gender lines suggested that new friendships had indeed blossomed in Jane’s classroom, and the air was filled with laughter, joy, and excitement as children performed with their new buddies.

What made the magic show even more wonderful was the bond between Jane and her students. At one point, a student needed some additional time to prepare her trick, and Jane suddenly jumped out of her seat in the audience, stood at the front of the room and said, “Now this is when you need your dancers to entertain your audience!!!” She began twirling around and dancing, and six or seven kids flew up to the front of the room to dance with her. Laughing loudly, Jane and her students danced together, while the audience clapped and smiled. Several students began doing their own dances; Faraz, shook his hips like John Travolta in the 1970s movie “Staying Alive,” and Jasmine and Lanay were doing a popular hip-hop dance called “the Harlem Shake.” Jane and the other dancers tried imitating some of these movements, which elicited even more laughter and

cheering. When the show finally ended, everyone truly believed in the magic of dancing, for it had made the borders between Jane and her students disappear into thin air.

Conclusion

In recent years, the concept of “border crossing” has gained significant attention as a way to describe and understand the experiences of European American teachers and African American students in schools (Giroux, 1994, 1997; Grossberg, 1994). However, much of work on border crossing in schools has been done at a theoretical level and therefore far removed from the complex and dynamic world of teaching and learning (Danridge, 2001; JanMohamed, 1994). This chapter offers a “naturalistic” description and interpretation of the concept of “border crossing” through the classroom experiences of a European American teacher and her African American students, and in so doing, reveals some of the conflicts, tensions, and issues that may arise when teachers and students aspire to become “border crossers” in school.

One of the most compelling themes in Jane’s story was the intricate connection between the imagery of “border crossing” and the educational equity of African American students. As a veteran teacher with over thirty years of classroom experience, Jane had developed a rich set of instructional practices that enabled her to successfully “open the world” and invite African American students into “cross into” the culture of school. Specifically, Jane assessed student learning styles and used that information to design appropriate learning activities, used explicit instruction and cognitive modeling to “bring reason” to school-based thinking and learning, promoted reading comprehension through aesthetic responses to literature, and created new student

groupings that facilitated socialization and collaborative learning to help African American students enter into and acquire the norms, literacies, strategies, and skills associated with full participation in the culture of school. Delpit (1995) cogently argues that this type of “direct” instruction centered on the practices and skills legitimated by the “culture of power” is particularly effective for African American students because it makes mainstream discourse more accessible. As a European American teacher, Jane was very interested in these democratic ideas about “equal opportunity,” and aspired to provide African American students with “equal access” to the acquisition of school discourse through high quality, explicit instruction. Much of her passion about these issues was deeply rooted in those early teaching experiences with Project Concern and in Memphis that taught Jane about the devastating impact of educational inequity upon the hearts and minds of African American students. These experiences powerfully raised Jane’s consciousness about issues of educational equity, and inspired to her “take action” against these injustices by providing instruction that made the “culture of power” (Delpit, 1995) equally accessible to African American students.

Jane’s insightful comments about border crossing as a “one-way street” for African American students revealed the “dark side” of this metaphor by exposing a powerful ideological “trap” hidden behind the good intentions and concern of European Americans: although many European American teachers gladly play a supportive role in the border crossing experiences of African American students, few aspire to take the risk and truly “get to know” these students by crossing borders into the “unknown world” of African American culture. Jane clearly recognized this problem in the perspective that Project Concern members had towards developing relationships with African American

parents; they were perfectly willing to “do something” about educational disparity by inviting a small group of African American students into their and making their schooling as “equal” as possible, yet they strongly opposed opening the doors of their schools and their community to the parents and families of these children. Based upon Jane’s comments, it seemed that Project Concern members believed that they should share their power and privilege with those less fortunate, and thus decided to “save” African American children from their disadvantaged schooling; because they did not wish to lose any of their privilege, however, the “missionary stance” towards African American children and parents enabled them to maintain psychological and social distance and secure their status and power. Gary Howard (1999) confesses that as a European American man, he also became ensnared by his own desire to “save” African American people, and that this is a common mistake for European Americans because oftentimes they believe that they can quickly “fix” the social problems that African American people have struggled with for hundreds of years. McIntyre (1997) calls this “the White Knight Syndrome,” and adds that most European American people, and particularly teachers, locate the “problems and issues” of African Americans within their families and communities rather than within racist and discriminatory practices and structures in society. As a result, many European American teachers believe that they can “save” African American children if they care enough to try and figure out how to fix what is “wrong” with them.

Like many European American teachers, Jane did believe that she could “save” African American students; she felt strongly about her supporting role in the border crossing experiences of African American students, and in particularly difficult situations

with students like Jasmine or John, she tended to think that she had to solve the problem on her own because she did not know how to develop supportive relationships with some African American parents. However, Jane did not suffer entirely from “White Knight Syndrome” because she crafted her professional identity around the image of a “border crosser” rather than a “missionary.” McIntyre (1997) contends that European American teachers who believe that they can play the role of “White Knights” or “missionaries” by saving African American students oftentimes think that they know what is best for them and that they have the power to solve their problems. As a border crosser, Jane believed that she did have good suggestions for helping African American students with their academic and social issues, but she openly admitted that she didn’t always know the “right” answers. As she journeyed into unknown lands, Jane positioned herself as a “learner,” asking questions of African American friends like Gladys, gaining insights about culture and diversity through conversation and experiences with a close African American colleague and friend like Kim, and following the lead of her African American students in class. In this regard, Jane seemed to believe that she could save her African American students, but she also believed that they could save her. And perhaps that is the most important lesson that can be learned from the “practice” of border crossing.

CHAPTER SIX

NARRATIVE UNDERSTANDINGS

In this dissertation study, I aspired to tell a story about three European American teachers who are successful with African American students and enact culturally relevant practices. Through these teachers' stories of classroom practice, I wanted to capture the "experience" of culturally relevant teaching from their perspectives, particularly highlighting the social and cultural situatedness of their instructional and interpersonal responses to diversity. In so doing, I discovered that for Jane, Lydia, and Rita, enacting culturally relevant teaching required more time, patience, and courage than I ever could have imagined. Indeed, in reflecting upon Jane's perceptive question concerning European American teachers, and if they had a "harder time" making a difference in the lives of African American students, the stories that I collected based upon my extensive visits in their classrooms and conversations with them suggested that culturally relevant teaching is a "struggle" for these teachers, primarily because the issues around teaching and responding to student diversity were both complex and challenging.

Through an analysis of the three Burnett teachers' narratives, this inquiry offers a more nuanced understanding of the struggles that European American teachers may encounter as they enact culturally relevant teaching, and presents an in-depth look at the literacy instructional and classroom management strategies that promoted success for the African American (and other) students in their classrooms. What is clear from these narrative accounts is that the culturally relevant practices of some European American teachers may not at all look like those portrayed within the theoretical literature.

Obviously, Jane, Lydia, and Rita were not exemplars of theory, as were the “Dreamkeepers” in Ladson-Billings’ (1994) study. Unlike “traditionally” culturally relevant European American teachers who are culturally-compatible with their African American students by sharing extensive cultural knowledge of traditions, norms, the Burnett teachers did not specifically draw upon African American culture as an instructional “hook.” In fact, they seemed to have very limited knowledge and understanding of African American culture, they rarely discussed their own ideas and beliefs about social justice with students, and were generally uncomfortable talking about racial and cultural issues openly in their classrooms. Rather than being “color conscious” European American teachers who were adopted in the African American community as “external insiders” (Banks, 1999), Jane, Rita, and Lydia adamantly believed that their teaching was—and should be—colorblind, and they stated at our initial meeting, “We don’t see color; we work with children and try to meet their specific needs rather than working with them based upon race” (Fieldnotes, 8/27/01).

Yet, the success of the Burnett teachers was undeniable; according to the administrators, staff members, and African American students and parents that were involved in the nomination process, African American students were learning, they were happy, and they generally had positive perceptions about their classroom experiences. So what, in fact, were the Burnett teachers “doing” that yielded this type of success? If they were not using cultural-specific strategies like cultural compatibility to enact culturally relevant teaching, what were they using, and why did they use the metaphorical language of struggle and challenge to describe their teaching experiences? And given these apparent disconnections between the stories told by “everyday” teachers and those by

“researchers,” what are the implications for the theory and practice of culturally relevant teaching, particularly pertaining to the preparation of European American teachers who want to successfully educate African American students?

These questions are addressed in this concluding chapter. The first section presents a detailed explanation of the Burnett teachers’ culturally relevant practices through cultural hybridity, a strategy that is markedly different than the cultural compatibility storyline presented in theoretical narratives. The storyline of cultural hybridity is further explored in the second section, and is specifically described as the approach that the Burnett teachers constructed for managing the complex “diversity dilemmas” that arose in their classroom stories. Finally, the chapter closes with a discussion of theoretical and practical implications.

Cultural Hybridity: The Storyline of the Burnett Teachers’ Practical Narratives

Based upon their stories of practice, the Burnett teachers did not seem to be using the strategy of cultural compatibility, or the sharing of African American cultural knowledge, values, and beliefs with African American students, to enact cultural relevant teaching. Rather, they seemed to be drawing upon a new responsive strategy which I term “cultural hybridity.” Webster’s dictionary defines a hybrid as “the blending of two distinct cultures or traditions.” Within the context of the teachers’ practical narratives, it became increasingly clear that Jane, Lydia, and Rita wanted to create “hybrid” cultural classroom contexts rather than simply using a single culture (e.g., European American culture, African American culture) to teach their students. In other words, the Burnett teachers created classroom cultures that fostered the success of all students, as well as

celebrated and affirmed the differences amongst students, by integrating two distinct ideologies: universalism and pluralism.

Universalism: The center of culturally relevant teaching

Ideologically, Jane, Rita, and Lydia were deeply committed to the success of all students, and their universalistic perspective was at the center of their culturally relevant practices. When asked about strategies that they used for African American students, each teacher described strategies that she believed worked well with the entire group of students and seemed to also be effective for African American students. Lydia's comments are illustrative of this universalistic perspective on successful teaching:

...One of the reasons I think I am successful is that first I am not a nitpicker. I don't just pick away, pick away, pick away. I chose which battle I am going to fight with them. I try to keep a sense of humor, and lately I haven't been doing too well, but I try to keep a sense of humor. And I try to phrase my words so that I am not challenging the students. And that's not only for the African American students, that's for all of my students here in the classroom (Interview, 1/23/02)

Lydia's statement highlights a perennial issue in classroom teaching: meeting the needs of individual students within the context of the "group" (Lortie, 1975; Shuell, 1996).

Jane, Lydia, and Rita were concerned about the success of their African American students, but they were equally concerned about the success of the entire group, and they firmly believed that they needed to provide instruction that met the learning needs of the broadest range of students possible. According to Lortie (1975), teachers' universalistic ideologies are deeply grounded in American ideals about egalitarianism and democracy; as a society, we believe that our schools should treat everyone fairly, and that teachers, as agents of the school, are expected to engender inclusiveness in their classrooms through

pedagogical and interpersonal means. Thus, as Lieberman (1993) suggests, issues of equity are always present in the classroom, and teachers are called upon to ensure that the success of individual students does not supercede or interfere with the success of the entire group. Jane aptly summarizes this perspective, saying, “I want my students to know I’m fair...I don’t see color, and I try to treat every child equally and I think that where successful teaching starts” (Interview, 1/14/02).

Universalism not only centered the Burnett teachers’ philosophies and moral responsibilities, it profoundly shaped their classroom practices. For example, rather than using culturally-specific “hooks” (e.g., creating Afrocentric literacy activities, using African-oriented principles for classroom management) that might only motivate a small number of students, Jane, Lydia, and Rita hooked students into literacy learning through activities that engaged the entire class. Put simply, the Burnett teachers believed that “colorblind” literacy activities promoted fairness and universalism by making literacy success accessible to all students, not just those in particular racial/cultural categories. In their classrooms, Jane, Lydia, and Rita had to be responsive to a broad spectrum of diversity, including race/culture, learning styles, and cognitive/emotional “needs.” To ensure that they were providing high-quality instruction that met the needs of such a wide range of “diverse” learners, the Burnett teachers implemented these three universal “hooks”, albeit in varying ways: a) Creating invitational classroom environments; b) Developing personal relationships with students through literature; and c) Engaging students in literacy learning via affect.

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Creating invitational classroom environments. Scholars from various educational disciplines (Brophy, 1998; Hale-Benson, 1983, 2001; Shade, Kelly, & Oberg, 1997) agree that teachers who establish a pleasant physical and psychological classroom environment are more likely to foster student success. Purkey and Novak (1984) identify this as “invitational” education in which students are made to feel at home and as though they are contributing members within the classroom. While feeling accepted and valued is important for the academic success of all students, it is especially critical for African American and other culturally diverse students because these students often feel excluded and/or rejected in school, particularly when they are in the “minority” (Hale-Benson, 1983; Nieto, 1996).

As their classroom narratives demonstrate, all three Burnett teachers tried to make their classrooms attractive and welcoming for all students. Having classrooms in the main building gave Rita and Jane ample room to decorate walls with huge bulletin boards, student displays, poems, and posters with inspirational messages, and to design cozy spaces especially for shared reading and writing and other collaborative activities. Outside in the trailer, Lydia’s space in the trailer was severely limited, but she made every effort to make the environment as warm and “homey” as possible by putting up small posters and bulletin boards, arranging desks into small “neighborhoods” to promote collaborative work, and displaying pictures of her and students taken the previous year.

In terms of the socioemotional and psychological dimensions of their classroom spaces, Jane, Lydia, and Rita believed that it was extremely important for their students to feel safe to take risks in learning new and/or difficult material. Rita, for instance, explained that she didn’t “dive right into the curriculum in September because I think that

it is important for them to feel comfortable and safe, because [learning] can be scary” (Interview, 1/23/02). Similarly, Jane praised students for asking questions, or for saying that they “didn’t get something” because she knew how difficult it could be for students to admit that they didn’t understand (Interview, 1/14/02). According to the Burnett teachers, making mistakes, for example, was not something to be laughed at or ashamed of; in fact, they all believed that making mistakes in front of children were actually “teachable moments” because they could model how to handle them in appropriate ways, such as Lydia apologizing to students, or Rita and Jane accepting a student’s corrections with grace and a smile. Lydia perhaps best summarized their perspective: “I think that part of learning and living is making mistakes, and if they (students) see that I’m a teacher and that ...I make mistakes all the time, and I’m still OK, that they will be OK when they make mistakes, too” (Interview, 4/9/02).

Developing personal relationships with students through literature. In addition to designing invitational classroom environments, Jane, Lydia, and Rita met students’ relational needs by using literature to develop close relationships with them. Interestingly, all three Burnett teachers described the reading instruction that they received as students in school as “boring,” “uninteresting,” and a “turn off,” yet they ultimately became voracious readers because they fondly remembered the intimacy of reading and/or telling stories with family members (First Focus Group Interview, 11/06/01). Once they became teachers and were responsible for the reading development of their own students, the Burnett teachers endeavored to “foster that type of closeness

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with students by sitting around and sharing a story together,” a strategy that they found useful for all students regardless of their home literacy practices and experiences.

All of the teachers set aside for DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) within their daily schedules, and they used it as an opportunity to talk individually with students about books. Rita, for example, described this time as an integral part of the process of “getting to know students” (Interview, 1/15/02), and she often spent time talking with students about their reasons for selecting the books they were reading for DEAR time as a way to become more familiar with their personal interests and motivational styles. For example, Rita mentioned that she was “surprised” when she saw Emma, a European American child, reading a book about Jackie Robinson during DEAR, so she decided to ask her why she chosen that book, and Emma replied that she wanted to learn more about African American people. Rita noted that this information was “important” to her, because she realized that Emma was “curious about differences” and she could help her select other reading materials that connected to and stimulated her interest in diversity (Interview, 4/3/02).

Similarly, Jane held individual conferences with students during DEAR time, not only to assess their reading progress, but to have a conversation about their reading that oftentimes delved into their personal lives and interests. As these conversations developed into personal relationships, and Jane became more knowledgeable about students’ interests, she began drawing upon those insights by selecting “special books” for them to read:

Sometimes I keep books in my cupboard that I have in the classroom, and I don’t put them out [in the classroom library]... and when I have a conference with an individual child, and I look at the child’s reading ability and interest, then I say, ‘Oh, I have a book you might like to read! I

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think this is just for you.’ And I go up to my closet and pull it out...And somehow it really makes an impression... that I think that they’re special... and I have chosen a special book for them to read (First Focus Group Interview, 11/ 6/01)

Jane explained that she used the personal conversations through literature with students as a way to “make connections with each one of them on some level” (Third Grade Teachers’ Interview, 10/23/01), and that this strategy was particularly helpful for relating to students whom she didn’t “know well,” like John, the only African American boy in her classroom. After spending time reading a variety of books with John and talking with him, she discovered that he loved sports, especially football and basketball, and set aside “special books” about these sports for her conversations with him. She believed that these literature conversations, and the personal nature of the relationship that she built with John, helped his reading skills to improve and enhanced his motivation to read (Interview, 1/14/02).

Lydia also supported her sixth graders’ motivation to read and encouraged them to read more widely through the personal relationships that she developed through literature. And, like her colleagues, Lydia believed that her knowledge of her students’ personal interests and hobbies, coupled with her genuine desire to make positive connections with her students, played a critical role in her sixth graders’ literacy development:

I have a student his year who loves horses, and she rides horses and everything. So I said, ‘Have you read any Montgomery books?’ And she said, “Well, I’ve never heard of it.” And so we go to the library here [at school] and there was a whole basket of Montgomery books and she read them all this past year! And I have another child who’s Jewish and I said, ‘Have you read any books about the Holocaust?’ And so this child read some books that I had. And you have some who are kind of reluctant readers. They really don’t know what they want...you know. And sometimes I said, ‘Well have you ever tried science fiction?’ And if they

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haven't, then I say, 'Well, why don't you give that a try...and see if you like it?' And I kind of direct the children that way. (First Focus Group Interview, 11/6/01)

Engaging students in literacy learning via affect. To instill within students what Lydia called "the magic of literacy" (First Focus Group Interview, 11/6/01), the Burnett teachers used affect as a tool of engagement. All three teachers realized that their students had often developed an "aesthetic stance" (Rosenblatt, 1994) towards texts they were reading, but they did not understand nor retain the factual information. Therefore, Jane, Rita, and Lydia attempted to support students' affective responses in ways that promoted cognitive engagement and comprehension. For example, all three teachers asked aesthetically-oriented questions that connected students' emotional experience of the text to their understandings, such as:

- When you read the title, how did you feel? Could you predict what the story would be about just from reading the title?
- Which character would you want to be best friends with and what did he/she do in the story that made you want to be friends?
- How do you think the author felt after writing this story, and what features of the story (e.g., characters, events, ending) made you think that?

These types of questions are extremely critical for reading engagement because they tap into affective and cognitive factors (e.g., motivation to read, attitudes, towards reading, beliefs about reading) that influence the reader's construction of meaning and comprehension (Routman, 1994; Rudell & Unrau, 1994).

Equally important, Lydia, Jane, and Rita oftentimes expressed their own aesthetic responses to texts in class, and particularly during read alouds and other shared reading/writing activities. For instance, while reading various nonfictional texts about

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man-made environmental disasters (e.g., Exxon oil spill) with her sixth graders, Lydia's tone and facial expressions conveyed a deep respect for nature and life in such a moving way that even African American boys who were "problem students," like Marquet and Asad sat still and listened intently. And when introducing books that they would read aloud, Jane would not only summarize some of the main characters and events, she would also share her personal feelings about the books with her students; for example, she told her third graders that one of the Eve Bunting books they would be reading made her cry because it was so sad, while on another occasion, she shared her excitement about reading books about lighthouses because she loved lighthouses and had personally been to several that author Gail Gibbons had written about. With regards to writing, Rita was perhaps the most effective at conveying her personal emotional responses to both the writing process and to student writing. She openly shared her difficulties with writing during a graduate summer course she had taken, and seemed to use that experience to empathically connect with and support students when they experienced writing difficulties. During Author's Chair, Rita also took the opportunity to voice her personal responses to stories that the students had written, and encouraged peers in the audience to do the same.

Pluralism: New pedagogical and interpersonal perspectives

To create hybrid cultural classroom contexts, the Burnett teachers also drew upon the ideology of pluralism. Hollins (1996) defines pluralism as "a theory advocating a society wherein cultures coexist by maintaining distinct identities, yet sharing equal social, economic, and political status" (p. 28). Nieto (1996) adds that pluralism

emphasizes the celebration, valuation, and affirmation of human differences and challenges assimilationist perspectives that still remain popular in our society (e.g., the Melting Pot myth). In classroom settings, teachers generally enact pluralistic perspectives by trying to identify what “works” with specific populations of students and adapting instruction and interpersonal practices in ways that are sensitive to and respectful of those differences (Hollins, 1996; Shade, Kelly, & Oberg, 1997).

Based upon their classroom narratives, the Burnet teachers’ ideology of pluralism was not as fully developed as their philosophies about universalism. Yet they did attempt to enact a pluralistic perspective through “flexible” instructional and classroom management practices; their classrooms were structured enough to provide quality instruction for the whole group, yet flexible enough to accommodate the specific individual needs of African American and other students. Rita and Lydia, for example, used the Book Club model (Raphael, McMahan, Goatley, Bentley, Boyd, Pardo, & Woodman, 1992) to tailor reading instruction to student “differences” in ability, interest, and motivation to read. Within their Book Clubs, students were often given the choice of the books they wanted to read, as long as their selections were part of the curricular theme (e.g., non-fiction books on mammals, folk tales, mysteries). Also, unlike traditional groups which were inflexible and served as permanent groups, the Clubs had an “open door” policy, and students were allowed to leave and enter new Book Clubs based upon their literacy development. Although Jane did not employ the Book Club model in her literacy program, she also grouped children by ability during whole-group lessons; Jane made certain that her third graders were all reading books on the same topic

(e.g., non-fiction books about bats) but she selected texts representing a wide range of reading abilities based upon the learning styles of her students.⁸

Further, all three teachers designed activities that promoted heterogeneous groupings to affirm student diversity. During paired readings, for example, they often selected students who differed in reading ability, cultural background, or gender, to read and talk about texts together, and based upon their classroom narratives, these activities were highly successful with readers of varying abilities. Routman (1994) contends that in these heterogeneously-grouped activities, students' reading development is enhanced because reading is viewed as constructing meaning from the text rather than as skills or competencies. Further, heterogeneous groupings may foster sensitivity to diversity, as it did in Jane's classroom, because these activities tend to facilitate greater socialization across racial, cultural, and linguistic lines (Nieto, 1996).

In terms of classroom management strategies, the Burnett teachers also tried to implement rules that provided some flexibility within the structure. Rita was willing to "bend" the classroom rules so that African American students like Solomon and Troy could walk around and stretch for a few moments to stretch, and she also didn't mind providing additional incentives for these students as a strategy for enhancing their self-control and self-monitoring. Similarly, Lydia believed that she should take into account the personalities and socioemotional needs of her sixth graders; for example, thinking that Marquet was a "kinesthetic" child who needed to burn off energy occasionally, she would ask him to run outside while another student watched. This technique seemed quite

⁸ During the time I spent observing in her classroom, I never saw her divide students into particular reading groups or Book Clubs like Rita and Lydia did, and although Rita mentioned once that teachers were required to organize reading groups, I never saw Jane use this strategy and she never mentioned it during the interviews.

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effective; Marquet, an African American boy who was labeled as a “problem student” by other teachers, responded well to Lydia and rarely caused problems in her classroom. Of the three teachers, Jane seemed to stick most closely to her classroom rules, however, she believed that she did “bend the rules” for John by providing him “with a lot of movement” outside of the classroom; unlike the other students, Jane gave John opportunities to read, in addition to DEAR time, with Mr. Williams and other Burnett staff members in their offices (Interview, 4/9/02). Although Jane used this strategy sometimes when John’s behavior was challenging, most times she simply wanted John to have as many positive experiences with reading as he could during the day, in order to motivate him to read and to persist despite his reading difficulties.

Integrating Universalism and Pluralism:
Resolving “Diversity” Dilemmas Through Cultural Hybridity

The narrative analysis presented in the previous section suggests that the Burnett teachers enacted culturally relevant practices using a strategy that I term “cultural hybridity,” and through this storyline, they formed pedagogical perspectives based upon universalistic and pluralistic responses to student diversity. However, since none of the classroom narratives were exactly alike, it is quite feasible that there were variations in the ways that each teacher constructed this hybridization and demonstrated it within her classroom. In the following section, I explore these variations by identifying the various “diversity dilemmas” each teacher encountered in her classroom practice, and explaining how she used a culturally-hybridized approach to successfully resolve the dilemma and teach her students.

Rita's Story: Teacher as "Facilitator"

In her classroom narrative, Rita described her culturally relevant practice through the metaphor "teacher as facilitator." Emphasizing a social constructivist perspective of teaching and learning, Rita characterized her role as "facilitator" as being a "helper...I help the kids to figure things out, I do a lot of research things," and envisioned her classroom to be a "learning community" where "the kids are at the center....they have more say and they have choices" (Interview, 4/3/02).

Rita's initial images of "facilitator" were formed by vivid personal memories of her third grade teacher, Mrs. Nelson. Academically, Rita believed that Mrs. Nelson fostered her love of learning because "she just let us explore things that we were interested in...she was not an authoritarian teacher up at the front of the classroom lecturing...We just explored all these different things, and we learned as a group, and we learned at our own paces" (Interview, 6/17/02). What was even more important to Rita was the fact that Mrs. Nelson helped Rita overcome a "social issue" that had haunted her since she was a young child: severe shyness. In first grade, Rita's first grade teacher accentuated her shyness by isolating her from her peers and making her feel "different"; in contrast, Mrs. Nelson openly supported her existing friendships ("rather than getting on us, she would laugh and call my two friends and I 'The Three Musketeers' because we were always together") and gave her opportunities to cultivate new ones. Based upon her positive experiences in Mrs. Nelson's third grade classroom, Rita began to compose a storyline about successfully teaching diverse students that included two "universalistic" narrative themes: child-centeredness and inclusion.

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As a child-centered “facilitator,” Rita strongly believed that she could stimulate students’ intrinsic motivation to learn by designing literacy activities that promoted choice and autonomy. During read alouds and other shared reading activities, Rita generally selected the genre of books (e.g., nonfiction books on natural disasters, nonfiction books about animals, fairy tales), but encouraged her students to choose topics within that genre that they wanted to learn more about. In Writing Workshop, Rita gave her students even more autonomy, allowing them to write about topics that they were interested in, and supporting them as they took more responsibility for the writing that was being composed in the learning community (e.g., peer conferences). Although there were times that Rita agonized over her role as a facilitator because it was “hard to give up all that control and let the kids go” (Interview, 4/3/02) during Writing Workshop, it was also apparent from her classroom narrative that all the children, even African American students like Duane and Troy who were struggling writers, loved writing because they were given the freedom to pursue topics that they cared about and were given the opportunity to work collaboratively with their peers.

In addition to guiding her child-centered teaching philosophy, Rita’s personal experiences as an elementary student also strongly shaped her commitment to inclusion as a “facilitator.” Rita firmly believed that inclusion could teach all children to be accepting and respecting of students’ intellectual, physical, and/or social “differences.” As a “facilitator,” Rita endeavored to “treat inclusion kids like everyone else” (Interview, 5/8/02) and to craft instructional and relational practices that invited every student to learn and grow within her learning community. As Rita’s story demonstrates, her conception of “accepting and respecting diversity” did not include talking explicitly

about these student differences with the learning community, perhaps because she didn't want to accentuate the differences in a negative way, like her first grade teacher had done. By recognizing student differences, and working hard to ensure that the learning community was accepting of those differences (i.e. they did not mention them or discuss them at all), Rita believed that she was following the example set by her favorite teacher Mrs. Nelson, who "never singled anybody out" based upon their differences (Interview, 6/17/02).

What was most intriguing about Rita's image of a child-centered, inclusive "facilitator" was that it was composed through a strong storyline of universalism emerging from her earliest experiences with cultural diversity. Rita associated inclusion with an innocent "colorblindness" that emanated from childhood memories of "playing with all kinds of kids, boy, girl, Black, White, Asian, or whatever" and the fact that her family "was open...so anyone you wanted could come over to play" (Interview, 1/15/02). In these childhood stories, Rita saw cultural diversity as a normal "part of growing up"—something that was fairly commonplace and therefore not worthy of attention or discussion. Similarly, within her classroom story, Rita strongly believed that the fact that her students "all play outside together at recess, and no one is excluded from the game that they are playing, whether it's tag or ball or hide and seek" was highly indicative of their egalitarianism. By presuming that her "kids just don't see color" (Interview, 1/23/02), Rita felt that her students simply accepted cultural diversity, and all other student differences, as a normal part of classroom life. Moreover, as these comments illustrate, Rita thought it imperative that she maintain a sense of colorblindness within the learning community:

I think it's really neat that these kids don't see color. And if they don't see it, I'm not gonna say anything! And I almost think it's a shame that as they get older, their friends start telling them things, or people in their community might start telling them things, and the kids start to think, "Oh, we don't want to talk to them because they're different"... but in my class, even on the playground, they all play with each other, and I think it's really neat to see (Interview, 1/15/02)

Diversity dilemma: Crisis within the learning community. Rita's diversity

dilemma emerged when students began to perceive her accommodations of student differences as preferential treatment. Students began questioning the "fairness" of her responses to their peers, and because Rita did not want to address these differences openly, she was unsure how to explain herself and her actions to them. Rita was caught between two conflicting narrative themes; she wanted to enact a pluralistic perspective and affirm student diversity by adapting her pedagogical and disciplinary practices to fit the needs of her students, yet she also wanted her students to perceive her as a "fair" teacher who treated everyone in the same way. Rita's frustration about the situation was particularly conveyed through this statement:

It's hard to get that balance, because one child might need to stand up to work, and other kids will say, 'Well, why can't I stand up?'...and they really don't compare themselves with others, but they do notice what others are doing and sometimes they ask about it because they don't think it's fair, or because they want to "get in" on the "special treatment." And it's hard because I don't know what to say (Interview, 1/15/02)

Resolving the dilemma through cultural hybridity. Rita's plot in her classroom

narrative dramatically turned when she decided to modify her image of "facilitator" and re-examine some of her deeply-held beliefs about universalism. As she interacted with students in the learning community, she began to realize that they had indeed "seen color" and they were curious about diversity, in terms of cultural, intellectual, and social

differences. Over several months, her new image of facilitator included a new storyline of “cultural hybridity” that was expressed through her willingness to allow her students to be “at the center” of the learning community and to pursue issues of diversity by themselves and with the entire community. Rather than assuming that students would be intolerant and disrespectful of diversity if it was “seen but not discussed,” Rita attempted to promote more open discussions about diversity by following the examples set by students in her learning community, like Emma, the European American girl who was reading books about African American people because she “wanted to know more about them,” or like John, who openly shared his experiences living with Tourette’s Syndrome with the class, or Hasan and Solomon, African American boys who wanted to talk about Ponce de Leon and Spanish culture.

In addition to learning from her students, Rita also developed a “hybrid” classroom community by working hard to change her instructional and personal responses to diversity. Although Rita stated that, “It is hard to change...it’s risky...it takes a brave person to say, ‘I’m gonna try doing this a different way” (Interview, 1/15/02), she was willing to try to adopt a new stance on diversity for the sake of her third graders. Rita was a reflective practitioner (Schon, 1983) and learned to shape a storyline of cultural hybridity by drawing upon professional development resources, including an inservice on cultural diversity, which challenged her to rethink some of her communicative approaches with diverse children (e.g., asking students to make eye contact while speaking to her); the mentoring relationship she developed with Jane; and the school counselor, who, at Rita’s request, did a presentation on diversity for her class. Using these resources, Rita was able to critically question her practices and assumptions

about universalism, and to develop new responses that allowed her to openly and sensitively talk about diversity within her learning community.

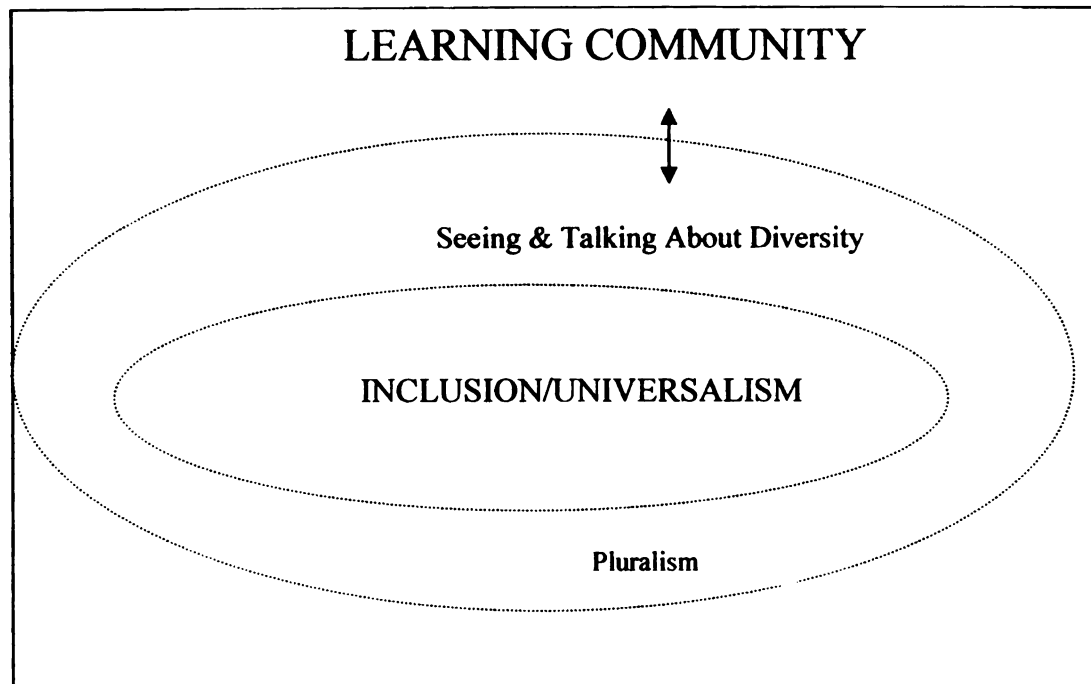
By the end of the classroom narrative, Rita had begun to enact an evolving perspective of hybridity that promoted universalism and pluralism within the learning community. She explains,

For inclusion to work...you have to let kids be individuals...and in order for the other kids to be accepting, you have to accept them. And I think as a model for other kids, it was hard at the beginning [for me]...and so, I had to accept them for who they were and teach about those differences (Interview, 5/8/02)

Rita's usage of the word "teach" in this comment is critical because it signifies the tremendous shift in her responses to student diversity. When Rita discussed her response to student differences in the January interview, she took a decidedly "don't ask, don't tell approach" and contentedly believed that her students "just didn't see color"; in May, however, Rita recognized that she was a "model" for her students, and that achieving her "universalistic" goals of inclusion and success for all within the learning community meant consciously bringing the subject of diversity into her instructional conversations.

Rita's metaphor of "teacher as facilitator" is represented by Figure 4 below. At the core was her initial interpretation of inclusion as "universalism" based upon early personal experiences with cultural diversity and early memories of her favorite teacher, Mrs. Nelson. The outer circle, pluralism, conveys the new ideas that Rita developed through her professional experiences as the "facilitator" of a third grade learning community, and the arrow represents the interactive nature between the learning community and her evolving perspectives on cultural hybridity.

Figure 4: Graphic Representation of Rita’s “Teacher as Facilitator” Metaphor



Lydia’s story: Teaching as “personal power”

Unlike Rita’s “diversity dilemma” that emanated from a crisis in the learning community during the middle of the year, Lydia’s “dilemma” met her at the schoolhouse door on the first day of school. Lydia had looped with her sixth grade students the previous year, and although she recognized that there were some obvious advantages (e.g., the students knew her routine and they were able to “get to work” the first week of school), she also knew that her students were in the throes of preadolescence, and were likely to get out of control sometimes; their bodies were developing, their hormones were racing, and they knew they were getting ready to make the transition into middle school. Although Lydia didn’t take her students’ “mouthiness” personally because she knew that it “was a natural part of development” (Interview, 10/24/01), she also realized that she needed a sense of authority and power that would enable her to manage her class and

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effectively teach. Lydia's diversity dilemma, then, involved developing and exhibiting the type of authority that all her students would respect—particularly the group of African American boys in her classroom who had been labeled as “problem students” by some of the upper elementary teachers. She had specifically requested these boys because she believed many of her colleagues were “intolerant and inflexible,” and she didn't want to see them suffer at the hands of these teachers for an entire year. Yet she also realized that these boys needed to “fit” into her way of organizing and managing a classroom if she wanted to have a successful sixth grade class.

As her classroom narrative developed, it was clear that Lydia believed she was enacting a very different type of power and authority than some of her European American colleagues; rather than drawing upon the power vested within the unequal social positioning of teachers and students, Lydia used her “personal power” (Delpit, 1995) to resolve the diversity dilemma in her classroom. Lydia's sense of personal power emanated from two critical sources: her nurturing and caring personality as an experienced mother, and her sense of advocacy as a teacher/cheerleader dedicated to “leveling the playing field” for her African American students. Through these dual images of “mother” and “cheerleader,” Lydia demonstrated her personal power and enacted the storyline of cultural hybridity within her classroom narrative.

The “mother” image of teaching. According to Lydia, the story of her classroom life was best represented through the intimate images of mother and family:

I have five children of my own and they're all from different nationalities because they were adopted....and I just feel like this classroom is an extension of what my family is....and I run my classroom like I run my

home...and I get miffed at my students just as a mother gets miffed and I praise them just like a mother praises her children...(Interview, 10/24/01)

Clearly, Lydia strongly believes in the universalism of motherhood: mothers should be willing and able to give a “loving hand” to all children, regardless of racial, cultural, or linguistic background. As the “adopted mother” of children in her home and in her classroom, Lydia demonstrated the “ethic of care” (Noddings, 1992) through close affective relationships. Throughout her practical narrative, she described caring physical gestures, such as hugging and patting shoulders, that demonstrated her genuine concern for her students. Further, she used phrases that expressed strong affection for her students (e.g., “I love them this week,” “they are special to me,” “my babies are going off to middle school and a part of me wants to go with them”) that a mother would use in reference to her own children, and in her comments, expressions such as “getting miffed” and “praising” students also convey the wide range of emotion that was expressed between Lydia and her classroom “children.” Using familial discourse as a way to discuss classroom life was another strategy that Lydia used to develop close bonds with all her students and to make them feel accepted and included.

As a classroom “mother,” Lydia strongly believed that she should treat “all her students the same” and that she “should not see color” (Interview, 1/23/02), and these sentiments emanated from early professional experiences as a teacher in a predominantly low-income, African American school in Kentucky. Through her experiences at this elementary school, and more specifically, through her interactions with African American students and their families, Lydia learned that African American people, though they were culturally “different” in some ways, were very much culturally “similar” to her. As she talked and visited with students at their homes, the fact that Lydia was able to

connect with these families, not on a cultural level but on a “human” level, gave her the impression that they were “good families” with values that were similar to the ones cherished in her own family. Despite the fact that they were poor and many were uneducated, Lydia perceived these parents to be strong, loving, nurturing, and moral; they had the same love for their children and the same concern for their education as her European American parents did, and this realization seemed to give her a great sense of admiration of and respect for African American parents. Years later, at Burnett Elementary School, this universalistic respect and admiration of African American parents had become an enduring theme within her classroom narrative. Lydia had developed positive relationships with nearly all of her African American parents because she was able to make “human” connections that transcended racial and ethnic boundaries, and the stories that she was able to share about these parents were optimistic and uplifting. Perhaps the most telling story this year was about Marquet’s mother; Lydia and the administrators knew that she was a recovering drug addict, but while Mrs. Matthews, the principal, perceived her to be a major cause of Marquet’s academic and behavioral “problems” (Interview, 6/10/02), Lydia openly admitted that she “admired” this mother because she was a woman of great strength and courage who supported her son’s education and loved him dearly (Interview, 1/23/02).

Interestingly, Lydia’s experiences as a mother formed the core of her professional aspiration to “make a difference in students’ lives” by “being the type of teacher that my son didn’t have” (Interview, 4/9/02). Lydia believed that the intolerance and inflexibility of her son’s teachers slowly eroded his self-worth, his confidence, and his chances for success, and he began to believe school was painful and boring. After the agonizing

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experience of watching her son drop out in his sophomore year of high school, Lydia returned to teaching determined to equip her students with the tools necessary to succeed in school, and more importantly, in life, by “make learning fun and enjoyable” for her students (Interview, 10/24/01). By complementing her sixth graders’ high levels of energy and sociability, Lydia was able to engage all students—even those like Asad, Eric, and Marquet who were considered “behavior problems” in other classrooms—in reading, writing, and critical thinking. For instance, Lydia used Quick Book Looks to introduce various topics (e.g., Native Americans unit in social studies) and to gauge which types of information that students would be most interested in. As they studied ancient civilizations, Lydia encouraged students to write creatively and collaboratively about the stories of the people and their lives, societies, and cultures. And Lydia’s word games and verbal puzzles were additional ways that she attempted to “make learning fun” for her sixth graders.

The “cheerleader” image. Of the three Burnett teachers, only Lydia had a pluralistic perspective that was relatively well-developed and specifically attuned to racial and/or cultural issues. Although Lydia considered herself to be “colorblind” and did not openly discuss student diversity in class, she explained that she was particularly conscious about these issues outside of class:

I don’t see color in my classroom, but there are [other] times when I am aware...And as a teacher I can cheer these kids on, and sometimes I have to protect my African American students, and I want what’s fair for my African American students...and we as teachers need to be the advocates for these children (Interview, 4/9/02)

As a “cheerleader,” Lydia was very sensitive to the inequities that African American students encountered in schools, and when she thought that these students were not “getting a fair shake,” she advocated for them in whatever ways she could. She challenged the status quo at Burnett Elementary School by raising critical questions about issues that were “off limits”; for example, she talked with the administration several times about the lack of African American students in the Gifted and Talented program, and called attention to the fact that the entrance exams may not reflect the true intellectual capacity of African American students with examples from her own classes. Further, she questioned some of the disciplinary policies of the school, as in the instance where the only students missing the Valentine’s Day party were fourteen African American students, and voiced her concerns when she felt that African American students were being unfairly targeted and punished. Although it made her unpopular, and she felt criticized and disrespected by several of her colleagues, Lydia continued to bring these issues to the forefront, because she was committed to “cheering” for her African American students and advocating for them.

Lydia also felt it was important to let African American students know that she was “their cheerleader” and that she was genuinely concerned about their academic lives. Consequently, she spent a substantial amount of time talking privately with African American students, making certain that they were aware of various opportunities and encouraging them to take advantage of all available resources. For example, she talked to academically-talented African American students like Lavita about participating in the Gifted and Talented program, and even discussed it with Lavita’s mother because she knew very little about the program and its benefits for her daughter. But Lydia also spoke

with African American students like Eric and Amara about their potential to be in the GT program because she believed that their test scores did not reflect their intellectual abilities, and she hoped to inspire them to perform at a higher level in class and on the test.

Further, Lydia spent time talking privately with African American boys like Marquet, Asad, and Eric who had been labeled as “problem students” by other teachers. Through the gentleness of her “personal power,” she tried to persuade them to change their behaviors and to stay out of trouble, particularly when they went over to the “main building” for music, art, and physical education, or when they had to interact with some of the other sixth grade teachers. She often told the boys that they “need to get along, even with people who don’t really like you” (Interview, 4/9/02) because she wanted them to achieve certain behavioral goals. Undoubtedly, these were difficult conversations for a European American teacher to have with African American children, but Lydia provided this type of support because she knew that “in the past, a lot of these children have missed trips and other nice events because of their behavior” (Interview, 4/9/02), and she wanted her African American students to have the opportunity to participate. Equally important, Lydia consistently showed these boys that she was “on their side” by fighting for these opportunities and advocating for them in various ways throughout the year, from attending Mr. Cordello’s sex education class to ensure that her “boys were being treated fairly,” to speaking with the physical education teacher and asking him to give one of her African American boys the “benefit of the doubt” rather than sending him to the office.

Interestingly, it seemed that Lydia's pluralistic perspective developed through significant experiences with diversity that occurred early in her life. As an elementary student, Lydia remembered being a "large, tall child...large, not really heavy, I was thin, but I was taller than most of the other kids in my class" (Interview, 5/21/02), and she distinctly remembered feeling "different" because her physical size, coupled with her keen love of math, made her "stand out" from the other girls in her classroom. She had fond memories of her fourth and fifth grade teacher, Sister Marietta, because "she was an inspiration to me. She was the one that would say, 'There's no such word as 'can't, you can do anything that you set your mind to do.' And for a young girl interested in math to hear that, it was like, 'WOW!' (Interview, 5/21/02).

Although Lydia encountered many other teachers whom she liked, Sister Marietta was special; in fact, Lydia loved her so much that she continued to correspond with her until she died at age 92. Sister Marietta played a critical role in Lydia's story because she taught her that student differences should be acknowledged, accepted, and affirmed by others. Fondly remembering Sister Marietta's words in high school and college, Lydia developed a strong spirit of advocacy that became an important theme in her story of "personal power"; fighting for the rights of the only Black senior in their class to attend the prom, talking with her Afro-Caribbean friends about racism and discrimination in American, realizing that her own father and mother were "a wee bit prejudiced" (Interview, 1/23/02) against African American people, and leaving the restaurant that changed the prices on the menus to "get rid" of African American customers, were all critical experiences that profoundly shaped and affirmed Lydia's commitment to social justice for African American people. Lydia acknowledged that African American people

were subjected to unfair treatment in society simply because they were “different,” and in her personal and professional life she endeavored to “make whatever changes I can, even if they are just little things, because that’s the way that big changes eventually happen” (Interview, 1/23/02).

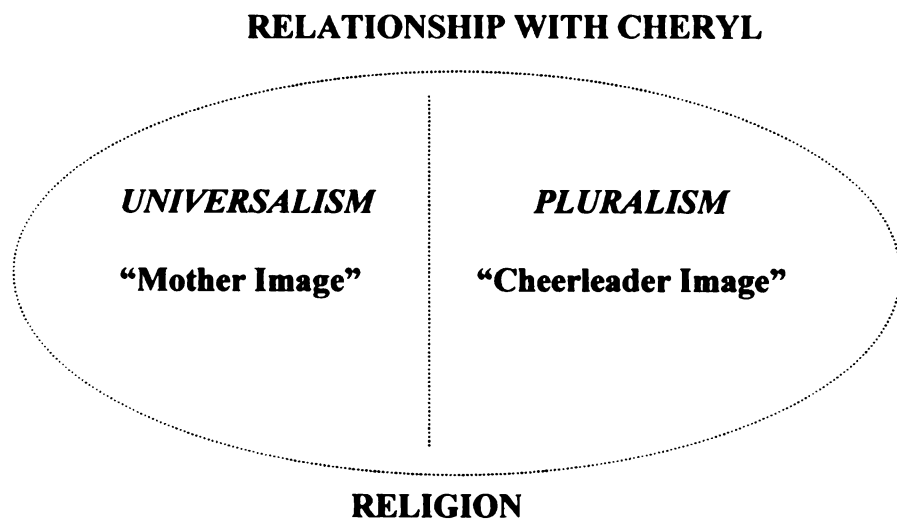
The struggle to enact dual teacher images and develop “personal power.” For Lydia, enacting the “mother” and “cheerleader” images was not always an easy task. In fact, Lydia used the metaphorical language of “struggle” to describe the personal and professional challenges and difficulties that arose from doing such emotionally-draining and time-consuming work. Yet Lydia did not complain nor did she give up; rather, she explained that, “I always set my goals too high, because the joy is in the struggle of trying to get there” (Interview, 1/23/02). Lydia derived her “joy in the struggle” from two inspirational sources. First, as a devout Christian, Lydia believed that her religious faith was an integral component of her “personal power” because it motivated her to be a better teacher:

I want to be the very, very best Christian that I can be, so many times that helps me to watch what I say and do, even as a teacher...I want to show my students the love of God, even though I don’t talk about religion in my classroom...and my religion is very “hands-on” and I believe in being very active about my faith...(Interview, 6/4/02)

The second source of inspiration, her close friendship with Cheryl, an African American colleague, also supported her efforts to become a better teacher. Their friendship, in fact, was based upon their desire to improve their teaching, so Cheryl helped Lydia with language arts, and Lydia helped Cheryl with the math. In addition to teaching, Lydia could talk with Cheryl about other “universal” topics, such as family,

marriage, and children. Interestingly, Lydia and Cheryl also talked about racial and cultural issues, particularly about African American students, that reinforced the spirit of pluralism and advocacy that Lydia had developed through the years. This relationship with Cheryl-- perhaps more than anything else-- embodies the balance that Lydia aspired to achieve in her own classroom life through the “personal power” of cultural hybridity (see Figure 5 below).

Figure 5: Graphic Representation of Lydia’s “Personal Power”



Jane’s story: Teacher as “learner”

Jane’s metaphor of culturally relevant teaching was deeply rooted within her personal experiences as a “different learner” in school. In her childhood stories, Jane remembered school as being “hard for me because the style and the way I was taught did not make it easy for me to learn” (Interview, 4/9/02). Jane described the instruction she

received as a student as “mostly teacher-directed, like... ‘You will do this!’ and lots of paperwork” (Interview, 4/9/02), and although she “spent a lot of time studying, you know, reading over and over, and making notes” (Interview, 4/9/02), she had tremendous difficulty learning in school. College was a critical turning point in Jane’s story of learning, for it was there that Jane discovered that she was, in her words, “a global learner,” and that instruction that emphasized hands-on activities rather than “chalk and talk” lectures was best suited for her particular style of learning.

As a teacher, Jane situated her culturally relevant instructional practices within those vivid personal memories of being a “different learner” and within the knowledge that she had acquired about learning styles in college. Throughout her narrative, Jane made specific references to this critical relationship between her experiences as a learner and her teaching, as the following comment illustrates:

...I’m also a different learner, too, and I know that from working with other people that I tend to look at things differently and globally. So if I’m that way, then there must be other people like that, and kids are people, so they have to have different learning styles too. I mean, I learn best by doing things hands-on and I know there are kids who need to do that, and I know there are some kids who can look at a list and memorize it and have it down. So since there isn’t any one way to learn something, if your expectation [as a teacher] is that you want your kids to learn, you have to provide the instruction that meets their needs (Interview, 1/14/02)

For Jane, providing instruction that “meets students’ needs” entailed recognizing and accommodating diverse learning styles. In telling her story of culturally relevant practice, Jane described herself as “opening up a whole new world to students” (Interview, 4/9/02) through collaborative, “hands-on” literacy activities, and “bringing reason to their learning” (Interview, 1/14/02). Through literacy instruction, Jane “brought reason” to her students in a variety of ways, including using and explaining advanced

vocabulary and concepts during class, providing extensive cognitive modeling, and explicitly teaching meta-cognitive literacy skills (e.g., making predictions, visualizing). These types of higher-order thinking and literacy skills are critical because they develop the habits and dispositions associated with being “good readers” (Routman, 1994), and therefore may have enhanced the comprehension skills of struggling African American readers like John and Tamyra.

For Jane, the concept of learning styles represented a “universalistic” approach to student diversity. Rather than using race and/or culture, Jane defined student diversity through the lens of learning styles because she believed that this concept clearly conveyed that she was “accepting of everyone”; thus the students would perceive her as being “fair to everyone” and “not playing favorites” (Interview, 1/23/02). Put differently, it seemed that Jane felt if she characterized diversity in racial or cultural terms, then some students would be treated unfairly because not all students have “culture.” However, all students, regardless of cultural background, had a particular style of learning, and when these differences were acknowledged and accommodated by teachers, then they were actually treating everyone fairly; after all, she was a “different” learner who knew firsthand that European American students could experience severe learning difficulties when there was a mismatch between instructional style and learning style, and she strongly believed that had it not been for the seventh grade teacher who “saved” her, she would have been “lost” (Interview, 5/9/02). Consequently, Jane endeavored to treat all her students equitably by understanding their learning styles rather than focusing on their cultural backgrounds.

In general, Jane considered a “universal” concept like learning styles to be an appropriate strategy for achieving equity in the classroom; however, based upon her early teaching experiences with Project Concern and in Memphis, she also recognized that African American students may need a more “pluralistic” approach to ensuring equal educational opportunities. For example, when African American students needed additional resources, Jane believed that the teachers, administrators, and the entire school had to take responsibility in making educational conditions and opportunities “more equal,” because as she explained, “We have to help them, we have to support the all-around child, I think, like giving them breakfast if we find out [that they aren’t eating] or making sure that they know that they’re safe” (Interview, 1/14/02). Further, Jane’s classroom narrative offers compelling evidence that she was genuinely concerned about an African American student like John, who had been retained once, was still experiencing academic difficulties, and would not be likely to receive an “equal opportunity” to learn and be successful as he advanced in school due to his academic record. Thus, Jane went out of her way to “support” him by making sure that he ate lunch at school—even if she had to provide money for him to buy it-- because he “was always so hungry in class” (Interview, 4/18/02), and by giving him access to services and resources (e.g., reading independently with the reading teacher) that he was not officially entitled to because he was not a “special education” student. Jane would have made these efforts for any student, regardless of their cultural background, but she seemed to believe that her efforts with African American students like John were especially important because they counteracted some of the unfair treatment from other teachers in school and from people in society:

I think that sometimes people have expectations set up. Like “Oh, they’re from that neighborhood, or they are from that cultural background, and maybe they’re not going to be able to do well.” ... And I think that if you think the child is not going to do well, they don’t do well...and when teachers think like that, it is hard for them to reach out and save a student like John, and that scares me because no one does that for him, I am afraid that he will be lost (Interviews, 1/14/02, 4/9/02)

Jane’s pluralistic spirit of activism was deeply rooted within her involvement with Project Concern. Through this initiative, she and other European American educators and community members had come together in an effort to essentially “integrate” an all-White elementary school by providing African American students with “more equal access” to the resources and learning opportunities that were unavailable in their community schools. For Jane, Project Concern was a “critical moment” in her life story because it raised her (color)consciousness about issues of equal educational opportunity for African American children, and she described her involvement as “a real eye-opening experience...because I had never thought about the difference in education [that White and Black children receive], and how important it is for all children to have equal opportunity” (Interview, 1/14/02). Jane’s experience in Memphis further raised her awareness of the educational inequities that African American students suffered in school, and seeing the dilapidated conditions of the schools and witnessing the severe strictness of the teachers was “shocking...to know that and seeing that there was a difference in how kids were treated...was absolutely shocking” (Interview, 1/14/02). Both of these early teaching experiences were crucial to the development of a more “pluralistic” perspective on student diversity.

Diversity dilemma. As a teacher interested in promoting equity, Jane was comfortable with integrating the “universal” perspective of learning styles with a more “pluralistic” approach for African American students. And if her diversity dilemma had been within this realm, she probably would have known how to resolve it. But as Lampert (1985) reminds us, the practical dilemmas that teachers encounter often arise as “common problems” within their work and are both unexpected and complicated.

In Jane’s narrative, her story of dilemma revolves around the need to help her students to “gel” and to come together as a learning community. Not only did she have a diverse student population, in terms of cultural and linguistic background and intellectual ability, but she also perceived the students to be fairly cliquish and unfriendly with one another. She was particularly concerned about a small group of African American girls that seemed to run the social scene because, in her opinion, they seemed to be less tolerant of diversity:

This year, and I have quite a few Black girls, and I can’t put my finger on what it is....(12 second pause)...but there’s no embracing of the cultures...And I think some of it is personality, and I have to try and get them past that, so that they can accept everyone. Otherwise, we’re gonna have Black kids sitting over here, White kids sitting over here, Hispanic kids over here, Asian kids over here, all the time (Second Focus Group Interview, 4/3/02)

For a teacher like Jane who was very interested in equity, this social issue was indeed a dilemma. On the one hand, she was happy that the African American girls were friends, and she didn’t think it was fair to ask them to dissolve their group because they truly enjoyed interacting with each other. On the other hand, the African American girls had unintentionally formed a clique that seemed to be impenetrable to some of the other students who were culturally or socio-economically “different” than its members. As the

months passed, the clique became more powerful, and the students increasingly divided themselves in small groups that either opposed the clique or wanted to be included. Making matters worse, Jane feared that the leader of the clique, Jasmine, had begun to develop a domineering personality that would be problematic later in life.

Resolving the dilemma by enacting the “learner” metaphor. As Jane’s story illustrated, she did not know exactly how to resolve the social dilemma in her classroom. Rather than complaining about her students, or giving up on the situation and allowing it to fester, Jane decided to enact the “learner” metaphor that was so integral to her philosophy of teaching:

The bottom line is I want my kids to learn...I feel that is my important job, and I will do whatever it takes for each child to be successful. So sometimes I have to find things that I’m not familiar with and I have to include them in my teaching....or I’ll seek people who have had success and I’ll ask them, ‘How did you do that?’...I’m not afraid of asking for help (Interview, 1/14/02)

Jane’s comments nicely illustrate the ways in which she positioned herself as a “learner”: she conducted research on topics that she was unfamiliar with in order to incorporate them into her teaching, she turned to “experts” for their advice and guidance in handling certain situations, and she was willing to ask for help when she needed it. Teacher educators such as Feiman-Nemser (2001) Borko and Putnam (1996) contend that these “learner” qualities and characteristics do not undermine the expertise of the teacher; rather, teachers who see themselves as learners and engage in serious efforts to improve their teaching are more likely to deepen their pedagogical knowledge, extend and refine their instructional repertoire, and strengthen their reflective dispositions towards their own practice.

Indeed, this learning approach proved invaluable to Jane as she developed a “hybrid” course of action to resolve the diversity dilemma in her classroom. By learning through trial-and-error, she discovered that she could promote universalism and pluralism by arranging the students in groups that supported existing friendships and increased opportunities to form new ones. Thus, the African American girls could remain friends, but they would also benefit from talking and working with students whom they didn’t usually interact with. To increase this level of socialization, Jane often asked students to work in pairs on literacy-related activities, such as science experiments, math demonstrations, and social studies projects.

Further, Jane positioned herself as a learner in her relationships with African American students and colleagues. She openly admitted that she was “fascinated” by diverse cultures (Interview, 6/5/02), and listened to student conversations in order to gain insights into their cultural worlds. Oftentimes, Jane would ask her African American friends like Kim about the issues and topics that her African American students talked about in class, so that she could develop a deeper understanding of African American culture. Moreover, Jane would ask her African American friends about their experiences in school, and their ideas about education and equity, in order to know how to help her African American students more specifically. Importantly, these types of discussions strengthened Jane’s pluralistic approach to meeting teaching African American students, and helped her to become more sensitive and responsive to their meeting their instructional and socioemotional needs.

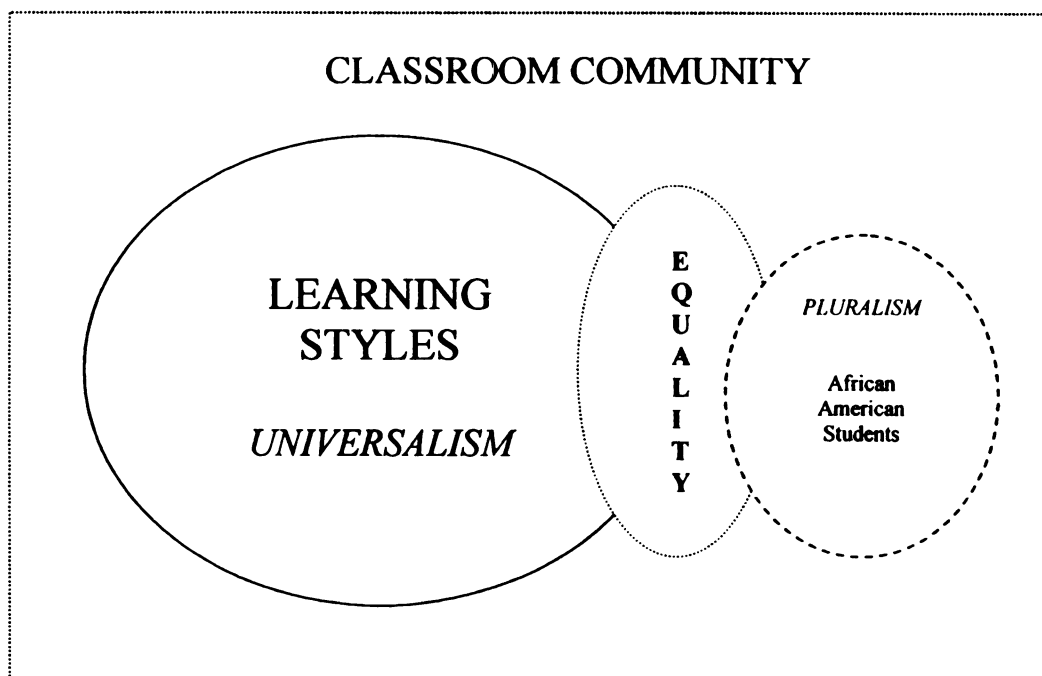
Finally, Jane used literature to promote learning about self and others. To address the personality “issues” that she perceived in Jasmine, she read an African American

book with her and they specifically discussed the main characters and their behaviors. Although Jane recognized that Jasmine's personality would not completely change after reading one book, she was much more hopeful that Jasmine would be able to use her leadership qualities in positive ways after reading the book with her and talking with her about her family and life experiences. Similarly, during literature conversations, Jane also tried to provide opportunities for students to share their personal thoughts and opinions as a way to elicit more personal information about them. Through these conversations, Jane discovered that she was not only learning about students; they were learning more about each other, and the personal knowledge that they were sharing supported the bonding of the learning community. The literature conversation about The Memory String offers a nice example this particular process; after reading the book about a girl who collects strings from the quilts and clothing of her family members, and then sharing their own stories of memory-making, students were eager to talk about the similarities and differences that they noticed. A common theme during this discussion was that people had different ways of doing the same thing; students collected various objects and artifacts to make memories (e.g., photos, stamps, trinkets) but the underlying motive was the same: to remember the time spent with a loved one. Conversations like these seemed to bring Jane's third grade learning community together and ultimately supported its success.

Figure 6 below is a representation of Jane's "teacher as learner" metaphor for culturally relevant teaching. The larger circle represents the universalistic theme of "learning styles" that is most prominent in Jane's classroom narrative, and the size indicates how her personal experiences as a "different learner" in school reinforced her

understanding of learning styles as an appropriate approach to diversity and equity issues in the classroom. The smaller circle represents the pluralistic themes that were particularly visible in the stories Jane told about her efforts to help African American students receive equal educational opportunities (e.g., Project Concern, working with John), and its size and dashed outline indicate that Jane is still “learning” about pluralistic responses and thus they are not as fully-developed as her universalistic responses. The circle in the center represents the storyline of “equality” that was developed through and shaped by the interlocking themes of universalism and pluralism, or cultural hybridity, within Jane’s classroom narrative.

Figure 6: Graphic Representation of Jane’s “Teacher as Learner” Metaphor



Narrative Implications for the Theory and Practice of Culturally Relevant Teaching

In this narrative inquiry, I have described the disconnections between theory and practice that provided the impetus for investigating culturally relevant teaching through a narrative perspective. While the theoretical stories of culturally relevant teaching portray European American teachers as “Dream keepers” who have extensive knowledge of African American culture and create connections through cultural compatibility, the stories of classroom practices told by the Burnett teachers suggested that their success with African American students did not emanate from this type of cultural strategy. The obvious disconnections between the theory of culturally relevant teaching told through the educational literature, and the practices of the Burnett teachers, has important implications concerning the relationship between theory and practice. Although some narrative researchers, such as Clandinin and Connelly (2000), characterize the relationship between theory and practice as conflictive, I contend that this relationship may in fact be complementary. If that is the case, then how do these practical stories told by the Burnett teachers enhance the theoretical stories of culturally relevant teaching?

I believe that the rich stories of classroom practice shared by Jane, Lydia, and Rita suggest that there may be multiple ways to enact culturally relevant teaching. As educators, we are most familiar with one particular set of stories and strategies—those told through theory. Over the past twenty years, theoretical and empirical work by Hale-Benson (1983, 2001), Howard (2001), Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995), Shade, Kelly, and Oberg (1997), and others has emphasized the “storyline” of cultural compatibility. Within these theoretically-based narratives, European American teachers are “culturally relevant” when they have extensive knowledge of African American culture and are able

to “hook” African American students into learning in school by situating instruction within their cultural practices. Further, culturally relevant teaching also requires European American teachers to be culturally-compatible because issues of race and culture are central aspects of the curriculum; in other words, European American teachers who are culturally relevant do not just teach the standard curriculum, they also delve into issues of power, social justice, and multiculturalism by providing supplementary materials for children to use in class and by openly discussing these issues with students. These theoretical narratives, and the storyline of cultural compatibility, have made an important contribution to our understanding of the instructional practices that support the learning and achievement of African American students, and institutions such as the American Educational Research Association (1997) and the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (1998) have drawn extensively upon these “stories” in a genuine effort to equitably and productively educate diverse children.

Yet the narrative analysis presented in this study suggests that cultural compatibility may not be the only storyline that promotes culturally relevant teaching. When we examine the practical stories told by Jane, Lydia, and Rita, we discover that they were not culturally compatible with their African American students because they did not have the extensive knowledge necessary for creating such highly culturally specific and situated pedagogical practices. The Burnett teachers’ stories provided compelling evidence that they were successful with African American students, not because they connected with them through African American culture, but because they had the flexibility to hybridize their instructional and interpersonal responses to student diversity. Put differently, Jane, Lydia, and Rita enacted culturally relevant teaching by

integrating two distinct perspectives on diversity that resonated with their own lives rather than situating their teaching and classroom management within one particular culture. The strategy of cultural hybridity described earlier in this chapter is the major storyline in the classroom narratives of the Burnett teachers, and as an “untold story” of culturally relevant teaching, it offers an alternative approach for describing the nature of culturally relevant teaching and interpreting the cultural perspectives that some European American teachers may bring to bear upon their practices.

I suggest that cultural hybridity may be a valuable perspective for extending and expanding the theory of culturally relevant teaching for three reasons. First, it calls attention to the personal and professional nature of knowledge that is needed for culturally relevant teaching. Theoretical narratives typically characterize knowledge about learners and the roles that culture plays within their learning as professional knowledge that European American teachers need in order to support culturally-compatible practices (Nieto, 1996, Shade, et. al., 1997). To develop this extensive knowledge, these European American teachers are likely to be “external-insiders” (Banks, 1998), or adopted members, within the African American community. By rejecting their own “European American” cultural group, they have come to affiliate themselves with African Americans in important ways: oftentimes, they have lived in the community for extended periods of time, they have established intimate friendships/relationships with African American people (e.g., marrying an African American person), and they participate in various institutions that serve predominantly African American communities (e.g., the Church, community centers, social justice organizations). But is this a realistic expectation? Should we expect all European

American teachers who want to be successful with African American students to rearrange their lives in order to develop such experientially-based forms of professional knowledge about culture and diverse learners? And more importantly, given the fact that most European American teachers have had limited exposure to cultural diversity, do not live in the communities where they teach, and have little experiential knowledge of diverse cultures and practices (Banks, 1999), can they ever hope to be successful with diverse children if they don't establish these intimate ties with their communities?

The storyline of cultural hybridity suggests that European American teachers may not need to become "external-insiders" within the African American community because it brings together the personal and the professional understandings of diversity that European American teachers already have, and encourages the development of new perspectives through the process of "personalizing diversity" (Hollins, 1996). In their stories, for example, Jane, Rita, and Lydia were sensitive to various types of diversity (e.g., cultural, learning style, special needs) because they developed a general awareness of and respect for "differences" based upon their early life experiences with diversity (e.g., a favorite teacher who responded favorably to their personal differences; beliefs about diversity from family or school). In other words, Jane, Lydia, and Rita did not view diverse students as being "foreign" or "exotic" because, at some point in their lives, they had also felt "different" in school. Based upon these personal experiences, the Burnett teachers seemed to have developed an empathic concern for other students who might have been experiencing similar feelings that inspired them to make all children in their classrooms feel as accepted and valued as possible.

Hollins (1996) also notes that personalizing diversity involves “connecting with shared human experiences that transcend cultural, racial, and ethnic boundaries” (p. 53). This idea was manifested in the universalistic perspectives that centered the Burnett teachers’ culturally relevant practices. Jane, Lydia, and Rita were concerned about the success of all their students, including their African American students, and thus they provided access to literacy through “humanistic” strategies such as creating an invitational classroom environment, developing personal relationships with all students (not just those who were struggling) through literature, and using affect as a “hook” into literacy learning. Within their classroom narratives, the Burnett teachers seemed to believe that “good literacy instruction is good for everyone” and rather than designing culturally-situated activities to empower specific groups of students, they emphasized the socioemotional aspects of literacy (e.g., aesthetic response, attitudes and feelings towards reading and writing, motivation) that would likely enhance literacy engagement for a broader range of student “diversity” (e.g., cultural, intellectual/emotional, learning style). Equally important, the Burnett teachers promoted universalism by perceiving student misbehavior as a natural part of the development of children, rather than as a cultural or socioeconomic “deficiency.” This was particularly important for African American students, whose misbehavior is oftentimes attributed to cultural, familial, or socioeconomic deficits (Edwards, Danridge, & Pleasants, 1999). By perceiving misbehavior as a phase that “most kids go through at some point,” Jane, Lydia, and Rita were less likely to overreact to their students or to take their behavior personally, and they were more willing to work with students on changing their behaviors rather than punishing them (e.g., taking away privileges, sending them to the office).

Professional knowledge also played an important role in the hybridized perspectives that made Jane, Rita, and Lydia successful with their African American students. What was most striking in their narratives was the critical role of pedagogical content knowledge and subject matter knowledge (Shulman, 1987) that grounded their classroom practices and enabled them to effectively teach literacy and manage the diversity dilemmas in their classrooms. All three Burnett teachers had well-developed literacy instructional repertoires that supported adaptive responses to students' needs as literacy learners and as culturally diverse children: Jane was able to resolve her diversity dilemma by creating new patterns of socialization through various shared reading activities (e.g., paired readings, partner retellings); Rita connected to students' interests and supported their motivation to write through her Writing Workshop; and Lydia used fast-paced reading and writing activities to stimulate students' creativity and energy. These practical stories of success resonate deeply with Lampert's (1985) observation that teachers who successfully manage dilemmas "bring themselves"—their personal experiences, their professional identities, and particularly their professional knowledge of teaching and learning—to this complicated task, and draw upon these personal and professional strengths as tools that allow them to cope with the dilemma and ultimately construct an approach to manage it. Cultural hybridity, then, brings an important notion to the fore: the practice of culturally relevant teaching depends not only upon the presence of professional knowledge, but how European American teachers adapt and apply that knowledge, in concert with their personal knowledge, to successfully respond to novel situations involving issues of diversity in the classroom.

Secondly, the storyline of cultural hybridity illuminates the significance of professional development in the “making” of culturally relevant European American teachers. Within theoretical narratives, virtually all of the European American teachers, like the “Dream keepers” in Ladson-Billings’ (1994) study, were experts; their professional knowledge regarding culture and cultural diversity, the needs/strengths of diverse learners, and the pedagogical practices that best supported these students’ learning, was so highly-developed that their practices had become automatic and intuitive (Berliner, 1988). The Burnett teachers’ practical narratives, however, described their perspectives on cultural hybridity as evolving throughout the course of their personal and professional lives, and particularly demonstrated the growth of new pluralistic practices within the course of one year. Therefore, the practical narratives suggested that European American teachers don’t have to “know” all of the answers in terms of cultural diversity, but they do need to be committed to actively learning and improving their practices. Jane, Lydia, and Rita were successful teachers because they were eager to learn more about cultural diversity, and they took advantage of the various professional development resources that were available, such as the in-service diversity workshops, the school counselor, and mentoring (Rita), and the African American colleagues/friends (Lydia & Jane), to enhance their personal and professional knowledge. Importantly, the Burnett teachers constructed powerful learning opportunities from these professional development resources, and through serious and sustained conversations about racial/cultural issues and teaching, the acquisition of new information on diversity, and critical reflection upon their practices and their professional identities as teachers

(Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Nieto, 1996), they were able to develop more effective instructional and interpersonal responses to the diverse learners in their classrooms. Finally, cultural hybridity emphasizes the “locality” of successful practice for diverse learners. One of the inherent dangers of process-product research and other types of studies on successful practice is the development of generalized teacher behaviors or pedagogical approaches that are presumed to be effective in any classroom context (Erickson, 1986). Although many researchers conducting studies on culturally relevant teaching have not fallen into this particular trap, unfortunately, those who have target their work towards European American teachers. For example, in her practitioner-oriented article, Jackson (1997) offers seven basic strategies for enacting culturally relevant practices, including “Affirm students’ cultural identities” and “Establish positive relationships with parents,” without providing concrete examples of what these practices may look like in various classroom settings. Similarly, in their book, Shade, Kelly, and Oberg (1997), describe general “culturally relevant” instructional and relational practices that foster success for diverse students, such as “Build on previous experiences from students’ individual cultures” and “Use instructional strategies that support cooperative learning.” Although the authors emphatically deny that their book is a “cookbook,” unfortunately this is the impression most strongly conveyed by their work; absent a clear and thoughtful discussions of how these broad guidelines and strategies may be interpreted and implemented by different teachers, this book—as well as other work on culturally relevant teaching designed specifically for practitioners—portrays culturally relevant teaching as a new and improved version of a “scripted text” for teaching that is “teacher-proof” and “guaranteed” to promote successful learning for African American

and other diverse students. Regrettably, few scholars of culturally relevant teaching address the issues that may arise from implementing such culturally-specific practices in a multiethnic, multi-linguistic classroom: How would a teacher organize her classroom and design instruction to achieve “cultural compatibility” across several cultural groups, and is such a thing possible? If not, which culture should teachers be most concerned about, in terms of achieving compatibility? If cultural values and beliefs between groups are conflicting, how should a teacher resolve this problem and achieve “compatibility”?

Through the Burnett teachers’ personal narratives, and the storyline of cultural hybridity, we are reminded that culturally relevant teaching is a “local” pedagogy that is situated within particular classroom settings and is contextualized by specific social, cultural, and emotional spheres. Unlike the theorists who never fully address questions of implementation, the Burnett teachers were working in multi-linguistic, multicultural classrooms, and African American students were the “minority,” not the “majority,” so these questions were extremely relevant to their teaching. Perhaps this is why cultural hybridity seemed so appealing to them, because rather than locking them into particular cultural strategies, it enhanced their flexibility to be responsive in “universal” and “culturally-specific” ways. What is also quite unique about cultural hybridity is that it can be summarized as a set of general instructional and classroom management practices, which I demonstrated in the first section of this chapter, but it is also a perspective that develops over time through the unique situations and dilemmas that emerged in each teacher’s classroom, which was evident based upon the discussion in the second section. Consequently, culturally relevant practices, and storylines like cultural compatibility and

cultural hybridity, should be described and interpreted, bearing in mind the “setting” of the classroom story.

EPILOGUE

NARRATIVE POSSIBILITIES

Telling a new story about culturally relevant teaching has been an incredible personal and professional journey. Personally, I have reflected upon my own experiences with European American teachers more critically, unafraid to ask some the questions that had once intimidated me. The findings of my narrative inquiry suggest that African American students may remember European American teachers, like Mr. Mimm, Mr. Mealey, Jane Smith, Rita Lucent, or Lydia Browning, as some of their favorite teachers, not because they were “cultural compatible,” but because they were caring, nurturing individuals who thought that African American students deserved to be treated “like everyone else”: with dignity, respect, and compassion. As an African American woman, I would never advocate for European American teachers to be “colorblind” or to pretend that everyone is all the same, yet I do intuitively understand, based upon many experiences of being “the only minority student,” that sometimes African American students do want teachers who will simply see them as “students” and make them feel as if they belong in the classroom. European American teachers who uphold a “universal” perspective can support the academic success of African American students, who may be feeling “different” in predominantly-White classroom settings, by giving them the acceptance and validation that they need to achieve (Hale-Benson, 1983, 2001; Reglin, 1995). African American boys seemed to particularly thrive under the “humanistic” principles in class with Jane, Rita, and Lydia, because their high energy levels, activeness, and sociability were perceived as “normal” or “appropriate” for their age

rather than as “inappropriate behavior” or “misconduct.” Consequently, compared to other African American boys at Burnett Elementary School, these boys spent more time in their classrooms working and learning rather than sitting in the office. This suggests that European American teachers who are culturally relevant do not forget that students are people; despite their different personalities, interests, and backgrounds, all students need a positive socioemotional environment in which to thrive, and most times, they just need a little patience and understanding as they grow and learn.

The experience of telling a new story about culturally relevant teaching has also promoted my professional growth as a scholar. In pursuing the theory of cultural compatibility, only to find that the Burnett teachers were not demonstrating this storyline in their practical narratives of culturally relevant teaching, I learned a valuable lesson about the relationship between theory, practice, and research. Initially, I thought that the purpose of conducting research on culturally relevant teaching was to understand how “successful practitioners” crafted pedagogy from theory. When my narrative inquiry revealed the disconnections between theory and practice, ironically, that’s when the “real” research began, for it was then that I put theory aside and really stopped to listen to the teachers and to think carefully about what they were doing in their classrooms. As it turned out, Jane, Lydia, and Rita were not culturally compatible with their African American students, which was why their instruction did not look like the teaching of the “Dreamkeepers” (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Their sense of pluralism—which I assumed would be well-developed and demonstrative of a high level of cultural expertise based upon the theory of culturally relevant teaching—was in fact developing and evolving throughout the year. Although many of us agree with Nieto’s (1996) contention that

becoming a multicultural educator is a lifelong process, it is ironic that in our research, we expect successful European American teachers to be highly proficient and knowledgeable about issues of diversity; in other words, we believe these particular educators are successful because they have completed the “process” of becoming multicultural educators.

Through telling a new story of culturally relevant teaching, I became acutely aware of how this vision of “success” had indeed blinded me to the cultural realities of these three European American teachers. Like most European American teachers, they had limited cultural exposure and experiences, they did not live in nor socialize with the African American community, so it was highly unlikely that they would have developed the extensive cultural knowledge necessary for cultural compatibility. What these teachers did have was the willingness to learn; deep pedagogical content and subject matter knowledge in literacy; a strong commitment to diversity and equity issues across the board; and the courage to take the risk to try new things in their classrooms; and it was these qualities, rather than culturally compatibility, that fostered their success with African American and other students in their classrooms. Telling a new story about culturally relevant teaching lead me to think about the “characters” (i.e., European American teachers) and the “pluralistic” storylines in the narratives of “successful teaching of diverse children” in a completely different way, and in so doing, raised new and intriguing questions: Is it really possible for European American teachers to be successful while they are still learning how to be “multicultural”? At what point do European American teachers believe they have “learned enough” about pluralism to take the risk and teach in a culturally relevant manner? Which personal and professional

learning contexts (e.g., friendships, professional development workshops, mentoring) produce the type of powerful learning needed to teach European American teachers about pluralism?

One new pluralistic storyline that was illuminated through this dissertation study was “diversity dilemmas,” and I contend that this idea may be quite useful for composing new stories about culturally relevant teaching because it highlights the “struggle” that many European American teachers may encounter. The Burnett teacher narratives clearly convey the challenges of teaching diverse children and represent this type of pedagogical work as uncertain and complex. Henry Trueba (2001) asserts that diversity in schools is oftentimes an “abrupt awakening” for many educators who are just are coming to terms with the fact that they are “living multiculturalism” everyday when they see their children’s faces. For European American teachers like Jane, Lydia, and Rita who are not accustomed to “living multiculturalism” in their personal lives, it may be quite difficult to address these issues within the classroom: How do European American teachers approach a group of African American girls about their behavior without offending or disrespecting them? How do European American teachers treat all children fairly when they know that there are some children who needed additional support and thus require “differential treatment”? How do European American teachers advocate for students whom they believe are getting a “fair shake” at school? These are tough questions, for they touch the very essence of who we think we are (e.g., professional, cultural identity) and how we relate to others (e.g., fair and equitable treatment, compassion). To the Burnett teachers’ credit, they were sensitive enough to ask these questions about their own responses to diversity, and were willing to make the changes that they believed would foster success

for all students. Based upon the Burnett teacher narratives, I argue that the “diversity dilemma” storyline would be helpful in developing new stories that moved beyond the “tourist” approach of talking about food, fun, and festivals, because we know that this perspective does not yield culturally relevant practices (Hollins, 1996; Nieto, 1996). European American preservice and inservice teachers need to know about the realities of teaching diverse children; it is a complex task that requires their “head and their hearts,” and although it may be quite frustrating at times, they can learn to resolve these dilemmas and achieve success with their students like Jane, Rita, and Lydia.

New storylines could be developed through future research, and the three examples that I share here are based upon the limitations of this narrative inquiry. First, storylines that give more prominence to the voices of African American students and parents could broaden our understanding of what counts as “culturally relevant teaching.” In this study, I could not include the opinions of African American students and parents in the initial phases of the project because the administration was uncomfortable with the idea of my interviewing parents about their children’s experiences at Burnett (see Appendix A for a more detailed description of this issue). When I finally interviewed these African American students and families at the end of the year, I discovered that they had definite criteria concerning “successful teaching” that may have been helpful as I observed and talked with the three Burnett teachers. Since we know that “culturally relevant teaching” may look differently according to cultural group affiliation (Delpit, 1995; Nieto, 1996), it would be extremely important for further research to involve as many African American educational stakeholders as possible in order to better represent the range of culturally relevant practices in schools.

Further, additional narrative studies that delve into the “cultural worlds” of European American teachers through stories that represent their cultural heritages and backgrounds, their opinions and thoughts about social justice issues (e.g. activism, White privilege, racism, discrimination, and other forms of oppression), and their knowledge of diverse cultures, would be quite useful for developing interpretive insights into their cultural perspectives. Due to the extremely sensitive nature of these cultural stories, I did not feel comfortable asking these types of questions until the study was nearly over, and although I did ask some of these questions in the final interviews, I felt in many ways that the stories that I elicited were just “the tip of the iceberg” in terms of their beliefs and opinions about issues of diversity. We need to know much more about the cultural perspectives successful European American teachers draw upon to construct cultural relevant pedagogy, particularly in light of the finding of this study that cultural hybridity may in fact be a viable perspective for European American teachers. Further narrative research could tell us if other successful European American teachers also have crafted this cultural perspective, and if they have, this research could also inform us about how this culturally-hybridized perspective enabled them to resolve the “diversity dilemmas” that they may have encountered, and could describe which personal and professional experiential contexts (e.g., personal/professional relationships, professional development and training, teacher preparation) have been most influential in the development of this perspective.

Finally, like most exploratory studies, this dissertation uncovered several important themes that were woven within and across the Burnett teachers’ narratives, such as (a) the significance of early school experiences of feeling “different” and

teachers' responses to diversity; (b) the presence of African American friends/colleagues; (c) the role of professional development resources (e.g., mentoring, in-service workshops, school counselors and other staff members), and (d) the confluence of personal and professional knowledge in developing culturally relevant pedagogy. These narrative themes warrant further research, because although we have substantial knowledge about what culturally relevant teaching look like, our understanding of how this capacity develops is extremely limited. The developmental perspective that these narrative themes seem to illuminate may be particularly important for teacher educators and others concerned with the preparation and development of European American teachers, for in knowing how personal and professional experiences shape culturally relevant practices, we have a better chance of teaching others how to do what Jane, Rita, and Lydia did, and increasing the number of success stories that are told by teachers who work with diverse children.

In conclusion, as we pursue new avenues for narrative research on culturally relevant teaching, we need to bear in mind Susan Florio-Ruane's challenge "to tell new stories" and to do so "in many voices." As educational researchers, we have the unique opportunity to hear and share the practical stories of European American teachers who successfully educate diverse children—stories which may contribute significantly to our understandings about the nature of culturally relevant teaching and the development of culturally-relevant European American teachers. But how we choose to tell these practical stories—whether we conform to traditional storylines that recapitulate the theory of culturally relevant teaching, or whether we bravely step out and try to develop innovative stories that more fully explore the complexities and uncertainties of this

pedagogy as well as highlights its triumphs —is the question that may ultimately determine the fate of diverse children in our nations' schools.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Methods

Although most of the methodology was described in Chapter 3, the narrative structure did not allow for all aspects of the inquiry to be described. In this appendix, I highlight three important methodological issues that were not explained in Chapter 3: a) the selection of participants; b) negotiation of access and entry into the site; and c) criteria for validity and reliability.

Selection of Participants: The Reputational Nomination Process

In this narrative inquiry, the participating teachers were selected through a reputational nomination process. This type of purposeful sampling procedure is appropriate for qualitative studies where investigators want to discover and understand a particular phenomenon and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned (Merriam, 1998). The term “reputational nomination process” was coined by Foster (1997) in her narrative study of successful Black teachers, but variations have been used in numerous studies of successful practice (Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Pressley, Yokoi, Rankin, Wharton-McDonald, & Mistretta, 1996).

In purposeful sampling, the criteria for selecting participants to be studied are critical. In my narrative inquiry, I did not determine the criteria used to assess “successful practice with African American students;” rather, I allowed the “experts” that I chose to define and operationalize their definition of “successful instruction.” This technique is used to reduce the effects of any existing researcher bias (e.g., the researcher is familiar

with the pool of participants and selects those whom he/she knows or likes) and more importantly, it provides insights into how success is assessed by multiple stakeholders within “local” contexts.

Three groups of nominators were chosen to provide names of teachers whom they felt were successful with African American students:

(a) County administrators

I met with a small group of Early Literacy administrators at the County office of curriculum and instruction in March 2001. The women in the group suggested Burnett School as a “good place” to do the study because the school’s administration was “stable” and there was “a lot of diversity” at the school. They also informed me that the school was identified as being “at-risk” by the County and thus was involved in on-going school reform, which also might have been of interest in my study. The County administrators also suggested three teachers who were successful with African American students.

(b) Burnett School administrators and staff

I met Mr. Williams, the African American administrator at Burnett, in July 2001. He was the informal representative of the Burnett staff, and he invited me to conduct the study at Burnett. He noted that the principal and the other assistant principal met together to discuss the study, and they believed that three teachers would be “perfect” for the study because they were “outstanding.”

(c) African American students and parents

Former and current African American students, and their parents, were to be included in the study as nominators, but because all of these interviews were conducted at the end of the school year, their nominations did not affect the process. I wanted to meet with the former African American students and parents at the beginning of the year, however, the Burnett administrators were quite reluctant to provide the contact information because they did not want me to speak with them at that point; they were uncertain about the types of questions I would be asking, and, as the principal mentioned, the school’s relationship with the African American community was something that they were “working on” but it was “still very fragile.” Thus, I decided to wait and interview the former African American students and parents near the end of the year, after I had the opportunity to cultivate a deeper relationship with the school. At the end of the year, however, only one former African American student and parent were available for the interview, and they both were interviewed at their home in June 2002.

Current African American students in the sixth grade, and their parents, were also interviewed. These students were selected because as sixth graders, they had more well-developed thoughts and feelings about culturally relevant teaching, had more experience with European American teachers, and could articulate this information better than the third graders. Further, the third graders were involved in the high-stakes testing, and I felt it was unethical for these students to miss instructional time in order to participate in my interviews; the sixth graders, however, were not involved in the testing, and Lydia was very generous with their time at the end of the year. In total, four African American sixth graders were interviewed in school during May 2002, and two of the four parents were interviewed in their homes in June 2002. I frequently attempted to contact the other two parents, even after the school year had ended, but one parent had her phone disconnected, and the other seemed disinterested in talking with me, so after a few weeks, I stopped calling.

In terms of the nomination process, I met with each group of nominators separately, and during the 20-45 minute interviews, I asked the members of the group the following question: Do you know any teachers who are successful with African American students? If so, please tell me their names and why you believe they have been so successful. Nominators were asked to provide as much specific information as possible concerning their criteria for assessing the success of the teachers they nominated.

Based upon the nominators' responses, three criteria were central to their evaluations of "successful" teachers and teaching of African American students:

(1) Teacher personality

Administrator and staff nominators consistently reported that the teachers who were successful cared deeply about all their students, and offered specific examples of instances where the teacher “went out of her way” for particular students (e.g., one teacher allowed an Asian student and her family to live with her for a few weeks when their home was destroyed in a fire). According to the African American student, caring was also expressed through respect for students and their opinions, and through taking an interest in their personal lives. Interestingly, the African American parent felt that caring was demonstrated through authoritative discipline and “not letting students get away with anything.”

(2) Teacher responses to student misbehavior

Burnett administrators and staff particularly discussed this criterion at length. They noted that teachers who were successful with African American students were not “engaged in a power struggle with them” and thus were less likely to “punish” student misbehavior. In their opinions, teachers who were successful with African American students “handled” misbehavior in their classrooms rather than sending children to the office for more severe disciplinary measures. Similarly, the African American student noted that teachers who gave them the “benefit of the doubt” and didn’t “nitpick” about each and every infraction were most successful with them in class. The African American parent contended that teachers who were successful reported her child’s misbehavior “as soon as it happened” rather than waiting to address these issues in a formal conference or meeting.

(3) African American students’ achievement

Both the County and the school administrators were reluctant to discuss specific test scores, but overall they concurred that teachers who were successful reduced the achievement gap between African American and European American students on the state-wide test, and they were greatly concerned about the performance of African American students, not only those in their classrooms, but in the entire school. African American students described successful teachers as those who “helped them” with subjects that were particularly difficult for them; similarly, African American parents noted when teachers “took an interest” in their children and helped them progress in specific content areas (e.g., reading, math, science) as well as expanded their intellectual interests.

Negotiation of Entry and Issues of Access

In this narrative study, issues of entry and access were intricately linked to the reputational nomination process. My initial point of contact was an administrator who worked in the Winston County office. This administrator worked in the early literacy department, and Dr. P. David Pearson knew her well. He gave me her information and told me to talk with her about possible schools for my research project. After talking with her, she invited me to present my research plans to a group of her colleagues. This meeting served a twofold purpose: to discuss the study with the Winston County administrators, and to generate a list of possible sites and participants (i.e., teachers, school administrators) who would be interested in my research. It was at this meeting that the first phase of the reputational nomination process began, as these administrators suggested that I contact the principal at Burnett Elementary School and described several teachers (i.e., Rita, Lydia, and Jane) that were “successful” with African American students.

My initial contact with the principal at Burnett Elementary School, Mrs. Matthews, was quite awkward due to a miscommunication between the Winston County research office and me. After meeting with the Winston County administrators, I submitted a formal research plan to the research office in Winston County in order to gain permission to conduct the study in their school system. After a lengthy phone interview and review process, my proposal was accepted, and a letter of approval was sent directly to Burnett Elementary School. Because I was told not to contact the principal until I received permission from the research office, I did not talk with the principal at Burnett at all. However, in the meantime, Mrs. Matthews had received the

letter that the study was approved, and she was very confused and somewhat agitated that a research study had been planned at her school without her knowledge. As soon as I received the official letter of approval, I tried numerous times to contact Mrs. Matthews, but since it was the end of the year, and she was extremely busy, we did not actually talk until mid-June 2002. Mrs. Matthews told me that she was upset that the project had been planned without her knowledge or consent, and I apologized for the miscommunication. After hearing more about the study, she agreed to be involved in the research, and asked me to talk with Mr. Williams, the assistant principal. I met with Mr. Williams in July 2002, and at that meeting, the second phase of the reputational nomination process was completed.

In order to feel more comfortable at the school, I attended as many school functions as I possibly could: Back to School Night, the Math Carnival, the Spring Concert, the Veterans' Day celebration, the Read A Thon, and the Reading is Magic Show were just a few of the activities that I attended throughout the year. I believed it was extremely important to participate in these functions for three reasons. First, I wanted to show my appreciation to the school, the administrators, and the staff for willingly participating in my study, and I thought that the best way to do that would be to attend these special activities. Second, I had the opportunity at these functions to see the three teachers involved in my study outside of the classroom environment. This was a particularly important aspect of my research, for it was through these out-of-class activities that I was able to identify some of the broader "school factors" that shaped their ability to craft culturally relevant instructional practices (e.g., their relationships with African American colleagues, their relationships with counselors and other staff

members). Finally, it was important to me as a researcher/“traveler” conducting a narrative inquiry that I felt as if I “belonged” in the Burnett Elementary School community. As my visibility at school functions increased, Mrs. Matthews and Mr. Williams began to realize that the purpose of my study was to be supportive, not critical, of their educational practices and philosophies. Through these special activities, I was able to effectively develop strong relationships with the Burnett Elementary administrators that enabled me to better understand the “story” of the school and its special teachers.

Issues of validity and reliability

In general, narrative researchers assert that criteria for evaluating research based upon reliability, validity, replicability, and objectivity are inappropriate for narrative-based inquiries (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1994; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). Rather than working with these “positivist” criteria typically associated with quantitative research, narrative researchers draw upon concepts that illuminate the highly interpretive nature of narrative inquiry. In this dissertation, I borrow the concept of narrative resonance (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Conle, 1996) to address issues of coherence, correspondence, and persuasiveness in narrative.

As I engaged in this narrative inquiry, I envisioned narrative resonance to be an important concept on two interrelated levels. First, I wanted to ensure that the narratives I wrote “resonated,” or were plausible, to the three Burnett teachers whom were the major characters in the story (Riesman calls this correspondence). Although the classroom narratives were admittedly written based upon my interpretations of their teaching and

life experiences, I still believed it was important that the teachers could “see themselves” in the story and felt that it was an accurate representation of them.

To enhance this level of “participant resonance,” I did member checks with my participants informally and formally. During several interviews, I would give teachers some of my interpretive commentary and ask their opinions; for example, with Rita and the concept of motivation, which was an overarching theme in her story of culturally relevant teaching, I asked her specific questions about motivation (e.g., How do you define motivation? Which students in your classroom do you think need to be motivated the most and why?) which either confirmed or disconfirmed my interpretations. In many cases, these informal checks were important, not only because they provided insightful information about particular themes, but they often lead to new questions and topics of interest pursued in later interviews.

In April 2002, I also did a “formal” member check with the three Burnett teachers involved in this study. The teachers were curious to know about the study and how I had been making sense of their teaching during the year, and so I set up a meeting with them to discuss the findings. However, Dr. Pearson and Dr. Edwards suggested that I use the meeting as an opportunity to “test” my interpretations of the teachers’ culturally relevant instruction by having a more “open” discussion about my interpretive findings that invited the teachers to evaluate the authenticity, plausibility, and adequacy of the themes and categories that I had generated, and to construct their own meanings and interpretations in ways that could further inform my analyses as the researcher. During this meeting, I had not formally constructed the classroom narratives that were presented in this dissertation; rather, the narrative themes and storylines were discussed with the

teachers. For example, I drew upon the concept of “family” to describe Lydia’s teaching, and she wholeheartedly agreed with that interpretation of her classroom, and provided additional confirmatory evidence based upon her own personal meanings that she constructed about her classroom life. However, Lydia also pointed out that she was an advocate for her students, and through her discussion during this member check, I was able to construct the narrative theme of “cheerleader” and to create the storyline of the dual teacher identities and personal power that became central to her story of culturally relevant teaching. Because I structured this meeting around in-depth conversations with each teacher about their teaching, this formal member check process lasted nearly three hours, was audiotaped, and transcribed.

The second level of narrative resonance concerned the explanatory quality of the story as a “research text” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Scholars should not evaluate a narrative based upon criteria of “objectivity” or “truthfulness” because, as the Personal Narratives Group contends:

When talking about lives, people lie sometimes, forget a lot, exaggerate, become confused, and get things wrong. Yet they are revealing truths. These truths don’t reveal the past “as it actually was,” aspiring to a standard of objectivity. They give us instead the truths of our experiences...unlike the Truth of the scientific ideal, the truths of personal narratives are neither open to proof nor self-evident. We come to understand them through interpretation, paying careful attention to the contexts that shape their creation and the world views that inform them (Personal Narratives Group, as quoted in Riessman, 1993, p. 22).

Consequently, narrative theorists such as Bruner (1996) and Polkinghorne (1988) suggest that personal narratives should be evaluated according to coherence criteria. Riessman (1993) asserts that for the interpretation to be more than a superficial reading of a personal narrative, coherence must be as “thick” as possible, ideally relating various

thematic, contextual, and behavioral elements into one compelling and comprehensive story. To create this “thick” coherence in the Burnett teacher narratives, I employed four basic strategies commonly used to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research (Merriam, 1998):

- (1) Long term observation: In this narrative inquiry, I repeatedly observed the Burnett teachers’ literacy instruction over the course of an academic year. By gathering data over an extended period of time, I was able to generate tentative interpretations about their culturally relevant teaching that were continuously refined as I “tested” them in the field. Further, this technique enabled me to collect the substantial amount of ethnographic data necessary to construct rich, descriptive stories of their classroom lives.
- (2) Researcher biases: As a narrative researcher, I believed it was important to identify and discuss some of my personal biases. To convey the personal significance of this work, and to explain how my interests in culturally relevant teaching and in European American teachers who were successful with African American students developed, I followed Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) suggestion of beginning the dissertation with an autobiographical narrative. Additionally, in the third chapter, I reveal my theoretical biases and assumptions about culturally relevant European American teachers through a narrative account of my search for conceptual understanding, as well as explore the methodological shifts in the study that ultimately brought me to narrative research.
- (3) Triangulation: As a narrative researcher, I constructed the teacher narratives from multiple sources of data, including a) fieldnotes during classroom observations; b) transcripts from interviews with the three Burnett teachers, Burnett administrators, Burnett staff members, and current and former African American Burnett students and parents; c) notes from informal conversations with teachers and administrators, and d) reflections from my researcher’s journal. In so doing, I was able to create a coherent story of culturally relevant instruction that incorporated a wide variety of data. Further, I used two different methods of narrative analysis to produce interpretive findings within each teacher’s story and across the three teachers’ stories, which greatly contributed to the comprehensibility and complexity of the understandings generated from this study.
- (4) Peer examination: In order to ensure that the teacher narratives and the interpretive commentaries were coherent, I asked two colleagues to read each story after it was composed, and to provide feedback that specifically pertained to the relevancy and the adequacy of the themes and storylines within each narrative. Based upon these colleagues’ suggestions, the stories were revised, and were then sent to Dr. Pearson and Dr. Edwards, the dissertation co-directors, for their

comments. Oftentimes, Dr. Pearson, Dr. Edwards, and I would then have a conversation about the teacher story and the emergent findings in the study, and any additional revisions to the story would be made after our conversation. Through these multiple levels of “peer” examination, I was able to compose teacher narratives that were more consistent with the data collected, and to construct interpretations about the nature and implementation of culturally relevant teaching that were more persuasive.

APPENDIX B

Contact Letters and Consent Forms

Contact Letter

September 2001

Dear (Teacher, Parent/Guardian, Administrator, Staff Member):

Hello, my name is Jennifer Turner. I am currently a fifth year doctoral candidate in the Educational Psychology program at Michigan State University. In collaboration with my faculty advisors, Dr. David Pearson and Dr. Patricia Edwards, I am conducting a research project that focuses on teachers who have worked in positive ways with African American elementary students and have contributed to these students' school success. This area of research is of personal interest because there were several teachers in my life who supported and encouraged me to stay on the path towards success during my own school experiences as an African American student. In this research project, I am also interested in learning more about how children feel about their experiences with teachers whom they believe have provided support and motivation for themselves and for other African American students in their class, and how parents feel about teacher who have taught their children in elementary school. The perspectives that you bring would be important and valuable to this project.

I would like to invite you to participate in this research project. During the year, from September 2001 until June 2002, I will be visiting and observing teachers and students in their classrooms, particularly during literacy instruction. I will be conducting interviews with teachers, African American students and parents, administrators, and staff members at the school concerning their beliefs and perceptions of successful teaching for African American children. These interviews will be completely confidential, will be audiotaped, and will most likely occur in school. Please keep in mind that you may withdraw at any time during the study, and you may refuse to answer any questions during the interviews, without giving a reason and with no negative consequences to you.

In closing, I hope that you would consider participating in my research project. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at home at (703) 263-0433. Thank you so much for taking time to read this letter, and I am looking forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Jennifer D. Turner, M. Ed.

Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in a research project that focuses upon the pedagogical and interpersonal strategies who foster resilience for African American elementary students. The main purpose of this study is to understand how teachers, who are oftentimes “different” from their students, move beyond these differences and work with African American students in effective ways that are supportive, engaging, and motivational. Ultimately, I hope that I can share this research as a way to provide other teachers who are working with African American elementary students with innovative, practical ideas and suggestions that facilitate school success for these students.

Data collection for the study will begin September 2001 and end June 2002. You will be observed as you teach in your classroom or other academic setting (e.g., after school program or tutoring program) 3-5 times each month, particularly during literacy experiences, such as reading, vocabulary instruction, writing, etc. You might be asked to identify African American students in your classroom as focal students for more focused observations. Also, you will participate in several individual interviews and 2 Focus Group interviews concerning your beliefs and perceptions of culturally relevant instruction and successful African American students, including how you see cultural differences impacting school success, and any specific pedagogical and interpersonal practices that you use in order to help these students succeed. All interviews will be audiotaped, and will last about 60-90 minutes, and will be scheduled at your convenience.

Your participation in the study is voluntary. You can choose not to participate at all, refuse to participate in certain procedures, or answer certain questions, or may discontinue your participation in the study at any time without giving a reason and with no negative consequences to you.

Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. Data gathered will be treated with strict confidence on the part of the investigator. Your real name, as well as any identifying information about yourself, will be deleted or protected with pseudonyms in any verbal or written report of research findings. Your identity may be known to the principal investigator but will be kept confidential. Upon request and within these restrictions, results will be made available to you.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study, you may contact Jennifer D. Turner at (703) 263-0433. Participants with questions about their role and rights as a subject of research may also contact David E. Wright, PhD., Chair, University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects at (517) 355-2180.

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Signature

Date

APPENDIX C

Teacher Interview Protocols

Common First Interview

You have been nominated by several people to be a successful teacher of African American students. Why do you think you are successful? What is the secret of your success?

How would you describe your teaching philosophy? What do you believe “works”?

How do you handle discipline in your classroom?

How did you learn how to teach African American students? How much of what you know about teaching African American students have you learned from your teacher training, either preservice or inservice?

Have you had any personal experiences with African American teachers or other school professionals that have helped you to develop such a successful way of teaching African American children? Please describe for me what these personal experiences looked like.

Did you learn how to teach African American students based on your experiences of working with African American students over the years? If so, can you describe some of those experiences for me?

I know that in a previous conversation you mentioned that you see children as individuals rather than as members of particular racial groups. Can you share with me how seeing children as individuals helps you to be successful with African American children?

Do you think that a student’s cultural background shapes how he or she learns? If so, how? Can you think of any characteristics that African American children as a cultural group bring with them to the classroom? And how do you incorporate this knowledge in your teaching?

Rita’s Protocols

Interview #2: In our last conversation in January, we talked about “changing” and you mentioned that changing was difficult for new teachers as well as for those who are more experienced. I’d like to begin our conversation today talking about some of the changes that you have made in your classroom this year. You have made quite a few changes in your literacy curriculum this year (e.g., introduced a writing process for student writing, formed Book Clubs for reading, student-led Morning Message, paired reading with first graders).

1. What was your literacy curriculum like before these changes? How did you feel about it? How were students responding to it?
2. When do you remember first thinking about changing your literacy curriculum? What was going on at the time?
3. What lead you to make these significant changes this year? (Probe: What was going on last year that was working well and what was not working so well that made you think you should change?)
4. What did you do to make these changes a reality this year? (probe: What kind of planning did you do? Did you seek advice from others?)
5. What do you think and how do you feel about your literacy curriculum now? What have the students' reactions been?

You also mentioned that you changed your discipline program.

6. Can you tell me the story of this change? When do you first remember wanting to change the program and what was going on?
7. You talked about the idea of "making things work for you" as a teacher when it comes to classroom management. What was your experience like in figuring out what worked for you before you went to the Fred Jones conference? Why do you think his methods worked so well for you?
8. Do you think it would be, in general, easy or hard for many teachers to make the kinds of changes that you made in your classroom? Why?
9. You mentioned when we talked last that a teacher has to have courage to take risks, they have to be brave, and be willing to step out of their ways to try something different. Who (or what experiences) helped you to develop your sense of courage and bravery?

Interview #3: In this conversation, I'd like to ask a few questions about your student teaching experiences and how they have shaped your teaching now.

- (1) When and where did you do your student teaching? What kind of school was it? What grade did you student teach?
- (2) What were your experiences like as a student teacher? How did you feel? What were some of the moments that stood out to you?
- (3) Many teachers comment that their student teaching days were some of the first where they encountered student diversity. Was that true for you? If so, how would you describe your feelings and reactions to teaching students who were from diverse backgrounds? What do you remember about the ways that the "experienced" teacher interacted with African American or other diverse children?
- (4) What did you learn about teaching from your student-teacher experiences? What did you learn about students? What did you learn about yourself as a teacher?
- (5) Because many teachers first encounter diversity as a student teacher, these experiences give them an opportunity to think about some ideas like "equality," "cultural differences" and "diversity" in ways that might be different from what they were taught in their teacher education programs, or ways that they grew up

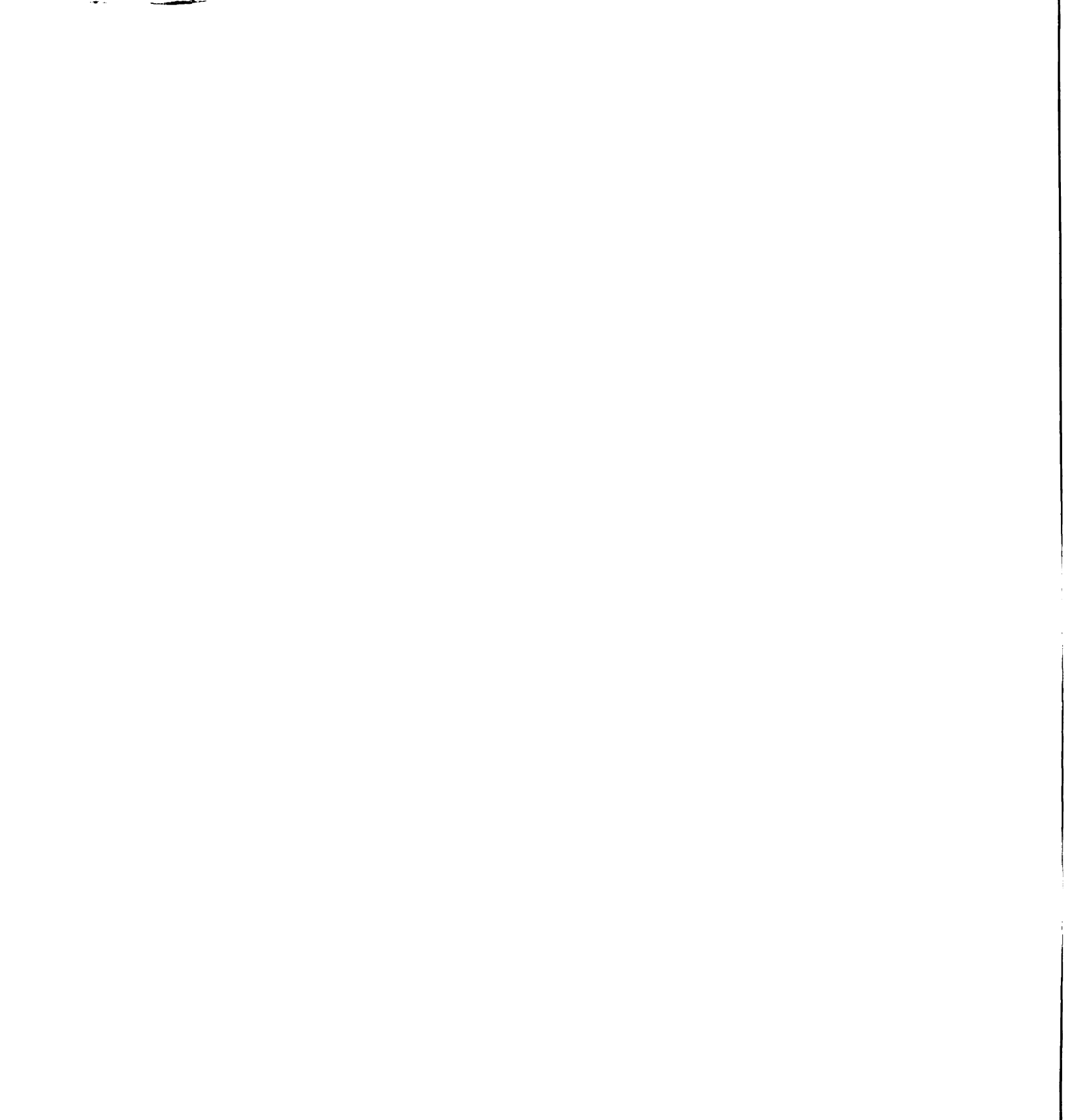
thinking about diversity. What do these words mean to you as a teacher and what do they mean for your teaching?

Interview #4: Thank you for meeting with me today. We will be covering several topics in our conversation, beginning with some of your reactions to our discussion last Tuesday.

1. I'd really like to hear some of your reactions to the metaphor of "dance" that we talked about last Tuesday. Does it resonate with who you want to be as a teacher? Does it accurately describe your teaching?
2. How would you choose a metaphor for your teaching or to describe yourself as a teacher? What factors would you consider to be most important in terms of who you are as a teacher and what you feel your teaching is like?
3. In your experience as a first grader when the teacher isolated you from everyone, was your twin sister in the same classroom?
4. What has your experience been like as a twin? What was it like growing up with a twin sister? How are you two alike? How are you two different?
5. You mentioned that you thought that your "openness" to diverse people was a part of your growing up with your family. What did your parents teach you about diversity? Why do you think they were so "open" to diversity?
6. You mentioned that the mentoring program here, sponsored by FCPS, was very helpful for you, but that it did not continue after the first year. What kinds of things might a second and third year teachers want to talk about in a mentoring program?
7. You also mentioned that you are on the TAT here at Burnett. What has that experience been like? How did you come to be on this team? Has being on the TAT changed your teaching in any way? If so, how?
8. Have you ever worked with or taught with an African American teacher as a student teacher or as a colleague at Burnett? If so, what was your experience like?

Final Interview: I'd like to thank you for allowing me to be a part of your classroom this year, and for agreeing to have these conversations with me; I have learned so much! In our last conversation, I'd like to ask a wide range of questions based upon topics that I didn't cover in other conversations, as well as questions about this year.

1. Looking back today, what do you think the most important factors were in your decision to become a teacher? Can you remember what qualities that you had that you felt fit well with teaching as a line of work for you?
2. You mentioned in another conversation that the first grade teacher you had was one that you did not want to emulate when you became a teacher. Were there other teachers that you had when you were a student that you wanted to emulate once you became a teacher? What was he or she like? What did he or she do?
3. You mentioned during one of our conversations that Janice was your "unofficial" mentor. How did she become your mentor? How did your relationship develop?
4. You made some pretty important changes to the ways that you interacted with students and taught them this year. Overall, what was it like to make these



- changes? What was easy about it? What was difficult? What did you learn from this experience of change this year? Would you be willing to make some of these changes in your practice again? Why or why not?
5. You mentioned in April that you are going to be teaching first grade next year. How do you feel about that?
 6. We have talked quite a bit about successful teaching in our conversations. In your opinion, what kind of personalities do successful teachers seem to have? In terms of being a successful teacher, what role does:
 - being flexible or having the ability to change play?
 - being persistent play?
 - being a maverick/rebel (e.g., when it comes to conforming to administrative rules or policies) play?
 - being aware of cultural differences in students play?
 7. Have you ever experienced anything that might be called a “turning point” where you sort of knew that you had developed these kinds of qualities and were using them to teach successfully?

Jane's Protocols

Interview #2: In this conversation, I'd like to talk, in more detail, about two early teaching experiences that you had in Connecticut and Tennessee that were very powerful. I'd like to have you think back to them for a few moments.

1. How would you describe your experiences as a student teacher during the riots in the late 1960s with so much upheaval and turmoil in the country and so many changes? What were you thinking and feeling?
2. Would you share with me your feelings and ideas about the Civil Rights Movement? Did your ideas about the Movement impact your thoughts about education and/or school and “equal access?” If so, how?
3. In Connecticut, you mentioned that you were student teaching when the school first integrated. What were some of the teachers' reactions to integration? The parents? The students? How did you feel about it? Did your mentoring teacher have any black students in your class then? If so, what were the interactions in the classroom like? In your opinion, was integration successful at the school? Why or why not? Who was it successful for?
4. You mentioned before that in Tennessee, your teaching experiences were radically different. You said education should not have been that way, the way it was in Memphis. What did you think education should be? Some people would have had that experience in Memphis and they would have just accepted it and said that was how black children should learn. Why was it unacceptable to you?

5. What lessons did you learn about the concept of “fair treatment” or “equality” and “diversity” and “cultural differences,” particularly in terms of African American students in school, from these two important experiences?
6. It seems that teachers might find it difficult to trying to treat students fairly when they also have to taking into account students’ differences when they are teaching. What has this experience been like for you?

Interview 3: In this conversation, I’d like to ask you some questions about your student-teaching experiences because I found it fascinating that you student-taught in the late sixties.

1. How would you describe your experiences as a student teacher during the riots in the late 1960s with so much upheaval and turmoil in the country and so many changes? What were you thinking and feeling?
2. What was going on in the school were you were doing your student teaching? How were teachers, administrators, and students reacting to what was going on at that time?
3. Would you share with me your feelings and ideas about the Civil Rights Movement? Did your ideas about the Movement impact your thoughts about education and/or school and “equal access?” If so, how?
4. What did you learn about teaching from your student-teacher experiences? What did you learn about students? What did you learn about yourself as a teacher?
5. Since the Civil Rights Movement, educators have talked more openly about things like “cultural differences,” “equality” and “diversity” in terms of our need to enhance the achievement of and educational opportunities for a greater number of students. What do these words mean to you as a teacher and what do they mean to your teaching?

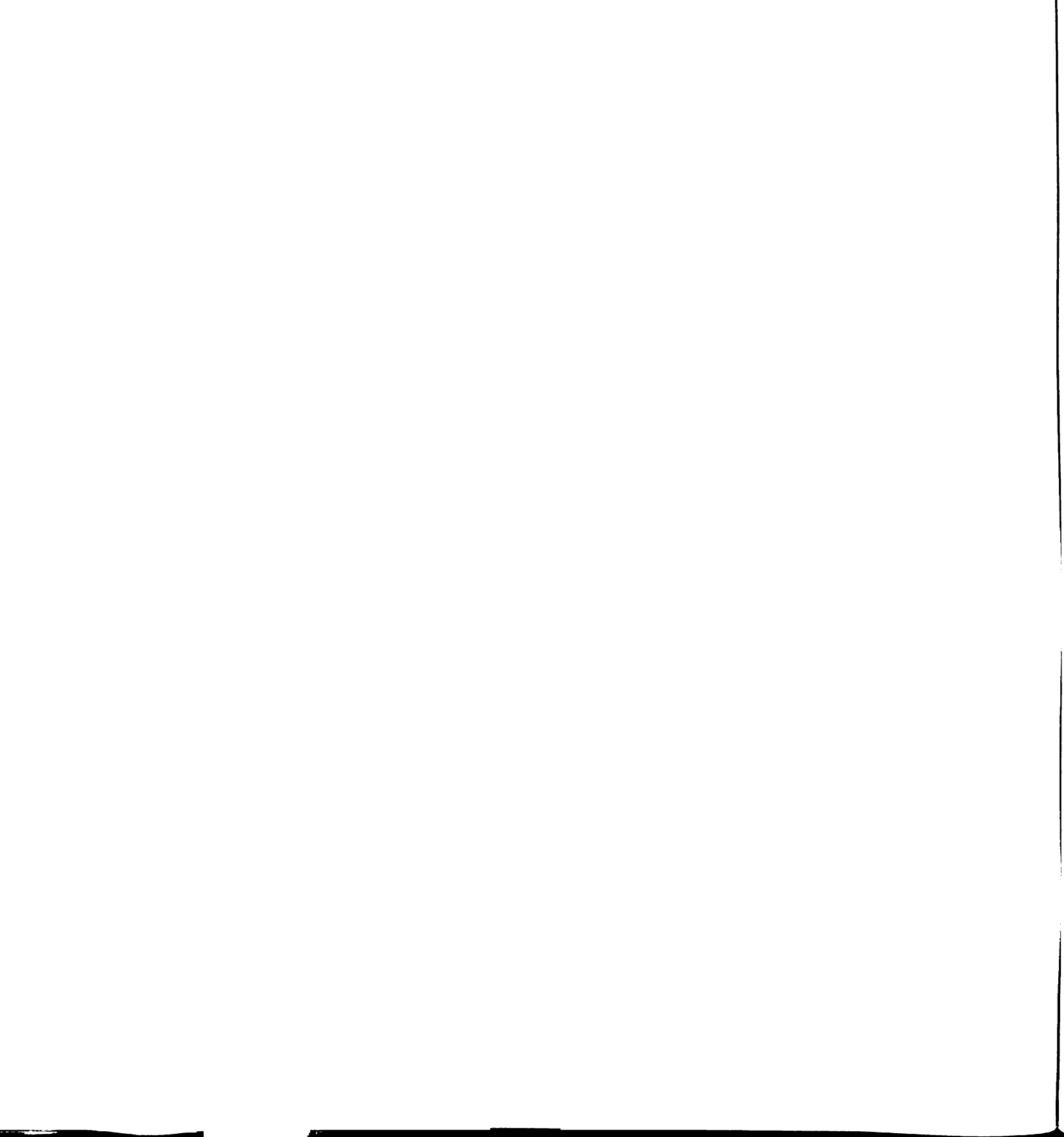
Interview #4: Thank you for meeting with me today. We will be covering several topics in our conversation, beginning with some of your reactions to our discussion last Tuesday.

9. I’d really like to hear some of your reactions to the metaphor of “dance” that we talked about last Tuesday. Does it resonate with who you want to be as a teacher? Does it accurately describe your teaching?
10. How would you choose a metaphor for your teaching or to describe yourself as a teacher? What factors would you consider to be most important in terms of who you are as a teacher and what you feel your teaching is like?
11. Could you tell me more about the 7th grade teacher who “saved” you? How were you lost? What did she do specifically that made you feel “safe?”
12. Many people have difficulty making friends with people from other cultures. What kind of experience has it been for you?

13. You mentioned that you have a friend of African descent that you taught with. Tell me about the story of your friendship. When, where, and how did you two meet?
14. You mentioned that you two do a great deal of sharing. Have you ever asked your friend for advice about the African American students that you were teaching? Can you remember a specific time you did? What was the problem? What was her advice? What was the outcome?
15. Have you received insights or understanding about African American people or children from your friend or other African American people that you would not have learned otherwise? If so, what are they?
16. Would you say that this friendship has made you a more effective teacher of African American children? Why or why not?

Final Interview: I'd like to thank you for allowing me to be a part of your classroom this year, and for agreeing to have these conversations with me; I have learned so much! In our last conversation, I'd like to ask a wide range of questions based upon topics that I didn't cover in other conversations, as well as questions about this year.

8. Looking back today, what do you think the most important factors were in your decision to become a teacher? Can you remember what qualities that you had that you felt fit well with teaching as a line of work for you?
9. You mentioned that you have a friend of African descent that you taught with. Tell me about the story of your friendship. When, where, and how did you two meet? What makes this friendship special to you?
10. You mentioned that you two do a great deal of sharing. Did you ever have discussion about African American students? What would you talk about? (Probe: Have you ever asked your friend for advice about the African American students that you were teaching? Can you remember a specific time you did? What was the problem? What was her advice? What was the outcome?)
11. Looking back this year, what were some of the things that went really well in terms of your teaching? What are some of the things that were challenging to you this year?
12. Are you planning to teach third grade next year? If so, what things might you do differently? If not, what grade will you teach and how do you feel about that?
13. We have talked quite a bit about successful teaching in our conversations. In your opinion, what kind of personalities do successful teachers seem to have? In terms of being a successful teacher, what role does:
 - being flexible or having the ability to change play?
 - being persistent play?
 - being a maverick/rebel (e.g., when it comes to conforming to administrative rules or policies) play?
 - being aware of cultural differences in students play?
14. Have you ever experienced anything that might be called a "turning point" where you sort of knew that you had developed these kinds of qualities and were using them to teach successfully?



Lydia's Protocols

Interview #2: I really enjoyed conversation in January, and I'd like to use our conversation today to talk a little bit more specifically about some of the really interesting topics you mentioned.

- (1)** Let's begin with something you said that was really important. You mentioned that you wanted to be the kind of teacher that your son didn't have. What kind of teachers did your son have when he was in school? Which of their personal characteristics had the greatest negative impact upon him, and why? Why do you think your son was so turned off by his teachers in school?
- (2)** I was very intrigued by your idea of "trying to phrase my words so that I am not challenging to a student" especially because you said it was a key to your success with African American children. How did you come to develop this idea of "not challenging" a student? Were you this way when you were a student teacher, or did this perspective develop as you taught? If it developed, what were some of the classroom experiences that helped you develop this idea?
- (3)** In your opinion, what kind of relationship do most teachers have with their African American students? Where do you think these ideas about teacher-student relationships and power comes from? Is this the kind of relationship that you try to have? Why or why not?
- (4)** You mentioned that there was, for you, "joy in the struggle" of trying to reach very high goals that you set for yourself. How did you come to see joy in struggle when so many other people see misery or hopelessness?
- (5)** You have said that you are successful because you don't nitpick like you have felt that some teachers do to their students? As a teacher, were you ever a nitpicker? If not, how did you avoid becoming one? If so, how did you develop into the kind of teacher you are today?

Interview #3: In this conversation, I'd like to ask you about your reactions to the presentation/conversation we had in late April. I'd also some questions about your student- teaching experiences because I found it fascinating that you student-taught in the sixties.

- 17.** I'd really like to hear some of your reactions to the metaphor of "family" because although I knew you wanted to build a classroom family, I wondered if the examples used resonated with who you want to be as a teacher and accurately described your teaching.
- 18.** Some people would feel a tension between trying to build a family in a classroom where they would probably take on a "mother" role and also have to fulfill the

responsibilities of a teacher. Have you ever experienced this kind of conflict between these two roles?

19. Please share with me something about your neighborhood and the community where you grew up. What state was it in? Was it a small town, suburbs, large city? Who lived there (were there diverse families living there)?
20. How would you describe your experiences as a student teacher during the riots in the late 1960s with so much upheaval and turmoil in the country and so many changes? What were you thinking and feeling?
21. What was going on in the school were you were doing your student teaching? How were teachers, administrators, and students reacting to what was going on at that time?
22. What did you learn about teaching from your student-teacher experiences? What did you learn about students? What did you learn about yourself as a teacher?
23. Since the Civil Rights Movement, educators have talked more openly about things like “cultural differences,” “equality” and “diversity” in terms of our need to enhance the achievement of and educational opportunities for a greater number of students. What do these words mean to you as a teacher and what do they mean to your teaching? Did your ideas about the Civil Rights Movement impact your thoughts about education and/or school and “equal access?” If so, how?

Interview #4: I ‘d like to ask you a few questions about your personal friendships with African American people, beginning with a few questions about your childhood, then moving onto your professional relationships.

1. Please share with me something about your neighborhood and the community where you grew up. What state was it in? Was it a small town, suburbs, large city? Who lived there (were there diverse families living there)?
2. You have mentioned several African American friends that you have had throughout your life. Did you have any African American friends while growing up, for example, in school?
3. I was particularly interested in your friend, Cheryl, who was a teacher with you here for four or five years. Tell me about the story of your friendship. When, where, and how did you two meet?
4. Have you ever asked Cheryl for advice about the African American students that you were teaching? Can you remember a specific time you did? What was the problem? What was her advice? What was the outcome?
5. Have you received insights or understanding about African American people or children from Cheryl or other African American teachers that you would not have learned otherwise? If so, what did they teach you?
6. Have you ever talked with Cheryl or any of your African American friends about race? What has that experience been like for you both? Have you ever talked with them about the idea of “not seeing color”? What has their reaction been?

7. Many people have difficulty making friends with people from other cultures. What kind of experience has it been for you?
8. In your own opinion, would you say that your friendships with African American people have made you a more effective teacher of African American children? Why or why not?
9. How do you think that teachers who do not have any African American friends or do not know any African American people at all learn to teach African American children effectively?

Final Interview: I'd like to thank you for allowing me to be a part of your classroom this year, and for agreeing to have these conversations with me; I have learned so much! In our last conversation, I'd like to ask a wide range of questions based upon topics that I didn't cover in other conversations, as well as questions about this year.

1. Looking back today, what do you think the most important factors were in your decision to become a teacher? Can you remember what qualities that you had that you felt fit well with teaching as a line of work for you?
2. What was your student teaching experience in Denver like? What kind of school was it? What grade did you student teach? What did you learn about teaching from your student-teacher experiences? What did you learn about students? What did you learn about yourself as a teacher?
3. I was particularly interested in your friendship with Cheryl, who was a teacher with you here for four or five years. Tell me about the story of your friendship. When, where, and how did you two meet? What makes this friendship special to you?
4. You mentioned that you two do a great deal of sharing. What kind of sharing did you do and how was it different from the sharing that other teachers might do? Did you ever have discussions about African American students? What would you talk about? (Probe: Have you ever asked your friend for advice about the African American students that you were teaching? Can you remember a specific time you did? What was the problem? What was her advice? What was the outcome?)
5. Looking back this year, what were some of the things that went really well in terms of your teaching? What are some of the things that were challenging to you this year?
6. We have talked quite a bit about successful teaching in our conversations. In your opinion, what kind of personalities do successful teachers seem to have? In terms of being a successful teacher, what role does:
 - being flexible or having the ability to change play?
 - being persistent play?
 - being a maverick/rebel (e.g., when it comes to conforming to administrative rules or policies) play?
 - being aware of cultural differences in students play?
7. Have you ever experienced anything that might be called a "turning point" where you sort of knew that you had developed these kinds of qualities and were using them to teach successfully?

APPENDIX D

Teacher Demographic Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions on this brief questionnaire.

Last Name _____

Please select a ***pseudonym*** that you would like me to use as your name in all oral presentations and written materials (e.g., dissertation), and write it on the line below:

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Ethnicity ____Euro American ____African American ____Hispanic ____Asian American

____Other (please specify)_____

Do you live in the same district as this school? ____yes ____no

PROFESSIONAL INFORMATION

Where did you attend undergraduate school? _____

What is your undergraduate degree in? _____

If you have a teaching certificate, what is it in? _____

Do you have a master's degree? ____yes ____no

If so, what is it in and what school did you attend? _____

Are you currently taking any graduate/professional development classes? ____yes ____no

If yes, what classes are they and what school do you attend?

How many years have you been teaching? _____

How many years have you been teaching at this school? _____

What is your favorite grade level to teach? Why?

What is your least favorite grade to teach? Why?

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