Dialogical inquiry in critical literacy: A staff development intervention study

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DIALOGICAL INQUIRY IN CRITICAL LITERACY: A STAFF DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTION STUDY

by

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Doctor of Education Degree

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ABSTRACT

Dialogical Inquiry in Critical Literacy: A Staff Development Intervention Study

by

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This study systematically examined the journey of a group of eight elementary school teachers and their administrator as they explored the social, political, and cultural world of critical literacy and its relationship to teaching. This expedition included using texts as social tools, which facilitated participants’ critical reflections of personal beliefs and practices. They also investigated through dialogical inquiry the social, historical, and political elements that comprised their own cultural and historically situated identities. Data were collected through ethnographic methods, and four case studies were developed through artifacts, writing samples, transcriptions of discussions, observations, and interviews. Four individuals were chosen to participate in the multiple case study portion of this research. The participants were chosen based on the diversity of initial findings. Through analysis of the case studies, the following findings emerged: (a) Zurie had a major impact on her pedagogical practices, (2) Jo experienced a validation and deepening of previously held beliefs, (3) Beverly made personal discoveries regarding her identity,
and (4) Tonya experienced a pedagogical impact along with a deepening awareness of her students’ cultures. Findings indicated that dialogical inquiry, under certain circumstances, does have the potential to influence teachers’ personal and professional beliefs and pedagogical practices.
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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Collaboration: intrapersonal and interpersonal dialogues while in a collaborative group (Vygotsky, 1978).

Collaborative Group: a group of peers with varying abilities working together to complete a project or solve a problem (John-Steiner, 1996.)

Critical Literacy: the use of language in all forms of communication and to understand the relationships of power (Luke, 2000, 1998).

Critical Pedagogy: the study of schools in both historical and sociopolitical contexts (Wink, 2001).

Emancipatory Discourse: culturally relevant communicative social practices utilizing language to work towards a greater respect and freedom for all people (Janks and Ivanic, 1992).

Dialogue: learning while doing (Wells, 1999).

Identity: socially constructed, not fixed, and opened to fluctuations and change (Ivanic, 1998).
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A journey can be taken by many different means: cars, trains, boats, and planes. The journey this researcher documented was not a physical journey to a foreign land, but one in which a group of educators embarked on a 15-week trek to explore and create critical self-awareness regarding basic concepts of community, culture, self, and identity (Hoffman, 1996). One of the participants described his view regarding the content of this journey:

When you look at cultural differences, likenesses and languages, physical characteristics of race and so on, if we look at it with an open mind and be very tolerant and accepting, willing to learn, go deeper than awareness to infusion of multiculturalism and so on. I think you can truly feel what diversity is and then if you can identify as being a part of it, then you are a part of all of whom you’ve met. If people can come to that length in their development, it would be so much easier to learn from one another (Braden, critical incidence).

Purpose of the Study

This study systematically examined the journey of a group of elementary school teachers as they explored the social, political, and cultural world of critical studies and its
relationship to teaching (Freire, 1998). This expedition included using texts as social tools that allowed teachers to critically reflect on their beliefs and positions (Luke, 2000) and to investigate the social, historical, and political elements that made up their own individual identities through cultural composites, which are discussed in detail later in this chapter. This investigation allowed teachers the opportunity to negotiate a critically altered sociocultural view of their students, a view that identified dominant cultural practices, themes, and ideologies (Foucault, 1972) to form culturally-conscious oriented teaching practices (Au, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

The purpose of this study was to document the process of teachers exploring literature related to critical literacy for the purpose of critically engaging in authentic discourse with a common goal to include culturally relevant literature and activities within a schoolwide move to a content area literacy program.

Sociocultural Learning

This study was grounded in the Vygotskian (1978) perspective that learning is social and must be experienced in meaningful contexts. The meaningful context was one of a schoolwide staff development literacy project to content area literacy units with an additional goal of combining content area literacy (Readence, Bean, & Baldwin, 2001) with multicultural literature to create a culturally relevant curriculum (Nieto, 2002, Sleeter, 1996).

The teachers volunteered to participate in this journey to become what Freire (1970) described as joint learners, learning and teaching each other through dialogue, personal writing, and discourse within a community of learners to broaden individual identities as
teachers and members of a pluralistic society. Larson and Maier (2000) depicted this type of functional literacy as a social and cultural practice that is co-constructed by means of participation through interactive thinking and composition practices. Lee and Smagorinsky (2000) advanced this idea of a community by saying that it "does not necessarily refer to a sense of harmony, but rather to a shared sense of social practices and goals that become differentiated among subgroups..." (p. 5). Participants described in this study did not need to agree with co-participants; however, through the shared goal of restructuring integrated units, they had a common ground from which to work.

The journey's setting was a professional development course (PDC) in which the group of teachers came together to investigate how curriculum and texts work to construct identities and cultures in powerful and ideological ways (Ivanic, 1998; Luke, 2000). Luke (1991) described this practice as reconsidering current curriculum and how social practices affect literacy development. This group of teachers was responsible for creating units from the existing state mandated literacy, social studies, science, and health standards and infusing them with culturally relevant literature. Investigating aspects of critical literacy to make a difference in social justice issues are what Freire & Macedo (1987) called reading the world to assist in encoding the power structures of society.

Before the travelers could read the world with a critical perspective, they had to identify their role, as individuals, in the world by investigating their own identities. These identities acted as cultural passports on their metaphoric journey and also in the context of their real lives. The cultural passports admitted membership into places of power and prestige for some individuals, but also acted as gatekeeping devices for others. One participant in the study related a time when she was a young girl visiting the
southern United States. She went into a diner and was told that they weren’t cooking that
day. She further conveyed that she could smell the food and see other people
eating…other people who were white. This participant’s cultural passport included her
African-American heritage, something the people in this diner did not value. That aspect
of her identity acted as a gatekeeping device for being served a meal at this particular
diner in the southern United States. During the course of the study, many different
aspects of the cultural passports were discussed, identified, and labeled through group
dialogical inquiry (Gee, 1996). The midterm project was a self-assessment of each
participant’s understanding of the multiple layers that formed his/her identities.

Investigating Identities

For the PDC members the midterm project, referred to as a cultural composite, was a
synthesis of what each individual traveler learned about her/himself while journeying
through the concepts of community, culture, race, ethnicity, class, and gender. The
projects were displayed in a variety of forms and orally presented to the fellow
participants during the midpoint of the PDC. Table 1 represents a synthesis of the
composites.

During the time of self-investigation, travelers learned to critically appropriate codes
and vocabulary (Giroux, 1987) such as reading between the lines to find the power and
discrimination in words and in texts. This was initiated by reading Wink’s (2000)
Critical Pedagogy Notes from the Real World. In this text, Wink described how critical
pedagogy could be both transformative and empowering for teachers and students.
Giroux also elaborated that when teachers learn and teach from a critical pedagogical
Table 1.
Midterm Cultural Composites.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Form of Midterm</th>
<th>Part of Identity Represented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jasmine</td>
<td>Artifact share</td>
<td>Artifacts from the places she lived and the people that impacted her life the most</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jo</td>
<td>Full size body map</td>
<td>Listing of personal attributes and important people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braden</td>
<td>Picture journal</td>
<td>Pictures of all the important times and people in his life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>Life time line</td>
<td>Outline from birth to current time with all the important people, places and events documented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mikaela</td>
<td>Life Map</td>
<td>Plotted the many places and people she experienced during the drastic moves she encountered as a child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aurora</td>
<td>Family Tree</td>
<td>She documented her family background and uncovered relatives she did not know she had</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonya</td>
<td>Pocket Book</td>
<td>A book with pockets in which she tucked important artifacts of her past to represent important times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zurie</td>
<td>Life quilt</td>
<td>The quilt was color coded to show the different ‘hats’ she wore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beverly</td>
<td>Word collage</td>
<td>Display differing aspects of sayings that made-up her life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perspective, they and their students can transform to a way of thinking that suspends the status quo to develop a perspective in which all students feel validated and empowered.
Luke (1991) noted that learning to look at the world critically included learning to be curious, skeptical, engaged, and non-complacent. Giroux argued that educators must understand how school knowledge is produced, which dominant culture produces it, where it comes from, and how it privileges some while marginalizing others.

Baynham (1995) described the effect of using discourse practices as being “…socially powerful and raises important questions of identity: Am I the same person that I was before I learned to speak/write like this, or has this process changed me?” (p. 240). Braden, the only male traveler in the group, suggested that the dialogical journey influenced his knowledge base when he stated:

> Teaching is so complex and I'm learning now that it is even more complex than I ever thought. I feel like when we teach we have to find some way to avoid the complexity of what we know about teaching and get right on with the simplicity of presenting yourself as a facilitator so individuals don’t just get some information from you that you might test and see if they remember later. But, actually interrelate along the way so they learn something else besides what you present as part of the complexity without making it complex (10/01/02).

Throughout the journey, participants were able to develop a climate of trust by engaging in dialogical interactions. These interactions included sharing of personal vignettes, asking relevant questions, and discussing opposing views in an open forum. These types of dialogical interactions facilitated participants understanding that in a pluralistic society there is not one correct way in which society functions, that there are many facets and views from many cultural standpoints. One of the goals of the course was to make an impression on teachers’ beliefs and practices through dialogic inquiry to
include new and positive experiences that will help travelers to “...accommodate the practices of schooling to meet the needs of [all] students” (Powell, 1999, p. 4).

Gee (1996) theorized that by acquiring new forms of literacy, an individual’s identity can actually be changed. By participating in this journey, participants were influenced in multiple ways; looking at the world, making sense of the human experience, and gaining different cultural views and realities. Zurie (transcribed notes, 9-17-02) noted that the dialogic aspects of the PDC made her realize:

Listening to you guys talk, I realized, I think for one of the first times, one of the only places I’ve never seen color is probably the classroom. Where I just see my students for who they are based on personality, because it [race] just does not matter.

The journey facilitated participants’ development of additional cultural knowledge and aided in their taking a critical pedagogical perspective to literacy development. This perspective included developing a educational goal for students from all ability levels, social classes, and differing cultural positions to gain academic practices that have meaning for them in their own culturally situated lives. This process was initiated by reading McCarthey’s (2002) Students’ Identities and Literacy Learning. This book allowed participants to consider their own literacy backgrounds, the multiple and ever-changing identities of their students, and how an individual’s identity is shaped by cultural and historical settings they have experienced. After the reading, writing, and discourse construction regarding McCarthey’s book, the participants presented their final projects.
The final projects required participants to summarize what they experienced in the context of relating all they learned during the PDC back to their pedagogical knowledge as educators. The schoolwide content area literacy program units had already been developed using the state department's mandated teaching objectives. The content area units were developed using objectives from the areas of science, social studies, and health. The travelers' final project was to research appropriate multicultural literature, which would enhance both the content area objectives and stimulate literacy activities with the goal of making the state mandated objectives relevant to students' lives.

An example of a culturally relevant trade book that would add a cultural dimension to a unit on the Pioneers Going West would be a text such as Coolies (Soentpriet, 2001). This beautifully illustrated book could be used to give students the opportunity to think critically about an alternative view of modern history of the United States. Soentpriet, from a young boy's perspective, described the endurance and heroism of Chinese immigrants building the transcontinental railroad as he learned about how his grandfather and uncle went to the United States to make a better life for their families and how they successfully negotiated to help build the transcontinental railroad. Yokota & Cai (2002) described how students encounter social injustices in a variety of forms and that the act of reading contemporary and historical books to children to illustrate these topics offers opportunities for students and teachers to explore how people's lives are affected by social justice issues.

This study documented how teachers explored their personal and pedagogical lives through a journey utilizing texts as guides, which gave them the opportunity to explore
culturally relevant teaching practices prior to implementing this type of pedagogy in their own classrooms.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical perspective for this study was the combination of critical theory and sociocultural theory as a means to investigate culturally responsive learning and development. The Vygotskian (1962) viewpoint of shared intersubjectivity drives the overall framework of the journey. These theoretical frameworks were utilized because of the assumptions I have about teachers in the American school system. The next section contains three assumptions along with a statement and an accompanying stance of what I strived to document throughout the study.

Assumptions

My first assumption is that many teachers have the sociocultural perspective of a white, middle class lens and do not have the knowledge or understanding of how their discourses and cultures of power discriminate, marginalize, and constrain students from alternate cultures (Bean & Readence, 2002; Ivanic, 1998; Powell, 1999). By creating a community of multicultural traveling companions, teachers can traverse this journey with escorts who come from different cultures, races, ethnicities, and classes to provide alternative views from that of the dominant white-middle class perspective (Miller, 2001/2002, Sleeter, 1996).

The second assumption is based on the idea that discussing race has been a taboo subject for many generations (Sleeter, 1996). As early as the 1850s, American schools
were considered an effective tool to assimilate immigrants and create Americans, which according to Katz (1971, 1975) covertly meant to Anglicize all cultures and races. It is my assumption that before teachers can look at a new area of interest and have a critical understanding of that area, they first must investigate the components that formed their own identity (Ivanic, 1994, 1998). In the context of this journey, travelers must look within themselves and identify their own complex identities including culture, social class, race, gender, and schooling experiences through a critical lens.

The goal of trying to understand and acknowledge their own backgrounds and biases before they can hope to understand how pedagogy can affect students drove this study. Luke (1998) described research that showed students and teachers struggle to “engage with the culture of schooling” (p. 305) because schooling is never a neutral place. Cherland (1994) maintained that the main function of schools is to reproduce the social formations and economic relationships for the purpose of preserving existing societal structures. Luke (2000) also stated that for children from all cultures and backgrounds to feel comfortable in educational settings, literacy education must focus on inclusion and setting the conditions for engagement to occur within a social setting with peers and texts to spotlight relationships of power, giving students a stake in designing their social and community cultures.

McKenzie (1992) described critical language teaching as the teacher’s perception of students as social agents functioning within the educational institution and not as isolated individuals. This change of thinking opens up the possibility for students to develop an awareness of language as a political tool for emancipatory practice. Clarke and Smith (1992) extended this notion by stating that students need to understand this knowledge
through the lens of their past experiences in order to exercise control over what they learn. Critical learning is having ownership and control over learning. Clarke and Smith viewed having control over individual learning as the main motivator of the nature and practice of education. They elaborated by stating that the traditional vision of schooling is for the learner to concentrate on what is learned, -the product, not the act of learning itself, -the process. If students do not know how learning is achieved, it limits critical practices.

The third assumption was that development of a critical view of the world could help participants to achieve alternate perspectives and engage internal dissonance (Clark & Ivanic, 1997; Gee, 1996; Ivanic, 1998; Powell, 1999). It is my belief that creating dissonance is necessary for change to occur. Newman, Griffin, and Cole (1989) expressed the idea that change is possible if participants engage in intense collaboration for the purpose of making sense of goals and methods related to the innovation. The insight participants experienced in this study was that there are inherent power structures at work in society, even in the American school system (Sleeter, 1996). Hall and Hord (1987) believed that teachers must take a stand and become part of the change process by becoming change facilitators themselves. They argued that improving the instructional performance of teachers is the most significant way to improve schools. In the context of the journey, teachers adopted a sociocultural model of learning. This model uses Vygotsky’s (1978) shared intersubjectivity to create a community of participants in which open dialogue can occur in a safe and non-threatening environment.
Methodology

Ethnographic methods are established in contemporary educational research as a viable means to enter into a social setting and get to know the people as they participate in their daily lives (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). I acted as a fellow traveler and participant-observer (Spradley, 1980) throughout the course. During data collection and analysis, critical ethnography was employed to provide a technical and theoretical guide to document the actions of participants as they negotiated the textual and dialogic interventions during weekly classes. Critical ethnography focused on the concepts of primary data collection and system relationships (Carspecken, 1995). To inductively build on the ethnographic data, multiple case studies also contributed to the end product of this field-oriented research (Merriam, 1998). Merriam defined a qualitative case study as an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single bounded unit. Unique sampling was employed to purposefully select case study participants from the entire group of participants. Methodology is further detailed in Chapter III.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter I contains the introductory information. Chapter II is the Review of the Literature, which takes a conceptual view of dialogical inquiry, communities of practices, and teacher change through beliefs and practices. Chapter II is subdivided into sociocultural context, critical pedagogy, teacher beliefs and practices, teacher change, and identity. Chapter II is designed to set the stage for the ethnography, which is found in Chapter IV. Chapter III details the methodology.
The summary, conclusions, additional findings, and recommendations are found in Chapter V.

Limitations

This research project is limited to the study of a research question and the methodology, which is part of the qualitative, constant comparative and case study design. All generalizations are through the participants’ and researcher’s personal lenses with which they view the world. The events that happened during the context of this study are situational and were in a continual process of transforming as the study developed. The themes emerged naturally from the critical, theoretical, and social cultural perspectives (Spradley, 1980).

Research Question

How do teachers transform their beliefs and practices by participating in critical dialogue through a school-based professional development course?
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study was aligned within the paradigms of critical and sociocultural theories. Critical literacy challenges and has the potential to transform dominant discourses, and bring social justice issues to the forefront of educational reform (Luke, 2000), while a sociocultural perspective focuses on learning as a social construction in perception, action, and consciousness (Green, 2001). This review of the relevant literature will guide the reader through the theoretical framework from which this study was designed. It will also examine the existing research related to the study of teacher change, teacher beliefs, and pedagogical practices. Figure 1 represents an advanced organizer of the theoretical perspectives for this chapter.

Figure 1. Overall perspective of the study
Sociocultural Perspective

The work of Lev Vygotsky (1978) is significant to the overall perspective of this study. Vygotsky’s analysis of the relationship between human beings and their environment from a social, cultural, and historical perspective undergirds the design of the study and provides the basis for the theoretical perspective. Wink and Putney (2002, p. 62) declared, “In a Vygotskian perspective, everything about learning and development is social.”

The ZPD

Vygotsky believed that by utilizing language as a tool, peers assist one another in developing a deeper understanding and/or become self sufficient at the task or activity. When individuals work in collaboration with more capable peers, they have the potential to further their own development. This co-creation of knowledge by peers is what Vygotsky viewed as the “Zone of Proximal Development” (p. 86) or ZPD. Vygotsky defined the ZPD as:

\[
\text{The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (p. 86).}
\]

Vygotsky (1987) further stated that when a group meets in a formal setting where participants are thinking and participating in way that is valued by the group itself, it leads to “higher mental functions” (p. 127). The higher mental functions can promote selective outcomes within the members of the community.
Thought and Mind

Olson (1995) envisioned Vygotsky’s theories as a part of cultural and historical activities that shape perception, action, and consciousness. He further noted that the mind is a cultural artifact and that our own culture shapes our minds, thoughts, and actions. This study’s perspective originated from the desire to combine Vygotsky’s and Olson’s theories into a vision of a sociocultural learning community in which fellow participants worked within each others’ Zone of Proximal Development to learn about cultural practices, critical literacy, and concepts of identity in a shared experience. These investigations used texts as social tools (Luke, 2000), authentic discourses as mediational instruments (Gee, 1996), and critical pedagogy as a transformative and empowering device (Giroux, 1987; Wink, 2001) to rethink the consequences of current instructional methods and practices from a social and cultural perspective (Luke, 1991; Nieto, 2002).

Collaborative Community

Jennings & Di (1996) declared that a group of participants can become a community of learners when they engage in activities that facilitate their development through using the elements of reading, speaking, thinking, writing, and listening. Jennings and Di believed that utilizing learning communities benefit teachers as well as students. They noted that collaboration advances students’ social skills, which include listening to others, contributing ideas, encouraging peers, explaining oneself clearly, and criticizing ideas, but not the peers themselves.

Vygotsky (1962) experienced the act of learning from and with a group of colleagues in a significant and meaningful context. John-Steiner (1996) elaborated on Vygotsky’s experience and termed a group of colleagues working together as a thought community.
She defined a thought community as a group of scholars mutually creating knowledge. Wink and Putney (2002) described thought communities as entities functioning to integrate new ideas through collective collaboration. Through collaboration, teachers socially constructed their own identities, reflected on how those identities influenced their pedagogy, and related to students' literacy learning as they participated in authentic discourse practices. Anderson (1998) described a high level of participation in a thought community as authentic participation.

**Authentic Participation**

Social aspects of learning include authentic participation. Anderson (1998) stated that authentic participation moves beyond public relations and authority and relates to shared control and participation in the journey. This type of shared and genuine participation is important for the development of the individual and the increase of learning outcomes. Graves (2001) added that when teachers collaborate and have strong emotional connections with colleagues their teaching energy is high.

Giroux (1981) explained that through providing individuals some power in shaping their own destiny, it becomes a liberating experience to assist in developing the process of their futures. By utilizing a strategy of shared responsibility as the overall structure for the PDC, participants had the opportunity to shape their own destinies through leading the discussions through texts, discourse, and critique. Kelly (1955) regarded individual participants as people who build on personal constructs as they interpret the meanings of events that take place for themselves within the context of their own social and historical backgrounds. Harre’ and Gillett (1994) furthered the concept that humans are not inert and simply being moved along a continuum beyond their control, but are investigators.
who enter into a dialogue with peers. This dialogue could, in turn, influence behavior in relation to the collaborative groups’ thoughts and actions.

**Critical Dimensions of Sociocultural Theory**

Vygotsky (1978) theorized that every function in a child’s cultural development appears twice: first on the social level and then on the individual level. It then appears between the child’s relationship with people and then again inside the child. Classrooms are places where knowledge is constructed, not places where knowledge is merely imparted (Putney, Green, Dixon, Duran, and Yeager, 2000). This sociocultural theory informs our understanding of the social processes of language and learning because it views children as active members of a community in which learning is constructed (Wink & Putney, 2002). Larson and Maier (2000) viewed literacy as a social and cultural practice that is co-constructed through participation in interactive thinking and composition practices. Being social is what Burns (2001) developed into a new pedagogical practice for his writing curriculum. He taught his students new ways of being social through their writing and empowered them at the same time because their social interaction was expanded. This social empowerment has the potential to lead to emancipation.

**Emancipatory Discourse**

Janks and Ivanic (1992) called culturally relevant communicative social practices emancipatory discourses. Emancipatory discourse means “…using language, along with other aspects of social practice, in a way which works towards greater freedom and respect for all people, including ourselves” (p. 305). They expanded this theory by
describing emancipatory discourse as an implication that someone actually needs emancipation. In this case, it would be students needing emancipation from the hegemonic powers and control of society.

Janks and Ivanic believed that utilizing reading and writing from a disempowered position has the potential to be transformative, using discourse to break the reproducing cycle of domination by being resistant to the status quo. The status quo referred to the deeply ingrained inequalities of schools by the dominant society (Bennett, 1999; Nieto, 2002). This study attempted to document the influence on participants’ beliefs and practices as they learned to acknowledge and respect the diversity of their students and to transform their teaching practices though a sociocultural perspective and critical theoretical lens (Fairclough, 1992; Freire, 1998; Luke, 2000).

Critical Literacy

Critical literacy emerged in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s (Fehring & Green, 2001) providing educators with a new framework to examine literacy development. Green (2001) described critical literacy principles as a repositioning of students to be researchers of language. This repositioning included knowing multiple literacies, something Gee (1996) called primary discourse patterns, which originate from the home, and secondary discourse patterns, which originate from school. Gee also called for viewing texts from a critical perspective and employing the use of social perspectives for instruction. He viewed language as inherently riddled with problems because different social groups have different cultural models for what represents typical or expected relationships. Students raised within different cultural groups are reared with different
norms for their culture. It is when students from non-mainstream backgrounds experience school literacy that they come to realize that their home discourse patterns and values are different from traditional school environments (De la Luz Reyes & Halcon, 2001; Gee, 1996; Ivanic, 1998). These students need to be able to maintain their cultural capital, heritage, and customs, while acquiring a secondary discourse (Gee, 1996). The transaction from primary discourse to secondary discourse acquisition should be one of comfort for the student, allowing transition from home to school literacy patterns to develop over a continuum (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Critical literacy advocates appropriating new vocabulary such as power, equity, access, and social justice in the school context (Nieto, 2002; Powell, 1999; Sleeter, 1996).

*Culturally Responsive Pedagogy*

Nieto (2000) stated that for teachers to overcome the disequilibrium their students from non-main stream background experience they needed to “take a stand on social justice and diversity, make social justice ubiquitous in teacher education, and promote teaching as a life-long journey of transformation” (p. 180). Ladson-Billings (1994) called for culturally responsive pedagogy. Culturally responsive pedagogy acknowledges the deep-seated racial inequalities by looking at a students’ background as a deficit and not an asset. Culturally responsible pedagogy acknowledges that teachers need to develop pedagogical skills to teach students of all backgrounds while acknowledging that students’ diverse backgrounds are assets for instruction (Gay, 2000). Nieto (2000) agreed with the concepts of culturally responsible pedagogy, but related that the pedagogical aspect as a whole remained at a superficial level because it avoids asking difficult questions related to social justice, equity, and access. She noted that it is essential for
young people to attend schools that expect an education to be rigorous, critical, and engaged.

Miller (2001/2002) described good multicultural teaching as the practice of helping every child be successful in the classroom. He recommended that educators make a genuine effort to incorporate materials that genuinely reflect the world’s diversity and to develop curriculum that consistently includes minority perspectives that are not tokenistic or single out cultural minorities as victims or heroes of discrimination. Giroux called this type of teaching a “language of critique and of possibility” (p. 175), a language of critical literacy. Venezky (1994) defined critical literacy as the use of language in all forms of communication and the understanding of the relationships of power.

Luke (1998) argued that students and teachers struggle to “engage with the culture of schooling” because schooling is never a neutral place (p. 305). Cherland (1994) maintained that the main function of schools is to reproduce the social formations and economic relationships for the purpose of preserving existing societal structures. Luke (2000) also stated that for children from all cultures and backgrounds to feel comfortable in educational settings, literacy education must set the conditions for engagement to occur by giving students a stake in designing their social and community cultures within a social setting with peers and with texts that spotlight relationships of power.

McKenzie (1992) described critical language teaching as the teacher’s perception of students as social agents functioning within the educational institution and not as isolated individuals. This change of thinking opens the possibility for students to develop an awareness of language as a political tool for emancipatory practice. Clarke and Smith (1992) extended this notion by stating that students need to understand this knowledge...
through the lens of their past experiences in order to exercise control over what they are learning. Critical learning is having ownership and control over learning. Clarke and Smith viewed having control over individual learning as the main motivator over the nature and practice of education. They elaborated by stating that the traditional vision of schooling is for the learner to concentrate on what is learned, the product, not the act of learning itself, the process. However, if students do not know how learning is achieved, it limits critical practices.

Luke (2000) stated that literacy education is about access and inclusion and potentially about discrimination. Reading and writing are about social power, and critical literacy education would have to go beyond individual skill acquisition to engage students in the analysis and reconstruction of social fields. Kempe (2001) affirmed that there are choices to be made by students because there is not just one common sense or natural way of reading texts to their world. If students understand this concept, they will have more cultural power and textual control.

Green (2000) warned that literacy could be a double-edged sword in that it may not only be liberating, but exploitative. hooks (1994) described an event when she left her low socioeconomic childhood home and went to college. She excelled in college, but socially she did not feel she belonged in either world because she could not reconcile the discourse patterns from her home life with the academic discourse patterns of college. This dissonance stemmed from the development of multiple conflicting identities. This illustrated what Green (2001) and Moll (2001) described as gaining literacy and not gaining power. Just because you can read or write doesn’t mean you will get beyond the societal gate-keeping device that separates the haves from the have-nots (Vasquez, 2000).
Cherland (1994) called for “creating a context for real events” which will empower marginalized groups to erode the gate keeping devices (p. 3). She fostered this theory by stating that the concrete details that make up the societal structures are real; the abstract device is working with people. Cherland stated that critical education theory must begin with the dissatisfaction of how society and schools both propagate and exclude certain members of society. Yet, schools should be places where students are empowered and where the transformation of different societal structures include all people in our pluralistic society.

Hagood (2002) described literacy tools as instruments for naming and organizing identities to aid participants’ self-discoveries. During the PDC, writing and other literacy tools were used as a formal map for travelers to maintain their courses as they negotiated the altering terrains from solid ground to rough waters as they contemplated differing aspects of critical literacy. Luke (2000) illustrated the widening of educators’ repertoires of teaching strategies to encompass critical literacy learning as adding to their literacy toolkit. Peterson (2001) described showing students how they can use writing to sculpt thoughts, feelings, actions, and values as tools for social change. She showed her students how this tool called writing could transform ordinary daily experiences into powerful writing pieces, which were accepted within their social worlds and aided in their self-discovery.

Teacher Beliefs and Practices

Peterson (2001) believed writing could empower children and therefore be used as a tool for social change. This type of teacher belief transpired into practice is something
that Dobson and Dobson (1983) described as pedagogy guided by a set of internalized personal beliefs. They asserted that many educators do not have a congruency between a teachers’ pedagogy and their genuine belief systems, which cause many educators to simply “get things done” with little consideration of means-ends compatibility” (Dobson & Dobson, p. 21). Marshall (1973) indicated that until teachers are certain of their own educational beliefs they cannot become effective educators, because effective teachers have a clearly defined orientation to pedagogy, which grows out of a set of values. Without a congruency in beliefs and values, an internal conflict wages until the congruency in beliefs and practices is achieved (Dobson & Dobson, 1983; Short & Burke, 1996).

Richardson, Anders, Tidwell, and Lloyd (1991) used theories and theoretical orientations interchangeably to define a set of individual beliefs as related to teacher beliefs and practices. Beach (1994) posited that belief systems are a major component in teacher theories and that beliefs and theories are often used interchangeably. Clark and Peterson (1986) described teacher actions as being influenced by thought processes, which are in turn influenced by belief systems and the principles they personally hold. Richardson et al. (1991) described teachers as knowing beings whose knowledge influences their actions. Delford (1985) stated that knowledge shapes the belief system and therefore attitudes direct behaviors. Directing our attitudes and beliefs are something that Burk and Short (1994) called our knowing and doing as teachers.

Lenski, Wham, and Griffey (1998, p. 218) stated, “The theories that teachers develop are frequently implicit, personal, and informal, but theory building is the natural outcome of transactions among teachers, students, texts, researchers, administrators, parents, and
personal experiences.” Transactions among teachers are often in the form of inquiry. Short and Burke (1996) used inquiry as a tool to examine teachers’ beliefs and practices through inquiry regarding curriculum. They found that teachers’ initial changes were surface changes in pedagogy, not changes in beliefs. If teachers become satisfied with surface changes in their practices, the change process will eventually halt and the teachers will revert to their previous ways of teaching. The mistake of thinking the initial changes were substantive potentially blocks the deeper and more substantial changes from occurring; the changes that are needed to transform society. Short and Burk recommended that educators continue learning by interrogating beliefs and practices and not assuming the answer would ever be found. Gibson (1998) furthered this premise when she stated, “…we have the opportunity to engage in a process wherein the dynamic quality of the relationship among ideologies and practices can be exposed and explored...these revelations can lead to revisions, renewals, and newly created relationships between what we believe and how we act” (p. 369). Dobson and Dobson (1983) concurred that through dialogue teachers can overcome limiting situations that result in lack of harmony between what they profess to believe and what they actually practice.

**Dialogic Inquiry of Beliefs and Practices**

McLaughlin and Zarrow (2001) believed moving to a culture of inquiry is a necessary step in changing beliefs and practices. As part of this change process, it is crucial to implement a cycle of inquiry to develop new understanding about practices in schools and classrooms. Innovations for educational change can be initiated, planned for, and enacted by participants through a dialogical approach to change that permit multiple
perspectives, mutual respect, and the orientation towards a common goal which may allow participants to develop into communities of learners (Ivanic 1998; Wink & Putney, 2002). MacLean and Mohr (1999) debated the notion that collegial balance between educators is sometimes difficult because of the grade level separation and/or different disciplines, as well as the physical space that separates teachers from one another. However, they believed that when teachers come together to discuss, implement, and sustain innovative changes it is necessary to form an inquiry group of peers to balance the individual work that occurs in classrooms, and that once the inquiry group is in place, significant changes can occur.

Yankelovich (1999) noted that when an organization attempts to align and implement a shared vision, proponents of the change must first start by creating a community of inquirers as a means to lead the entire organization to implement a shared vision and strategy towards change. He further stated that the act of having a dialogue within a learning community is not always a place of harmony; it can be a place where participants come to understand why they so vehemently disagree with someone else. When members of a community try to understand each other's viewpoint, they are not necessarily agreeing with that point of view. It may be a simple process of listening to all sides and then agreeing to disagree; within a community, this is considered an open dialogue, not a dialogue of harmony in which everyone thinks the same.

Wells (1999) described dialogue as learning while doing. He reinforced this insight by stating that the creation of a collaborative community of practice is one in which teachers participate in activities and therefore are apprenticed. Dobson and Dobson (1983) declared “A dialogic situation serves the purpose of clarifying teachers’ thoughts
with one another; in this process they no longer learn in isolation, but rather in a world context with peers” (p. 24). Beach (1994) described the act of teachers socializing with one another as a process to become members of a particular school culture. Olson (1988) stated that when teachers teach, it is not only based on what they know and believe, but it also comes from an understanding of the school climate and culture in which he or she teaches.

Davis and Sumara (1997) called the process of developing a culture of schooling “a common sense orientation to cognition” (p. 107). They described cognition as it defines teachers’ understandings between their inner belief systems and their external practices. When educators utilize dialogic inquiry as an intervention to reconstruct beliefs and practice, the conversation focus changes and unfolds depending upon the persons involved. Davis and Sumara believed that conversations were a way for people to open themselves to each other. However, they acknowledged that if teachers are in a shared action group they may change in ways they did not expect such as, forgetting self, merging of identities, and mutual specification to form actions that could not have been accomplished without participating with a collaborative group. This reflects Vygotsky’s (1978) theory that social interaction is essential for learners to internalize new or difficult experiences as a precursor to change.

Changes in Beliefs and Practices

Hall and Hord (1987, 2001) stated that for changes to occur in an educational setting, the principal must be viewed as a strong education leader who controls educational change at the school level and one who can fully understand the change process as it occurs within the specific school setting. Newman, Griffin, and Cole (1989) expressed
the belief that difficulty may occur when the developers of the innovation’s abstract specifications try to embody the concrete objectives that need to occur in the planning of the new curricular goals. However, they further stated that change is possible if participants engage in intense collaboration in order to make sense of the school’s new goals and methods.

McLaughlin and Zarrow (2001) called the process of engaging in collaboration “moving into a culture of inquiry” (p. 86). Developing a culture of inquiry is not something that just happens; it requires acceptance of the new goals and methods by the faculty and staff. It also revolves around teachers becoming a learning community to inquire how the new goals and methods influence their teaching and therefore their students. Farris (1996) promoted this notion by stating that in order for teachers to face up to new challenges, they need weekly opportunities to ponder, reflect, and synthesize their personal theories and those related to the change in programs in which they work.

**Barriers to Change**

Lortie (1975) theorized that the difficulties teachers contend with when it comes to changes are due to the isolation inherent in the teaching profession. Teachers often do not see themselves as being colleagues, sharing information, observing each other’s work, and striving towards change as a group. Lortie further stated that most teachers lack concrete models that allow them to see multiple teaching styles, methods, and models. Fullan (1982) affirmed the notion that teacher change is difficult and frequently does not work. He continued by stating that innovations typically fail because the promoters of the innovative change are often administrators, legislators, or university professors. Fullan further stated that these types of change initiators might not have a
clear understanding of how a sound theoretical innovation may not translate to a practical stance in the classroom simply because of an assumption of conditions that differ from those faced by teachers in the classroom.

The challenge to sustain change within any organization according to Senge, Keliner, Roberts, et al. (1999) is to overcome three types of boundaries. The first boundary is the fear and anxiety among the people outside the group of those proposing the changes. When an organization affects changes with open and candid conversation, it allows the possibility for participants to question old beliefs and assumptions. However, this questioning can cause dissonance in the group. This dissonance is a natural part of change, but may cause some participants to experience fear and anxiety. It is the educational leader’s responsibility in this scenario to develop a timeline and to monitor for steady progress. This may enable innovative changes to occur at a slow and steady pace.

The second boundary is to monitor the gap between the institution’s way of measuring results and the impact the change has on those results. Senge et al.’s focus primarily originates from a business organization’s point of view, but if we parallel it with the high-stakes testing which is so prevalent in today’s educational society, we can get a clearer picture of their theory as it relates to the field of education. The typical way to measure results of an innovation in an educational setting is with either a criterion-referenced test or a norm referenced test. These tests may only pose a challenge to an innovation because the innovation may not initially affect the assessment as the effects of the innovation may be in the early phase of a learning curve. The innovation’s impact on the learning curve can show minor, but steady progress, which may not immediately
impact test results. Senge et al. further stated that change facilitators might need an additional means to assess the initial impact of the innovation.

The third boundary to change is that of the true believers and the nonbelievers. Senge et al. pointed out that if the pilot group working on an innovation spends too much time together they develop their own unique ways of operating which may be drastically different from the organization as a whole. This way of operating may alienate the rest of the organization, which may cause an ‘Us versus Them’ mentality. However, inviting new participants and mentoring those participants in the reflection process can minimize this view.

Change supporters need to respect new members’ inhibitions regarding change by laying a foundation for the innovation, discussing the innovation in depth, and letting new members develop their own opinions about the innovation without coercion. Hall and Hord (2001) confirmed this by stating that “…successful change starts and ends at the individual level” (p. 7).

Change and Self-Efficacy

Individuals’ past experiences may contribute to effects of self-efficacy when it comes to experiencing change. Bandura (1995) suggested that self-efficacy beliefs are something that “…involves acquiring the cognitive, behavioral, and self-regulatory tools for creating and executing appropriate courses of action to manage ever-changing life circumstances” (p. 3). He also advanced the theory that if participants are involved in the process of change by allowing discussion and reflection regarding the innovation, they are more apt to view the change as a shared action. The act of contributing to their own futures allows participants to view themselves in the change process with a positive sense
of self-efficacy, which develops into a high sense of personal self-efficacy and directedness. Cantrell (1998/1999) confirmed that teachers who are already viewed as effective practitioners are more apt to consider implementing new instructional practices than those who do not have a positive sense of self-efficacy. Once a high sense of self-efficacy is attained, it is much easier for participants to accept the change process (Meyerson & McKinney, 2000).

Discourse, Literacy, and Issues of Identity

Luke (1998) argued that there is “...no ‘right’ way of teaching reading and writing...” (p. 306). He believed it is about realigning curriculum, instruction, and assessment to better serve the cultural capital of students to include students’ diverse cultural and community contexts. Many students have difficulty learning in school because their communities’ cultural capitals are not valued in schools’ standards and behaviors (Nieto, 2002). Goodman (1996) called the term “culturally deprived child” (emphasis in the original) (p. 17) a dangerous value judgment many researchers and educators place on at-risk students, because, if you look critically at the statement, it asserts that students are disadvantaged because of their lack of middle-class culture. De la Luz Reyes and Halcon (2001, p. 3) described the act of white middle-class teachers viewing minority students as culturally deprived and therefore teaching those students to act and react from a white middle class perspective “eradicating all traces of foreignness for the price of becoming literate...identity is intertwined with the meaning and consequences of becoming and being literate.”
Miller (2001/2002) believed that non-minority teachers have a desire to help minority students but approach the act of teaching with the wrong assumptions about minority students. Minority students should be approached just like any other student by creating scaffolding (Wink & Putney, 2002), moving from joint learning into self-sufficiency, for each learner to be successful in the classroom. Miller made recommendations, which included educators knowing their own prejudices, beliefs, and values because no one is totally free of prejudice. Educators need to develop a trust with students and parents and make a valiant effort to be worthy of their trust.

Miller further described educators as teaching cultures from a tokenistic standpoint in that they usually teach culture by singling out one culture at a time to study, typically around a holiday or event. He believed that it is much more effective to make concerted effort to search for and integrate materials that reflects the world’s diversity and to develop curriculum that respects minority cultures and perspectives.

Joseph, Bravmann, Windschitl, Mikel, & Green (2000) stated that the problem educators face when applying notions of cultures other than their own is due to the cultural lens from which they see all things and not to provide reasons for the things they see. Wink (2000) described it as rethinking, negotiating, and transforming the relationships of teaching to view the production of knowledge, the internal structures of school, and the material and social relations in the context of a wider society. Wink likened it to the metaphor of a prism, which “...has a tendency to focus on shades of social, cultural, political, and even economic conditions, and does all of this under the broad view of history” (p. 30). Joseph et al. (2000) proposed that the cultural lens is developed by the culture in which individuals were raised and the one in which they have
been trained. It takes a lot of effort for individuals or groups to step outside their own cultural framework and understand how their culture relates to others. Once this alternate perspective is attempted, it can be a dissonance-inducing process that can have an impact on an individual’s identity.

Identity

Ivanic (1998) described identities as ever-changing, depending upon experiences. Identity has the possibility of changing due to dissonance, scaffolding of peers, and new experiences. Students’ identities can be impacted in diverse ways within groups and the political power structures of school and home cultures. Pataray-Ching, Wendelin, Module, et al. (2001) portrayed identities as being developed by competing discourses as two cultures traveling in tandem, a vivid term for a multicultural classroom and the diversity in which dialogue takes place. These children come from homes with their primary discourse rooted in their families and community cultures to a school setting with multiple discourse patterns of other students as well as the specialized academic discourse patterns of school (Gee, 1996), all of which could result in dissonance.

Dissonance occurs within the identity of the student when they feel their primary discourse pattern is not valued or is not accepted in the school setting. Gee (1996) and Ivanic (1994) theorized giving students the tools to mediate their use of primary discourses to affect their secondary, or school discourse, thereby developing a cyclical relationship to create a balance between the two, simultaneously strengthening a student’s school identity. Peterson (2001) viewed children as having a “signature of individuality” (p. 451). This individuality comes from children’s backgrounds including sociological factors of race, class, and gender.
Powell (1999) believed that for educators to assist marginalized children they must value the language of their homes, families, and communities. Students’ literacy should begin with their own primary discourse patterns and slowly move into the secondary discourse patterns from which they can gain knowledge of academic literacies, including writing (Florio-Ruane, et al., 1999).

Clark and Ivanic (1997) used the term “autobiographical self” (p. 136) to describe self-representation in writing including personal history, while McCarthey (1994) described autobiographical writing as encouraging student ownership of text and topics. Davis, Fitzpatrick, Grenko, and Ivanic (1994b) described writing as a literacy opportunity, which can give students the chance to express and share things that matter to them. McLane (1990) reinforced this notion by maintaining that writing may be relevant to life and have a sociocultural framework. Taking these variations on a common theme, it would seem that self-reflective, personal writing would be one way for students to express themselves, that is, if teachers give the control of topic and genre to the student.

McCarthey related an observation in which a teacher believed so strongly in the power of children writing about their own lives that she discouraged them from writing fictional stories. This type of practice limits students in the scope of their writing and can make the classroom atmosphere one of coercion, not freedom. Schneider (2001) stated when teachers choose to direct or limit writing topics or encourage students to write about other topics to which they are resistant, it may negatively affect a child’s identity on a very deep level. Teachers need to take the lead from their students and not push a student to write about personal experiences that are either too private or possibly too painful (Schneider).
Peterson (2001) also described ways in which students have had choice in their writing genre, but the more choices they were given the more they were confined by their social worlds, in this case, one of “taken-for-granted gender roles” (p. 425). This type of reproduction in stereotyping was done through students identifying themselves in gender roles as socially competent males or females. Peterson acknowledged the difficulties she experienced trying to teach students critical literacy, but, with documented efforts, she realized that by providing mini-lessons specifically directed at making social change, students were able to utilize writing for societal change. She stated that when students participated in constructing thoughts, feelings, experiences, and values into writing they created possibilities for new meanings to be internalized. This building of opinion (Davis et al., 1994) will assist students to develop an identity that is based not on the mandates of literacy and writing itself, but on the person as a whole, including valuing other people’s strengths and shaping that identity through choice and understanding of other cultures (Ivanic, 1996).

Summary

This review examined the extant literature related to Vygotsky’s sociocultural learning theory and supported the theory that teachers’ pedagogical practices (Clark & Peterson, 1986) are based upon a set of internalized personal beliefs (Dobson & Dobson, 1983). These belief systems are constructed through intersubjectivity negotiated (Vygotsky, 1978), interactions among peers, students, texts, and personal experiences (Lenski, Wham & Griffey, 1998). Short & Burk (1996) stated that for deep and substantial changes in beliefs and practices to occur educators must continually
interrogate their own beliefs and practices with the assumption that the answer will never be found. Gibson (1998) postulated that relationships between ideologies and practices must be explored for any revisions or renewals in pedagogical practices to be achieved.

Dialogic inquiry can be used in a collaborative community as a means to investigate teachers’ beliefs and practices (Dobson & Dobson, 1983; McLaughlin & Zarrow, 2001; Vygotsky, 1962). Dialogic inquiry within a collaborative community allowed participants to work towards a common goal, exploring their multiple perspectives within an arena of mutual respect to implement a shared vision and strategy (Beach, 1994; Dyson, 2000; Wells, 1999; Yankelovich, 1999).

Participants shared a vision and desire to change their schools’ literacy programs. The review of literature suggested that for innovative changes to occur, a strong educational leader, such as the principal, (Hall & Hord, 1987) must assume responsibility to fully understand the innovation and to develop concrete objectives (Newman, Griffin & Cole, 1989) to lead teachers to develop a culture of inquiry (McLaughlin & Zarrow). The culture of inquiry may allow participants the time to ponder, reflect, and synthesize personal theories (Farris, 1996). Bandura (1977) believed that past experiences give a person self-efficacy, or regulatory tools, for negotiating life’s changing circumstances. If a person is involved in the change process they are co-initiators of the change and more likely to view the change in a positive light.

This review of the literature described foundational concepts for the study. The study documented the efforts of individual participants as they joined to form a collaborative community to attempt to make pedagogical changes on a broad scale (Nieto, 2000).
Teachers attempted to transform their beliefs and practices through experiences with colleagues in a collaborative encounter to create a culturally responsive curriculum.
CHAPTER III

METHOD

Critical and Sociocultural Research

This study was aligned within the paradigms of critical and sociocultural theories. Critical literacy challenges and has the potential to transform dominant discourses and bring social justice issues to the forefront of educational reform (Luke, 2000). A sociocultural perspective looks at learning as a social construction in perception, action, and consciousness (Green, 2001). Blending these two theoretical paradigms provided a lens from which to view the journey the teacher-travelers took as they learned to become critical and self determined thinkers (Giroux, 1982) regarding literacies as social practices (Au, 1998; Cazden, 2001; Luke, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 2000).

Research Design

This study was a naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) into the beliefs and practices of teachers as they participated in critical dialogues to investigate aspects of identity, self, race, class, and gender as they related to literacy instruction. The design for this study is a qualitative, multiple case study approach (Merriam, 1998). Merriam defined a qualitative case study as an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single bounded unit, “an ideal design
for understanding and interpreting phenomena” (p. 2). Merriam suggested that a case study’s special features, such as focusing on a particular situation, program, event or phenomenon, could further define it. The four cases documented in this study are heuristic because they elucidate the readers’ understanding of the phenomenon under study. They are also particularistic case studies because they concentrated attention on the way a particular group confronted, specific problems from a holistic perspective (p. 29). The phenomena I investigated were the impact on teachers’ beliefs and practices as they participated in critical dialogues. The teachers who participated in the overall study assisted in the initial data development, and the teachers who participated in the case studies assisted in further defining phenomena as they arose throughout the interviews and observations.

Context, Setting and Participants

Context

This study took place in the context of a school improvement program related to student achievement in literacy. The school’s site-based management team took the initial developmental steps of this journey by creating a professional development course (PDC). The course was designed to provide teachers the time to participate in a collaborative group (Jennings & Di, 1996) to listen and learn from peers (Vygotsky, 1978) while developing knowledge regarding cultural ideologies, social relations, and understanding of students’ literacy practices (Luke, 2000). Participants were compensated with two credits of professional development hours toward their state recertification process for the time they spent in the PDC.
The goals of the PDC were aligned with Miller's (2001/2002) professional development recommendations in which educators make a genuine effort to find and incorporate materials that reflect the world's diversity and cultivating curriculum that consistently incorporates and respects minority perspectives in ways that are not merely for show.

The overall objectives, criteria, and requirements for the PDC were presented to the faculty members in a July faculty meeting by the school's principal and me. Applications for admittance into the PDC were taken and initially 12 people registered. Three had to drop the course prior to the class starting due to failing health, a logistical problem, and to an already overloaded class schedule. The remaining nine faculty members were all admitted into the PDC through their verbal commitment to the principal that they would: (1) complete the course, (2) fully participate in all discussions, (3) complete all course work, and (4) attend each session. This commitment was considered a binding contract between each participant and the principal, and with this verbal contract, the principal purchased all course materials for each participant.

The Site

Paul L. Segundo Elementary School was selected as the research site because I was a faculty member at Segundo and was interested in documenting the change process as attempted by the principal and the site-based management team. I became interested in researching what transpired when teachers came together to collaborate, to learn, and to become critical and self determined thinkers (Giroux, 1981) regarding literacies as social practices (Au, 1998; Cazden, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 2000). The study was part of a schoolwide literacy project developed collaboratively with the principal and the site-
based management team. The site was located in a state in the southwestern United States. At the time the study occurred Segundo had a student population of approximately 900 students and a staff of 65 including teachers and support staff.

Participants

Nine teachers enrolled in the PDC course, and all nine agreed to participate in the study. Seven participants who completed the course received professional development credits upon completion, and two participants audited the course simply for the experience. The next section utilizes pseudonyms and outlines each participant’s background. The vignettes of each individual participant’s background came from informational sheets I asked them to complete (example in appendix) and through personal communications. Table 2 further illustrates the differences in participants’ backgrounds including teaching positions, years in education, and age. The ‘other’ category in the table lists how each participant viewed himself or herself as bringing uniqueness to the group.

Jasmine.

Jasmine was a 23-year-old female. She was a first-year teacher but had approximately three years experience working in day care centers prior to teaching. She was originally from the Sudan but moved to the United States in 1995. Her native language was Arabic, but she was also taught rudimentary English in her home country. When she came to Las Vegas, she did not receive any special classes to help her adapt to English language learning. The perspective of coming from another country with very limited knowledge of the English language gave Jasmine an alternate view from that of a traditional classroom teacher. She was teaching first grade at the time of the study.
Table 2.

Participant information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jasmine</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>First grade</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sudanese</td>
<td>Arabic native language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jo</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>First grade</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Polish-American</td>
<td>Very strong Catholic identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braden</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Irish and African-American</td>
<td>Low socioeconomic Southern U.S. perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Fourth grade</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Philippine-American</td>
<td>Speaks three languages: Tagalog, Spanish, and English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mikaela</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Fourth grade</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>European-American</td>
<td>60’s Bohemian counter-culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aurora</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Third grade</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>European-American</td>
<td>New York enculturated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonya</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>First grade</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>European-American</td>
<td>Hegemonic experiences in the business world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zurie</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Fifth grade</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Experienced racism and criticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beverly</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Reading Specialist</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Hired in East Chicago as part of the Affirmative Action plan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Jo.

Jo was a 49-year-old female with 27 years experience as a classroom teacher, mainly in the primary grades. She had completed her Master’s Degree in Educational Leadership within the last two years and would like to be a principal later in her educational career. Both her parents were of Polish descent, and she had a very strong Catholic background. She referred to herself as a “Thoroughbred Pole”, taking pride in her Polish heritage. She was a first-grade teacher during the scope of the study.

Braden.

Braden is the only male in the class and the principal of the school. At the age of 55 he had been in the educational profession for 32 years, holding such positions as an attendance officer, guidance counselor, classroom teacher, and finally principal. He received his Master’s Degree in Counseling. Braden was raised in the Southern part of the United States and is from African-American and Irish backgrounds. While living in the South as a child he encountered blatant racism such as “white’s only” drinking fountains. He related an experience of defying authority as a child by running in the “whites’ only” waiting room at the bus station and drinking out of the water fountain and running out again before they could catch him. These types of experiences gave Braden an alternate perspective of the pluralistic world in which we live and the injustices that are enacted on behalf of the marginalized people in our society. This included insight into blatant as well as subtle racism that many educators have not experienced.

Asia.

Asia was a 43-year-old female from Manila, Philippines. She was fluent in three languages: Tagalog, Spanish, and her current primary language, English. She had been in
the educational workforce for 15 years holding positions as a classroom teacher, mainly in the intermediate grades, and as a school counselor. She was teaching fourth grade at the time of the study.

*Mikaela.*

Mikaela was a 30-year-old female with 4 years of teaching experience ranging from first to fourth grades. She had also had a past career as an educational social worker. She came from an English only background and did not identify herself with any specific ethnicity or heritage culture. However, she described her childhood as being very bohemian, because her family lived an unconventional life, due to her parents’ experiences in the 1960s United States’ counterculture. As the only child of two bohemians turned conventionalist, she struggled as an adult with her parents’ ‘total reversal’ of the class system in which she was raised. During the time of the study she was teaching fourth grade.

*Aurora.*

Aurora was a 33-year-old white female and had been teaching third grade for the entire eight years that she had been teaching. She was an English only speaker but identified herself with the unique culture of growing up in New York, which she defined as being very direct. She described her experiences of moving to the Western United States as being very troublesome because of her New York background. This was due to her fact that people in the west did not understand her directedness and thought she was simply being rude. She described the great efforts she made to lose her accent and to develop a more western mindset of not being so direct in her communications. Her family had strong ties to their European ancestry: Scottish, English, Italian, and German.
Tonya.

Tonya was a 39-year-old white female. She entered the teaching force after many years in the business world. This gave Tonya another viewpoint of education through the lens of her previous hegemonic experiences in the business world. She described how she watched man after man receive promotions while she continued to receive excellent evaluations, but no promotions. Tonya had been teaching for 5 years in the primary grades. She received her master’s degree with an emphasis in science. A unique aspect of Tonya’s identity was that during her public school career she attended 25 different schools between kindergarten and high school.

Zurie.

Zurie was a 30-year-old African-American female with the unique background of having a father that taught her Black history while she was growing up. She had learned about two sides of history, the hegemonic powers that control society, and had experienced some of that racism and criticism throughout her young life. She had been teaching for two years, both in a fifth-grade classroom. She brings cultural capital to her students in the form of cultural studies allowing the students to create cultural composites as part of their course work.

Beverly.

The last participant was Beverly. She was a 56-year-old, African-American female with 29 years of teaching experience, 11 of which were in the classroom and 18 were as a literacy specialist. Beverly has a unique perspective on teaching because in 1974 the school district in East Chicago-Indiana, was mandated by the Affirmative Action Act to hire more minority teachers. Beverly was one of nine African American teachers to be
hired that year as a literacy specialist. She indicated that, since those positions were created as a result of Affirmative Action, until 1990 no Caucasian person would accept a literacy specialist position because of the status it held as a minority position. Beverly is currently a literacy specialist concentrating on the primary grades.

Role of the Researcher

I act as a participant observer during the course of the study. Utilizing Spradley's (1980) context of "dual purpose" (p. 54, I viewed each class as a social situation in which I engaged in activities appropriate to the situation and observed the activities, participants, and physical aspects of each situation as they arose. Spradley also stated that researchers may view the study from an insider/outsider perspective. The role of the researcher in the context of the PDC is one of an insider because I was a faculty member in the school where the PDC occurred. I was able to accrue additional meaning by participating in the social situations because of my insider point of view. However, I also positioned myself in the role of an outsider because I was able to step back and simultaneously observe myself and the other participants as they created an exchange of ideas as part of a dialogue with one another in the context of the course. I was able to accomplish this shift in perspective through participants accepting responsibility for joint teaching and learning. Each week a different participant facilitated the class discussion by developing additional thinking questions and by taking the lead in the discussions. Spradley termed this type of participation "complete participation" (p. 61), one in which the researcher is already a participant. Therefore, as Spradley indicated, I had to work very hard to see the tacit cultural rules and slight nuances or fluctuations in data from the
outsider perspective, because a researcher can actually know too much about a community’s culture. I attempted to counteract the commonplace setting by utilizing what Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) described as trying to recall first impressions by watching participants as they came to the setting. I paid special attention to how participants learned, adapted, and reacted to the readings, discourse, and other participants.

Researcher’s Lens

During the data collection for this study, I took the perspective that knowing comes from a certain viewpoint and a researcher must be aware of her bias and articulate it in her communications (Emerson, et al., 1995). I articulated to the participants my historical bias of growing up in a white, middle-class neighborhood with one prominent religion and few minorities. I also related the fact that the minority people I met as a child were so Anglicized that they did not seem culturally different from anyone else I knew. During the initial weeks of the journey, I described how during certain times in my life I made critical discoveries that led me to uncover the knowledge that some people exercised hegemonic power over me. These discoveries allowed me to develop a critical orientation (Fairclough, 1992) of the social circumstances of the pluralistic society in which we live.

Procedures

The analysis of the data occurred in several stages as I considered the links between the research question and the data. The first step in the analysis was to read, sort, and
organize the data by participant. Then through analysis, I came up with terms, concepts, and categories that reflected the findings in the data.

**Materials**

The materials that were utilized during the course of this study were Wink’s (2000) *Critical Pedagogy Notes from the Real World* and McCarthey’s (2002) *Student’s Identities and Literacy Learning*. Participants also brought in articles and videos based on their presentations.

**Data Sources**

The data sources used for this study included: (a) weekly book walk sheets, (b) field notes, (c) artifacts, (d) audio-tapes of each class, (e) interviews, and (f) observations. Each of the data sources are described in detail in the next section and illustrated in table 3.

*Book walks.*

Book walks were essentially the same practice as a picture walk in a picture book that a teacher would use to assist emergent readers (Clay, 1979). Book walks were a simple procedure of underlining a part of the book that jumped out at the reader to mark the spot they felt was important or something they felt needed clarification and dialogue. Each participant completed the book walk prior to coming to class each week to aid in the dialogic inquiry. I created a think sheet for each class that had several triggers or thinking questions from the chapter that I hoped would elicit responses from the group and assist in initiating the class discussions (example in appendices).
Table 3.

Data Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Type</th>
<th>Collection Period</th>
<th>Purposes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Field Notes</td>
<td>August - December</td>
<td>Contextualized the setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifacts</td>
<td>August - December</td>
<td>Contextualized the participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book walks</td>
<td>August - December</td>
<td>Constant comparative analysis to develop categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Incidence</td>
<td>August - December</td>
<td>Combined with categories to further define participants’ case study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcriptions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>February</td>
<td>Observed pedagogical practices to find links and connections to previous findings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>February</td>
<td>Semi-structured with the purpose clarifying previous findings and allowing participants to tell more of their story</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the first 10-15 minutes of each class period, the participants completed the book walk sheets. Once complete they used them as a guide for the class discussion. Many of the thinking questions that Wink (2000) provided thinking questions at the end of each chapter of her book were utilized on the book walk sheets. For example, after reading the chapter on “Where Critical Pedagogy Comes From” (p. 115). Wink asked:
“Our future together will need new leaders. What critical leadership qualities do you bring to the future?” (p. 115)

Field Notes.

Field notes were written during and after each course period. Ivanic (1998) equated writing from the personal lives we have lived as writing from our autobiographical selves. I wrote field notes from my autobiographic self and theoretical perspectives of critical, sociohistorical, and cultural frames. However, as Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte (1999) stated, the researcher must separate stereotypes, opinions, and judgments out of her autobiographical self to effectively record the opinions, words and meanings of the participants. I attempted to write brief sections of what I heard and observed while also trying to keep a self-awareness of my own perceptions regarding what arose during the course of the study. An example of one of the entries from my journal:

Dissonance, Jasmine: not retaining anything now. Braden: forces the problem. Beverly: female pronoun. Beverly from Jonathon’s (Wink, 2000) point of view: sad, an opinion, literacy is not a panacea, and parents made a critical difference. Aurora: assume anything about Jonathon’s family (Wink), and we would be wrong! Beverly: learning to read, reading to learn, and doing things that are more fun too. Zurie: content area units, I like it, I’m in the process of planning. Jo: it takes a lot of hard work. Braden: integration is the way. (they really seemed to take the section on Jonathon to heart, they really wanted to explore the meaning behind what happened to Jonathon and how that impacted his education. They also spent a lot of time discussing how they can alter their practices to include not jumping to conclusions about families) (notes, 9-3).
The field notes were not coded as part of the construction of categories; they were utilized as a conceptualization for the course context and participants’ actions to enhance the case studies.

*Interviews.*

Interviews were conducted with four of the nine participants. The four interviewees were chosen through purposive sampling. Merriam (1998) stated that before purposive sampling could be done, a researcher must determine the selection criteria. Due to the nature of research, predetermined criteria could not be established. However, once the data collection commenced the participants who displayed variations of impact were asked to participate in the classroom observation and interview process. This was what Merriam described as “maximum variation sampling strategy” (p. 65), one that is based on having as much variation as possible in the selection of cases or the phenomenon of interest.

Interviews were semistructured with what Merriam (1998) termed as probes. Probes are questions that follow-up something already asked or designated as critical incidences with the coding of transcription of the class audiotapes. Each interview was audiotape recorded in its entirety and transcribed with Schensul, LeCompte, et al. (1999) termed a critical incidence approach.

The semi-structured interviews were not designed to elicit new information, but to add depth, clarity, and richness to the data that was previously collected and analyzed. Each interviewee was asked about their time in the PDC and what affect the course had on their current practices. They were each asked clarifying questions about statements, they had previously made during the course of the study. An example of a clarifying
question would be when I asked Jo what she meant by her statement that we are all Americans first. This question initiated ten minutes of additional data, which enriched Jo’s overall case study.

Two interviews took place in the interviewees’ classrooms after school, one took place in the participant’s classroom during her lunch period, and the last interview was conducted in my classroom during the participant’s preparation period in the late afternoon. Each interview was recorded to ensure that the content of the interviews was depicted in its entirety. The methodology used to transcribe the interview tapes is described in the course transcriptions section of this document.

Observations.

Observations of each case study participants’ classroom and teaching practices occurred the morning of the scheduled interview. Merriam (1998) described six things to observe in a setting. I list her suggestions and how I attempted to adhere to those suggestions.

(1) Physical setting: During the observations I diagrammed the layout of the rooms, noted the items on the walls, arrangement of student desks, and any other physical attributes of the rooms I deemed important.

(2) Participants

(3) Activities and interactions: During the observations I noted the participants’ behaviors, interaction with students, and pedagogical practices.

(4) Conversations: I listened to conversations between students and between teachers and students.
(5) Subtle factors: During the observations I tried to observe how students reacted to the participants, and how the teachers disciplined and guided their students as well.

(6) My own behavior: I documented what I did, where I sat, and if students interacted with me while I was taking notes. These steps assisted in contextualizing the case studies and provided further documentation on the participants’ pedagogical practices.

Validity

I utilized four basic strategies as outlined by Merriam to enhance internal validity. Triangulation, long-term observations, peer examination, and researcher biases. The triangulation was accomplished through the utilization of two additional investigators to aid in the construction of major categories. Long-term observations were conducted over a seven-month period starting in August and ending in February. During the interview process, I asked participants to comment on the data, which was by peer examination. As discussed previously, I outlined my researcher’s biases informing participants of my theoretical lens and sociocultural and historical viewpoint during the initial day of the PDC.

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) referred to a researcher as a “bricoleur” (p. 3) who understands that research is an interactive progression shaped by her personal history, ethnicity, race, biography, gender, social class, and the participants in the research setting. I understood that my presence influenced the data. Merriam declared “one cannot observe or measure a phenomenon/event without changing it” (p. 202). During
the course of the PDC, I used my sociocultural and critical theoretical liens to document the events that occurred, which includes key events as well as those that ran counter to my expectations. I made a special effort to document the actions of the participants by recording how they reacted to the texts and to one another. At the same time I tried to avoid assumptions about how participants should act based on my own values (Emerson et al., 1995) by documenting what took place during the PDC without adding personal reflections regarding participants as well as keeping my theoretical lens at the forefront of my perception as I analyzed their statements, artifacts, and data sources.

Data Analysis

Merriam (1998) stated that data analysis is making sense out of the data. Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p. 11) made the statement that a “gendered, multiculturally situated researcher approaches the world with a set of ideas, a framework that specifies a set of questions that are examined in specific ways”. In order to make sense of the data I had collected I approached the data analysis of this study from a descriptive account, moving into category construction, and finally multiple case study analysis.

Descriptive Account

The initial steps of my data analysis were to read the entire collection of data and artifacts to get an overall conception of the insights that might constitute findings. The next step was to listen to all data recordings one time through. During the second listening, I took notes and purposefully selected segments which were deemed critical incidences. Over the third listening period the critical incidences were transcribed and
subsequently filed with the other data sources. Once all the data were organized and all descriptive accounts had been initialized, category construction was initiated.

Category Construction

Category construction occurred through a variation of comparing and renegotiating until all the data were compressed and linked together in a manner that conveyed the meaning of the research question a process Merriam (1998) termed constant comparative method. Merriam described the constant comparative method of data analysis as “...continuous comparison of incidents, respondents’ remarks, and so on, with each other. Units of data—bits of information—are literally sorted into groupings that have something in common” (p. 179).

The research question I investigated were the ways that teachers transform their beliefs and practices by participating in critical dialogues. Merriam described this type of category construction as “...systematic and informed by the studies’ purpose, the investigators orientation, and knowledge...” (p. 179).

The first step in construction of categories was placing the units of data, a phrase participants noted on the book walk sheet, onto two organizational sheets based on the research question: (1) belief statements, and (2) practice statements. The data units were then utilized to take chunks of data from the book walk sheets and list on the researcher designed belief and practice grid sheets (see appendices).

After all 98 statements were collected and noted on the belief statement and practice statement sheets, the data was read, then reread and analyzed for patterns. The patterns in both the belief statements and practice statements coalesced into four distinct designs. The patterns were then identified and named as categories. The identified categories are:
(a) impact on classroom practices, (b) cultural consciousness, (c) deepening of previously held beliefs, and (d) strengthening of self.

In accordance with Merriam, the categories reflected the purpose of the research, and they also were exhaustive as is illustrated in the researcher triangulation section of this Chapter. The categories were sensitizing because an outsider can read the titles and understand what the nature of data in the category were. Finally, the categories were conceptually congruent because they all were all at the same level of abstraction.

Category and Researcher Triangulation

I utilized researcher triangulation and data triangulation to confirm findings. Researcher triangulation is the process of using multiple investigators to analyze the data. I used a research triad (Schensul, Schensul, et al., 1999) of two doctoral students and myself to triangulate the category construction and the placement of data under the category headings. The two peers were chosen because of their knowledge of critical and sociocultural theories. I trained the peer coders to interpret and apply the codes consistently to the data. Schensul, Schensul, et al. described this process as developing an intercoder agreement.

The two peer coders and I met and designed the intercoder agreement. This agreement stated that I would send each of them the four categories, the definitions of the categories, and the 98 data units. The process of pattern analyses was employed to separate each data unit and place it into one of the four categories. Upon completion of the initial placement of the data, we met and discussed any discrepancies in the data placement. The process of discussing each discrepancy was continued until all the data were placed into categories as agreed upon by the three researchers. Combining the
categories, the transcriptions of critical incidences, and the artifacts allowed me to purposefully select four cases for a maximum variation sample based on the diversity of the data.

*Course Transcriptions*

Schensul, LeCompte, et al. (1999) described ways to insure a high quality audiotape experience while conducting ethnographic research. One of their suggestions was to purchase a good quality microphone. I purchased a multidirectional microphone to aid in the taping of each class session. The tape recorder was a traditional school model, and the two pieces of equipment worked well together. The recorded sound condition was of high quality, even with multiple people speaking at the same time. Each tape was marked with the class date, and a new tape was utilized for each class period. These tapes were stored in a drawer in room 33b at Segundo Elementary School for the duration of the study and were be stored in my home for the requisite time period.

I utilized Schensul, LeCompte, et al.’s critical incidence approach to transcribing the data from the many tape recordings that were made of each class period. The critical incidence approach provides a method for select specific segments of data for transcription. Combined with Merriam’s single bounded unit made it an ideal design to interpret the phenomena, while focusing on a particular situation or event. A bounded unit could be as small as a sentence or as large as several paragraphs. I initially identified each critical incidence by listening to each class tape, on a tape recorder with a built-in counter. When I identified a critical incidence on the tape the number on the counter was noted for future retrieval. A critical incidence was defined as something that
happened during the class discussions that related to the question guiding the study. An example of a critical incidence transcription for Zurie on September 17:

Side A, 450 ...it’s innocent, they do it so innocents as to lower the value of the group of students and to raise the value of another and I think so many people do this unintentionally, but it’s still, it’s wrong! ...Normal Way! [top of page 52]

The next step in the critical incidence process was to take the section of the audiotape that was critical to the study and transcribe the segment. The final step in the process was to summarize the rest of the tape’s content.

Due to the qualitative nature of this study, I acted as the transcriber-coder for the transcription process. The application of the critical incidence codes might be ambiguous for an individual not familiar with the study and the participants (Schensul, LeCompte, et al.). I also conducted multiple listening sessions with each tape to ensure that all critical incidences were identified and transcribed. These critical incidence transcriptions contributed to the clarity of the case studies and provided vignettes to enhance the reader’s negotiation of this document.

Data Reporting

The findings and results of the qualitative research study were identified through the data and constructed into categories. The data were provided by participants as they participated in a critical dialogue regarding changes in their school’s literacy practices to include culturally relevant pedagogy and content area literacy. The scope of the study was then narrowed to investigate four individual participants. These four individuals were interviewed to gain a perspective of the teacher’s sociocultural context and the
changes in their beliefs and practices based on participation in the study. All data pertaining to the four interviewees were developed into case studies (Merriam, 1998). The potential audiences for this study include classroom teachers, principals, and staff developers. The descriptions and vignettes of the case studies may possibly contribute to promote the study of how critical studies create awareness in and of our pluralistic society.
CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This study of a group of elementary school teachers exploring the social, political, and cultural world of critical literacy and its relationship to teaching and content area literacy was guided by the following research question: How do teachers transform their beliefs and practices by participating in critical dialogue? This study took place in the context of a school-based professional development course (PDC). During the course, teachers had a variety of opportunities to explore, discuss, modify, and reject different beliefs regarding critical literacy practices from a variety of sources including texts, peers, mentors, and an administrator. The information that was presented during the PDC had the potential of making a key impression on participants’ personal beliefs and professional practices regarding content area literacy practices and how those literacy practices have cultural and political ties. In this chapter, the themes and/or categories found in the data that exhibit participants’ beliefs and practices are documented and analyzed to interpret what transpired across the 15-week semester as a result of reading and analyzing critical literacy practices.

I have organized my interpretations into two sections. First, I derived categories from data and I briefly present my findings related to the research question from the analyses of all nine participants. I examined viewpoints of the nine participants as they
participated in critical dialogues the depth to which those discussions influenced their personal beliefs and professional practices. Secondly, I present cases that demonstrated the varying levels of impact that the PDC had on those four participants. The impact of the PDC on participants included: (a) a major pedagogical difference, (b) validation of personal and pedagogical practices, (c) deepening of cultural and pedagogical beliefs, and finally, (d) reaffirming personal and professional connections.

Deriving Categories from Data

The patterns that coalesced from the book walk sheets yielded four major categories including: impact on classroom practices, cultural consciousness, strengthening of self, and deepening of previously held beliefs. The overall findings from all nine participants starting all data sources are noted in table 4. The categories and excerpts from participant examples follow:

- Impact on classroom practices

  Aurora: “I feel that I am and will become a better teacher after having taken this course and having had the opportunity to evaluate myself and the direction I am going in” (book walk, 12-10).

  Zurie: “I have come out of my comfort zone for my students in subjects such as math and science, and I am having a blast. I am open-minded and willing to take risks due to my experiences [in the PDC]” (book walk, 12-10).

  Tonya: “I got to know more about staff members [and that] concerns of others (classroom) are similar to mine. Renewed motivation to continue improving my teaching awareness” (book walk, 12-10).
Table 4.

Major and Minor Levels of Influence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact on Classroom Practices</th>
<th>Cultural Consciousness</th>
<th>Deepening of Previously Held Beliefs</th>
<th>Strengthening of Self</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M = Major impact</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m = Minor impact</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-- = No impact</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aurora</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braden</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beverly</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jasmine</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jo</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mikaela</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonya</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zurie</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Cultural consciousness
  Asia: “Various identities in the classroom which includes the students and my own can be utilized to enrich classroom lessons, activities, classroom life in general” (book walk, 9-3).

- Strengthening of self
  Beverly: “…I’m feeling peacefulness in knowing I’m not crazy. I’m understanding of other’s decisions and actions. I’m not as condemning or critical
lately. I always thought life was a constant change and adjustment, but now I’m really experiencing it” (book walk, 9-17).

Mikaela: “I have done some soul searching—thinking about what really is important. Reflecting on my ideas, beliefs and what I know is true. It has given me the rebirth of the thought that my beliefs are ok” (book walk, 10-15).

- Deepening of previously held beliefs

Braden: “[this class]…affirms my beliefs about teaching and learning” (book walk, 12-10).

Jo: “reflective and validated myself as a person and teacher” book walk, 10-15)

My analysis of the data, displayed in table 4 showed that of the nine participants, four experienced a major impact on their classroom practices. Only one participant showed a major impact in the area of cultural consciousness and two participants experienced a strengthening of self. Finally, two participants experienced a major impact in the category of deepening of previously held beliefs.

The categories, as listed in the previous section, represented sections of data that were available from book walk sheets. Book walk sheets aided in class discussions by listing thinking questions regarding the weekly readings. The next section outlines the setting in which the book walks were completed. Four case studies follow in the Case Study section of this Chapter. The case studies present an in-depth look at the various ways participants were impacted by PDC experiences.
Each Tuesday, as soon as the 3:21 P.M. release bell rang, nine teachers and their administrator headed to the library for the PDC course. The Segundo Library is centrally located in the school with four learning communities radiating from each corner. Participants came together in this central location from each of the four corners of the building to pursue interests in developing a new culturally conscious, content area, schoolwide literacy program.

The library lights were typically dimmed when participants arrived. Each week a participant would volunteer to bring and assemble refreshments for the group. Foods such as store bought cuisine, fruits and vegetables, and homemade cultural family recipes were prepared and brought into class so that individuals could be recharged after a long day of teaching. Ten tired individuals appeared, but after a few moments, a bantering group of educators would emerge and transform into a community of learners.

As a researcher, I was most enlightened just prior to the formal group discussion as participants conversed and snacked. For example, during the second week of class while participants were loading up their plates, the banter hit a high note. The following vignette displays the type of repartee and camaraderie which became a part of the weekly PDC. Tonya was a track one teacher. Track one starts three weeks later than the other four tracks each school year. Tonya was lamenting on the lack of time she had to get everything accomplished to start her new school year. Since the rest of the group was already in their second week of the new school year, they were not allowing her comments to pass without interceding with jocularity:
Jasmine: You’ve got nothing else to do [talking and laughing at the same time]

Jo: I was going to say [in a sarcastic tone]

Jasmine: You should have read the whole [Wink] book, don’t ya think Mikaela?
[continue laughing]

Truman: She did, and she asked me for more reading materials. [gasps and stares come from around the room]

Tonya: Yes, I did!

Jasmine: You’re kidding me, right?

Tonya: No, cause I’m trying to figure this crap out! [laughing]

Truman: What do you mean crap? How am I going to critically take that one?
[sarcastic and laughing tone]

Jasmine: I want a Webster’s dictionary, please, [laughing and pointing]

Tonya: [mock laughing] How am I going to critically take that one?...I’m sorry.
[stopped to laugh] I didn’t mean....

Zurie: [interjecting with a big laugh]

Tonya: That’s just a reflection of my frustrational level. [grappling with new ideas from Wink’s book] (transcription, 09-12)

This tone was the overriding theme of the course. Participants could laugh and enjoy one another’s company while grappling with a different way of looking at pedagogy, students, and at themselves.

After the plates were loaded, drinks were in hand, and the heavily-outlined and annotated books were covering the tables, the class facilitator would begin the dialogue. Each week a different participant facilitated the class discussion by taking the lead in the
discussion and asking previously prepared questions he/she had prepared prior to coming to class. This type of class format was utilized to assist in creating a sense of shared power with the participants. Freire (1970) described this type of class format as an environment where joint learners are teaching and learning from each other through dialogue.

To facilitate the dialogue, I provided each participant with a book walk sheet, which listed thinking questions to aid in the discussions. Participants completed the book walk sheets as they enjoyed their snacks. The book walk sheets were then used by participants to focus their thinking on issues related to the context of the chapter and other impromptu concepts we investigated. These sheets later became the data that were used to construct the previously stated categories.

Beliefs and Practices

The findings from this section support the original premise of the PDC, which was to introduce the concepts of culturally conscious oriented teaching practices. Teachers came together to critically engage in authentic discourse with a common goal to include culturally relevant literature and activities with a schoolwide content area literacy program. To further investigate the depth to which the participants’ beliefs and practices were impacted, I combined the previously developed categories of impact on classroom practices, cultural consciousness, deepening of previously held beliefs, and strengthening of self. These categories were merged with critical incidence transcriptions from the course, classroom observations, and semistructured interviews to develop four case studies, which are explored in the following section.
Cases of Impact

Zurie: A case of pedagogical impact

Zurie viewed herself as a person wearing many hats. She listed these hats in a graphic representation. A recreation of that illustration is as follows:

Figure 2. Zurie’s web

This graphic represents Zurie’s perception of herself. It illustrates that she has very strong ideals about herself and how she views her place in society. First, she is an African American woman, a daughter, mother, wife, and teacher. She has a strong Christian background that values morals, justice and caring, and she is passionate about...
what she believes. Her interests revolved around family and friends and included cooking, travel, reading, and music. She was a new mother of a baby girl and was having a hard time dealing with coming back to school after an extended maternity leave. The beginning of the year was initially a very difficult time for her, but she quickly made the personal adjustments that were needed and arrived back at school with her work and family matters in place.

*Zurie: Strengthening of self*

Zurie was born and raised in West City, a section of town that is now viewed as inner city. As a young girl, she remembers being very leery of white people. She related the time when she made a negative comment to her mother about white people, and her mother told her not to judge people by their skin color, but by their actions. She said that at times this was difficult for her to do because she had uncles who were in the Black Panther movement. The Black Panther movement was initially formed to protect black residents from police brutality. Later it “developed into a Marxist revolutionary group that called for the arming of blacks, their exemption from the draft, the release of all black prisoners, and payment of compensation to blacks for centuries of exploitation by white Americans” (Education at Yahoo.com, 2003). Zurie developed an anti-white perspective because some members of her family were politically active. However, she further developed the perspective that white people were racist because of her negative experiences with Caucasians as a young girl. A small vignette from a class discussion tells her story:

I'm torn between the two worlds of growing up in the 70s and 60s and today because everyone, everything is so hidden. Whereas before it was so much out...

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spoken and if you didn’t like me you let me know it. Where as now you think that you are OK with a certain group of people and you’re really not, so I grew-up totally different. I had so many uncles that were Black Panthers and I’ve always been so skeptical ya know, of white people. As a little kid, my first experiences with them [Caucasians] were always so bad. So, it was hard for me to change that. My mother’s the total [opposite]. She’s like ‘why do you act like this? I have taught you to love all people and your Christian, da, da, da’. I’m like ‘OK, mother whatever.’ [laugh] So [laugh], its interesting, ya know, I grew-up totally different, ya know, predominantly black and that’s what I preferred and that’s my comfort zone. So its interesting it can go both ways you know, to where ya know, black people are totally prejudice or racist towards [others] (transcription, 9-17).

Zurie’s father played a big role in the way that she views the world today. He made sure that she not only learned the traditional history as taught in the public school system, but also the history of African Americans. One of the books they read together was Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America by Bennett (1961). She allowed me to borrow her copy and read some of the history so I would have an idea of her childhood. The book started with the African past, as far back as 700 B.C., goes right straight though to the Civil War, and ends in the year of 1963, the 100th year of black emancipation. She relayed that it was important to her father that she knew and understood an alternative view of history, and her people’s history, as opposed or in addition to the history of Jefferson, Lincoln, and Washington that was taught in the public school system.
Zurie said that while she went to her neighborhood elementary school, she was viewed as gifted. She was always a good student, but liked to engage in conversations with peers and adults. Zurie related that she felt she might have turned out to be a different person if she had not had the educational experiences she had. She expressed this by stating:

Well, when I read that part [of Wink’s book] I thought all the way back to when I first started school and how my personality has changed so much. And then I thought about what we did on the first day of this class talking about all the different hats that we wear. I’m glad that I wear those hats but at the same time I think that the bigger part of who I actually, probably should have been, has been so stifled because of the type of teachers that I have had. …its innocent, they [teachers] do it so innocent as to lower the value of the group of students and to raise the value of another and I think so many people do this unintentionally, but it’s still, its wrong! (Transcription, 9-17)

Zurie was the group leader the day she told this story. She was referencing a section in Wink’s book regarding teachers’ labeling one group of students as normal or regular and the rest as not being normal. Zurie had experienced feeling as if she was not viewed as normal based on her actions and her teachers’ responses to those actions. Gee (1996) pointed out that many teachers from a white-middle class perspective cannot relate to any culture other than their own. Therefore, children who do not come to school with the same perspective and interaction models sometimes conflict with the values and perspectives of the school culture. They are treated differently and asked to change who they are to fit into the practices of traditional schooling. Zurie experienced this first-hand.
as a child, and now she was trying to circumvent this type of marginalizing from happening in her fifth-grade classroom. She believed the practice to be unfair to her students.

The next major step Zurie experienced was a move from her West City comfort zone into the world of private school. She had been in public school all her life until she became what her parents viewed as a ‘problem child’. When she was old enough to go to middle school, they moved her to a predominantly white, private, Catholic school. She had a very difficult time at Carmen because she had been raised in West City where the schools were predominantly black. When she was thrown into a private school with a totally different religion, she was completely out of her comfort zone. She stated:

It opened my eyes to a lot to a whole ‘nother world to see a whole ‘nother group of people, but I rebelled like you wouldn’t believe it. Just some of the hidden little subtleties that are placed there by people that you go to school with for four years straight. You think you really know [them] and [then] something happened in the eleventh grade. One of the girls, her BMW was broken into. And she was dating one of the black basketball star players at that time. And she made the comment in class that she knew that it was somebody black that broke into her car and then she turns around and immediately apologizes to me. “You know I’m not referring to you.” …it would always irritate me that they would classify me as someone totally different outside of my race because she knew who I was. But you just can’t do anything, and it still happens and little kids say “oh, it doesn’t.” I know

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they’re going to experience it and its just a matter of time (transcription, 9-17).

The experience of being taken out of her comfort zone and placed into a totally foreign place was another major event that impacted the way Zurie viewed reality through her own cultural lens. Sleeter (1996) noted that by the time we become adults, we hold deeply ingrained belief systems about human nature and the characters of various social groups. Zurie was able, for a time, to experience a very different social group than she would have otherwise experienced if she had not attended Garmen. Therefore, the constraints of her cultural lens were loosened and assisted her in interpreting the world differently. I deduced that this is one of the reasons that Zurie was able to engage in discourse with her peers and critically read the texts to extract the pertinent information. She allowed other individuals and the texts to influence her practices and, in turn, her belief structure as well.

Changes in Pedagogy

Zurie’s major change was in her classroom practices. During the class on October first, she stated that her classroom focus had changed because she had never thought of her actions as a teacher in a classroom as political.

When it says as a teacher you’re choosing to teach and not to teach certain things, I always teach what’s really comfortable for me and what’s my passion, which is reading. So science and those types of things kinda fall toward the wayside and its not fair to the kids who love it, so I’m making myself [laugh]...at least introduce it...and I said, “Well I can always learn from the kids too”. Whatever it is they bring to it. I can build on that year after year and I’ll always learn
something so that’s my big goal for the year. Is to push more of the things I’m not comfortable with, just because I don’t care for it. Because somebody in there [classroom] needs it.

This was the initial shift in her belief structure that gave her ideas on how she would like to alter her teaching program. Two weeks later, on October 14th, she related an experiment she tried in her classroom. She stated that she had come out of her shell while teaching math. Math is a subject Zurie thought she did not have much confidence in so she taught it in a rather regimented way. However, that day in math she thought that she would do something a little differently. She implemented a hands-on activity with expressions, a concept relating to algebra. She stated that the classroom was getting pretty noisy, but that the students were learning. While the students went through the exercises, they started coming up to her making statements that had nothing to do with her objective. The statements, however, were a connection to a concept that the class had covered in math two weeks previously. She stated that she got as excited about the transition as the children did so they started adding more concepts to clarify and expand the game. Zurie stated, “That was because of this [PDC] because I would have never done that [transformative learning]” (transcription, 10-14).

Zurie came out of her shell and implemented what she had read in Wink’s book regarding transformative learning. Transformative learning is based on the practice that “teachers and students own knowledge, everyone knows something, learning starts with students, students learn to learn, and that communities control schools, not schools controlling the community” (Wink, p. 130). Zurie felt the power and her students’ excitement for the extended lesson and the control they had over their own learning. She
also believed that she had grown professionally and personally by allowing this transformational learning to occur because it was out of her comfort zone. She further related:

It’s part of the process, letting them come-up with the questions … they seem to enjoy the class so much more when it’s not, ya know, teacher directed and they’re learning and their like, ‘oh, you don’t understand either…’ I like them to discuss things with each other and cooperate.

**Zurie: Cultural consciousness and content area literacy**

The next major pedagogical implication came in the form of taking a content area unit that one of her co-participants had developed and implementing it in her classroom. The unit was based on the book, *The Breadwinner*, by Ellis (2001) which was used not only a social studies unit but as a current event connection as well. *The Breadwinner* takes readers into Kabul, Afghanistan, where the Taliban imposed harsh restrictions on the freedom and behavior of girls and women. The book’s central character is an 11-year-old girl named Parvana. Because her mother could not leave the house and work, she disguised herself as a boy and was responsible to earn money for her family after her father is arrested.

During our interview, Zurie related to me that she spent time during her winter break reading and interpreting the book and creating engaging activities to facilitate group discussions with the themes from the story. She used *Journey of a Reader in the Classroom: K-12 Assessment Tasks and Tools* (Dwyer & Thompson, 1999) to create a well-balanced literacy program around the book, *The Breadwinner*. She utilized assignments that she thought would get the children to think deeper about
the subject matter. To facilitate this process, Zurie created a Response and Activity Journal for each of her students. She included the following sections in the journals: (a) a map of Asia; (b) prereading think and predict sheet; (c) a double-sided journal entry section with a quote from each chapter; (d) a word wall section which allowed students to write down unfamiliar words from the reading; (e) 10 sheets of lined paper to be used for reader responses; (f) a character map to map Parvana’s personal attributes; (g) a story plan sheet; (h) character synthesis worksheet; (i) a discussion web; (j) a book talk sheet to act as a summary; and finally, (k) a story pyramid which was completed in dyads to use as a social component to develop an overall perspective of the story and Parvana as well. Along with the response and activity journal, students completed a book evaluation. The book evaluation was a large 12x18 size construction paper folded in half to look like a folder. On the front cover, students were directed to depict one of the scenes from the book by sketching in pencil and then coloring. Many children drew the graveyard scenes as one of the most disturbing and/or influential places from the book. Then, on the inside left, the students were directed to complete a fiction book evaluation worksheet. On the inside right were a few sheets of lined paper in which students were guided to complete a summary response on the book. My observation of Zurie’s class took place on the last day of activities pertaining to the Breadwinner unit.

Zurie: The observation

At approximately 11:15 A.M., I walked into Zurie’s fifth-grade classroom and sat at her worktable in the back of the room. Zurie’s room is configured with
students sitting in groups of six to form tables. Slogans, writing traits, hints for word decoding, and posters representing math algorithms covered the walls in her room. She has a personal library of chapter books that took up one of her bookcases, while dictionaries and basal readers occupied the other bookcase.

I observed Zurie sitting in the front of the room in what she called the “author’s chair” (notes 12-10). She purchased the chair, a cushioned bar stool, so that her students would have a super-sized chair to sit in while they shared their writing with the class. Zurie had one computer workstation, and several tables and/or student desks were utilized for a reading center, a listening center, and a center for small group work.

From Zurie’s position in the author’s chair, she conducted a whole group wrap-up discussion of the book, which included student critiques. Zurie asked, “How was Parvana’s dad when he came back from prison?” When one student replied, “Fine”, she utilized a questioning strategy and restated the question. Zurie kept utilizing this questioning strategy to engage all students. Thirty minutes later, she gave them one last opportunity for any questions or predictions. Then, the discussion went towards a follow-up book, Parvana’s Journey (Ellis, 2002). She ended the discussion by promising to purchase Parvana’s Journey and read it as a teacher-read-aloud during story time. They predicted what the book would be about and then wrapped up and prepared to go to lunch. I left the room and compiled my notes for our interview later that day.
Our interview occurred in Zurie’s room at her back table after school at approximately 4:00 P.M. During our interview, I asked Zurie to tell me how she implemented the book in her classroom and why. She related how she acquired the idea from Beverly’s presentation during the content area unit sharing from the PDC. She modified the unit’s lesson plan to make it work for her class to cover the objectives she wanted her students to experience. She further stated that she used this book as a model for how she wanted the children to approach literature when they moved into a reader’s workshop approach, which they began as soon as this unit was completed. When Zurie and I discussed the connection of the cultures between what her 11-year-old students and the 11 year-old Parvana, she commented:

[I wanted to] take them [her students] out of that fifth-grade world. They’re so into me, me, me, me, and me and find out something. I had heard a few negative comments from them about the World Trade Center, and people in Afghanistan, and people from the Middle East. And I thought, ‘They just don’t know enough about these people.’ So I chose this book because it focused on a child that was their age so they could get an idea of what, ya know, life was like as a 10-year-old, or fifth grader, in another country. It was different from anything I’ve ever taught because I was so into it and they got more into it too (interview, 2-3).

She also related that the students were able to have some control over their learning and expand certain assignments. They were especially good at expanding the
lessons within the geography context. She stated that they were continually coming in and telling her information they had heard on the news or read in the paper. After Zurie completed her retelling of the experience with the Breadwinner, I continued to ask follow-up questions regarding things she had written or said during the PDC.

Zurie: Cultural consciousness

Zurie experienced some cultural enlightenment during the flow of the PDC as well. One week in November, while she was on track break, Zurie watched The Oprah Winfrey show. Oprah featured Michael Moore, who created a comic strip and movie called Bowling for Columbine (2002). Zurie thought the cartoon was so telling about racial prejudice that she wanted us to view the comic strip. She broached the subject this way:

I've always thought that fear—people are afraid of what they don't know. But, I never thought it could go that far, to that extent that he did on the cartoon. But, I've always thought that was the basis of why people, you know, treat people the way that they do...because they are not familiar with or where they are coming from...pretty down and dirty (transcription, 11-12).

The cartoon illustrated how Michael Moore, a white man, thought that racial prejudice and fear came from not knowing or understanding what people have not experienced. He further stated that Americans are inventing things of which to be afraid including the fact that any stranger may harm us. He furthered stated that this premise is complicating race relations, because the news media perpetuates the myth
that black men by presenting them in roles in which they are a menace to society. He described examples such as mugging, car jacking, dealing drugs, and even committing murder. The critical and social justice concepts as presented in the PDC’s program of study made Zurie think about how the critical aspects of race and culture related to her classroom and her own cultural perspectives. She later commented, “even though I am an African American and have been exposed to so many things culturally--I still need to work on removing my blinders throughout my career as an educator in areas other than race” (book walk, 12-10). During one of the early class discussions, she related that she thought the only place where she doesn’t see color is in the classroom. She, instead, viewed her students as individuals with different needs, backgrounds, and attributes.

Listening to you guys talk, I realized I think for one of the first times, one of the only places I’ve never seen color is probably the classroom. Where I just see my students for who they are based on personality because it just does not matter (discussion, 9-17).

Zurie: Deepening of previously held beliefs

Zurie liked to approach issues such as culture, race, and family background with her students by starting her school year with what she called the Cultural Composite Project. This project allowed her fifth-grade students to investigate aspects of their own culture starting with their own heritage, religion, and family, continuing through the surface cultures of foods, styles of dress, friends, and music. She believed that:
When you understand certain things then you understand that person and then you are not afraid. I think people are afraid of what they don’t know and what they don’t understand. I think that is why it is so important that I take that two weeks or three weeks at the beginning of the school year because I want to know those kids. And fifth graders, they stereotype like you wouldn’t believe. And there was so much I found out about the kids. I felt bad because I look at certain kids and you just kinda know and [after the project] I’m just like, WOW! I never had any idea and then they feel good about themselves and its nothing to really be embarrassed about. But I had a few students that I felt like they reached to fit or mold in with whatever’s going on in the class. And they’re at that age where they want to fit in and they didn’t want to really bring out certain things about this in their culture or this about themselves because it didn’t maybe fit in with what other fifth graders or teenagers or adolescents are doing. So, just kinda feel good about, I think you feel better about yourself, once you know more about them, and they know more about you, there’s more understanding.

The previous vignette exudes the overall philosophy Zurie applied to her life. To find out more about people: how they act, why they do the things they do, and to let others be themselves. I have inferred that over the course of the PDC that Zurie was able to incorporate many aspects of critical features into her pedagogy and to broaden her belief system to include alternative perspectives dealing with culture and race both in the classroom and with people in general. Unlike Zurie who avidly enjoyed the course for the cultural component, Jo looked at the class strictly from a
pedagogical point of view. However, the pedagogical aspects, when looked at from a data analysis standpoint, uncovered critical components associated with race and class.

Jo: A Case of Validation

Jo viewed herself as a person with strong family ties. These ties included her heritage, religious background, parents, grandparents, husband, children, sister, and brothers. During our initial class meeting, she described herself as a thoroughbred Pole, because her parents were born in Poland. This is a very significant component to Jo’s overall personal identity, and it is the lens from which she viewed the world and her position in society. A recreation of a web Jo created in relation to her identity is as follows:

Figure 3. Jo’s web
This web illustrated Jo’s views that the main components of her life were her family, friends, and experiences. Throughout the semester, Jo spoke often of her life experiences, many of which included her family and how those experiences made her who she is today.

Jo: *Strengthening of self*

During the time of the study, Jo turned fifty years old. I gathered from data sources that this was a major event in her life, which had wide-ranging effects. Jo got into shape recently and slimmed down from a size twelve to a trim size six. She was the type of person who carried herself with a regal air and dressed in name brand clothing. Jo wore her hair short and changed the style and color every few months. Her midterm cultural composite project was an actual outline of her body, which a friend traced in black marker onto white butcher paper. She then “played with all the graphics on the computer...some specific...some global” (transcription, 10-22) and utilized computer clip art to identify and label specific personal attributes, interests, and culture. She connected, “The pictures represent some of the things each of these people in my life have done, um...I kinda took it as, ‘what did I gain from each of these people’ or the gifts they have given me” (transcription, 10-22).

Jo positioned the computer-generated icons inside the body map at random intervals to symbolize the components she believed made up her life. She then described to the group what each icon represented and why she chose each of the particular icons. One of the icons was a witch flying on a broom. Jo illustrated the choosing of this icon by stating:
This [pointing at the witch] symbolizes my birthday. My birthday is the day before Halloween. So I always kinda said instead of a witch I’m a...[pause]...change the beginning sound [some perplexed faces in the group, some group members knowingly smile]... [whispered] bitch ...[group laugh].

However, she also stated that she only used the icons that she thought were appropriate for a school setting. I interpreted this statement as evidence that she was only showing parts of her multiple social identities. In effect, she was creating a picture of how she would like her co-participants to view her and leaving out the more sensitive parts of her personality, the parts she only allows her closest friends and family to experience. This is something Ivanic (1998) described as wanting to portray ourselves in a certain light in our academic communities. The exhibited parts of her cultural composite included:

- Family: Polish grandparents taught her to do her best and enjoy good Polish food. Her mother taught her how to clean house and garden. Her father taught her to stand on her own two feet and to take pride in her heritage and religion. Her brothers helped cultivate the tom-boy side of her.

- Cooking: Jo enjoyed her father’s praise and her mother’s tutelage.

- Witch: She was born the day before Halloween. She jokingly stated that one can replace the W with a B, and it would still be fitting.

- Astrology: Using the stars, she is a Scorpio and using Chinese astrology, she is a dragon. She reinforced this by saying that being a dragon is possibly why she likes the heat of the Southern states.
Teaching: Jo’s taught twenty-seven years, most of which as a first grade teacher and before that as a life guard teaching swimming lessons.

Interests: walking for exercise, reading for pleasure, enjoying wine with friends

During the time we spent together in the PDC, it became clear that Jo was in a time of personal solidification where she made her social opinions and pedagogical practices seem secure, substantial, and firmly fixed. She evaluated everything in the course from a reflective standpoint. Once such reflection was, “Prior experiences make us who we are...considerations of experiences...define us as people” (book walk, 9-3).

Jo: Deepening of previously held beliefs

During the third class in September, Jo made the statement that for her “everything revolves around being Polish” (transcription 9-20). It was very important to her hold on to her Polish heritage. She reflected about her father and his passion for his European educational experiences, because Europeans valued world history and taught history of many peoples, whereas American’s we focus too much on American history, which is to narrow in scope.

Me and my dad would sit and have long political discussions, even as young as middle school. And [he] would ask me where this was on the map, where that was on the map, and [he would] tell me a little bit of history. Some of it was his bias, but that, nevertheless, was still, um, an experience, learning experience for me. (transcription, 9-20).

She was relating her experiences as a child to how the children of today have changed. Jo stated that while reading the chapter in Wink’s book about a child struggling to learn to read, she thought about her childhood experiences learning to read with the Dick and
Jane series. She stated, “I think the kids today have so much more, so much more, and it is so much more real, that, ya know, we had” (transcription, 9-20). I was able to ask her about this statement during our interview. She said that she was referring not only to the high quality literature available in picture and chapter books, but also the basal reading series we have available to teach from now because it is full of authentic literature.

Later the same afternoon, she described her pedagogical stance from which she teaches her first-grade students:

I do geography, ya know, in first grade we talk about the continents we talk about those types of things, just so they have some kind of small knowledge of it. But, because America is such a baby. And, ya know, in the scheme of things that these kinds of things are just starting to, ya know, get around and people are becoming more aware of the fact that we are a melting pot. You guys say African-American, [I say] no they are Americans first. I believe [that] first we are people.

Jo believed that her father got her ready emotionally to enter school and pushed her to learn the way he learned which she conveyed as, “…the historical perspective in Europe [in which] they teach you history of the world” (transcription 9-20). She stated that in her household, “We as a family we had discussions…a very inteligencia was spoken in my household…we were not afraid to have political discussions, religious discussions…” (Transcription, 12-3)

These statements are evidence of Jo’s strong family connections. Her parents relocated to this country as immigrants. Taking up permanent residence in the United States has had an impact on the way Jo looks at society today. Jo believes in the assimilation notion of the “melting pot” because of her parents’ immigrant status.
However, Sleeter (1996) stated that, “Euro-Americans often describe the U.S. as a nation of immigrants, but describing it in this way minimizes very important distinctions in groups’ historic experiences...” (p. 139). Looking at the United States as a melting pot postulates that immigrants come to the United States and lose their cultural heritage. The melting pot theory is what many white teachers use to minimize the extent of the impact of racial discrimination has on whole groups of people. I reasoned that Jo does not discount discrimination, but instead views the classroom as a place where race does not matter and one in which all students should be treated equally, as evidenced by her statement, “I try to see people, children, for their potential as learners” (book walk, 9-24).

Jo: Experiencing prejudice, not cultural consciousness

Jo stated many times over the semester that throughout her life she has had friends from all different nationalities, races, and income levels. She viewed herself as someone standing up for the underdogs in society because of her own experiences with racism. She related an experience she had had while she was in high school:

I had an experience where one of the administrators walking, ya know, would call me Polack, all the time. ‘Hey Pollock, hey Polack’. And finally, one day, I turned to him and I said, ‘You [can] call me that’, I said, ‘You can call me that, you can call me that anytime you want, but the next black kid that walks up here you use the N-word and then you can call me that.’ Then he goes, he was, I mean, I just laid it on the line with him and he never touched me again with that [slur].

I inferred that Jo thought of herself as coming from a minority background; but the reality is from her looks, talk, and walk, she is one of the white majority. Sleeter (1996)
argued that “...a part of our adherence to the idea that ethnicity does not matter, most whites profess to be colorblind. But in doing so, we cover over the meanings we attach to race, rather than actually dissociating race from meaning” (p. 143). Sleeter further noted that when applying this type of colorblind thought to classrooms, “…teachers, trying to be colorblind, therefore, means trying to suppress the application of those negative associations to individual children one is teaching” (p. 144). When Wink addressed the subject of schools grooming an A team, who have power, and a B team, who are marginalized, Jo made the statement, “Hopefully we are grooming them all...hopefully I mean to see their potential, you know reach that and to realize that they are individuals among masses and be proud of that individuality, there’s nothing wrong with that” (transcription, 9-17). This is another statement of evidence that Jo assumed the assimilation notion of colorblindness. Sleeter (1996) stated, “Since ethnic and racial identities and cultures are difficult concepts to deal with for most white teachers, they tend to reduce multicultural education to a question of individual differences” (p. 144). However, during a discussion about single-sex schools and schools that are predominantly white Jo stated that,

I don’t want to teach in a school that’s like that [all white middle class without diversity]. I would much rather have diversity within the classroom and within the school and I just think I always had it. That’s how I’ve always taught and that’s how I, I grew up (transcript, 9-24).

During the discussions regarding tracking Jo demonstrated that she has not actually considered many of the societal problems the minority students in today’s society face. She illustrated this deduction when she stated:
When I got [read about] the tracking thing. At first, I didn't know what they were talking about. I'm like, what are they talking about tracking? My heads thinking more like year round type thing. I knew I'd heard that term before, ya know I'd heard that terminology, and until I got...anyway sometimes when I read these things I can see how naive I am because I always think that everything is like what it is in our little world. I forgot that other places and other schools I mean, even here or where ever are different. They have different [pause] social tracking and all these kinds of things. I don't know I, I just forget, and I know I've heard that from um, other principals that I've worked for. They keep, ya know, I would say “what do you mean? Why are we doing this” Because everybody doesn’t do that...I have to remind myself that what I consider as normal is not necessarily what is happening all around (transcription, 9-24).

**Jo: It takes hard work**

Jo has a very strong family heritage and bond with her Polish grandparents such as a demanding work ethic. She reminisced about her family’s work ethic sharing vignettes about her father and how he never wasted a minute in the day lounging around, but instead, was always doing something like gardening or working around the yard. Her mother was always supporting the family by cooking, cleaning, and gardening. She also referred to her grandparents as hard workers. This European cultural mindset had been engrained in Jo since birth. I gleaned that Jo does not understand why other people of European descent do not share her beliefs and attitudes about assimilation practices because of a statement she made to me during our interview.
Jo: Questioning others culture

During our interview, it surprised me when Jo stated that she felt that I was almost embarrassed of being white. I explained to her that it was not about being embarrassed, but trying to understand my heritage because my ancestors came from so many different European countries and that I could not identify with any of them. I also was exploring how I fit into this multicultural society as a person of European ancestry and trying to come to terms with the knowledge of white dominance. I explained that I was investigating how to broach the subject of race and culture with other educators and learn to acknowledge stereotypical and hegemonic views that served to perpetuate mainstream and dominant views to possibly alter the way they and other educators view teaching practices from a white, middle class perspective. She seemed to understand my point and told me to research one section of my ancestry so that I would have the feeling of cultural ties. This whole interchange drew me back to my initial assumption going into this study, which was that educators from a white, middle-class perspective do not see that refusing to examine issues of race actually perpetuates the status quo, something that Sleeter (1996) termed white silence on racism.

Jo: Pedagogical assumptions

Jo’s experiences with the PDC actually validated her teaching style and pedagogical practices. She stated that the course’s impact on her was, “Mostly validations with my teaching style and acceptance of others—students, teachers, and all the school community” (book walk, 12-10). I reasoned that the validations came from the concept of the content area units. Segundo’s site-based management team, which Jo is a member, implemented a schoolwide move to content area literacy units with an additional goal of
combining content area literacy (Readence, et al., 2001) with multicultural literature to create a culturally relevant curriculum (Nieto, 2002). Jo still practiced many of the concepts of integrated curriculum and had developed extensive units over the years to integrate content area literacy and math concepts.

I have already taught that way [integrated curriculum]...for me its easier that way, to separate [is hard]...its just a different way, ya know. I’ve done it for so long that way that I don’t even, I mean, my, my day is still structured. They don’t, I mean the kids don’t look at it so much like that. They don’t know, ‘K, now we are going to do math’, ‘now we are going to do language arts.’ I mean they just know, where we’re heading. Ya know, it just like starting off today and talking to the kids and letting them know they are already readers...taking all that needs to be taught in a grade level I do it thematically and through centers...it lends itself for the kids to work on different levels when you did it in centers. Thematic [teaching is] still based on the curriculum. (transcription, 9-3)

Jo was very comfortable with the transition to the content area literacy units and did not have to change her pedagogical practices to accommodate the newly combined units. This made Jo much more at ease than some of the more traditional teachers. During some of the debates over the curriculum, Jo would get frustrated. She expressed her frustration in the book walk on December 10th. She wrote, “I will continue to be less critical of myself with not understanding why teachers don’t get “it”! Teaching students not subjects.” Jo also stated that the basal series that Segundo Elementary adopted as part of their textbook program is full of multiculturally appropriate literature and if teachers utilized the basal series that they would have appropriate multicultural literature.
During one portion of our interview, Jo did express concern and regret over Native Americans. She stated that she had an affinity for Native Americans and that for over two-hundred years, they had to battle for their land and their beliefs. She related the plight of the Native American’s to the people of Poland and Rome when those countries experienced ethnic changes (interview notes, 2-4). Transferring one’s experiences to another’s experience devalues the experience of the Native Americans. To extend this point, during one of the PDC classes Jo described how she utilized a cultural component of content area literacy to teach about the Native Americans.

She stated that she teaches a Native American theme just prior to Thanksgiving. The Native American unit is cross curriculum including the areas of science, math, and social studies. She brought in the story of the Legend of Blue Bonnet. Jo described how she spends a lot of time with her students reading and discussing the book and relating connections to the way Native Americans were before the white settlers came. They utilized maps to look at the areas of the United States map to research what states the Native Americans are living in now and contrast those with the areas the Native Americans lived in prior to the arrival of the Europeans. Students also considered the states’ temperatures and what their lives would have been like if they had lived as the Native American’s lived 200 years ago. These considerations included kinds of crops they would grow, hunting and gathering, types of dwellings, and other basic human needs. Jo also connected the different foods the Native Americans used to a science experiments with Maize. They plant popcorn seeds and grow plants, grind the seeds to corn meal, and make popcorn (notes of transcription, 12-10).
Jo continued to explain that she believed that good teaching comes from allowing students the time to explore, something she called "think time" (transcription, 9-10). In addition, by giving children the latitude to explore and discuss things with one another they in turn become the teachers. This statement, along with my observation, interview, and 15-weeks of course content combined suggested to me that Jo does believed in the Vygotskian (1978) theory that learning is social and must be experienced in meaningful contexts. The meaningful context through which Jo allowed children to experience was in peer teaching through center activities. This is something I connected to in my observation of her teaching practices and classroom set-up. I also explored the concept with her during our interview.

Jo: The observation

I arrived in room 31A just after 11:00 A.M., walked directly through the door, and positioned myself at the back of the room to minimize the interruption to the lesson Jo was teaching at that time. I sat at a table made of student desks and began to sketch the room. After about five minutes, a little boy wandered back to see what I was doing. I just motioned him to sit down, and he relented after seeing that I was just drawing and writing in a journal. Jo was at the front of the room guiding a whole group-reading lesson around the story of a fox and a duck. She was utilizing a repeated reading strategy, and many of the students were able to follow along, answer questions, and predict what would happen next in the sequence of events.

Jo’s room was set-up as a as a model of what McCarthey (2002) termed a community of effective practice. The desks were arranged in a pattern of five desks on one side of the room and five desks were on the other side of the room with the two rows facing each
other. Three student desks connected the two rows at the top of the class to form a U shape. Four other desks were placed in the middle to accommodate all 17 of Jo’s students. Jo had stacks of books around her room in baskets and bookshelves including: big books, picture books, dictionaries, basal series readers, and student made books. The calendar activities, a word wall, and something she called sparkle words covered the west wall. Sparkle words were used to praise the students and have them praise each other. She believed that students buy into the school-wide life skill program when they can use positive language with each other. Some praise words were: dynamite, wonderful, cool, fantastic, awesome, groovy, and out of sight. The south wall was mainly used for teacher information and slogans. The east wall had student work displayed, and the north was occupied by two large white boards. She had written Daily Oral Language (DOL) and Daily Oral Math (DOM) type of work on the boards that the students copied into their writing journals during the morning. She had one computer in the room that the students used as part of center rotations, typically two students at a time. Her whole room was set-up so students could rotate around the room to a variety of centers, which included: listening, reading, computer, writing, math center with manipulatives, and activity. Her first grade students could often be seen working outside of her room in pairs or in groups of three or four. They were always on-task and working hard at the projects they were assigned.

During the time I spent in Jo’s classroom, I noticed many of the pedagogical aspects she had mentioned during the PDC. She continually prompted the children and moved them along without giving them any answers. She utilized a questioning strategy to get them to dig deeper into the texts. She used humor and metaphors to assist with any
unfamiliar vocabulary. I noted in my journal that I thought the students felt safe and secure in the room because during the guided reading activity they were allowed to say out responses, converse, and prompt one another without fear of reprisal. However, even with the minor outbursts the classroom did not turn into a noisy situation. It was all controlled and orderly. To end the lesson, she asked individual children to read the end of story questions from the text. Then, the whole class discussed the questions until a consensus was achieved. The questions were very literal so a consensus could be achieved. During our interview later that day, she related to me that one of her goals of the lesson was to reinforce constantly the vocabulary words.

I discovered four major elements while observing in Jo's room. The elements were (a) positive reinforcement by teacher and peers, (b) using questioning strategies to get students deeper into the text, (c) vocabulary reinforcement, and (d) not giving them anything, making them work for meaning and for decoding too. I asked Jo about these four elements during our interview later that day.

Jo: The interview.

Jo and I met in her classroom around 4:00 P.M. We sat in the front of her classroom at student desks. We discussed the lesson I observed earlier that day and the main points that I took away from it. She stated that she had not consciously thought about the use of a questioning strategy, but after teaching for 27 years, she had just implemented it as another common sense strategy along the way. This reminded me of a comment she made during the PDC, which was, "I have been doing this for 27 years, for crying out loud! I [had] better know something crucial" (transcription, 9-10). She believed that, "...sometimes just by observing too, we as teachers tend to learn more hands-on than

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through a book” (transcription, 9-10). Through my observation, Jo saw her teaching practices though my eyes and was again validated by what I had brought to her attention. I then asked her about what she meant during our time in the PDC when she talked about being Americans first. She discussed, at length, her affinity for the Native Americans, but did not reference any other cultural groups.

The next question I posed to her was regarding her statement, “The more you talk about something a better or different understanding occurs,” I asked if she experienced any difference in understanding with issues such as race, class, gender, and how it applied to teaching over the last semester. She told me that not everybody has the same experiences and that things are not as open now as they once were. She described her past experiences:

Living here in Las Vegas it was never, it never occurred to me that there was any difference between me and the black kid in my class. I mean, yea, we were different color, but that was as far as it went. I would never say, ‘No, I’m going to sit by him or the Hispanic, or Mexican, or Chinese or what ever. I knew there were differences, cause part of that was the way I was raised, we learned about different societies. We learned about history, but it was not that the people were different. Its just there are differences [stressed differences]. I guess what frustrates me, as much as we want it to be the same. The more we talk about it, the more we make an issue about it, the further we get away from it (interview, 2-4).

This statement confirms what Goldberg (1993) proposed as the great irony; by not taking race seriously, we solidify racism. Sleeter (1996) believed, “Western thinking has
reduced racism to an irrational psychological response, while at the same time, positioning Western actors as the world’s most advanced” (p. 61). Jo believed herself to be a non-biased individual with many friends and acquaintances for all races and cultures. However, she turned a blind eye towards racism which perpetuated racism. Nevertheless, Jo’s teaching practices are aligned with the basic principles of content area literacy and incorporated many different genres and multicultural authors. I inferred that Jo tried to do her best pedagogically and culturally for her students. She is viewing the world through the cultural lens in which she was raised.

Like Jo, Beverly has been teaching for almost 30 years in a variety of positions. Unlike Jo, however, Beverly was initially hired as a teacher in Chicago in the early seventies as part of an affirmative action plan to get more African American’s into the school systems. Beverly’s experience in the PDC brings forth additional findings for this study.

Beverly: A Case of Self-Evaluation

Beverly viewed herself as a tenacious and strong person, someone who adheres to her beliefs and values. Her values stemmed from a variety of areas including: family, education, and the various environments Beverly had experienced. A recreation of a web Beverly constructed in relation to her identity is as follows:
Figure 4. Beverly’s web.

This graphic represents how Beverly viewed the main components of her life. She described her family and her prior experiences in school, work, church, employment, travel, and various organizations in which she had held membership as having the most impact on her identity (transcription, 8-20). Throughout the semester, Beverly spoke about her family and the level of impact they had on her life as a young child, into adulthood, and later in life as she was raising her two daughters.

At the time the study took place, Beverly was a fit and trim 56 year-old African America woman, mother of two grown daughters, and grandmother of two-grandchildren. Beverly had been raised in the Midwest and moved to Las Vegas during
the early 1980s. She had only been married to her second husband for just over a year. She was just starting her 29th year as a teacher.

_Beverly: Deepening of previously held beliefs_

One of Beverly’s most significant experiences during the course of the PDC was her midterm project (journal entry, 10-24). She told me privately that the midterm cultural composite project had a strong impact on her because it made her stop and think about her life. This reflecting clarified some issues for her regarding her past and brought back many memories of her youth. She even took the project to her ailing mother’s bedside and shared the memories with her as well (journal, 10-24). She prefaced the presentation of her midterm project by stating that the midterm project was a great experience for her. She woke-up Saturday morning laughing. “I woke Michael up [giggles] and told him, you can’t believe all these memories that are coming back now” transcription, 10-22).

The front cover of the report represented Beverly and included the following names she has been called: “Beverly Dottie Riverwood. I had many pet names including Dottie, honey, sweetheart, Beverly, Bev., grandma, tootsie, babe, and Aunt Bev” (transcript, 10-22).

Beverly was born in 1946, and at that time the small town her mother lived in only had one black doctor and one hospital room for black women. However, this doctor did not have any daughters and emotionally adopted Beverley’s mother. After Beverly’s oldest brother was born through a caesarian the doctor advised her not to have any more children. She did have two more and both were healthy babies. However, when Beverly was born, her mother had to spend six weeks in the hospital to ensure she had a bed to give her when it was time for the surgery. (transcript 10-22).
The previous description of Beverly’s cultural composite presentation outlined a portion of where Beverly believed she gained the foundation of her belief system and cultural identity. Ivanic (1998) stated that individuals have multiple social identities derived from the way we speak, to our cultural background, and our experiences.

Beverly: *No wimps and other cultural connections*

Beverly believed that upon completion of the midterm cultural composite project she had gone through the process of reflection and self-attribution in order to make sense of her life. She related one experience in which her mother taught her a valuable lesson about life at the tender age of four. Beverley and her family lived in a white neighborhood, so there were not any kids for her to play with, so she mostly stayed in the house and played with her mother. A few years later, a little girl moved in next door and she was black. The girl was a couple of months younger and a little bit smaller than Beverly. One day, the two girls were not getting along very well so the younger girl tried to bite Beverly. So she started running back to her house yelling, “Mom, Mom open the door” (transcript, 10-22). Her mother opened the door. And then she yelled:

“Shut the door”. She asked why, and I told her, “Because Clarise is coming and she is going to bite me!” She asked why, and I explained the situation to her. So, she sat me down and gave me this long lecture [about] how we can’t be afraid of people, we have to face our problems. And I continued to play with this little girl and shortly later it happened again. So I am running saying, “Mom, Mom open the door” [participants all laughing loudly now]. I get to the door, I open the screen, because I can’t turn the door knob, I open the screen and there’s my mom. Ya know, I hear ‘click, click’ [simulated the motion by turning her hand]
Participant shouted: She locked you out! [Beverly nods, and everyone laughs]. And there I was with that Clarise [she stressed Clarise] coming, and there was a fear in me that I’d never know before. I mean I was really afraid of that little girl! And I kept saying, “Please mama, open the door”. Then the closer Clarise got and tried to bite me... She bit me [high pitched voice] and when she was getting ready to bite me again. I thought, “Well she just can’t bite me again”, and even at four [years-old] I knew I didn’t want to bite another kid, but I bit her. And when I bit her I felt nasty and dirty. And then I said, “Hey, I’m kicking your butt” [big boisterous laughs from all the participants]. And then I went into the house and my mom sat me down, “Well, you know” she said, “What you did is what you have to do” [laughs all around], what my mom always did, she always said, “Anybody can handle one a-s-s! [she spelled out ass]” She said, “The fight is over when you stop and fight. It does not matter if you win or lose, you have to stop and fight because there are no wimps in our family!” (transcription, 10-22).

This story was at times humorous and heartfelt, but it also illustrated one specific instance in Beverly’s very young existence where her mother taught her a life lesson, a lesson that was almost taken as a family code of honor and conduct. The statement, “no wimps in our family”, is a very powerful ideology in Beverly’s family. They were going to hold their heads high, take care of their own, and not let anyone exert any authority over how they conducted their lives. The additional patterns that developed through Beverly’s midterm project which illustrated her beliefs coincided with the previous patterns of family, environment, and education.

- Consistent parents... work-a-holics, mom up at 4:00 A.M. everyday.
• Daughter: If you could describe me in one word, what would it be [Beverly’s question to her daughter]? Tenacity.

• Parents looked at people as individuals, not at race.

• Between the ages of six and seven seemed like she [mother] spanked me everyday...it taught me to make the right choices!

• Female friends [her friends were alternative kids], fat kids, skinny kids, etc. not just superficial friends.

• Power influence [her black P.E. teacher] always wanted to be a cheerleader, but was put in dance class instead because the P.E. teacher didn’t like her [she viewed it as a grooming process].

• Scriptures

• Being a product of my parents...never wanted to be like my mom, but as I get older, I am more like her.

• I wanted to be a Republican so some black people would be in the Republican party...non-conformist...underdog.

• I really enjoyed doing this project.

• Critical pedagogy is life and life is BIG! (transcription, 10-22).

Beverly elaborated further on her midterm project. She stated, “I will probably keep them [collages] forever” (interview, 2-7). She talked about her aging parents and how her mother had developed a touch of dementia. She further stated that due to her completing the midterm cultural composite, she is continually trying to keep the family memories going:
When I’m with them [parents] I try to make them remember things that I’d done before to remind them of what terrific parents they were. And, um, when I’m with my daughters [I say], “Well, my mom and dad said...blah, blah, blah”. So I am really beginning to go back in the past with them [her daughters], especially now that my [youngest] daughter is going to graduate [from high school]. I’m trying to show her that everybody, ya know, has choices to make. Looking at your mom and dad and what they did and this is what they told me. Ya know, this is what we should consider. This is what you have to think about. So lately, I’ve been un, thinking a lot about that actually (interview, 2-7).

Again, she talked about choices and how the choices people make affect their lives. She reminisced about her parents and how their choices affected her as an adult. Of all the participants in the PDC, I gathered from Beverly’s comments and enthusiasm in her presentation that she enjoyed the process the most. She also learned about herself from the series of actions and was strengthened personally by it because she was able to critically view her past and come to terms with previous experiences that had happened. Those reflections allowed her to understand that all of those instances made her the person she is today.

Beverly: Becoming stronger

One of the conclusions I derived from the analysis of Beverly’s data was that while attending the PDC she was strengthened personally. The course provided her a forum to discuss issues of race, class, culture, gender, and change. Looking at change is something Beverly needed to think, rethink, and unlearn (Wink). Shortly, after the September 17th discussion about critical pedagogy she wrote, “…I’m feeling
peacefulness in knowing [that] I’m not crazy. I’m understanding my need to be flexible and understanding of others’ decisions and actions. I’m not as condemning or critical lately. I always thought life was a constant change and adjustment, but now I’m really experiencing it”. Beverly’s life had been a series of changes, the most difficult one being the death of her beloved first husband and the father of her children. Beverly remarried just a year and a half before the PDC started. She told me it took her quite some time to make a commitment to someone else, but she is glad now that she made that monumental change in her life because she is very happy with her wonderful second husband (head notes, 11-21). During the PDC she made a comment that if you change some “people will call you fickle” (transcription, 10-14). However, she related that reading Wink’s book and learning about change made her feel more comfortable with the whole concept of change. Another aspect in which Beverly had experienced much change is in her career as an educator.

_Beverly: The professional self_

Beverly’s teaching experience started in 1974 when she was hired by a school district in East Chicago, Indiana. She was hired because the state was mandated to employ more minority teachers as part of the Affirmative Action Act. Beverly was one of nine African American teachers hired in 1974 to work as literacy specialists. She indicated that since those positions were initially created as a result of Affirmative Action, because of the minority status the position held, Caucasian teachers would not accept a literacy specialist position in that district until sometime after 1990.

Eighteen of the 29-years, Beverly worked as a literacy specialist, the remaining 11 years she was a classroom teacher. She relayed an experience about what she believed
were good pedagogical practices and the resistance she encountered because of her beliefs. The experience occurred during the time she was employed as a classroom teacher in the East Chicago-Indiana district:

I had an evaluation where my supervision came in and, uh, she questioned something I was doing. We talked about it and she agreed ‘yes, what you are doing makes sense’ [pedagogically]. But, she was an experienced teacher of what, 35 years.

The next year, we had another supervisor who had only been teaching about five or six years. She came in and said the same [questioned her practices] thing and I explained it to her and she didn’t accept it. But, I felt that, that but, I know this was wrong of me, but I felt, rather than make the correction to her specification that I felt that she [pause, exhale]. Uh, I felt that I was right! She wanted me to follow the format of the book because I was in the school district where everyone had to be on the same page at the same time and I was like, about seven pages behind. I showed her how I, I did more extensive [teaching]; I did more with my lessons than the other teachers did. So when I was suppose to do this page I had like three lessons that I would do to prepare the kids for this page and she did not accept that. I really felt that it was ok and that I would take one negative [evaluation] on my report [permanent employment record]...my philosophy was threatened and I had to really say, ‘I don’t believe this’. But, that is, when you are challenged with your philosophy, what do you do? (transcription, 11-12).

This experience of standing up for her beliefs was another point of change for Beverly. Before this instance, she had not stood up to the authoritative powers that were
built into the hierarchical structures in the school system. She felt that she needed to remain dedicated to her pedagogical beliefs and what she viewed constituted good teaching practices that were, in the end, for her students’ benefits.

In the vignette, Beverly demonstrated that she wanted to conform to her administrator’s expectations, until her belief structure was threatened, then she was able to overcome her tendency to conform to her supervisor’s expectations. During the early part of the PDC she wrote, “I have finally arrived at being a risk taker (80% of the time), but I’m still listening to the social and political worlds” (book walk, 9-17). She further described a political stance when she wrote, “[to be counter hegemonic you] have [to have] a strong belief in what you are doing, is the best educational approach for your students (transcription, 9-17).

*Beverly: The interview*

The interview occurred during an afternoon in early February in my classroom. Beverly requested that I did not observe her because she does not have a formal classroom and mainly worked with students on a pullout basis or with other teachers coming up with strategies for individually struggling children. Therefore, Beverly’s interview questions related to what she experienced during the PDC. She continually described her experiences and how her beliefs were situated around the theme of the best educational approaches for children.
I questioned Beverly regarding how the PDC affected how she viewed her position as a literacy specialist. Her response was in relation to the work she does with teachers. In the next vignette, Beverly discussed her beliefs and how she made important connections in the context of the PDC.

It [critical literacy lens] has given me more confidence in the area of choice of literature. Because I can’t believe, I’m over there [in the school’s library] and every time I come across a piece of literature that has another culture in it I put it down [on her wish list] that its one of the books [for our new reading program]. So that [critical literacy] has made me focus more so on that [cultures]. In fact, I’m going to be honest, I’m really [pause] seeing people as, we really have to go into who they are. It will help the children to understand the children.

[For example], I was talking to Mrs. Thurston [another female, African American teacher] the other day. She came in to question me about, to mention, this black history thing, and um, [she told me] a couple of kids [in her class] don’t want to participate. And I said, “Well, who are they?” And she said, “They are da, da, da” and I said, “Well, they’re Hispanic”. And she said, “Yeah, and they said I didn’t cover their [cultural] area fairly”. And I said, “Well did you, because you know there is so much you could have covered back in the fall, did you?” She said, “Well, I felt I did”. I said, “OH”. I said, “Well ya know…” And I would really prefer to do that, ya know. They acknowledge us [African Americans] for a month and I would like to acknowledge [indecipherable] and Hispanics for a month. I think we should know about the others... You should be doing it all year, but definitely if you have missed it, then during its month.
Beverly stated how much learning about multiculturalism through a critical literacy lens has impacted her pedagogical practices. It allowed her to see past her own cultural capital and to relate to students outside her own culture. This expanded Beverly’s belief system in the area of multicultural pedagogical practices. The previous vignettes have shown how through the PDC, peer discussion, reading of texts, and self-evaluation that Beverly was strengthened in many areas.

*Beverly: Strengthening of Self*

It is my inference that Beverly’s steadfast and counter hegemonic attitude comes from her early experiences and was built upon throughout her life. Giroux (1981) described this as shaping one’s own destiny, which in turn becomes a liberating experience. Beverly acknowledged this by writing that, “I’ve learned just how much a family—and the early years have influenced by choices today” (12-10). This comments exemplifies my main findings about Beverly, which is that going through the PDC and participating in this research study strengthened her beliefs about herself, personally “I’m not crazy” and pedagogically “I’m a risk taker”, because it gave her the forum to reflect. She stated that during the PDC, she learned, “To be more observant and supportive to student learning styles” (book walk, 12-10). She also stated that during the PDC she learned “My experiences are my teaching practices. Every encounter I’ve had (in elementary, middle, and high school, college, careers, environments, etc.) has influenced my teaching practices” (book walk, 12-10).

Beverly experienced growth in the areas of strengthening of self and of her pedagogical attitudes during the course of the PDC through reflecting about her past. Like Beverly, Tonya experienced a pedagogical renewal, which stemmed from
experiences with gender-bias. The discrimination she experienced allowed her to view her students as possibly being marginalized due to the limitations of coming from a linguistically diverse background.

Tonya: A case of feminist perspective and pedagogical renewal

Tonya viewed herself as a very strong and self-determined woman. The diagram she drew about herself displayed the concepts of a very strong female. The illustration she created was not actually a web, as the rest of the participants created, but a series of random words on a page. The words were written in a way in which some were combined, yet others were in a section alone. The largest written word on the page was WOMAN. A recreation of her illustration is as follows:

Figure 5. Tonya’s web.

The graphic represented Tonya’s perception of herself and what she considered as different facets of her identity as an individual. These facets included Tonya’s self-
perception as a woman; she is a wife, daughter, aunt, and teacher. During the presentation of her illustration to the class on August 20, she described why she chose the word reader, placing searcher and tired underneath it. She stated that because once she gets interested in a subject, she cannot let it go until she has exhausted all the reading on the subject, which made her tired. At the time she was coming to grips with the issues of “learn, relearn, and unlearn your way to critical pedagogy” (p. 23) from the initial chapter of Wink’s book.

Tonya: Cultural Consciousness

Tonya was seizing the issue of critical pedagogy and wanted more reading materials to assist in the development of a deeper understanding of the whole concept of critical literacy and how it applied to her life. She asked me early one morning for more reading material to assist in her understanding of how critical pedagogy is developed. That request precipitated a lively exchange in our afternoon class:

Tonya was lamenting on the lack of time she had to get everything accomplished to start her new school year. Since the rest of the group was already in their second week of the new school year, they were giving her a hard time:

Jasmine: You’ve got nothing else to do [talking and laughing at the same time]
Jo: I was going to say [in a sarcastic tone]
Jasmine: You should have read the whole [Wink] book, don’t ya think Mikaela?
[continue laughing]
Truman: She did, and she asked me for more reading materials. [gasps and stares come from around the room]
Tonya: Yes, I did!
Jasmine: You’re kidding me, right?

Tonya: No, cause I’m trying to figure this crap out! [laughing].

Truman: What do you mean crap? How am I going to critically take that one?

[sarcastic and laughing tone]

Jasmine: I want a Webster’s dictionary, please [laughing and pointing].

Morgan: [mock laughing] How am I going to critically take that one...I’m sorry [stopped to laugh] I didn’t mean....

Zurie: [interjecting with a big laugh]

Tonya: That’s just a reflection of my frustrational level. [grappling with new ideas from Wink’s book] (transcription, 09-12)

Tonya was grappling with the concept of white dominance. She became somewhat uneasy when we ventured into previously unknown concepts, which included appropriating new vocabulary such as power, equity, access, and social justice in the school context (Nieto, 2002; Powell, 1999; Sleeter, 1996) and it produced feelings of dissonance for her. She described her feelings:

I didn’t really want to see myself as someone that was doctrinating children with values. Cause I kinda felt like that was over stepping my boundaries because its more of a parent job so, ya know I find myself, as the years go by, feeling the need to, ya know, instruct values and teaching things to children and of course we do it everyday. It is still a bit of a conflict for me. It is and sometimes, um like when what ya are saying, like making people little robots or something. I feel like am doing that sometimes. It is a little disturbing (transcription, 9-10).
Nieto (2000) stated that for teachers to overcome disequilibrium they need to “take a stand on social justice and diversity, make social justice ubiquitous in teacher education, and promote teaching as a life-long journey of transformation” (p. 180). Culturally responsible pedagogy acknowledges that teachers need to develop pedagogical skills to teach students of all backgrounds while acknowledging that students’ diverse backgrounds are assets for instruction (Gay, 2000). Tonya relayed how she attempted to incorporate culturally responsible pedagogy by using a school district program called FLES (Foreign Language Educational Services). FLES teaches Spanish in half-hour segments via video tapes. She thought it would be great to have Spanish speaking kids be the experts for a change.

She also stated that she utilizes literature that’s from different parts of the world, such as Rough Faced Girl and Lon Po Po and Cinderellan [Caribbean Cinderella]. She also uses traditional fairy tales to enable her students to contrast and compare the books story elements (transcription, 12-10).

This vignette was taped during the last class of the semester and by the detail Tonya put into the reasons she chose the pedagogy she was trying to overcome the hegemony of primary discourse patterns that her English Language Learners (ELL) experience in her classroom. Green (2001) described this practice as a repositioning of students to be researchers of language. By using FLES to try and shift the ELL students as experts, Tonya was trying to get the other students to gain a respect for minority cultural literacy practices. This repositioning included her ELL students learning multiple literacies, something Gee (1996) called primary discourse patterns. Primary discourse patterns
originate from the home and secondary discourse patterns originate from school. She related an experience in our September 24th class by stating:

A lot of these kids from last year are really standing out in my mind that you know from the books point of view [Wink] have read the world even before they got into my classroom. And probably before they were in kindergarten also, because they were already embarrassed before anything happened and a lot of times I knew they knew Spanish words for something and they wouldn’t tell me. They wouldn’t tell me. They wouldn’t say it. Cause I would ask them, one of them, to speak their language and they would act like they didn’t know [Spanish] and they did (transcription, 9-24).

Tonya’s prior experiences with her ELL students provided her with the knowledge that powerful forces were being applied to her students because were that they had already been so stifled, “probably before they were in kindergarten”. They did not want to take on the role of expert in a language that made them feel embarrassed about their primary discourse patterns.

When discussing this issue in the context of the PDC Tonya stated:

It’s like a wake-up, if you think things are going to be as they have always been, or you know, something’s changed…its like a wake-up call. There’s got to be a shift in thinking. That’s kinda of what she made me think of, it’s a shift in thinking, thinking about living in a multicultural society and you’re going to have to review all your beliefs and ideas about people and each other and find a new way (transcription, 10-15).
I deduced from Tonya’s statements that she was really grappling with the whole issue of what Sleeter called the “we-they boundary” (p. 149). Tonya was trying to “validate their [students] way of thinking” (book walk, 9-3) while trying to understand how her European culture fits into the equation. Then she stated, “The text and discussions have made me think about last year and how I handled student differences, what is valued in my classroom, what I am modeling to students” (9-17). She also stated that she knew that, “We bring our own values and beliefs to the classroom and this effects the way we teach and how we treat students” (transcription, 9-3). She concluded that she “look[s] at cultural and gender issues more critically [now]” (transcription, 12-10). I surmised that Tonya had very personal issues that precipitated her being able to adjust to the alternate and critical way of thinking about educational issues.

Tonya: Experiencing discrimination

Tonya related an event which happened to her prior to her starting her teaching career. I reasoned that her prior experiences with the male dominance and pejorative practices of her past work environment allowed her to develop an alternate perspective. This development allowed her to step outside of her cultural box and to see students as having their own cultural heritage and pedagogical needs. She stated that she had experiences with sexism while working in the grocery industry for 13 years. She believed the environment is different than at a school because most people at the store level were not educated. She stated further that the glass ceiling was not just for women, it was for any minority because it was very much a white male dominated arena.

She revealed that while she was reading Wink’s book she was thinking about the way people carry themselves. While in the grocery industry, women who looked like men...
were promoted. She stated that she vacillated back and forth trying to be herself and trying to act like a man to be the personality that was promotable. She was not successful in this area because when she did promoted, it was still into jobs that were for females.

I would be the manager of a deli department, which is, what am I doing? I’m cooking! [laughs] ya know! And so those kind of things [happened] and um, so ya know, that’s one of the reasons I got out of that business. I just wanted to get out of business all together because I’m not comfortable in that environment. You know, how the hierarchy goes, it doesn’t fit me and it was really painful for me for years to do that. But, since then, since I left there, I feel a little bit better, not much because it was a lot of wasted time and energy all those years. But that, that particular company I worked for, they were part of class action law suits that paid out millions of dollars to people for not promoting females and minorities. I do [feel like suing], but in a way there’s a part of me, I’m happy where I am. And I know I learned a lot [while at that job], but there’s still a part of me that walked away defeated, ya know. And that’s always going to hurt. It’s always going to be a part of me because I spent so much time in it and that I didn’t have anywhere else to go ya know, without any education and no other experiences (transcription, 9-17).

I surmised that Tonya was alluding to her construction of hegemonic knowledge as it related to gender equity. Talbot (1992) acknowledged that when people become more aware of language and how it shapes and constructs them regarding certain practices, they come to realize that particular experiences affect their own social identities, including their beliefs about gender. Tonya lived through what she expressed as a very
harrowing experience. This experience affected her beliefs about society, but it also affected how she thought about herself, “part of me that walked away defeated” (interview notes). However, through this experience she was able to see how women and minorities, including children, are affected by society’s influential powers. This allowed her to take Wink’s prism, which focuses on shades of social, cultural, political, and economic conditions, and apply it to her own life as an individual in society and as a teacher. She viewed her pedagogical practices through the prism to find that she had “renewed motivation to continue improving [her] teaching awareness” (book walk, 12:10). I was able to get a clearer understanding of these practices when I conducted an observation in her room.

Tonya: An observation

I walked into Tonya’s first-grade room on a crisp, February morning around 11:05. Initially, her room appears to be traditionally configured. The desks are in three rows of six, all facing the front of the room. Two large white boards and a sizeable rolling cart which was stacked with all kinds of containers were in the front of the room, which I later learned contained all kinds of math and literacy games. The front of the south wall displayed a calendar and various morning activities that included math, first 100 days of school, weather graphing activity, language or chant activity, along with others. The walls in the room were minimally covered with posters and student work, but much of the original wall covering was left exposed. Tonya was in a class size reduction room, so a brown panel divider had been placed down the center to create two rooms and was now the south wall, to divide her classroom from the teacher next door. The back of her room was the computer, teacher desk, bookshelf, wardrobe, file cabinet, and television. She
had a rectangle table in the back of the room, which she utilized during reading and math groups. Along the north wall was the coat rack, another rolling card, a bookcase with basal readers and dictionaries, and an overhead cart.

When I walked in, I went directly to the back of the room and sat down at the table Tonya used for reading groups. The children were buddy reading or reading by themselves. They were sitting anywhere they chose in the room; some on the carpet, some in chairs, but none of the children were at their desks. The books they were reading were picture books and student made books from years past. I heard two students ask Tonya about stories in a United States book, which I would later find out it was in connection to a past lesson. I also observed two students sharing the computer. They were quietly and cooperatively working on phonics-based software program.

Tonya implemented a transition by stating, “I’m looking for a three point team” (notes 2-5). She was looking for a group of children in their desks with their heads down. The students who cleaned up, went to their desks, and sat down with their heads down were rewarded with a team point. When the children settled into their desks two boys went to the front of the class, it was the same two boys who were talking to Tonya during reading time. The boys were in the front of the class holding a map. They connected the map to the previous days lesson on Harriet Tubman. They noticed that the map could help them trace the route Harriet Tubman took slaves on as part of the Underground Railroad. Tonya allowed the time for the two boys to go around the room to show each of the 17 children in the room the route on the map. Further teacher led conversation occurred, and then Tonya called the class manager, Suzie, to go to the front of the room.
Tonya once again called the class to transition by stating, “Eyes on Suzie” (observation notes, 2-5). Suzie went to the front of the room to lead the class in calendar exercises. She led the class to skip count by twos, syllabifications clap the name of the new student in their class, they read the date, and finally she picked a game.

The games consisted of a series of math-and literacy-related exercises. One of the games that I observed was interactive and very simple. I assisted with the memorization of the 12 months. Suzie pulled out a zip lock bag, containing 12 cards. The cards were approximately 12 inches by 12 inches and were all the same pink color. Suzie randomly chose 12 children by handing them one of the cards. Children came up to the front of the class and put themselves in order by month starting with January. Then Suzie led the class in singing a little song about the months. Tonya asked the class if the months were in order. One child pointed out that two months had been transposed. The students switched places and everyone agreed the months were in proper order. As I observed, Suzie instructed the class in approximately six of these types of activities. It was evident that this was an everyday activity, because the rules and sequences for each game were well known. I exited the room after approximately 40 minutes of observation.

It was evident to me that Tonya believed in, as well as implemented, Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory of practice. Vygotsky noted that when individuals work in collaboration with more capable peers, they have the potential to aid their own development. Tonya acknowledged her students’ differing social and historical perspectives and used those points of view to potentially learn about alternative perspectives from one another. This co-creation of knowledge by peers is what Vygotsky viewed as the Zone of Proximal Development or ZPD. Tonya utilized the ZPD by
allowing her students to teach one another, but she also was hovering just beyond the initial interactions to be able to intervene when the students needed assistance.

In the context of Tonya’s classroom, her students were reinforcing appropriate first-grade skills in the context of playing games with their classmates, in effect creating a community of learners. The creation of a community of learners working within participants’ ZPD’s is what Vygotsky termed a collaborative group. Tonya’s students became a community of learners when they engaged in activities that facilitated their development using the elements of reading, speaking, thinking, writing, and listening (Freire, 1998; Jennings & Di, 1996). Jennings and Di believed that utilizing collaborative communities had benefits for teachers as well as students. They noted that collaboration advanced students’ social skills, which included listening to others, contributing ideas, encouraging peers, explaining oneself clearly. As I alluded in the beginning of this section, the layout of Tonya’s room made it seem as if it was the room of a traditional teacher. However, Tonya’s sociocultural and constructive teaching practices were evidence that she was a contemporary teacher with progressive ideas. We discussed her pedagogical practices in our interview which occurred an hour later in her room over lunch.

Tonya: The interview

I met Tonya in her classroom over our lunch period. We sat in student desks in the front row of her classroom. My first question was in reference to one of her book walk notations where she pondered what made people critical thinkers. When I asked her if she found out what made people critical thinkers, she replied: “It has to come from questions for yourself; it has to be something personal that you want to know. And, um,
something important enough that you would want to explore something and look at it critically” (interview, 2-5).

The second question I posed was regarding her statement about indoctrinating students with values education. She replied, “What I took away from this class [PDC] is to be careful that maybe I’m not stepping on something that is cultural” (interview, 2-5). We went on to discuss how much cultural awareness is really the objective and to learn as much about other cultures as possible so we won’t make any cultural or racial comments unwittingly.

I then asked Tonya about how she felt about the impact of discussion as pedagogical tool. She stated, “Discussion is a more valuable learning tool than I’d realized. That’s part of critical thinking also because you are bouncing your ideas off someone else and I think it does promote critical thinking” (interview, 2-5). Due to that statement, I countered with, “Have you changed your teaching practices due to that realization?” She stated:

Yea, I think I have, um, you know, I’ve always wanted the kids to engage in discussions. But at the same time I’m kinda a control freak, so [laughs]. So, I think I’m more aware of it now and I have made more time for them to discuss as a class (interview, 2-5).

I shared with her my findings from the observation I had made earlier that day. She followed up by stating that she felt that she still needed to do more sharing in her class. She also stated that she was trying to implement that type of practice whenever she could. Then she got this peaceful look on her face and conveyed to me that:
I am in a big change process right now, really with my classroom [practices]. Part of it came from our class [PDC] discussions and then also, just, I don’t know. My sixth year of teaching, just trying to look at myself and see how I can become more effective and I took that one GRIP class and now I’m taking another one. And, um, I don’t know, a bunch of change more so than in other years. I guess I am feeling secure enough that I have things enough, under control enough, that I can do something different and not have everything fall apart on me (interview, 2-5).

Tonya’s final statement confirmed my findings that I have interpreted though all the book walks, artifacts, transcription, and now the interview. Tonya was strengthened pedagogically from the PDC. It also allowed her to use a reflective practice to analyze her beliefs about teaching and learning. She made connections between her past hegemonic experiences with what her ELL students experience both in and outside the classroom. Tonya stated that due to her experiences in the context of the PDC, “I’m feeling more competent as a teacher” (book walk, 12-10) and that “I got to know more about staff members. Concerns of others (classroom) are similar to mine. Renewed motivation to continue improving my teaching awareness” (book walk, 12-10)

Through these examples, I concluded that teachers transformed their beliefs and practices by participating in critical dialogues. However, participants did not all experience the same transformation; some had very little transformation. They instead viewed their experience in the PDC as a validation of their beliefs and practices. These findings are explored further in Chapter Five.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This research provided an analysis of nine teachers as they participated in critical dialogues with the goal of infusing culturally conscious pedagogy into content area units. The objective was initially developed through the site-based management team at Segundo Elementary School and implemented through a professional development course (PDC). Through the course of the study, data were collected and later used to derive conclusions regarding how teachers transformed their beliefs and practices by participating in critical dialogues within a collaborative community. The course provided a forum for a group of teachers to come together to critically engage in authentic discourse to become what Freire (1970) called joint learners. Joint learners teach and learn from each other through dialogue, personal writing, and discourse, essentially creating a community of learners.

Limitations

The greatest limitation in this study was that the findings were subjectively-situated within the group and myself. I was the only researcher who collected the data and all the data were filtered through my social, historical, and political lenses, which included my assumptions, experiences, beliefs, and interpretations. However, I tried to compensate
for this limitation with researcher triangulation and data triangulation. Researcher triangulation included using a research triad to analyze the data, confirm category construction, and placement of data into categories. The data triangulation utilized multiple methods to collect and analyze the data to enhance and confirm the findings.

A second limitation came from the actual group of participants. The pool of participants was 65 faculty members and of those only 12 expressed interest in the course, which led to this study. It is my opinion that the lack of participation was due to the sensitive and critical nature of the course content. Sleeter (1996) contended that teachers, and people in general, have a difficult time discussing issues of race, class, and gender because any form of “multicultural education can be understood as a form of resistance to dominant modes of schooling, and particularly to white supremacy” (p. 2). Of the nine educators who participated in the PDC only four were Caucasian. However, I contend that the multicultural make-up of participants in this study enhanced the group’s depth and understanding of the course materials. The presence of the school’s principal was also limiting, if not hindering to the group. During the discussion of the Wink (2002) book regarding hegemony, the group discussed how Braden had authority over the group because of his status as our administrator. Braden countered, “Here, I’m just another participant” (field notes). However, the hegemonic presence of the participants’ supervisor was evident during the multiple listening sessions of the course tapes. During the time the principal was not in attendance, the group seemed more at ease and talked at greater length on subjects than the times in which he was present.

Another limitation is the professional development course credit. Participants might be motivated to attend this type of course to attain the credit only and not fully participate.
in the discourse for change in practice. Participants who sign-up for the PDC may actually exhibit resistance to the change which may limit the project's impact.

These limitations influenced the interpretation of the results. As I stated from the onset of the study, I acknowledged my historical bias of growing up in a white, middle-class neighborhood with one prominent religion and few minorities. I also stated that throughout the research that my views are colored through my theoretical lens. I have not attempted to generalize the results to other participants and/or settings. I now return to the question guiding this study with the previously stated limitations under consideration.

How Did Critical Dialogue Impact Participants?

Through constant comparative methods, categories were constructed and case studies were analyzed (Merriam, 1998). Through this methodology, I ascertained that the development of this dialogical-based collaborative community influenced participants in a variety of ways. The areas of influence were: impact on classroom practices, cultural consciousness, strengthening of self, and deepening of previously held beliefs. This section outlines the four major categories of influence on all nine of the participants' beliefs and/or practices.

The following section provides the reader a brief overview of the areas of influence on all nine participants as determined by the study. It is then followed by a discussion of the four case studies, which provide the reader a look at each case study participant's beliefs and practices as they were influenced over the six-month period during which data were collected. Finally, an overview of the influences the course had on participants concludes the section.
Impact on Classroom Practices

The category of impact on classroom practices included any references relating to classroom practices, pedagogy, curriculum, and/or teaching. Four participants’ beliefs and/or practices were influenced regarding the operation of their classrooms due to the time they spent in the PDC. Throughout the study, Aurora related her frustrations with the education system. During the dialogical interactions with her peers and by completing her midterm cultural composite, she was able to look at her teaching practices through an alternate lens, which provided a new way of viewing her pedagogical practices. Her personal life was also affected; while researching her family tree, she discovered living relatives she did not know she had. She stated this had a profound effect on her because she did not know much about her father’s side of the family.

Zurie was the participant who exhibited a significant change in her pedagogical teaching practices and her belief structure. She came to the realization that classrooms are political entities and that by teaching in her comfort zone, she was marginalizing certain students. Due to these revelations, Zurie made changes in her pedagogical practices to include culturally relevant curriculum.

The prior experiences Tonya encountered while in the business world colored the way she viewed society. She understood how insidious discriminatory practices could be to a person’s self esteem, and she used this knowledge as a precursor to developing curriculum for her English language-learning students. She stated during our interview that the time she spent in the study was the impetus she needed to continue improving her teaching awareness.
Jasmine was a first-year teacher and was striving to develop her pedagogical skills in all areas. The impact of the dialogic learning for Jasmine was that she realized the value in the cooperative aspects of learning from and with peers. Due to Jasmine’s personal history of moving to the United States from the Sudan in her teens and speaking very little English at the time, she tended to be a person who did not rely on others for assistance. She prided herself on getting good grades and excelling under her own authority. Gaining the knowledge that additional perspectives can enhance the educational perspective of her students was a significant development for Jasmine.

Cultural Consciousness

The category of cultural consciousness included any references relating to culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, the culture of teaching or schooling, and any references to students’ cultures. Much of the data referenced identity, race, and culture. Asia was the participant that exhibited the most change in her cultural awareness and how it related to her classroom practices. Throughout life, Asia had lived in many countries, and she thought she taught in a culturally-conscious way prior to the study. However, she experienced a reflective period, which caused her to alter her teaching practices and include more of her students and their parents’ backgrounds and cultures into her pedagogical practices. “Various identities in the classroom which included the students and my own can be utilized to enrich classroom lessons, activities, and classroom life in general” (book walk, 9-3).
Strengthening of Self

The category of strengthening of self included any references to personal issues regarding family, friends, self, and/or identity. Beverly experienced enhancement of her beliefs regarding her self. She also encountered personal changes in the way she viewed herself within the context of her social and historical family setting. She came to believe, based on the readings and class discussions that she was a conscientious teacher with philosophical beliefs that were congruent with the readings and discussions that unfolded during the course of the study.

Mikaela came to me a few months after the end of the course and conveyed that she had started her master’s course work at a local university. She related an experience from a class discussion in which she participated instead of sitting back, letting others express their opinions, which is what she used to do before learning about critical practices. She was able to engage in the conversation even though her view was in opposition to what others were saying. She said that it was due to the dialogical interactions with peers reading course materials provided the context to withstand her hegemonic position in the class. She had an opinion and was no longer content to sit back and be afraid to oppose the mainstream opinions of other class members or the instructor.

Deepening of Previously Held Beliefs

The category of deepening of previously held beliefs included any references regarding a conviction of truth or statements that a belief was more profound than it was prior to the study. Braden was one of two participants who experienced a deepening of previously held beliefs. He expressed that his philosophical beliefs regarding how he...
operated his school had been validated. He stated that his beliefs about teaching and learning had been affirmed by the participants and the authors he read. The second participant that experienced a deepening of a previously held belief was Jo; she experienced reflectivity and validation as a person and teacher. She believed her teaching practices had been endorsed by what she read and by the dialogical interactions of her peers.

Case Study Discussion

Zurie

During the six months I spent documenting Zurie’s professional and personal beliefs and her pedagogical practices, I noted that she made adjustments in a variety of ways: (1) allowing her students to be involved in some classroom planning and guiding the direction of some lessons, (2) viewing her classroom as a political entity, (3) looking at each student as an individual person, not just at their race, and (4) implementing a culturally relevant content area literacy unit.

As a participant, Zurie supplemented the course materials with her personal stories and open dialogue. She provided concrete examples of her childhood cultural biases of Caucasians that developed due to her experiences as a small child. She strengthened her personal history to include her parents’ vast input on her belief structure because of her father’s insistence on her learning Black history and her mother’s persistence that she treat everyone with a Christ-like perspective regardless of skin color. Growing up through her teens and into adulthood, she experienced both racism and friendship with individuals outside her race, culture, and socioeconomic background. I came to the
conclusion that Zurie was open to the process of transforming her personal and professional beliefs and pedagogical practices due to these previous experiences.

Jo’s experience during the course of the study was much different than Zurie’s. I surmised that one reason was due to the differences in years of teaching experience. Zurie had just begun her second year teaching while Jo had just started her 27th year as a teacher. A second reason was the lens from which Jo viewed society. Jo is the daughter of two Polish immigrants and her family life revolved around being Polish. This included, but was not limited to, family foods, schooling, work ethic, and religious viewpoint. This first generation immigrant perspective was the lens from which Jo viewed her classroom, pedagogical practices, and society-at-large.

Jo made various statements during the course of the study regarding her beliefs in the assimilation notion of the melting pot because of her parents’ immigrant status. These statements included, “You guys say African-American, [I say] no, they are Americans first. I believe [that] first we are people” (transcription, 9-20). Sleeter (1996) theorizing that if all immigrants are assimilated into the dominant Euro-American culture in the United States it means that immigrants lose their own cultural heritage which invalidated Jo’s statement.

Jo also believed that by discussing issues of race and culture, we are actually perpetuating the racial divide. Sleeter stated that when applying color-blindness to classrooms, educators are trying to suppress negative associations to individual children they are teaching. This is an actual dichotomy to a statement Jo made regarding all-white
schools. "I don’t want to teach in a school that’s like that. I would much rather have diversity within the school..." (transcription, 9-24).

During the study Jo mentioned many times that while growing up in Las Vegas she had many friends from all races, cultures, and walks of life. However, I surmised that Jo does not understand the actual cultural differences of her students only that they look different by skin color and therefore, if you ignore the color of the skin, everyone is the same. The course readings and dialogical interactions with peers did not impact Jo’s personal or professional beliefs regarding race, class, or gender. In fact, she perceived that the course actually validated her belief structure.

*Beverly*

During the time of the study Beverly utilized the course to look introspectively at her personal beliefs. During the study Beverly experienced the realization of how her current personal and professional belief structure had developed. Beverly believed that she was who she was today because of the strong family life she enjoyed as a child. Her mother taught her at age four that her family would not tolerate “wimps” (transcription, 10-22). She took this experience to heart and still remembers it very vividly to this date. Ivanic (1998) stated that individuals have multiple social identities derived from the way we speak, our cultural background, and experiences.

It was the theme of strength and change that Beverly returned to each week during the course of the study. She traversed the course materials in her traditional up-beat and common sense way. She related her own experiences to assist other participants in understanding her life and the experiences she had over the past 50 years that coalesced into the person she is today.
Tonya

Throughout the study Tonya was also going through a time of change. She had been teaching for six years and thought it was time to revamp and enhance her teaching practices (interview, 2-03). She was trying to incorporate multicultural teaching practices to facilitate her English language-learners’ transitions into learning the English language. She was also trying to incorporate teaching materials that reflected her students’ cultures. Tonya was the only Caucasian participant who really struggled with the course materials and strived to grapple with the critical pedagogical and critical literacy theoretical frames. Six months from the start of the study, she was still anxious about the politics of the classroom and how to teach the state-mandated curriculum while addressing her students’ needs. She was coming to grips with the idea of white dominance and incorporating new vocabulary such as power, equity, access, and social justice into the context of her classroom. During our interview, she stated that she believed she had made great strides, but still had a long way to go.

Implications for Professional Development: Teacher Education Courses

Jennings and Di (1996) suggested that a group of participants becomes a community of learners when they engage in activities using the elements of reading, speaking, thinking, writing, and listening that facilitate their development. John-Steiner (1996) stated that a group of colleagues mutually creating knowledge as a thought community. Whether a thought community or a community of learners, when a group of colleagues comes together to investigate aspects of critical literacy through dialogical inquiry, the
process does have the potential to influence teachers’ personal and professional beliefs and pedagogical practices.

Additional consideration relates to participants’ willingness to investigate lexicons, such as power, discrimination, resistance, dominance, oppression, membership, race, socioeconomics, and culture. Teachers hear about discriminatory and oppressive practices in the context of their teacher education courses, society, even the nightly news. However, terminology such as this in the context of a school improvement project has the potential to cause dissonance and denial in some participants as they consider the context as applicable to their own personal lives.

Another consideration involves the context of tools. The rigor of reading materials is a major factor. In academia, Wink’s book is not considered a rigorous course of study. However, for a group of teachers who are unfamiliar with critical and sociocultural theoretical frameworks and the coinciding vocabulary, a book such as Sleeter’s (1996) *Multicultural Education as Social Activism* may be too much for them to process at an introductory level.

A final consideration that emanates from this study relates to the context of the political nature of the education. Giroux (1981) stated, “Existing instructional arrangements reproduce themselves, in part through a form of cultural hegemony” (p. 47). It is through the existing power structure that schools unwittingly perpetuate the economic and class structure of the industrial societies of the West. If this cycle of reproduction is ever to be broken, it must begin with teachers and students. As Luke (2000) acknowledged, teachers must be given the tools to learn about critical literacy and the political truth of the relationship between schooling and existing power structures. It
is through dialogical inquiry interventions, such as this professional development course, that teachers are given the freedom to discuss taboo subjects such as race, culture, class, and gender.

Suggestions for Future Research

The study of teachers transforming their beliefs and practices by participating in critical dialogues though a school-based professional development course is not a new idea in the sense of the impact and processes involved in collaboration. However, there are areas of study that still need to be explored. During the data triangulation portion of this study one of the peer reviewers stated, “This course seems to be a first step in assisting teachers to understand how cultural consciousness can be transferred into classroom practice” (e-mail correspondence, 2/19/02). It is just the first step with many follow-up steps to monitor.

An area of follow-up study is to discover how negotiating critical dialogues within a group of colleagues can open the discussions regarding resisting racial, economic, and gender awareness and how it impacts classroom teaching. This is something Sleeter (p. 65, 1996) referred to as “teachers understanding the social order from their social locations.” To elicit teachers to fully participate in these types of studies, and not have them just tell people politically correct notions, but to truly interrogate participants’ own beliefs and practices, they will need to look introspectively. JanMohamed and Lloyd (1987) stated if discourse on practices of integration were enacted prior to participants’ understanding of their own self-definitions integration will not take place. Further assimilation by the dominant group would occur. Ivane (1996) stated participants must
research and understand their autobiographical selves before they can learn about other cultural perspectives.

Researchers proposing to conduct similar studies should consider a few essential points:

(1) The text and reading materials: Are the texts appropriate for the group of participants?

(2) Vocabulary development: Vocabulary development is a very important aspect of the intervention process. Participants must understand the theoretical framework of critical literacy and sociocultural theory and the associated vocabulary to be able to grasp the concepts as they come about through the dialogical process.

(3) Initial activities: The initial activity of the class must consist of team building through the collaborative aspects of the course. To facilitate initial dialogue during this study, I asked each participant to bring in an artifact, which represented something special about him or her.

(4) Reader response activities or book walks: In the context of this study book walks were a method for participants to get into the reading materials and discuss mark a section of text they felt was important or needed clarification and dialogue. During this study, each participant completed the book walk prior to coming to class each week to aid in the dialogic inquiry. Additionally, I created think sheets for each class, which had several triggers or thinking questions from the chapter that I hoped would elicit responses from the group and assist to initiate the class discussions.
(5) Context of location: The location of the class is very important. During two weeks of the study, the library was hosting a book fair and the group was relocated to the art room. The carpetless room with laminate counters was not as inviting as the library had been. The two classes that were conducted in that room were not as dialogically engaging as the other classes in the library.

(6) Midterm and final projects: Projects should be geared around the concepts presented in the textual readings. The midterm project in this study was a cultural composite, which was an excellent counterpart to Wink’s book. The cultural composite allowed participants the opportunity to turn their research skills introspectively to realize what assisted in cultivating their identities. The final project corresponded with McCarthey’s book on writer identity and supported the notion that children must be at the forefront of our educational objectives, which includes their culture, race, gender, and academic backgrounds.

A final suggestion for future research that stems from the findings of this study is to closely explore the connection of participants’ backgrounds. I theorize that the findings of this study would have been quite different if all the participants would have been Caucasian. Caucasian teachers do not typically have an understanding of how their white-middle class lens of power has the potential to discriminate, marginalize, and constrain students (Ivanic, 1998; Powell, 1999). Half of the participants in this study were from minority backgrounds and two participants were born in other countries and later moved to the United States. They had firsthand experience of how difficult it was to learn our language and customs. The differences in participants enhanced and gave credence to the multicultural aspects of the course and, therefore, the study.
Future studies can extend the findings in this study by including additional interventions across multiple school contexts. Utilizing multiple schools with a wide variety of participants to triangulate findings would provide a much broader representation of how teachers' beliefs and practices are influenced based on dialogical inquiry of critical literacy. A longitudinal study would also be recommended to determine whether participants a year or two from now discerned the shift in beliefs and/or practices that occurred in the context of the study had deepened or to determine whether the participants had regressed to their former beliefs and pedagogical practices.
APPENDIX I

A Critical Look at Content Area Literacy
Paul L. Segundo Elementary School – Fall 2002

PARTICIPANT REFLECTION SHEET

September 3, 2002

Name: ________________________________

1. Based on the previous class’s discussions what are some of your opinions about identity and how it relates to the classroom?

2. How do you see your identity as an educator impacted by the knowledge of your identity and your students’ identity as an integral part of classroom life?

3. What questions are most important to you in the context of your life right now?

4. What are some of your elusive answers?
APPENDIX II

A Critical Look at Content Area Literacy
Paul L. Segundo Elementary School – Fall 2002

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PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SHEET

Please complete this form. If any portion of this form makes you feel uncomfortable, please do not complete that section. This form is to receive demographic information only. All names will be withheld and a pseudonym will be utilized in all written documents. If you have a preference write your choice of pseudonym in the blank below.

Full Name: ____________________________________________________________

Choice of Pseudonym: _________________________________________________

Individual Uniqueness: _________________________________________________

PARTICIPANT’S TEACHING EXPERIENCE

1. _____ years as a CCSD classroom teacher
2. _____ years as a classroom teacher in another district
3. What other positions have you held in an educational setting other than a classroom teacher?

4. _____ total years in the educational workforce

HOME LANGUAGE SURVEY

1. First language learned by participant?
2. Language spoken by participant with friends?
3. Language spoken in the home?
4. Any thing else you would like to include?

PARTICIPANT’S RACE:

1. _____ White (not of Hispanic origin)
2. _____ Black (not of Hispanic origin)
3. _____ Asian/Pacific Islander
4. _____ American Indian/Alaskan Native
5. _____ Hispanic
6. _____ Other
7. Heritage information you wish to include:

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