On a path toward culturally sustaining pedagogy: how teachers experience race, culture, family, and family literacies in a professional development course

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ON A PATH TOWARD CULTURALLY SUSTAINING PEDAGOGY:
HOW TEACHERS EXPERIENCE RACE, CULTURE, FAMILY, AND FAMILY LITERACIES
IN A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COURSE

by

Laura Elisabeth Szech

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the
Doctor of Philosophy degree
in Teaching and Learning
(Language, Literacy, and Culture)
in the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

May 2019

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Renita Schmidt
This study is dedicated to elementary school teachers:
Thank you for your tireless work.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In yoga, we practice stability by standing tall, arms high up in the air, chest up, head tilted toward the sky, palms open to receive. Tāḍāsana. As we sweep our arms down and out to a T and dive forward, we bend in half, head completely to the ground to offer up all gratitude. Uttānāsana. Because you have supported my stability along the way, I now bend to you. Thank you.

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Last but certainly not least, I bow in gratitude to my family and closest friends: Mom, Alan, Dad, Karen, the Popetz’s, the Szech Sr.’s, Joanna, Jeanne, Stef, Laura, Marnie, and Maggie, for shaping me into the woman I am today. I would not be here without your love and support.
ABSTRACT

Public schools teachers in the U.S. strive to reach the needs of all students in the elementary classroom. However, teachers are increasingly expected to follow standardized curriculum. Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (Paris, 2012) pushes toward individualized educational practices and against the assimilationism embedded in standardization. This study considers the ways in which nine women-identified teachers, one Black, two Latina, six white, who teach elementary school in a Midwestern university town, experience, discuss, and implement Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy in a professional development course, specifically through the lens of the following question: In a course on culturally sustaining pedagogy, how do teachers experience race, culture, families, and family literacies?

Grounded in empirical research that considers teaching and learning through a sociocultural lens, and in the theoretical scholarship of Critical Discourse Analysis and Critical Pedagogy, the purpose of this qualitative, narrative inquiry is to describe teachers’ learning and responses to culturally sustaining pedagogical practices in order to understand this process and its implementation.

Data for this qualitative inquiry were gathered over five months in a professional development course setting using the qualitative methods of observations, interviews, audio recordings, photographs, detailed field notes, and participant self-reflections. The data collected was analyzed through descriptive coding (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014), narrative analysis (Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011), and Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2015; Gee, 2014).

Results from the study suggest that engagement in culturally sustaining practices is constrained by the standardizations of school, in addition to the discomfort and lack of knowledge of some teachers when talking about race and power in the elementary classroom.
Findings also suggest that teachers’ explicit engagement with research and discussions regarding these constraints led to new culturally sustaining practices.
PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Public school teachers in the U.S. strive to reach the needs of all students in the elementary classroom. However, teachers are increasingly expected to follow one-sized fits all curriculum and standards. Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (Paris, 2012), a method of teaching that responds to individual students by celebrating and upholding their cultures in the classroom, leads to individualized teaching. This study considers the ways in which nine women-identified teachers, one Black, two Latina, six white, who teach elementary school in a Midwestern university town, experience, discuss, and implement Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy by answering this question: In a course on culturally sustaining pedagogy, how do teachers experience race, culture, families, and family literacies?

The purpose of this study is to describe teachers’ learning and responses to culturally sustaining teaching methods in order to understand this process. Data for this study was gathered over five months in a professional development course setting using observations, interviews, audio recordings, photographs, detailed field notes, and teacher self-reflections.

Results from the study suggest that teachers who try to be culturally sustaining have a difficult time due to the standardizations of school and due to the discomfort and lack of knowledge of some teachers when talking about race and power in the elementary classroom. Findings also suggest that teachers’ explicit work with this material led to new culturally sustaining teaching practices.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

With my field notes journal and pencil in hand, I walked up to *Mainwood Elementary School, the site where I would be collecting my dissertation data. Excited and nervous to get started, I arrived thirty minutes early to Back-to-School Night. I was there to observe the interactions and relationships between the school as an institution, the teachers, and the families. When I walked up to the building, I found myself locked out with the other “guests,” the term the principal used for the parents. I felt frustrated thinking, ‘I’m not a parent. I’m here to help!’ As I stood there a minute amongst a growing sea of parents, I checked myself as someone who was neither a teacher nor a parent at this school and needed to remember that. I was an outsider, a researcher leading a family literacy professional development class with nine of the teachers, and that evening, although I was there to take field notes, I was just a visitor. As I shifted my thinking into the lens of researcher, I was there to observe the parents’ perceptions of the school and the outward signs of relationships with the teachers and the institution of school (or a lack thereof).

This dissertation study investigated teachers’ perceptions and discourses about race, culture, and family during a professional development course on family literacies (for course outline, see Appendix A). I considered the ways teachers talk about families and analyzed how their discourses shifted alongside the new information and peer discussions that I listened to and observed during the course. This study explored how they reacted to and questioned materials provided about race and culture (Majors, 2014; Rogers and Mosely, 2006), family literacies (Allen, 2010; Dudley-Marling, 2009), funds of knowledge (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005), parent partnerships (Irish & Parsons, 2016; Louie & Davis-Welton, 2016), discourses of power (Delpit, 2006), and various children’s books that were shared. In addition, this study looked
closely at how teachers developed deeper relationships with families through family visits and what they did with this new information. As I analyzed the teachers’ perceptions, I became more aware of my own implication in the study as a white woman, leading a course on culturally sustaining pedagogies. I became very interested in learning how to further conversations about race, culture, families, and parent relationships in my own work and with elementary teachers. Heeding the call of Lensmire et al., (2013), “there is a great need for detailed and thoughtful accounts of what actually happens, good or bad, when we pursue such work [antiracist teaching] in university classrooms and professional development” (p. 428). Through detailed descriptions of this study, and my reflections on the process of teaching it, attempt to answer this call.

During this study, I documented the professional classroom talk of teachers through observations, journals, course assignments, and interviews. Using the funds of knowledge theory (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005), an asset-based approach to teaching and learning, I framed the course around family connections and cultural literacies. These topics turned to unexpected conversations of whiteness and hegemony, and then circled back to conversations of the importance of sustaining cultural literacies. Because of this turn of events, in this research I also reflect deeply on how my own thinking, decision making, and perceptions as a white researcher who was working to understand racism and white privilege informed the course and write-up.

**Back to School Night**

Locked-out at the front doors to the school, I, a white woman and former elementary teacher, waved through the front glass until the secretary saw me and opened the door for me. I re-introduced myself to the white principal and asked how I could help. She directed me to set up t-shirts on the playground with the local Kiwanis group. I helped them set up a bit, then quickly realized I was locked out again. By this time, there were about 30 families crowded by the
entrance and there was no way I was getting back in. Although in the moment I was frustrated, in hindsight I am so glad that I had that experience. It felt awful to be locked out of a place where I thought I belonged, just as the parents did. What kind of message did locked doors send to the students’ families? As a former classroom teacher, I know why the schools did it— the parents would definitely come in early and expect the teachers to be ready. Teachers needed their time protected. However, in that moment on the outside of the locked doors, I felt insignificant in the crowd of parents, as I imagine at least some of the parents did as well. It is difficult to feel insignificant when you feel you have a rightful place somewhere. This space, after all, was not a space where research was the primary purpose of the space. My observations were those of an outsider. I was here as a former teacher, a doctoral student researcher, and a white teacher educator who hoped to help teachers learn more about culturally sustaining pedagogy.

As I stood there waiting outside, I noted that many of the parents did not speak Dominant English as a first language. I heard Spanish, French, African American Language, and Lingala (a language spoken in the Democratic Republic of Congo). At 5:30pm on the dot, the principal came out and welcomed her “guests,” in English, with a short speech about what to do and where to go. I wondered if the parents knew what the principal was explaining. The principal finally unlocked the doors and said, “C’mon in!”

A steady crowd of families streamed into the building from just this one unlocked door. In this time of school shootings and other violence, schools don’t open multiple doors. I found myself a place to stand by the office, but out of the way. Remembering Glesne’s (2016) observation that my stance as an observer can make me look and feel like, “a spy of sorts” (p. 65). I decided I needed to take notes on my phone. Pulling out my field notes journal and
writing furiously was going to be way too weird. At least on my phone, I just looked like I was obsessively texting someone.

I noted the loud and friendly atmosphere. It was a little chaotic and very crowded, but full of hugs and “how was your summer?” and “he’s gotten so big!” The young white office manager, who spoke in both Spanish and English, knew most parents by name and they seemed to know her. I overheard my former classmate speaking in French to a family. I thought that they likely needed many more employees speaking many other languages to accommodate this situation. The secretary had printed a bus route map on the wall on 8 ½ x 11 paper. It was so small and there were so many new-to-the-school and non-English speaking families trying to understand if they could ride the bus or not. It did not seem to be very helpful to them.

Many of the families clearly knew each other. A very pregnant Black mom slowly waddled through the crowd and sarcastically said to another Black mom, “I’m 37 weeks; I’m running tonight!” A white teacher hugged a Black dad and said, “Congratulations on the baby!” A Black dad teased a Black boy who was not his son saying, “Boy, you grown now!” Spirits were high, but I also overheard complaints about how hot it was, and I observed plenty of people fanning themselves with the colorful informational newsletters the teachers had created for the event.

I stood near a white male English Language Learner (ELL) teacher much of the evening. He was wearing a tie and I assumed he was the vice-principal. He laughed when I asked if he was the vice-principal, and I realized my own stereotypes about what “principals look like.” Many people seemed to know him. A white dad came up to him and shook his hand formally, asking about his summer. Later, a Latina mom did the same but with more enthusiasm. At one point, a Black teenage boy, who identified in conversation with the ELL teacher as being in 11th
grade, was there with his younger brother, perhaps in 6th grade. The ELL teacher shook his hand firmly and said, “Why isn’t your dad here?” to which the boy shrugged awkwardly as if that was a strange question. It struck me as a situation where the school perceived a family’s role on this night very differently from how this boy’s dad did. While the teachers wanted the families to come and meet with them, the families seemed to just want the information (bus routes, teacher letter, school supplies, etc.) they were supposed to gather before school officially began. Later, I observed a Black mom with two younger kids in tow who was having difficulty pushing a stroller through the crowd, say to another Black mom, “I’m done. In and out. I don’t play no games.” It occurred to me that the teachers perceived this event as fun and family-oriented, but it was really pretty stressful for some of the parents with multiple children or ones that didn’t understand where to go or what to do.

The crowd was winding down when the principal’s voice came over the intercom and thanked the families for coming. She asked them to respect the teachers’ time and allow the teachers to go home to their own families. She closed with an excited tone of “Goodnight, see you Thursday!” As a teacher for seven years, I remembered being so thankful for that announcement because family events were always exhausting whirlwind events.

I decided to walk around to observe the classrooms of the teachers in my study. I wondered what information they were giving to parents. In Amira’s room, a few of the desks still had papers on them, indicating that those families hadn’t come (see Figure 1). I wondered who those families were, and why they didn’t come to Back-to-School night. Perhaps they had to work? They knew it would be very crowded and chaotic? Or maybe they knew could always get the information on the first day of school and didn’t need to attend this event.
Amira’s packet contained lots of information for the parents, all in English. Her introductory letter was welcoming and included details about her family and personal life. I noted that the closing said, “Your scholar’s teacher” which reflected the way she spoke to her students when I had briefly observed the year before. The sheet on the left described how to “build” a reader. It had ideas such as, “explore books,” “pick good fit books,” “ask questions,” tips for “beginning readers,” and finally, “Read, Read, Read!” These were all common terms and ideas I was familiar with from being an elementary school teacher and they indicated what reading expectations were important in this classroom.

Back-to-School Night celebrates the beginning of the new school year. Mainwood was filled with excited teachers, diverse families with happy children, and diverse languages were heard everywhere. Teachers appeared to be eager and excited about the school year ahead and to teaching a new class of students. I also looked forward to working with teachers and families, as my opening notes documented my first feelings in the setting for my dissertation research.
Statement of the Problem

While the student population in the United States has become increasingly diverse, teachers remain overwhelmingly white (MacPherson, 2010). Studies show that many white teachers are unaware of their whiteness as a form of power and privilege which impacts their pedagogy (DiAngelo, 2018; MacPherson, 2010). Common classroom literacy instruction and practices continue to fail many students of diverse backgrounds (Au, 2006, p. 2). Teachers learn about diversity and pedagogy in their teacher preparation courses such as courses explicitly on diversity or the research, texts, and critical uses of children’s literature are embedded in other courses such as literacy methods, content disciplines, and practicum. However, as the relevant research on teachers engaging in pedagogies that sustain and forefront student culture shows (outlined in Chapter Two), this type of undergraduate preparation may not be enough to prepare the teachers for the realities of the classroom.

As this study began, protests and movements regarding diversity and equality were fervent in the public sphere. Women’s Marches and the Black Lives Matter movement gave push and purpose to sustaining and celebrating diversity in the classroom and beyond. With so much attention in the national and local news media about unequal pay and treatment of women and people of color (Connley, 2018), and so much attention to disproportionate violence against Black men in particular (Lowry, 2018), this course I taught was relevant and provided content knowledge for teachers who were interested in these movements and taking action.

Many teachers, like the ones in this study, discuss diversity in their everyday workplace, in various professional developments such as implicit bias training, and there is a plethora of research highlighting the benefits of responsive pedagogy (Alim, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2009; 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014). In this study, I define ‘responsive pedagogy’ generally as a teacher responding to students’ needs. The teacher is driven to make decisions based on her students, not
based on the pacing of the curriculum or external demands. When the word “cultural” is added to the front of responsive pedagogy, it can be defined as a way to put culture at the forefront of a teachers’ decision making in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2009; 2014). *Culture* remains one of the hardest words to operationalize. In seeking a clear definition for this study, I summarize many explanations of *culture* as bringing together the knowledge, conceptions, behaviors, and values of a subgroup of people (Banks, 1981/2016, p. 72-73). Banks (1981/2016) outlines that culture is macro and micro, that an individual’s frame of reference comes from many “microcultural groups” such as region, religion, ability, ethnicity, race, social class, and gender (p. 79). The problem in the field is that although many teachers embrace cultural diversity and recognize privilege, it is unclear how that translates to action or change (Lensmire et al., 2013).

Current and past research calls for teachers to be culturally relevant to (Ladson-Billings, 2014) and sustaining for (Paris, 2012) the students in their classrooms. Culturally sustaining teachers not only celebrate their students’ diversities through literacy but sustain and cement the importance of these diversities in our larger American society. In the 1990s, Ladson-Billings (2009) called for teachers to recognize that Black students not only make up a racial group, but a cultural one (p. 10) and that teachers of Black students must see their color and their culture in order to best educate them (p. 36). She called for pedagogy that is relevant to the students’ lives in the classroom. Paris (2012) pushed this idea to the next step, calling for pedagogy to not only reflect students’ lives but to “perpetuate and foster” their cultures (p. 93).

Many teachers are ready to pick up this charge. However, most teachers in the United States are middle-class, white women who might benefit from knowing more about their students’ cultures (MacPherson, 2010). I designed this course to consider methods and practices for helping teachers become more culturally aware. As a result, I was driven by the question, “In
a course on culturally sustaining pedagogy, how do teachers experience race, culture, families, and family literacies?” There is space for an explicit connection to be made between culturally sustaining pedagogical work and family-school connection work as a way for teachers to learn to be more culturally aware. To answer this question, I not only considered what they discussed verbally but also from a more wholistic view of discussions such as reading, writing, thinking, and sharing. As of result of the study, there was another explicit connection made between the need for understanding one’s own race and culture before understanding the race and culture of another. As the research developed, another important question came to light, “While facilitating and mediating a course about culturally sustaining pedagogies and family relationships, what were my own perceptions and experiences as a white doctoral student and former elementary teacher?” I was interested in the ways in which my identities and positionalities shaped my decision-making during the course and mattered in my work with the teachers in the study. Whiteness is often a masked subject among white people (DiAngelo, 2018). Because of this, I have attempted to shine a light on how I, as a white woman, facilitated this course and told this story. As I reviewed the field of previous literature, many of the studies regarding professional development on culturally sustaining pedagogy did not detail the process the teachers nor facilitator experienced (Mellom, Straubhaar, Balderas, Ariail, & Portes, 2018; Vass, 2017; Warren, 2017). However, it is not my intention to center this study on culturally sustaining pedagogies in whiteness. The goal of the course was for the teachers to understand and implement culturally sustaining pedagogical practices. As we worked toward this goal through, many of the teachers needed to understand their power and privilege and positionality before understanding the importance of sustaining pedagogies. It is important to see how white teachers, and those who have been socialized in white spaces, take up the call for culturally sustaining
pedagogy as these teachers remain the majority of the teaching force. As a result, in this research my story became very important as I worked through my own whiteness while teaching a course on race, culture, and power, with six white teachers, two Latina teachers, and one Black teacher.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe and look closely at the ways teachers learned to become more culturally sustaining in their literacy pedagogy through participation in a renewal credit course. In this research, “culturally sustaining literacy pedagogy” is generally defined as teachers using home, family, and/or community practices as a central tenet in their literacy teaching in the classroom. The purpose of looking at the teachers’ talk and reactions was to illustrate potential connections between language and power. Another purpose was to consider how teachers’ awareness of this connection impacted the potential deficit and assimilationist discourses they might have used about families and their children in the classroom. By highlighting deficit or assimilationist discourses while identifying strengths in culturally sustaining pedagogy, this study contributes to research on how teachers can adapt and grow to become more culturally sustaining.

I designed this course to address the above problems in the field by framing the course around culturally sustaining pedagogical practices, family connection best practices, and research on both of those topics. I chose the readings, discussions, and experiences of this course to position teachers’ thinking towards placing family and the family’s literacy practices closer to the center of their pedagogy. I wanted the teachers to question the lens from which they make decisions about how to teach literacy. To do this, nine teachers, all elementary women, 3 who were teachers of color and six who identified as white, attended the course for a semester and completed a variety of reading and response assignments. Four of these participants initiated and
engaged in family visits where they met with the student and their family outside of school hours and the school building, two were at the public library and two were at the family’s home.

During the course, teachers read studies by literacy researchers such as Allen (2010) and González, Moll, and Amanti (2005) on topics of family, literacy, and cultural lenses. Teachers also read various children’s books that they used in their classrooms to apply the research they were reading. The in-class discussions, assignments, and reflections of the family visits are all forms of data.

In this research, I described the different directions teachers took up to become more culturally sustaining in the literacy classroom. I situated this data in the current context of public education: standards based prescribed curricula, high-stakes assessments, and political pressures placed on public school teachers. At the time of this study, the federal government recently shifted from the federal policy of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) that allowed states to have more rights to choose their statewide assessments. In addition to the statewide tests, at the time of the study, students in this state were expected to pass a high stakes one-minute evaluation of reading that considers only rate (accuracy and speed). At the same time, the Secretary of Education pushed for more and more school choice, which, among other negative outcomes, implied that public schools were not performing. In this Midwestern state, changes to union laws also made it difficult for teachers to maintain their collective rights and a voice in their workplace. All of these laws were enacted as I considered the perceptions and backgrounds the teachers brought to this research study and as I discerned their implementation of any new information. Overall, I felt that this was a time when teacher agency (their ability to make decisions in their own classrooms) had been stripped, so
empowering them to try out new lenses for literacy might have been a challenge, but they proved ready and interested in making space for sustaining pedagogy.

**Significance of the Study**

Existing research on culturally sustaining pedagogy and teacher cultural competency is readily available (Banks, 2016; Delpit, 2006; Gay, 1983; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris, 2012) and will be detailed in Chapter Two. Existing research on parent partnerships and home school connections is an established and still growing field (e.g. Allen, 2010; Compton-Lilly, 2011; Edwards & Young, 1992) that I describe in Chapter Two. This research is distinctive in that it emphasizes the connection between teacher discourse and growth, specifically how teachers can become more culturally competent by learning about themselves and their students’ families through literacy pedagogy.

This research addresses a gap in understanding how teachers discussed race and culture in professional development (Lensmire, et al., 2013) and how these teachers expanded their concepts of literacy and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Bishop, 1990; Delpit, 2016; Paris & Alim, 2014), all while pushing back on normalized expectations in the classroom around prescribed curricula and pedagogy.

**Positionality, Previous Professional Experience, and Preliminary Research**

My middle-class, white, American, privilege has shaped my perspective as an educator and researcher in many ways. This shows through the way that I speak and perceive language (and how others perceive mine), the ways that I value specific types of literacy (for example, linear storytelling), and in the ways that I managed my elementary classroom (for example, rewarding quiet, calm voices). My expectations of school, students, and parents come from my ways of being in the world, which has been a middle-class white one. As I facilitated this
professional course, as well as when I analyzed the data and wrote it up, I attempted to understand my own positionality even further. In this study, I include my own learning as a way of describing the process a white woman teacher might go through along the way of teaching this type of content. As we move past recognizing privilege and into action, we must be reflective (Lensmire et al., 2013). In this section, I detail my own understandings of my past and present privilege and how that has shaped me as a researcher and human.

I embody many types of privilege that I am working to understand, namely, being raised middle-class, being white, speaking Dominant American English, and being American. I have learned the most about this privilege when I have traveled abroad. In recent trips to Mexico and Thailand, I was thankful and bothered by the fact that most everyone I encountered spoke English. I considered that my travel there (and therefore my money) was making this worse. In Thailand, it was especially easy to see because there was a shift happening to accommodate the influx of Chinese visitors (as opposed to a previous influx of American and European ones). The Thai people were trying to quickly learn Mandarin and open Chinese restaurants. In previous trips abroad to Peru and Ghana, I had not felt this way. Perhaps my awareness had grown or the other places, specifically the smaller communities I visited, were not yet as colonized by American middle-class travel.

Before I actively began trying to understand my privilege (which has been about ten years of slow incremental learning followed by a steep climb in the past four years), I did not fully consider the importance of the books I chose to read nor the cultural methods from which I taught a lesson. The way that I talked with parents and their children in my classroom came from a place of my own culture. I knew that I wanted to choose diverse books and felt it was important to honor diverse holidays, celebrations, and heroes. Although I had heard the term
“assimilation,” I did not understand my role as a teacher in an institution that was actively assimilating others. I now understand that many of the choices I made as a teacher came from a place that was shared by some of my students and not by others.

In my first year as a teacher, I taught third grade in east Denver. The majority of students in my class were of Mexican descent, most having moved to the U.S. within the last few years of and a few coming in just that summer. Now, as I think back, I remember that as a “Core Knowledge School,” we were expected to teach straight from E. D. Hirsh’s What Your 3rd Grader Needs To Know (2002). It makes me cringe; I was their first acculturater. I thought I was helping by teaching students the ways to be in America. We read “classics.” I taught Norse mythology, Caesar, and “Early Explorers.” The only people of color I taught about were early Native Americans. I do remember reading Jane Yolen’s book Encounter (1996), a powerful picture book told from the perspective of a young Native boy who fearfully watched Columbus arrive on land, which was probably our only critical discussion that year. The music in the curriculum included Tchaikovsky and the science revolved around John Muir and other white American astronauts. My students never saw themselves in our curriculum, and likely therefore, in America. I worked hard to teach them English and helped their parents learn to adapt in the American school system. The parents that year were my most supportive of all my years of teaching. Now that I am studying my positionality and power, I have to wonder why that was. Were they so deferential to me because I was a white American educator? Did they see education as the “American Dream” and the way out of poverty? Years after I taught at this school, I read Delpit (2006) during my doctoral studies, and I now can understand my position as one with access to the codes of power. I was teaching those codes to my students and parents. However, I didn’t do it as I would choose to now. As I taught students how to speak English and
overpowered them with how to become more “American,” I didn’t simultaneously value their heritage, their culture, and their codes.

In my second year of teaching, I moved to a new school in a predominantly white, middle-class, suburban town. The curriculum was drastically different. It was a charter school with schools all over the world, so it had a much more global focus. I remember specifically in the five weeks leading up to winter break, we studied the major religions of the world and their winter celebrations. I remember being privately embarrassed because I had to learn all about these religions and their celebrations before I could even begin to teach them. It was an understatement to say that I was unprepared to teach such global content, as I had only been prepared to teach the “contributions” and “additives” type of multicultural pedagogy (Banks, 1989, p.192). This was the first time I had ever studied Islam in any form. I remember looking to my teaching colleagues for help and advice, and none knew anything about Islam either. This was 2005-2006, years after the plane crashes of September 11th and the wars in Afghanistan, and yet we remained shockingly uneducated about Islam and the Middle-East. This year, I began to think about diversity in curriculum. However, I never considered any of it through my own positionality as a white person or the positionality of any of my students of color. It was more from a place of “isn’t this great that we talk about everyone?” It came from a place that ‘we are all American’ and ‘we are all the same (in our class), but there are different people around the world.’ It did not occur to me that this was a singular view from a position of power, from assimilationist mentalities and my whiteness. My misconceptions mirrored Lea and Sims’s (2008) description of hegemony working through schools “so that our student teachers come to see the traditional, Eurocentric classroom as benign and normal” (p. 188).
I left the charter school for a more stable job at a public district school, where I taught first grade for four years, my most recent elementary school position prior to this study. The district and school that I worked in was relatively mixed in terms of socio-economics and race (especially for Colorado, which is predominantly middle-class and white). The school at which I taught followed the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum. The IB is not the same as Core Knowledge described above, as there is no curriculum or suggested content. However, there are guiding inquiry questions and the teachers develop spiraling units at the school level. The mission statement is interesting for this purpose:

“The International Baccalaureate Organization aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect. To this end the IBO works with schools, governments and international organizations to develop challenging programmes of international education and rigorous assessment. These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right” (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2019, emphasis mine).

Each grade level writes curriculum to fit under these 6 themes every year:

- Who we are
- Where we are in place and time
- How we express ourselves
- How the world works
- How we organize ourselves
- Sharing the planet

At first glance, it seems as if this school model might fit the need toward culturally sustaining pedagogy. In reflection though, if we, as the teachers, do not understand who we are or how the world actually works, how can we teach it? As a teacher at this school, I brought in more diversity to my instruction than ever before, but still with an outward focus, not an inward one. In every unit, we considered how other kids around the world addressed the same things we did. For example, under our unit for “how we organize ourselves,” we taught about jobs and the
economy. We researched child labor and explored how other economies have different imports and exports than us. In “where we are in place and time,” we studied the history of the U.S. and discussed the world wars through the lens of the opposition. All of these things are progressive in terms of our current U.S. school system. But, in hindsight, I feel that I was missing the point. Yes, it is important for children to look outside of our country for different ways of being in the world. However, this was not introspective enough. The IB mission statement above assumes that nationally we are the same and we need to recognize differences internationally. It does not recognize that within U.S. cultures, there is strife and hierarchy. In particular, the last sentence, “lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right” (emphasis mine) feels very “othering” to me now. Embedded in the language that I used as a teacher probably was a superiority that we (middle-class white Americans) had the “right” way. Even the word can in “can also be right” (from the last line of the mission statement) assumes that we are right and that other ways could be right, but are not positioned that way from the start.

It was at this school that I began my work with family connections. I was hired to be a “family mentor,” an open-ended job description by design. My goal was to better connect families with the school in any way that each family needed. During this project, I participated in my first family visits as a teacher, which opened my eyes to how much stereotyping I had ingrained in me. On one of my first home visits, I went to the home of a child who I knew but had not previously taught. My impressions from knowing her in school were that her clothes were dirty, she fell below grade level in reading, she misbehaved in class, and her backpack always smelled like cigarettes. Somewhere along the way, I had decided she came from a poor,
single-parent family. When I appeared at her door, I was surprised to find that she lived in a large, clean, middle-class home with two parents and two children. I was wrong.

On a different visit, I went to the home of a former student that was more chaotic than I could ever have imagined in my own stereotypes. There were four adults living there with three children. The home was that of a hoarder, where there were only paths to walk through because the trash and general stuff from the house was piled up everywhere else. One of the men attempted to hide his canned beer when he saw me around the corner. After my initial shock, the child took me into his bedroom (where he did not sleep because the bed was too covered in things) where he opened a pocket closet door to reveal a three-shelf collection of hard cover, pristine condition children’s books that would make any teacher jealous. There were complete sets of the popular books from Dr. Seuss, David Shannon, Laura Numeroff, and more. I was in disbelief all over again.

Other homes were more as I imagined, including a small, dilapidated ranch that I came to love visiting (although I hated the cigarette smell my coat took on after each visit). They had a few toys and books scattered around and spent most of their time watching TV. The grandparents who were raising their three grandchildren were warm and loving and we remain close today.

From these visits and others, my perceptions and understandings of families changed dramatically. I was so naïve to the realities that families faced every day outside of school. I was also unaware of how much I took for granted that the ways that I “did school” were not the ways that everyone “did.” The relationships we built between school and home made a visible difference in the lives of the students involved and changed my perceptions as a teacher. This project was the catalyst for my decision to work on my doctorate, I wanted to research more about my new understandings and the connections I had made.
In my first year as a doctoral student, I received a nearly $5000 grant from a community foundation to pay teachers to participate in a family connections project. Over the course of the next two years, I piloted what a study on teacher-family connections might look like so that I could better design this current dissertation study. Four teachers from a local elementary school picked five students (along with the help of their colleagues and principal) that they wanted to build relationships with through family visits and building relationships. I interviewed the teachers individually about their feelings on families and literacies. I attended the first of each family visit and interviewed the parent and child. After that, the teachers scheduled and completed the visits independently each month. At the end of the first year, I went along on the visits, bringing books and games for the children. At this time, I interviewed the parents again. Along with interviews, I asked the teachers to write in a journal so that I could have a glimpse into their processes. One teacher did. Her journals were an important artifact of this data that I have used repeatedly to understand her thoughts and perceptions.

Concurrently, I began another research project at the same elementary school. In this project, teachers participated in a book club to learn more about cultural literacies. The same teachers who were in the teacher-family connections project were in the book club, along with an additional five to seven teachers, depending on the month. The group met monthly after school and read Lareau’s *Unequal Childhoods* (2011) then Stanton-Salazar’s *Manufacturing Hope and Despair* (2001). I recorded and analyzed how the teachers talked about families, cultures, literacies, and more. I used this as pilot study data to understand where the teachers might begin in this dissertation research and to understand how to push the sometimes silenced boundaries of race and culture in the classroom (DiAngelo, 2018).
Overview of the Dissertation

In chapter one, I outlined the study and overviewed the problem in the field. I also outlined my purpose and positionality within this research. I detailed the context and its significance in the field.

In chapter two, I summarize the current literature in the field related to my research questions. I outline the theoretical frameworks that ground my lens such as the sociocultural theories of learning and the connection between teacher language and power. Additionally, I detail previous studies related to literacy instruction, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and family school connections.

In chapter three, I outline my plans the data collection and analysis in detail. I describe the setting, my role as a researcher, and the participants. I describe how I collected each of the data sources such as the interviews, audio-recording transcriptions, observations, written responses, and course assignments. I also address how I analyzed this data after it was collected.

In chapter four, I show how the expectations of “real school” and the current models of standardization and testing impact the way teachers discuss and implement culturally sustaining pedagogies in their classrooms. Teachers appeared to be constrained by current standardization when attempting to implement new practices.

In chapter five, I explore how race, power, and privilege became an important topic of discussion and learning. I detail our conversations and show how some of the teachers were constrained by a lack of information on how to have conversations about race, as well as a lack of understanding whiteness. Findings here suggest need for more education around these topics.

In chapter six, I outline the ways that I observed the teachers engage in culturally sustaining practices and pedagogies through implementing new practices such as family visits,
reading new diverse books, and shifting their thinking about the roles of family in their classrooms. Findings show the teachers’ perceptions of these practices were positive.

In chapter seven, I return to the overall research question and expand upon my findings. I discuss the implications of these findings to classroom pedagogy and professional development. I also discuss the limitations of this research and my plans for future research from the study.
CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAME AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Theoretical Foundations

The theories that guide this research come from the foundations of sociocultural theory and critical theory. The sociocultural theories of learning guided my understanding of how the teachers in this study learned, as well as understanding my own learning as the instructor and researcher. This theory also guided my design for the course. By framing this work through the lens of critical theories such as critical pedagogy, critical discourse analysis, and critical whiteness studies, I examined the power within and around the pedagogy, the discourse, and the sociocultural influences of race on my participants and my positionality as researcher. These critical theories also helped frame the design and purpose for the course.

Sociocultural Theories of Learning

Vygotsky’s (1978) theory that human learning builds from societal influences frames my thinking about the importance of incorporating familial and cultural practices into the classroom. Vygotsky posited that learning is more than a simple stimulus-response activity. There is a third piece of the puzzle: memory (p. 40). In Vygotsky’s studies, children described their thinking and learning through experiences and memories, shown through an example of a child who defined the word grandma through a description of her “soft lap” (p. 50). This example illustrated how this child made meaning through her previous memories. My lens on learning literacy builds from this idea. Our prior experiences with literacy guide the way we think about what literacy is and how we define it. To teach children literacy at school, we must build from their memories and experiences from home and their communities. Vygotsky (1978) described the ways in which children internalized memories and concepts that came from their cultural development. He said, “every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social
level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (*interpsychological*), and then inside the child (*intrapsychological*). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts” (p. 57, emphasis in original). I frame my understanding of this in the literacy classroom, by conceptualizing that children already come to school with the first function he described above, the social level of memory and concepts regarding literacy experiences. I consider this lens when I examine the importance of teaching children to read on an individual level, the second function of development Vygotsky described. This lens also guides the way I consider the learning of the teachers in this professional development course. The teachers come to this course with societal, institutional, and individual experiences of literacy and literacy pedagogy. Using these experiences to build from and develop their thinking was an important part of my approach.

**Critical Pedagogy**

Freire’s concept of critical pedagogy guided my purpose for designing and implementing the course in this study. Critical pedagogy equips teachers and students with tools to recognize and resist the oppressing norms of our institutions. In Freire’s words, “[t]he educational task that contradicts the reproductionist process cannot be carried out by anyone who opts for the status quo. This task has to be carried out by the educator, who in fact refuses to maintain the inequality inherent in the status quo” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 126). By examining families, schools, language, and power through the lens of critical pedagogy, teachers can begin to disrupt inequalities. As Kim (2016) explained in her descriptions of Giroux’s work on critical theory, “the space of schooling can become a site of contestation, resistance, possibility, and hope” (p. 40). In this study, school as a site of resistance and hope became apparent.
Understanding Power to Understand Critical Theory

In theory and research, educational scholars examined the ways that deconstructing and reconstructing language expose power through the methods of critical theories. In practice, scholars have looked at how power is expressed and sustained through language in classroom usage and government policies. As Freire stated, “language should never be understood as a mere tool of communication. Language is packed with ideology, and for this reason it has to be given prominence in any radical pedagogy that proposes to provide space for students’ emancipation” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 128). Throughout this study, Freire’s words reminded me to look closely at language and its connection to surrounding political forces.

Examining the ways that teachers use language, not only in the classroom, but also about their students’ families outside of the classroom, is an important way to examine power structures. Foucault (1975/1995) conceptualized that “power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth” (p. 194). Those in power use language to generate ideas and statements that are accepted and taken as normal or fact, which Foucault conceptualized as ‘truths.’ These truths then continue to reinforce and sustain the power structures that created them. As Foucault explained, “‘truth’ is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it, a ‘regime’ of truth” (1972/1980, p. 133).

In schools, teachers’ language in the classroom creates ‘truths’ through vocabulary choices that index power and assimilation expectations. Teachers, administrations, and standardized assessment companies create deficit discourses of ‘truths’ about students. These power structures label students as “behind,” “catching up,” “unsatisfactory,” “not proficient,” “in the red,” and “below the line.” This discourse creates a ‘truth’ and power in the way teachers interact with, perceive, and therefore teach (or not teach) their students.
These ‘truths’ can also be categorized as language ideologies—perceptions of people based on the way they speak. In her work on the media’s linguistic undermining of a man from a non-dominant class running for government office, Graham (2011) showed that “power and authority work in language in an often-camouflaged fashion that masks the ways language can be manipulated to promote the agendas of dominant groups and actors and in the service of hegemony and oppression” (p. 178). A common ‘truth’ and ideology about students and families who come from poverty or a linguistic background other than Dominant American English is that they are “behind” linguistically and academically. Power structures sustain negative language ideologies about groups to maintain power over them (Woolard, 1998, p. 7).

Schools perpetuate this ‘truth’ through the vocabulary word choice and concept of students having a “gap” that needs to be “closed” (Averni et al., 2015). Specifically, past research referred to a “language gap,” which implied that students from non-middle-class homes did not have the capacity for language or vocabulary with which middle-class students came to school (Hart & Risley, 1995). This terminology and the idea of a “gap” sustains the hegemony of middle-class students by placing their peers at a disadvantage in the teachers’ minds. The idea that families who speak differently than the schools have a “gap” that they must “fill” is a function of sustaining discourses of power (McCarty, 2015, p. 71). By saying that they must “catch up” and “close the gap,” students are placed and kept in a position of less power, as though there is a physical distance between them. If teachers continue to view students as having a “gap,” they will continue to view them as ‘less than’ their middle-class peers. As McCarty (2015) explained, “[the] gap discourse ineluctably reproduces the very social, linguistic, and education disparities it calls into question” (p. 72).
Alim and Paris (2015) discussed that the power in the researchers themselves who reproduce this “gap” argument contribute to the ‘truths’ that sustain the hegemonic power of “linguistic supremacy”- the idea that some languages and dialects are superior to others (p. 79). They argue that research on critical language awareness and culturally sustaining pedagogies needs to lead the way to confronting these systems that sustain power in our schools (p. 80). In response to critiques that say deficit language ideologies are “just the way the world works” they reply, “forcing people to speak just like you in order to gain access to material resources is not the way the world works. It’s the way hegemony works” (p. 80-81).

Through teaching critical literacy and pedagogy, language can be used to push back. Teachers and researchers can generate power from the rejection of those discourses. As Foucault (1976/1990) stated, “discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (p. 101). Freire’s (1970/1998) work demonstrated that harnessing these ‘truths’ can generate power. Freire’s idea of conscientização, or consciousness, wields a ‘truth’ that can generate power for the oppressed. Conscientização is the idea of an awakening, an awareness by the oppressed people, the conviction that they “must fight for their liberation is not a gift bestowed by the revolutionary leadership” (p. 49). The creation of this language of ‘conscious truth’ is in opposition to the ‘deficit truth’ created by the power structures that oppress people. He conceptualized ‘truth’ as knowledge, as something to be used in the struggle for power: “they [the oppressed] can use the dominant knowledge effectively in their struggle to change the material and historical conditions that have enslaved them” (1987, p. 128). Freire (1987) stated that the oppressed must master the ‘truths’ in order to fight against them (p. 128), which I connect to Delpit’s (2006) codes of power (discussed below). As the oppressed learn the language of the dominant, they can use that
language to generate power. When teachers are awakened to the discourses and practices of the dominant practices in pedagogy, they can begin to disrupt them.

**Critical Discourse Analysis**

Teaching teachers that their discourse has power is an important path to engaging in this critical work. A recent body of educational scholarship conceptualizing the relationship between language and power comes from the field of critical theory through critical discourse analysis (CDA). Teachers’ language use in the classroom such as their tone, choice of words, style, and dialect can reflect deeper meanings that index institutional or social power. As Rogers (2011) explained, “meanings are made through representational systems- language being just one of the sign systems people use to create meanings. Meanings are always embedded within social, historical, political, and ideological contexts. And, meanings are motivated” (p. 5). Recent CDA scholarship conceptualizes language and discourse as a way to understand and expose these motivated meanings.

Fairclough (2015) examined language through a lens that focused on the power “behind discourse rather than just the power in discourse” (emphasis in original, p. 3). Power is located in the social use of language, not the words themselves. Its circular- power determines discourse but discourse also determines power. In his methods of CDA, he showed how language can expose these forms of power in discourse. For example, through “naturalized” discourse, people in power and power structures create ideas about what is common and normal (p. 64). By normalizing words, terms, and ideas, power can seep into everyday discussions by using terms so often that they become unquestioned. If a term becomes so commonly used, it becomes natural and seen as common sense, which perpetuates the power structures. For example, when schools repeatedly use terms such as “culture of poverty” (Payne, 1995), teachers take it as common
sense that children in poverty have a static culture that is the source of problems or that their culture needs to be replaced by a different one (Alim & Paris, 2015). This language becomes naturalized and unquestioned. In this example, it serves the dominant class and the government to perceive the poor as at fault for their own situations as opposed to a structural, institutional problem that can be fixed.

The power behind discourse is also present in Gee’s work on discourse analysis. Gee (2014) conceptualized discourse as a way that identity, values, practices, and powers are all expressed. He outlined a method for examining the power and context behind or within discourse by diagraming, questioning, and outlining what is within and beyond the words expressed or written, as a means to expose power. He described language as social, that it indicates an identity but also that an identity can be taken up by using the discourse of that social group. Schmidt and Whitmore (2010) used Gee’s methods of CDA to describe and analyze the language of a teacher who is oppressed by the limitations expected of her by standardized classroom legislation, which still existed at the time of this study. Through discourse analysis they described her strong and strategic identity and pinpointed the places where she took back her agency and power in an oppressive situation.

Bloome, Power Carter, Christian, Otto, and Shuart-Faris (2010) situated the power in discourse in the community of practice and social identity of the speaker as well. The researchers explained that the speaker enacts a social identity through the language process- the use of language in itself constructs the fluid social identity (p. 103). By looking at related events across contexts and communities, Bloome et. al. (2010) examined the identities different students enact in the institutional context of school. They asked questions about these identities as forms of social justice, such as “are the social identities assumed and assigned ones that provide students
with equitable access to educational resources and opportunities?” (p. 158). Using this frame, they also analyzed turns of talk in a classroom setting (p. 170). Analyzing discourse in this way helped them to outline the unequal distribution of power in the classroom and examine what knowledges and languages the teacher privileged (p. 168).

Beyond language in use, the power in discourse can also be examined through physical analysis. Kress (2011) described discourse analysis as a “means for elaborating tools to elucidate educational concepts, processes and forms, to help in shaping understandings of that institution, its participants, and their purposes” (p. 205). He conceptualized communication as more than spoken or written language, extending to speech, gaze, action, and touch (p. 213). Wohlwend (2011) used this form of multimodal analysis to examine the play and learning structures of a pre-school classroom to understand hierarchies built into them. By analyzing the physical and verbal forms of communication in the classroom she could “reveal who is disadvantaged and how this is accomplished through a gesture, a look, or the arrangement of furniture” (p. 262).

Using forms of critical discourse analysis to teach critical literacy is a way to teach how language can expose power. Critical literacy pedagogists analyze texts for whom and what purpose they serve and teach children to act on this knowledge (Janks, 2010, p. 19). After teachers learn methods of thinking and analyzing, they can teach children to uncover the power in the world around them- their textbooks, the representations in children’s literature, and the way in which schools expect them to be. In this light, Lewis (2006) charges the field with moving away from “doing” CDA to “using” CDA to support classrooms and learners. It is my intent to teach teachers to “use” these critical skills and methods in their professional lives.

Janks (2010) examined how teaching critical literacy can help teachers and students understand the relationship between language and power, seeing critical literacy as the
“‘weapons’ of oppositional politics” (p. 184). Janks (2010), among others, highlighted the ways that “language constructs reality” (p. 61). She examined how teachers need to be self-reflective, to understand and question the influences of “the discourses we inhabit” (2010, p. 55). In this course, teachers used this concept of critical literacy to be self-reflective and take action.

**Review of Literature**

The previous research that grounded and influenced this course, this study, and its interpretations are grouped below into categories. First, I examine a brief history of public schools in the U.S. to understand the assimilationist ideals that exist in our current structure of high standardization. Second, I explore research on race and culture as it relates to the identity of the teachers and me in this study, as well as how it relates to literacy pedagogy and the overall institution of schooling. Third, I review research on family-school connections and culturally sustaining pedagogy. I make the argument that these two separate fields complement each other in this study. From this research, I show the explicit connection between culture and family practices in literacy instruction. Fourth, because a large part of this study centered around the use of children’s literature, I review the research on using quality literature to start discussions as well as the importance of choosing diverse books in the classroom. Finally, I explore best practices for teacher professional development and outline previous work on how schools implement and sustain lasting change, a goal of the course. These bodies of work informed the way that I designed and understood the present study.

**The “Grammar of Schooling”**

Understanding the underlying frame of assimilationist pedagogy is important for pushing back through critical pedagogy. From the earliest days, U.S. public schools were designed to be an institution for training the workforce (Bowles & Gintis, 1976/2011) and assimilating
immigrants “into individuals who matched their idealized image of what an “American” should be” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 2). Around the time that Horace Mann famously referred to schools as “the great equalizer,” embedded in that notion was that poorer and immigrant children would go to school to become “equal” to their educated counterparts. A Massachusetts reform magazine article written in 1851, shortly after Mann was the Massachusetts Secretary of Education, wrote, “if we can by any means purify this foreign people, enlighten their ignorance and bring them up to our level, we shall perform a work of true and perfect charity” (Bowles & Gintis, 1976/2011, p. 28). Clearly, assimilation and saviorism was the reform goal of the time. As our country’s national motto proclaims, “e pluribus unum” (out of one, many), our schools are designed to be a place to weld Americans into one entity, which in earlier times implied a white, English speaking one, and perhaps still does today.

Tyack and Cuban (1995) described the underlying organization and structures that exist in today’s institutions as the “grammar of schooling” (p. 9). Instead of questioning these structures, they are accepted as “just the way schools are” (p. 85). These practices, such as having grade levels by age, subject areas of instruction, and having one teacher in a room, are unexamined structures that influence the way that people view “real schools.” Teachers “learned these [structures] as students, and as they moved to the other side of the desk, they often took traditional patters of organization for granted as just the way things were” (p. 9).

Gee’s (2014) concept of capital D “Discourse” provides a lens to examine the way society conceptualizes “real schools” as Tyack and Cuban (1995) called them. Gee used a capital D to distinguish a discourse as a well-known, larger, shared, cultural identity and activity. Gee stated, “the key to Discourses is “recognition”” (p. 52). He explained that Discourses must involve recognized identities, ways of enacting identities, and characteristics of behaving,
speaking, and more (p. 58). Here, the Discourse of “real school” is encompassed by structures such as age-based grade levels, identities of teachers and principals as ones who instruct and control students, and characteristics of instruction and homework that are understood and shared by the teachers, students, and the public (p. 86). These practices are seen as “just the way schools are” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 85).

Due to increased standardization of schools in the 1990s and the federal legislation of No Child Left Behind in 2001, schools in the U.S. have increasingly been driven by “accountability” (Ravitch, 2010, p. 95). According to Tyack and Cuban (1995), “the institutional design of graded schools produced a cookie-cutter sameness” (p. 107). One of the results of this “accountability” has been a production of this “cookie-cutter sameness” today. Shelton and Altwerger (2015) cited numerous studies that showed how the testing culture of schools has moved away from individualized instruction and disproportionately negatively impacted low-achieving students and students of color (p. 3-4). As Shelton and Altwerger bluntly stated, “children are no longer humans; they are numbers on a spreadsheet” (p. 6).

The school as a site for sameness and assimilation exists through power structures and hegemonic policies from the local to the federal levels. Policies such as English-only education, the standardization of curricula, and the high stakes world of fluency testing are clear examples of efforts to assimilate students. Applying Foucault’s (1972/1980) notions of ‘truths’ to these policies exemplified how what “counts” as knowledge can come from the top down, as he stated, “far from preventing knowledge, power produces it” (p. 59). The institutions of government and schools produce policies that constrain what counts in the classroom.

However, as Foucault (1975/1995) explained, power is not always negative. It can also be productive (p. 174). Teachers can exercise their own power and produce resistance. By
examining the institutional structures present in U.S. educational systems, researchers and teachers can uncover and push back on many forms of hierarchy, assimilation, and hegemony.

**Race and Culture**

According to Ladson-Billings (1998) Critical Race Theory (CRT) presupposed that racism is a normalized part of American life and its goal was to continually examine and expose racism in our institutions and culture. In the classroom, this is applied to the presumption that white teachers (and those who have been socialized by racism) see Black students with a lens of deficit. Ladson-Billings (1998) argued, “as a consequence, classroom teachers are engaged in a never-ending question for “the right strategy or technique to deal with (read: control) “at-risk” (read: African American) students” (parentheses in original, p. 19). Through the lens of CRT, white classroom teachers are working to control Black students. Although this study did not employ critical race theory per se, the tenets are important for understanding critical whiteness, which did emerge.

Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) have examined how the ubiquity of whiteness results in white educators who have never been forced to examine their own cultures as well as how the hegemony of whiteness is perpetuated by schools today. As Lea and Sims (2008) pointed out about curriculum, “‘multiculturalism’ still frequently presumes that the white, mainstream culture is central and that all other cultures must occupy the periphery, as if whiteness were the sun and minority cultures its orbiting planets” (p. 34). With similarities to Critical Race Theory, Critical Whiteness Studies emphasizes how the culture of whiteness is perpetuated through privilege and supremacy. Matias, Viesca, Garrison-Wade, Tandon, and Galindo (2014) connected codes of Critical Race Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies to examine teacher education from a more comprehensive lens. In CRT, they saw a “lack of understanding
contemporary racism” as a similar code to “colorblindness” in CWS. They saw “unintentional racism” in CRT as similar to “exertions of whiteness” in CWS. Both sets of codes highlighted pre-service teachers who obscured their white supremacy through the tenets of whiteness.

A central tenet of Critical Whiteness is to recognize that being white is, in fact, a culture, and that it is designed to be so normalized and ubiquitous that it can be difficult to see. DiAngelo (2018) explained that many white people do not understand that racism is institutional, that “we are taught to think about racism only as discrete acts committed by individual people” (p. 3). Racism and whiteness are embedded in our institutions of school, not simply the behaviors of one person or another. Lea and Sims (2008) described this even further, “whiteness is a complex, hegemonic, and dynamic set of mainstream socio-economic processes, and ways of thinking, feeling, believing, and acting (cultural scripts) that function to obscure the power, privilege, and practices of the dominant social elite.” (p. 1-2). They described whiteness as institutionalized and learned (p. 11) while also obscured and invisible (p. 12). In schools, these ways of thinking, feeling, and acting are invisible as well as institutional, perpetuated by the standardization of curriculum as well as the large number of white teachers who do not understand their own whiteness. Montag (1997) described this normalization and ubiquity as, “to be white is to be human, and to be human is to be white” (p. 285).

In the classroom, this ubiquity is perpetuated by the teachers and the curriculum. Rogers and Mosely (2006) stated that “white teachers can engage with multicultural education without ever having to interrogate the ways that white people are the beneficiaries of inequality in society” (p. 465). Without interrogating the role of whiteness in their pedagogy, teachers may not see the purpose for culturally sustaining pedagogy. Lea and Sims (2008) connected whiteness to what was described earlier as “real school” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). They explained, “hegemony
works through our school system so that our student teachers come to see the traditional, Eurocentric classroom as benign and normal, and student teachers (or faculty), who question or disrupt the structure or content of this classroom, as problematic or deficient” (p. 188). Giroux (1997) described that whiteness is a code for “authority, orderliness, rationality, and control” (p. 299), each of which are valued in the current model of schooling. Critical whiteness discussions aim to disrupt this normalized practice.

One of the problems with discussing race, racism, whiteness, and power comes from the notion of “White Fragility” (DiAngelo, 2018). When whiteness is discussed white people can get “insulted, judged, angry, guilty, outraged” and act on this by “crying, leaving, denying, arguing, and avoiding” among other emotions and actions (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 119). However, as Picower (2009) stated, “teacher education programs cannot continue business as usual, graduating students who are at best ill equipped and at worst damaging for children of color” (p. 211). In order to have these conversations in this study, I treaded carefully, sometimes falling into the trap of trying to protect the white teachers when I observed guilt, tension, and crying. In order to best have these conversations, Henze, Lucas, and Scott (1998, p. 189) recommend:

1. Development of shared definitions of terms such as racism, power, and privilege
2. Recognition that there may be several different perspectives on the same issue, and that our perspectives are shaped by our gender, racial/ethnic identity, and class background
3. An acknowledgement that some people in our society have more power and privilege than others, and that this is not arbitrary but systematic along race, gender, and class lines
4. An understanding that those who have less power and privilege have legitimate reasons to be angry, hurt, and frustrated
5. Development of strategies that will enable participants to engage effectively with others in discussions about power, privilege, and racism

By framing these discussions through the lens of picture books and research articles (explained in a later section), I attempted to follow these guidelines throughout the study. In closing,
DiAngelo (2018) reminded her readers that developing a “positive white identity” (p. 148-149) takes time and patience.

**Conceptualizing Literacy**

Understanding literacy is foundational to this study. Woolard (1998) stated, “as with language, ideas about what counts as real literacy have profound political and social consequences” (p. 23). Concepts of literacy have political consequences and political impetuses. As driven by current state standards, school curricula, and testing measures, what counts as “real literacy” in schools today is defined narrowly as reading, writing, speaking and listening, which are currently measured in standardized processes related to speed and accuracy.

Opposing this concrete notion of literacy, Heath (1991) discussed a “sense of being literate” (p. 3), situated in historical and cultural practices, for different audiences, needs, and purposes. As Van Sluys, Lewison, and Flint (2006) stated, “literacy is more than linguistic; it is political and social practices that limits or creates possibilities for who people become as literate beings” (p. 199). Pushing back against singular views of literacy, many scholars use the term “literacies” to encompass the fluid and multiple ways in which one can practice and “be” literate. The New Literacy Studies (Street, 1995; The New London Group, 1996) called for an expansion of the definitions of literacy, multiliteracies, to include a broader view of discourses in practice, languages, mediums, and various forms of communication (discussed in detail in a later section). Street (1995) described the New Literacy Studies as a movement that considers social and cultural contexts, allowing for multiple conceptualizations of literacy and literacy practices. The New Literacy Studies no longer defined literacy in one homogenized and dominant way like teaching “literacy acquisition” and students with difficulties leading to “remediation” (p. 1). I wanted the teachers to consider, an expanded form of literacy that included cultural forms of
literacy. When literacy is considered from this perspective, there is no dominant form, and “the relationship between written and oral language differs according to context- there is no one universal account of ‘the oral’ and ‘the written’” (p. 1). Street (1995) explained that literacy practices are not neutral or simply skill based, but instead cultural, allowing for the term “literacies” to emerge.

When schools value this universal dominance of language over other forms of comprehension, such as music, dance, and art or other channels of learning, Siegel (1995) referred to them as “verbocentric” (p. 456), literally putting “verbal” in the “center.” She pointed out that “young children turn reading and writing into multimodal events involving drawing, talking, singing, writing, and so on” (p. 457), so limiting what counts as literacy in the classroom limits their expression. She continued to describe the problematic nature of curriculum that measures comprehension with expected and so-called “appropriate” answers (as standardized curriculum guides do)- valuing this type of learning neglects the cultural and multimodal interpretations that children bring to a text (p. 464).

As a result of a changing definition of literacy, the pedagogy behind this concept changes as well. In this study, the notion of family literacies, cultural literacies, moving beyond verbocentric literacies, are all encompassed by this idea of multiliteracies. I designed this course with these definitions and practices in mind, with hopes that the teachers might shift their definitions and pedagogies to incorporate and expand on the multiple ways one can “be” literate, in an effort to engage in more culturally sustaining pedagogies.

Children’s Literature

A large part of this study centered around the use of children’s literature. Using children’s literature has long been a hallmark of teaching in the elementary classroom; however,
as Sipe (2008) pointed out, there is a “disturbing trend” away from using “real books” toward the use of scripted teacher manuals (p. 4). In Sipe’s study, using “real books” in the classroom provided a space for rich and varied student responses. He showed that by using literature in the classroom, students were able to analyze, relate, personalize, merge other texts, and perform their creativities (Sipe, 2008, p. 182). Teachers used children’s literature for more than just teaching “low level comprehension skills…or controlling discussion” (p. 5) but to invoke deep discussions and thinking. In this study, I used children’s literature to engage in the analysis, relationship building, personalization, and merging of which Sipe (2008, p. 182) spoke, but I used it to provoke these discussions amongst the adults for their own learning as well as to model how they also might use them in their classrooms, which many of them did.

In order to engage in high-quality literature and literacy instruction in the classroom, Hoffman, Teale, and Yokota (2015) outlined why choosing quality books mattered to instruction. They recommended choosing books with rich themes, rounded characters, complex illustrations, rich language, and complex plotlines (p. 12-14) to support “lifelong development as skilled readers” (p. 14).

Within this important realm of book choice, past research has also looked at how important choosing diverse and representative texts is. Teachers must be ready to critically analyze books to look for high-quality diverse literature. As Martínez-Roldán (2013) stated, “children’s literature needs to be approached as a cultural product created by authors and illustrators who live and work in specific historical times and in specific contexts” (p. 6). Bishop’s (1990) metaphor that children deserve to see themselves authentically depicted in the “mirrors” of the literature of their classrooms was a foundational tenet of the picture books I chose for this course. I shared this theory explicitly and repeatedly with the teachers.
This theory of representative book choice also matters for student and teacher identity. Diverse books as “windows” are also important for white students to learn about the world outside of their own. Bishop (1990) wrote, “if they [white children] see only reflections of themselves, they will grow up with an exaggerated sense of their own importance and value in the world- a dangerous ethnocentrism” (p. 1). Because middle-class white women continue to dominate the elementary teaching force and schools are continually segregated by neighborhoods, books (and other media) “may present some of the few opportunities for all students to encounter people of different racial, ethnic, and socio-economic groups” (Bishop, 1997, p. 3).

**Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy**

I conceptualize assimilationist pedagogy on the opposite end of a spectrum from culturally sustaining pedagogy. In our current school models, children are expected to assimilate (Hickey, 2015). The theory of culturally sustaining pedagogy pushes against that notion. Recent scholarship highlights the importance of culturally sustaining pedagogy; however, less is known about how teachers make the explicit connection between assimilationism and whiteness to better understand culturally sustaining pedagogy.

As with most educational movements, the path to culturally sustaining pedagogy has developed over time. A great deal of work went into changing laws and social perceptions leading up to this research, and yet a lot still needs to change, particularly in the realm of examining whiteness (DiAngelo, 2018). The passage of *Brown v. Board* (1954) was a beginning towards this movement of equality in schools. Along with the later passage of the Civil Rights Acts (1957, 1960, 1964), the Johnson Administration saw the specific discrepancies in our educational system. Not enough was being done to equalize education for children of color,
especially those living in poverty. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, or ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1965), was passed in 1965. This monumental education bill funded schools that served low-income and minority students. This bill was also the impetus of Head Start preschool programs, a foundational sector of home visit research. Three years later, the Bilingual Education Act (1968) was added as an amendment to ESEA to provide funding for students who spoke English as a second language. Although it has undergone many revisions and controversies, ESEA remains a fundamental part of funding the nation’s education system and captures the essence of democratic schooling as a means of ‘leveling the playing field.’ Along with recognizing that funding needed to change in the classroom, educators and citizens began to recognize that culture influenced the way that students learn and that all cultures belonged in the curriculum for all students. The mid-1970s were “an era of growth and expansion, both quantitative and qualitative. The educational and sociopolitical climates were receptive to innovation and change” (Gay, 1983, p.562). In this time, we saw the beginnings of multicultural education.

In 1972, the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) published a pioneering statement called No One Model American (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1973). This statement was one of the first to truly encompass the ideals of moving beyond a multicultural curriculum towards social action and justice. AACTE believed that in order for these ideals to be true of our country, they must be true of our schools. They proposed four steps, “1) the teaching of values which support cultural diversity and individual uniqueness; (2) the encouragement of the qualitative expansion of existing ethnic cultures and their incorporation into the mainstream of American socioeconomic and political life; (3) the support of explorations in alternative and emerging life styles; and (4) the
encouragement of *multiculturalism, multilingualism, and multidialectism*” (emphases mine, American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1973). Although this statement is over 40 years old, it continues to represent the goals of culturally sustaining pedagogy that teachers and researchers strive for today.

In the early 1980s, James A. Banks (2016) began his work on multicultural education. He outlined five dimensions necessary for multicultural education to occur. First, teachers would need to reduce their prejudices and learn that there are a variety of teaching and learning styles (p. 12-15). Also, teachers would need to come from a constructivist lens, understanding that frames of references influence the way students learn (p. 9-10). And finally, schools would need to integrate content and curriculum from many cultures and disciplines and would need to work structurally to empower all students (p. 8-16).

Banks (1989) defined four broad approaches to integrating cultures into the curriculum that have occurred over time and across teaching styles. These approaches are a continuum of levels, where teachers were incorporating cultural content as “contributions,” “additives,” “transformations,” and/or “decision making and social actions” (Banks, 1989, p.192). In the early years of *multicultural education* in the U.S., schools used a lot of “contributions” and “additives” type approaches. Students were exposed to heroes, holidays, and some literature and history. As I reflected in chapter one, I was at this stage for most of my elementary teaching career. As the shift towards cultural relevance happens, teachers teach more toward “transformation” and “social action.”

Along with Banks in the early 1980s, Geneva Gay (2000) considered a pedagogy that puts best practices for diverse students in the center, which she called *culturally responsive teaching*. She defined it as, “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of
reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective for them” (p. 29). Gay (2000) framed the need for this shift around the continued underachievement of students of color in schools. Culturally responsive teaching, however, is framed in high expectations and striving for personal excellence (p. 57). This shift in thinking happened around the notion that culture influences the way students learn and teachers make decisions, “even without our being consciously aware of it, culture determines how we think, believe, and behave, and these, in turn, affect how we teach and learn” (p. 9). This pedagogy is built around concepts of validation, affirmation, legitimacy, connection, and meaningfulness (p. 29).

Villegas and Lucas (2002) built off Gay’s pedagogy and further framed the theory in terms of changing teachers’ orientations. Teachers must come from a sociocultural perspective on learning in order to fully grasp the orientation of culturally responsive teaching (p. 27). Teachers must expand their worldviews to a “heightened awareness that there are multiple perspectives on the world” (p. 33) and be aware that one’s worldview reflects a person’s cultural position. They also argued that teachers must understand the power differentials and how school reproduces inequalities (p. 30, 32). Villegas and Lucas contended that teachers must understand that they are political agents who are responsible for disrupting unequal practices (p. 54). Their overall lens for being a culturally responsive teacher comes from having a constructivist view of learning. Students’ interests, strengths, and knowledges are a part of learning and must be incorporated into the curriculum (p. 92-101). In this study, I furthered this line of thinking by investigating how teachers began to understand these notions if they had not previously questioned them.
The shift towards *culturally relevant pedagogy* reiterated and maintained that culture is an important piece of learning and teachers must learn how to adapt their teaching to the students in their classrooms. Ladson-Billings (2009) explained that the primary goal of relevant pedagogy was “to assist in the development of a “relevant black personality” that allows African American students to choose academic excellence yet still identify with African and African American culture” (p. 20). She described that successful culturally relevant teachers used student culture to frame how they “impart[ed] knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 20). Culturally relevant teachers disrupted deficit cultural notions, embedded instruction in larger cultural contexts, incorporate the lived experiences of the students into the curriculum, expanded definitions of literacy to include broader conceptions, and taught students to have high expectations while resisting the status quo (p. 126-128).

Delpit (2006) added research to the theory of pedagogy for students of color and students outside of the mainstream culture of schools. Although she advocated for culturally relevant teaching, she also more explicitly added the dimension of power to the discussion. She defined the *culture of power* (p. 24) as the middle-class, mainstream, white culture in from which most U. S. teachers come. The culture of power included linguistic norms and the expected rules of the school. Delpit believed that students who were explicitly taught the norms of the culture of power were more likely to succeed (p. 25). She contended that the majority of white, middle-class teachers in the U. S. were unaware of their culture of power (p. 26-28). Delpit explained that teachers must learn and teach these codes of power, especially the linguistic ones. She theorized that culturally responsive teaching and creating a multicultural classroom was not enough; students must also be taught the codes to succeed because teachers “seem to believe that
if we accept and encourage diversity within classrooms of children, then diversity will automatically be accepted at gatekeeping points” (p. 40).

By questioning if the terms *relevancy* and *responsiveness*, Paris (2012) made the most recent shift towards *culturally sustaining pedagogy* (p. 93). He pushed for the re-centering of diverse cultures as opposed to ‘responding’ to them in order to upset systemic inequalities in classrooms. In 2014, Ladson-Billings supported Paris’ shift towards culturally sustaining pedagogy, which “layer[s] the multiple ways that this notion of pedagogy shifts, changes, adapts, recycles, and recreates instructional spaces to ensure that consistently marginalized students are repositioned into a place of normativity- that is, that they become subjects in the instructional process, not mere objects” (p. 76). Paris and Alim (2014) sought to center the conversation on sustaining culture, not a constant comparison to the dominant middle-class White one, pushing back in line with Lea and Sims’s (2008) metaphor of whiteness being the sun with others in its orbit (p. 34). Paris and Alim (2014) pushed teachers to see rich and complex linguistic and cultural practices instead of using “pedagogies that are not filtered through a lens of contempt and pity” (p. 86). Instead of comparing students of color to the White middle-class norms, they argued that being multicultural and multilingual should be seen as a path towards power in our diverse society (p. 89).

**Family School Connections**

Understanding students’ home lives is central to culturally sustaining pedagogy. Research on the purpose and outcomes of home visits is abundant. Here, I use the term “home visit” specifically to describe the following literature. This body of research describes teachers helping students be more successful in school, as opposed to the teachers learning from the family. These researchers do speak of partnerships; however, it appears to be more one-directional in these
studies. For example, Epstein and Sheldon (2002) used a survey to determine best family partnership practices for curbing absenteeism. Among a variety of interventions, home visits turned out to have the highest positive impact on changing behaviors of students with chronic attendance issues (p. 316). Best practices for planning and preparing for home visits has also been widely discussed in the literature. Hoover-Dempsey et. al. (2005) found that the best ways to increase parent involvement were for teachers to be specific in terms of importance and role, to give positive feedback and share goals, and to provide support and networks for the parents (p. 120). When considering the everyday experiences of parents and teachers at schools, the lens parents and teachers have on their role in school impacts their behaviors. Lawson (2003) looked at the power dynamics and differences in the way parents and teachers talk about and define parent involvement. Parents had a community centric focus while teachers had a school centric focus which could result in differing outlooks on the goals of partnerships and schooling (p. 122).

As I consider the entirety of the past research on this subject, I chose to use the term “family visit” in this study. There has been a gradual shift in the literature from using the term “family” instead of “parents” as well as “family visit” instead of “home visit” as discussed in the introduction to this section and in the following one. The way I conceptualize this, family visit implies that the teacher is not going to inspect the “home” or teach how to “do school” but meet the family and learn from them. This lexical choice also encompasses the possibility that teachers might meet with the family at a local library or another mutually agreed upon place outside of the school, not only at the family’s home.

Edwards and Jones Young (1992) were one of the first to shift towards the partnership theory of family-school connection pedagogy that exists today. They called for “the need to shift
from telling to showing” (p. 352). They explicitly stated, “showing these low-income African-American mothers how to share books with their children was not to justify a “transmission of school practices” model” (p. 354). Although they were only sharing the practices of schools and asking the parents to take them up, it was the beginning of a shift in the thinking against assimilation. In another article published later that year, Edwards and Jones Young (1992) described a school and community situation where teachers blamed parents for a lack of support or caring. These feelings led Edwards and Jones young to recommend that, “home/school strategies should be founded on the strengths of families and their understandings of their children” (p. 80). This recommendation reflects the foundations of the research I review below.

In line with Edwards and Young (1992), Shockley, Michalove, and Allen (1995) concluded that schools had a one-way model of parent involvement where the school trained the parents to read and write at home in the ways of school (p. 92). Parental involvement was limited to conferences, PTOs meetings, and to help the teacher with tasks when they came in to volunteer (p. 92). They described the model as “one-way” because the school was completely in charge of defining what the relationship looked like. Instead, their model of family-school connections was a Venn Diagram, where the practices of family and school met in the middle as a partnership, “a genuine partnership is constructed jointly by all the participants…partnerships remain unstable and dynamic, changing with the needs of any member” (p. 92). In this model, time, choice, support, books, and more were seen as shared choices (p. 92). Eventually, this theoretical model shifted to applied practices such as shared journals, stories, and conversations (p. 94).

González, Moll, and Amanti (2005) conceptualized partnerships through the lens of teachers as researchers. They worked under the assumption that pedagogy improved when
teachers knew more about their students’ lives (p. 6). Using anthropological methods from González, educational methods from Moll, and teacher perspectives from Amanti, the researchers used an ethnographic lens, spending significant time in the families’ homes and communities. During this time, they observed and documented the families strengths and their literacy practices. The important key to their lens on family visits was that the teacher was the learner, not the family. This view differs from most home visits practices where the teacher shows the family how to ‘do school.’ The researchers purposefully avoided the term culture, substituting ‘practices’ as a way to draw on the multiple and complicated cultural systems (p. 10). Teachers participating in these home visits were looking to build off of the family’s practices, or what they called funds of knowledge. Examples of families’ funds of knowledge included construction, plumbing, or gardening (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 2005, p. 73). González (2005) explained that through this lens, “student experience is legitimated as valid, and classroom practice can build on the familiar knowledge bases that students can manipulate to enhance learning in mathematics, social students, language arts, and other content areas” (p. 43). Moll et al., (2005) continued to explain that through this lens, teachers can know the whole child, “taking into account or having knowledge about the multiples spheres of activity within which the child is enmeshed.” (p. 74). These researchers showed that teachers could engage in field research with proper training, practice, and guidance (p. 76).

**Multiliteracies: Incorporating Family and Culture in Literacy**

I conceptualize that both culturally sustaining pedagogy theorists and family school connection theorists are working towards the same ideas in different spaces, intersecting at the point of literacy pedagogy. A goal of this course was to make this intersection clear to teachers. Both theories are frames and applications of literacy instruction. Culturally sustaining
researchers work toward teachers changing their pedagogy so that the curriculum and the form of instruction are aimed at *sustaining the cultural practices of the students who are in their classrooms*. Family-school connection researchers work toward teachers changing their pedagogy so that the curriculum and instruction are aimed at *incorporating family practices into their classrooms*. Through this lens, the definition of *cultural practices* is functionally similar to the definition of *family practices*, and therefore I see these scholars theorizing and promoting pedagogies that complement each other. From my perspective, culturally sustain pedagogy is a theory that needs further application, while family school connection research is an application that needs a bigger picture theory to frame it. Below, I outline how they complement and interact with each other through contemporary literacy research, creating a body of work that frames my understanding of cultural, familial, multiliteracy practices.

**Reading**

Both culturally sustaining and family school connection researchers expand on definitions of reading and emphasize the importance of selecting literature that reflects the students’ home lives. In many current U.S. classrooms, literacy is defined by proficiency in skills and strategies, knowing how to pronounce phonemes that make up words that make sentences. The research below reflects a sociocultural stance against those limited definitions.

Culturally sustaining teachers work toward understanding and using multiple interpretations of story in the classroom. Delpit (2006) examined the need for expanding the concept of reading comprehension and retelling through the lens of Native Alaskan (Athabaskan) children. She noted that in the Athabaskan culture, listeners were supposed to make their own sense of a story by adding in their own interpretations. When non-native teachers asked the students to re-tell a story they read (as a comprehension check), the teachers believed they had
not comprehended the story because the students interpreted it instead of retelling it (p. 63). Au (1980)’s research on participation structures in reading with Hawaiian elementary students was an important addition to expanding the definition of story structure. She analyzed the turn taking style of the Hawaiian ‘talk story’ that differs from the Western view of taking turns individually. Au (1980) noted that the Hawaiian teacher balanced conventional structures with Hawaiian talk story structures to meet the culturally appropriate needs of the children while still meeting the expectations of the reading lesson (p. 10). She found that the teacher adapted so that “the reading lesson resembles talk story in that its dominant participation structures involved joint verbal performances” (p.109).

Family connection theorists discuss how teachers can expand the notions of what counts as literacy at home and in schools and challenge deficit notions of reading practices at home. Family connection researchers worked to incorporate home reading practices in the classroom.

In their work with urban African American middle-school students, Compton-Lilly and Greene (2011) examined how two students who were not meeting school “standards of success” were both, in fact, using family literacy practices in their daily lives. They described that the students have “literacy abilities to enact personally relevant and socially shared literacy practices” (p. 71). In their visits with the two students, they described mothers and children engaged in literacy practices that were relevant to their lives, such as choosing novel genres that reflected those of their mothers’ choices (p. 80). The researchers used this example to show how school standards of success do not always encompass the relevant home literacy practices.

Allen (2010) suggested that schools hold family literacy nights to incorporate stories in the school setting. Many schools currently do this as a way to teach parents how to read in the school’s manner. However, the literacy nights Allen described involved families bringing in
“must-read” books as a way to ensure that schools were expanding and representing the books that were important to their students (p. 63). Here, Allen made the shift from teaching parents to “do school” toward celebrating the literacy in which the families were already engaging.

Each of these researchers above detailed at how reading instruction must reflect the values of the family and culture. Both theories pushed to expand the definition of literacy to encompass practices outside of the middle-class white ones. As Norton (2011) described, “commitment to sociocultural understandings of literacy practices entails incorporating the notion that people read, write, listen to, and speak oral, gestural, behavioral, visual, media, body, and print texts” (p. 112). Both theories worked toward incorporating all of these varied practices in the classroom.

**Writing**

In contract with the traditional teacher-directed prompt, both culturally sustaining pedagogy and family school connection research use lived experiences as a place to start in writing. As with reading, the concept of what counts as writing and the expected structure and style must be expanded. In many classrooms, current classroom writing instruction involves prompts and scripted structures. Both types of research push for a more relevant way to teach and use writing in the classroom.

Ladson-Billings (2008) shared an account of a teacher who used his favorite jazz song to encourage students to act out the “characters” that the musicians were depicting through the melodies. As a class, they turned this role-play into a written story using the title of the jazz song. Ladson Billings (2008) explained how there is no curriculum guide for this, teachers must be creative and figure out how to use their local resources (p. 119). Family visits could be a source for this information.
Delpit (2006) considered how structure of storytelling is cultural. In Arapaho stories, there is no ending because endings represent the end of life, which they do not believe in. They also believe the best stories last for seven consecutive nights. Students from this culture wrote stories in the classroom that continued on and on with no endings. Their teacher was correcting them until she understood that this was a cultural frame of reference (p. 61-62). When teachers teach from the lens of standardization and prompted writing, cultural storytelling can be at best overlooked, at worst, dismissed and deemed incorrect.

Family connection theorists also look to the parents and family communications as a place to start with writing instruction. In their work with family dialogue journals, Allen et al. (2015) explained how teachers and parents wrote back and forth to each other in a journal daily or weekly as a means to “create personally relevant academic conversations where all parties can learn about and from one another” (p. 77). They described this as a method for creating allies (p. 8), sharing home knowledges and experiences (p. 82), and making the connection between home and school explicit “by bringing in the experiences and opinions of families” (p. 8). They explicitly stated that the journals were not about imposing school norms or enforcing discipline (p. 4-6) but about learning from each other and creating a relationship.

**Speaking and Listening**

Both culturally sustaining pedagogy and family school connection researchers used the voices of the home culture and practices through acceptance and celebration of language and story. As detailed below, in many classrooms, Dominant American English is the only acceptable form of communication. Often, oral storytelling is not a part of the curriculum at all. These researchers believe that students should have the right to their own language practices in the classroom and access to learning the codes to the language of power (Dominant American
English) (Delpit, 2006). This research also shows that access to oral stories and using music were a means to cultural relevancy.

Philips (1983) reported discrepancies between the achievement of Native American and white students in a mainstream middle-class classroom. She found that the way the Native Americans structured language and attention in their home settings was different than how it was structured in the “mainstream” teachers’ classrooms. Specifically, she looked at the differences in a speaker’s volume choice, both speaker and hearer’s gaze directions and body movements, and the hearer’s audible responses such as ‘mmhhmm’ (p. 45-61). Philips argued that the differences in the way the white teacher structured attention and communication in the classroom negatively affected the Native children because of their communication differences (p. 95-125).

Delpit’s (2006) work on celebrating students’ home dialects in the classroom while teaching the codes of power (e.g., how to speak in Dominant American English) is foundational to the work of expanding what counts as literacy. She examined how teachers valued the home language practices of young children while teaching them to code switch to Dominant American English through safe and motivated methods such as putting on puppet shows and role-playing as super heroes or newscasters (p. 50-53).

Delpit (2006) also found that the structure of oral storytelling was different between young Black students and white students, especially girls. Young white students told “‘topic centered’ narratives- stories focused on one event” while young Black students told “‘episodic’ narratives- stories that include shifting scenes and are typically longer” (p. 55). When asked to assess these stories, white adults and Black adults ascribed different academic outcomes, with the white adults thinking that the Black students’ stories might “hamper” academic progress while the Black adults perceived the Black students’ stories as “well formed, easy to understand,
and interesting” (p. 55). Through the lens of culturally sustaining pedagogy, the storytelling and teacher assessment of story is an important area of research to be examined and expanded.

Family school connection theorists also believed that students’ and families’ voices should be a part of the classroom curriculum. Allen (2010) described a method of incorporating cultural stories into the prescribed curriculum. Students interviewed their families on their perspectives of the curriculum theme or topic then students created family stories (written in their home language or audiotaped) about their experiences (p. 62-63). She also described a project where families took photographs around their community then the students brought them in and wrote poems or stories in class, telling that photograph’s story (p. 66).

Compton-Lilly (2011) described the importance of telling family stories in the classroom so that children understood a larger picture connection to those stories that “occurred before they were born and continue to circulate and impact the experiences of family members in the form of stories and memories” (p. 79). She recommended that students document their own family literacy practices and research past practices and stories of their family members (p. 82).

Ordoñez-Jasis and Flores (2011) made the explicit connection between family oral stories and their perceived value in literacy practices. Latinx parents separated the oral stories and oral word play that was common in their homes from the phonics-based literacy instruction in schools, placing value on the phonics as real “reading” (p. 131). As a result of understanding this cultural norm, teachers explicitly worked to change their classrooms by committing “themselves to centralize the songs, ghost and love stories, pretend play, and rhyme that families engaged in with pure enjoyment, passion, and pride” (p. 133).

In this study, I examined how teachers engaged with the intersections of the assimilationism practices of schools, race and critical whiteness studies, expanded definitions of
literacies, use of children’s literature, culturally sustaining pedagogy and learning more about family connections. This literature helped me to consider what has already been looked at regarding these topics so that I could carve a space for my own research. It also helped me to design the course and the study by understanding what has already been established as best practice.

**Professional Development**

Because this study took place in the context of a professional development course with in-service teachers, it is important to address previous research on this topic as well. In planning for the course, I used much of the information previously provided in this chapter to best design my lessons. For example, I knew I would need to explicitly address much of the work on culturally sustaining pedagogy and wanted to make the connections with families, so I used this previous research to design the course. As I began the course, I noticed a lot of avoidance around talking about race, so I read and implemented the work of critical whiteness as the course continued on.

Previous research on teachers engaging professional development to learn more about culturally sustaining pedagogies showed that teachers benefit from building relationships with students. Peters, McMullen, and Peters (2018) explored how teachers did benefit from learning more about the cultural backgrounds of their students in a professional development setting, although the authors did not explain what that development looked like. Mellom, Straubhaar, Balderas, Ariail, and Portes (2018) showed that teachers learning new conversational methods of instruction did impact their instruction in a positive way. The teachers described listening to their students better and getting to know them better (p. 104). Warren (2017) discussed the need for more models in teacher education to determine best practices for teaching empathy and
perspective taking that could lead to becoming more culturally sustaining. Lastly, Vass (2017) showed that when pre-service teachers did learn new practices in their classes, they felt constrained by the resistance of their mentor teachers when trying to implement them.

Keeping these important areas of need from the literature in mind, I embedded the course in the teachers’ real contexts so that they could apply and understand the material with their own students and families. Lewis (2001) described four best practices of social learning in literacy: whole-class read alouds, teacher led literature discussions, peer-led literature discussions, and independent reading (p. 55-56). Each of these practices were designed into our daily course plans (me as the teacher and the teacher-participants in this case as the “peers”). According to Lewis, read-alouds engaged students and teachers in the “construction of social and interpretive competence” (p. 174) while the related teacher discussions pushed student boundaries and allowed focus on “resistant reading and critical stances” (p. 175). The peer discussions, or in this case when the teachers discussed topics without my direction, allowed for textual interpretation shaped “by moment-to-moment interaction embedded in sociocultural conditions and contexts” (p. 175). The independent reading, especially when the teachers chose the articles allowed for “discourses that opposed those of the classroom” as well as a chance for the teachers to “establish particular social identities” (p. 175).

A long-term goal of professional development is sustained school change. Fullan (2007) outlined the many diverse and interconnected aspects that lead to lasting change in a school culture. He examined the histories, the processes, and the people involved including the teachers, the principals, the administrations, the government, and the public. For this study, his focus on professional learning was important to consider. He discussed the need for change in culture, not just individuals (p. 291). This cultural change would happen through instruction that was based
on individualized and precise instruction as well as a school culture where “each and every teacher was learning virtually every day in concert with other teachers” (emphasis in original, p. 291). It is through this lens that I framed this study, not as a large school change project but perhaps a small shift toward teachers working together to individualize instruction and support each other while working in concert with the families that are also a part of the school culture.

**Conclusion to Chapter Two**

With its foundations in the sociocultural theories of learning and by using a critical lens, I grounded this study in theory and research. As I framed the course design and daily lessons in this foundational research on the topics of assimilation, race, power, whiteness, using children’s literature, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and family connections, I was able to better interpret the findings and steep them in previous studies. Using this work as a foundation, I move forward into Chapter Three where I outline the methods of the study and analysis.
CHAPTER 3: METHODS OF STUDY

This qualitative study documented the stories teachers told; the practices they questioned; the perceptions they shared about race, culture, and families; the reflections they wrote about family visits; and the literacy practices they implemented within the context of a course about sustaining culture through pedagogy. The methods for this research drew from the qualitative traditions of Glesne (2016) and Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) and used critical discourse analysis (Gee, 2014) as a theoretical and analytic tool. A qualitative study was necessary to examine the way teachers interacted, talked, and practiced literacy pedagogy in this course and their teaching lives. Critical discourse analysis offered me tools to carefully examine the inequity and power structures within and behind their discourses. Narrative inquiry helped me to delve into their lived realities and tell the stories as they unfolded. In this chapter, I describe how each piece of the qualitative design contributed to understanding the way teachers discussed and implemented cultural literacy practices.

Description of the Study

To learn about the ways that teachers discuss their relationships with families and to explore how that talk might shift with new information, I listened to and observed their discussions in the professional development classroom. This study explored how they reacted to and questioned materials about race and culture (Majors, 2014; Rogers & Mosely, 2006), family literacies (Allen, 2010; Dudley-Marling, 2009), funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005), parent partnerships (Irish & Parsons, 2016; Louie & Davis-Welton, 2016), discourses of power (Delpit, 2006), and various children’s books. This study also explored how teachers developed relationships with families through family visits and how that relationship impacted their classroom. Overall, this study documented teachers’ professional classroom talk during a
professional development course through observations, teacher reflections, teacher journals, interviews, and the implementation of new practices.

**Research Design**

This study was carried out in two connected but separate projects that both occurred in the fall of 2018. The first project was an in-service teacher continuing education course and the second was a teacher-family visit project. The purpose of the first project was to lead teachers in discussions about culture, race, families, family involvement, and family literacies all through the lens of culturally sustaining pedagogies. The purpose of the second project was to help teachers and families work together to build relationships. For my research, I designed both projects with the intention of observing and collecting data on the way teachers talked about and implemented these ideas.

**Research Questions**

Because I was interested in the way that teachers discussed the material for this course, I kept my research question open-ended. To start, I began with the question, “How do teachers talk about family and family literacies in a course on culturally sustaining pedagogy?” However, as I continued to comb through the data, I realized I was interested in the ways they discussed race and culture as well. My research question became, “In a course on culturally sustaining pedagogy, how do teachers experience race, culture, families, and family literacies?” This question considered how our class discussions of race and culture were linked to the discussions of family and family literacy practices. As the majority of the participants were middle-class white teachers, discussions and experiences tied to race and culture became intertwined with discussions of practices. As the teachers looked outward, they also looked inward. This question examined how the teachers experienced these topics before and after a family visit, within the
context of sharing with their colleagues in the course. Delpit (2006) articulated the need to gather this first-hand knowledge, “they [mainstream, white teachers] are never given the opportunity to learn to value the experiences of other groups…I would also like to see teacher initiatives and their educators go out to community gatherings to acquire such firsthand knowledge” (p. 179). I was interested in building on what she and other researchers have written about how teachers take the opportunity to learn to value the experiences of other groups.

A second question emerged, “While facilitating and mediating a course about culturally sustaining pedagogies and family relationships, what were my own perceptions and experiences as a white doctoral student and former elementary teacher?” I was interested in the ways in which my identities and positionalities shaped my decision-making during the course and mattered in my work with the teachers in the study. Whiteness is often a masked subject among white people (DiAngelo, 2018). Because of this, I have attempted to shine a light on how I, as a white woman, facilitated this course and told this story.

**Trustworthiness and Validity**

An important feature of a study is to plan for researcher trustworthiness (Glesne, 2016, p. 53). Because of the nature of the course expectations, I spent prolonged amounts of time with these teachers. Teachers attended the course once a month for two to four hours each time for five months, with an additional follow-up interview with one teacher and an observation with another. In addition, I observed a family event at the school for two hours. I also accompanied four different teachers on four different family visits that were each about an hour long. This meant that I had about 27-30 hours of data directly engaged with the participants. Because I observed a family night at the school, observed and participated in class discussions, collected their assignments, collected their journal entries, attended family visits with them, interviewed
one teacher, and visited one teacher in her classroom, I was engaged in multiple triangulations of
the data. This data set provided an opportunity to write rich, thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973).

As I taught the course while collecting data, I took reflective notes about my own
subjectivities. I recognized that it was difficult to both teach and collect data; however, I
monitored and evaluated my own positionality in the study through consistent reflection. I have
chosen to include much of my reflection in the narration of the study because I was an active
member of the class. Although I did not want to center the course from only my position of
middle-class whiteness, it is important to recognize that this is my rendering of what happened.
As much as possible, I included the direct, in context, statements and stories from the teachers in
an effort to share their positions and my own reactions to these positions. Throughout the
teaching, analyzing, and write up of this study, I asked my advisor for input on my positionality
as she was on the IRB, a trusted literacy researcher, and an experienced teacher.

In regard to validity, Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) stated, “overall, checking for
qualitative validity means assessing whether the information obtained through the qualitative
data collection is accurate” (p. 211). This assessment was completed through the triangulation of
the data. Because I collected journals, assignments, discussions, and an interview from the
teachers, I was able to consider the multiple view points and sources on each finding. As Miles,
Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) pointed out, “we may get corroboration from three different
sources, which enhances the trustworthiness of our analysis. But sometimes we may get
inconsistent or even directly conflicting findings” (p. 299). When I found inconsistencies as I
represented the narratives of the participants, I included them in the study as they added to the
rich and fluid identities the teachers were enacting at the time and the potential shifts in their
thoughts about these topics over time and with different experiences.
When I had a solid draft of the narrative and findings, I shared it with the teachers as a member-check. I asked them to read my draft and provide feedback. I explicitly stated that I wanted them to tell me if they felt my interpretations of events or feelings were incorrect from their perspectives or recollections (Glesne, 2016, p. 212). At the time of this writing, one participant told me that she had read it, enjoyed it, and felt that I “portrayed everyone pretty accurately.” When I returned to the school four months after the close of the course, I checked in with the teachers and will share those member-checks in the final chapter.

I avoided the “common pitfalls” that Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) discussed, such as “sampling nonrepresentative participants,” and “generalizing from nonrepresentative events of activities” (p. 295). As I described in the participants section, the teachers in this study reflect the majority of the teaching force in the U.S., as most where middle-class, white women. Another important aspect of sampling was that the participants matched the racial and ethnic make-up of their school’s population. The school was 75% white and 25% students of color, and the teachers in this study were 60% white and 30% teachers of color. In an attempt to avoid “generalizing from nonrepresentative events,” as I told the narrative and explored my findings, I was careful to tell the story as it was, not as I assumed it had happened. I did not “infer what is happening when you are not there” (p. 295), but rather stuck with telling the stories that were there in the moment.

**Role of the Researcher**

I identify as a middle-class, white, heterosexual, cisgender woman. As I was raised in a majority white, middle to upper class Northern suburb of Chicago, I was rarely exposed to the racial, ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic diversity that existed in the local schools of this community setting. From childhood through college, I attended schools where the majority of
students and teachers were middle-class white people like me. As I described in detail in Chapter One, my teaching experiences were not in predominantly white neighborhoods; however, until my last few years of elementary school teaching, I never once had to address my own positionality because mine was reflected in the positionality of power. I was one of those multicultural educators that Rogers and Mosely (2006) described who never had “to interrogate the ways that white people are the beneficiaries of inequality in society” (p. 465).

As I reflected in Chapter One, I bring a new awareness of this power and privilege to my research and to my teaching. As outlined in the review of power in Chapter Two (for example, speaking Dominant American English or that representatives from institutions create ‘truths’), I bring this awareness to the way I approach family connections and was present at the forefront of my decision making and research choices. I recognize that this power exists in my racialized skin color, my Dominant American English, my label as a researcher, and as a former teacher. I talked about these identities with the teachers and worked with them to identify their own. Each teacher, including myself, came to this professional development course with their own positionality and we worked to examine them together. We discussed this power imbalance between school and home and within racial categories, speech patterns, and more. This institutional power structure was important to discuss, especially as the teachers entered the families’ homes. Throughout the write-up, I included these reflections as a way of understanding my process and learning throughout the course.

As the facilitator of the course, I took a participant-observer role in the research. I facilitated the course as the instructor and engaged in the discussions with the teachers. I prompted questions to lead discussion at times and provided background and research as we
went along. Each day after class, I stepped out of my role as instructor and reflected on the learning and discussions the teachers had, with the lens of researcher.

Because I continue to self-identify as an elementary school teacher, it was important for me to recognize and continually check myself as a peer or colleague, as well as the instructor and researcher. My previous role as an elementary school teacher likely built rapport and trust with my participants so I was careful not to break that trust during the research process. I reminded them of my role as researcher by reflecting on what I thought of the previous discussions and bringing up my previous study as a reminder. As Glesne (2016) stated, ethical relationships and even friendships that can develop “no matter how much your friendships go beyond the inquiry, feelings of exploitation or betrayal may erupt from time to time in either researcher or participant” (p. 143). I am aware of the relationship I built with these participants and struggle with tension surrounding the ways I report the findings in this work.

Participants

Case Selection

After approval from the University’s Internal Review Board, the study began with the recruitment process. I advertised the course on a website for local professional development for practicing elementary teachers and through emails. I planned for the course to originally take place in the summer of 2018 at the University’s College of Education building. The sampling was designed to be purposive (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) with the criteria that the participants would be elementary teachers in the local school district. I kept the sampling open as possible to make sure that “it reflects the average person, situation, or instance of the phenomenon of interest” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 97). It was important to me that any teacher could see that work with any family across any socioeconomic class or culture can be important. The district’s
director of diversity and the communications specialist sent emails to the elementary school teachers and encouraged them to enroll. A few teachers enrolled but not enough to hold the course, so I had to change my plan.

As I realized that I did not have enough participants, Dr. Schmidt, my advisor, scheduled a meeting with the principal at “Mainwood” to propose housing the course at her school with her teachers. Because Dr. Schmidt had a relationship with this principal, and we knew that the demographics of Mainwood were very diverse (see setting and context below for details), we thought it would lend itself well to studying different types of families. At the arranged meeting, we discussed my ideas for the course and my objectives for research. The Mainwood principal was interested in housing the course at her school and agreed to send out the informational email below to the teachers in the building on my behalf. She wrote, “Please see below- great opportunity for learning and credit and it will be held at “Mainwood!”

Figure 2. Recruitment Email Sent to the Teachers

Dear [Teacher],

I am a graduate student and instructor at the University of [Redacted]. For my dissertation research, I am interested in starting a project at your school to strengthen and build upon parent partnerships between you and your families. This project could be multi-layered, depending on your interest.

**Renewal Credit Course:** I would like to offer a 15 HU renewal credit course at your school once or twice a month to discuss family literacy and best practices for building partnerships. We will read and discuss books and videos. We need to have 15 contact hours for the credit so I would propose the following dates but I am flexible depending on who is interested in the project: Aug 13th and Aug 16th for a few hours in the morning or afternoon; then once in September, October, and November right after school. We could have a make-up date in December. **For the first 8 who sign up by emailing me,** I have a professional development book (LitPacy in the Welcoming Classroom), three picture books to use with families or in your classroom (Why Am I Me? In My Family/En Mi Familia, and Stolen Words), and free registration for the renewal course ($50). I will also provide snacks at our meetings.

**Home/Family Visit:** For those interested, I would like to help you do once-monthly home visits with one family from your class. I will attend with you or you can go in pairs if that is more comfortable. Home visits are so powerful for learning about the family and building trust with the community. As you probably have experienced, teaching is easier when you have parent support- these visits can truly change the daily dynamic in your classroom. **For the first 8 who sign up by emailing me,** I will cover your class for an hour a month to make up for the home visit (I am a certified teacher and sub). You can take the renewal course without doing the home visits but I would highly recommend both.

**School Community:** I would like to learn and observe from what your school is already doing. I know you have a strong family support liaison and actively engage parents through the AVID program. I hope to be a resource for these projects that you are already working on. I hope to interview some parents and teachers to understand the needs of your school so you can plan activities that work for everyone.

Although this is a research project, you do not have to be a part of the research if that makes you uncomfortable. The course is open to anyone who is interested. Please let me know if you have any questions or if you would like to sign up!

Laura Szzech
laura-szzech@uiowa.edu

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Once teachers signed up for the course, they received an email from me about an informational meeting with Dr. Schmidt on the first day of the course regarding the study. Since I was the course instructor, Dr. Schmidt held this meeting so I would not have knowledge about who participated in the study. Therefore, there would be no concern about the possible conflict between passing the course and enrolling in the study. Teachers chose whether to be a part of the study or not. The teachers understood that I would audio-record the course, take photos, and write about it. Because of IRB regulations, I did not know who was in the study until the course was completed and grades were submitted. In the end, all nine teachers consented to participation in the study. As indicated in the recruitment email, I had $500 funding from the University to supplement my research. I used this money to pay for the teachers’ renewal credit and buy them some picture books.

For the family visits, recruitment occurred differently than the course. All the teachers in the course were asked to participate in an optional family visit. Although they all indicated interest, only four of the nine did so. I sat down with each teacher individually and reviewed the consent documents explaining that I would audio-tape them and ask them to reflect on the visits. These four teachers signed the consent and then reached out to individual families in their classes to request a family visit. As families accepted, I attended the family visit with the teachers. At the start of each family visit, I reviewed the consent forms explaining that I would audio-record the visit, take photos, and write about the visit. I made it clear that the visit could still occur without consent and I would simply not research it. Each of the four families consented.

**Teacher Participant Overview**

In Table 1 below, the participants are identified by their chosen pseudonym and the optional information they provided upon request. I asked them to write in how they identified
racially so that I would not place a category on them. They are presented in order of years of teaching; the asterisks indicates that they were new teachers to this school at the time I began the study.

Table 1. Teacher Participants Overview

<table>
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<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Self-Identified Race</th>
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<th>Years Taught</th>
<th>Highest Ed</th>
<th>Children of own?</th>
<th>Other Grades Taught</th>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Title 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maiah***</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>3,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lizzie***</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>White &quot;76% British acc to ancestry&quot;</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>MA+30</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>K-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amira</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Sped, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>2,3,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>MA+30</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>K,1,2, 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Setting and Context**

The course began before the start of the school year in August. Four of the nine teachers who enrolled in this course were new to this school, so they had not met each other or the returning teachers yet. I had taught two of the new teachers when they were in undergraduate courses at the University, so I knew them. In addition, I had a practicum student placed in one of the teacher’s rooms the prior semester when I was a supervisor, so I knew her as well. That teacher, Amira, volunteered her room for our meetings. The desks were in groups of two to four and the teachers sat in about the same place each time we met.

As shown in Figure Three below, Amira sat up front with the two newest teachers, Esperanza and Laelia, and the new librarian, Lizzie. The new in-district transfer teacher, Maiah, sat in the middle at a group alone but joined others for discussion, and the two returning
Kindergarten teachers, Jordan and Rachel, and the two returning second grade teachers, Rebecca and Karen, sat with their teammates at nearby groups towards the back, sometimes together as four at a table and sometimes two and two. I, as the instructor, often moved around. When stationary, I often leaned on the front desks. I avoided standing at the front of the room on purpose, as I did not want to be the center of discussion or information.

Figure 3. Layout of the Classroom

I placed two recording devices, one at the two foursome tables, and I had my phone recording at my table as well. Each lesson had a Google slideshow projected on the front screen. Participants each had access to these on their personal computers.

Another part of the study took place in the community. Teachers could choose to complete family visits as a part of the course and share back with the group. The four family visits took place in different settings, which depend on the choice of the family. Karen and Esperanza’s families (separately) chose to meet at the local public library. Amira and Lizzie’s families (separately) chose to invite us into their homes, both near the school.
City and District Contexts

The 2018 U.S. Census reported the population of this midwestern town as a little less than 20,000 people. The town’s racial make-up was 74.5% white, 13.1% Black, 9.4% Asian, and 5.9% Latino. The median value of homes was $206,800 and rent averaged at $861/month. Over 90% of the homes had broadband Internet and almost 55% of people over 25 held at least a bachelor’s degree. Over 70% of residents age sixteen or higher were estimated to be in the labor force. Despite these promising statistics, almost 15% of people were estimated to live in poverty. The town that the school was in sat adjacent to a University town of 75,000 people, with a median home price of just under $200,000. A majority of the population (59.9%) held a bachelor’s degree or higher. Many of the teachers identified as residents of the University town, not the town surrounding Mainwood.

Mainwood was one of the smallest schools in the district and proud of its 94% average daily attendance rates. The District “Snapshot” in 2017-2018 showed Mainwood students were almost 50% Black, 25% white, and 25% made up the other groups such as Hispanic, multi-racial, and Asian (the statistics were reported in a pie chart format without specific percentages labeled). Of the over 300 students, over 20% were English Language Learners and just over 75% were considered to have low socioeconomic status. In 2017, the average free and reduced lunch rate at the elementary school level was 37.4% so this elementary school was in an area of more concentrated poverty than many other schools in the district. Mainwood’s state assessment scores in reading proficiency were at 46% in 2017-2018 well below the state and district averages of 74% and 77% respectively.

In the years leading up to this study, the school district faced challenges in regard to diversity. In a 2012 Diversity Plan overhaul, discussions of redrawning boundary lines and bussing were contentious topics in the board meetings and in the local news. Students from low-
Income areas would be moved to other schools to attempt to even out the socioeconomic discrepancies that impacted the schools as they were. In 2013, the community fight continued over bussing students to the east side (lower socioeconomic) school to fill seats instead of building a new school. Parents and community members debated whether this topic was a diversity or economic issue, both sides felt that they were correct. The district was also under a microscope in regard to special education policies and overrepresentation of minorities in the program. The U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights did verify by July of 2017, steps had been taken to correct the overrepresentation of Black students identified in special education. Each of these topics came up in the various teacher’s stories and were in my mind as I planned for the course.

The district worked to address these and other ongoing concerns, as reflected in their latest strategic plan in which the third of three goals is to “annually improve the educational experiences for all children through culturally inclusive and response school environments and classroom instruction, as measure by various student assessments that included the Biennial Youth Survey, with a focus on equitable outcomes for students in protected classes.” In line with this goal, this course addressed teaching teachers to be more culturally inclusive in their classroom instruction.

**Structure of the Course**

Below I provide an overview of this study and then discuss each piece of data collection in depth. As I planned the study, I had outlined the readings and activities in order to seek approval for the teacher renewal credit from the University. As expected, things changed, and I adapted as I saw fit for the teachers’ needs based on our discussions and my reflections and
readings after each course. In Table Two below, I outline the basic timeline and logistics of the study as they occurred.

Table 2. Timeline of Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8/13/18</td>
<td>Class Day 1</td>
<td>4 hours</td>
<td>Mainwood Elementary, Amira’s Classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(School year had not started yet)</td>
<td>long</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/21/18</td>
<td>Back to School Night</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
<td>Mainwood Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Two days before school started)</td>
<td>long</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/20/18</td>
<td>Class Day 2</td>
<td>2.5 hours</td>
<td>Mainwood Elementary, Amira’s Classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/25/18</td>
<td>Karen’s Family Visit</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
<td>Public Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/2/18</td>
<td>Class Day 3</td>
<td>2.5 hours</td>
<td>Mainwood Elementary, Amira’s Classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/17/18</td>
<td>Esperanza’s Family Visit</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
<td>Public Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/22/18</td>
<td>Maiah Interview</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
<td>Mainwood Elementary, Maiah’s Classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/24/18</td>
<td>Class Day 4</td>
<td>2.5 hours</td>
<td>Mainwood Elementary, Amira’s Classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/1/18</td>
<td>Amira’s Family Visit</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
<td>Family’s Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/4/18</td>
<td>Class Day 5</td>
<td>2.5 hours</td>
<td>Mainwood Elementary, Amira’s Classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/5/18</td>
<td>Lizzie’s Family Visit</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
<td>Family’s Home</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, Table Three details each class period’s readings, assignments, and activities as they occurred, not necessarily as they were planned in the beginning. See Appendix A for more details. Each day began with discussion and reflection on the homework reading or assignment. Then we engaged in activities and read picture books. I presented one area of pertinent research each time as well. See references for full citations.

Table 3. Details of the Course Lessons and Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity Description</th>
<th>Activities:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug 13th</td>
<td>12p-4p</td>
<td>Where I’m From (Lyons, 1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Homework after class:</td>
<td>Introductory Questions (written)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Think about a family to visit, call them</td>
<td>Looking at Subcultures (Sunstein &amp; Chiseri-Strater, 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Choose one to read:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

70
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Picture Book Read Alouds:</th>
<th>Videos:</th>
<th>Presentation on:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 18th 3:15p-5:45p</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework after class:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do one family visit (optional)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2nd 3:15p-5:45p</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework after class:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete “Classroom Inventory”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do one family visit (optional)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 24th 3:15p-5:45p</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework after class:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choose one to read:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pole, K. (2015). “Why don't you riyt back to me?”.

Picture Books Shared:
- Hot City (Joosse, 2004)
- Tell Me a Story Mama (Johnson, 1989)
- Mama Miti (Napoli, 2010)
- Emmanuel’s Dream (Thompson, 2015)

Picture Book Read Aloud:
- Stolen Words (Florence, 2017)

Presentation on:
- Codes of power (Delpit, 2006)

December 4th 3:15p-5:45p

Homework after class:
Implement the literacy lesson

Activities:
- Discuss family visits
- Share reading articles
- Final questions, reflection
- Design literacy lessons

Table 3. Details of the Course Lessons and Activities, continued

Data Collection

The teachers’ stories, reflections, and discussions informed my thinking about how they conceptualized race, ethnicity, culture, and family practices in the classroom. I asked the teachers to write and reflect, as well as answer specific questions in the “in-class journals” I provided. The analysis of each of these data sources provided a roadmap to understand the power and discourses of school that were within them. I used my detailed field notes, my own observations and reflections, as well as numerous analytic memos that I took throughout the course to add to the complexity of these stories and perceptions. At the end of the course, teachers wrote new lesson plans for their classes based on the course, which added to my data collection and were analyzed to understand their thoughts at the end of the study.

Table Four represents an overview of the data pieces that were collected. Next, I detail each data source.
Table 4. Summary of Data Collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Time Collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demographics Survey</td>
<td>Class 1: 8/13/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preliminary Interview Questionnaire</td>
<td>Class 1: 8/13/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Discussion Transcriptions</td>
<td>Each class period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytic Memos, Field Notes, Observations, Photos</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Reflective In-Class Journals</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maiah Individual Interview</td>
<td>10/22/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Inventory Assignment</td>
<td>Class 3: 10/24/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observing Amira’s Family Visit Student in Class</td>
<td>11/12/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Literacy Projects</td>
<td>Class 5: 12/4/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Interview Questionnaires</td>
<td>Class 5: 12/4/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Visit Transcription</td>
<td>Ongoing, optional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Visit Field Notes</td>
<td>Ongoing, optional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Visit Teacher Reflections</td>
<td>After the family visit, optional</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As an overall means to share and collect written documents with the participants, I created two Google Folders. A main folder that included their consent documents, a scheduling document, each of my lesson plan slideshows, pdfs of all the homework articles assigned, and bibliographies of the books I read and mentioned in class.
Separate from the main folder, I created a folder for each participant that had individual documents in it. There were nine of these folders, one for each participant, and they existed outside of the main folder, so they were more privately shared between the participant and me, not as a group.

**Demographics**

I provided a demographic survey for the teachers to fill out, reflected previously in Table One. On the first day of the course, I asked the teachers to create their own “Where I’m From” (Lyons, 1999) poems about their identities because I was interested in how they described themselves. I wanted to frame their positionalities so that they would consider how they are from families that have important relationships and literacy practices.

**Preliminary and Final Interview Questionnaires**

This questionnaire served as the preliminary and final interviews. Because I knew the teachers had very little extra time in their days, I did not want to ask them to each provide more time for in-person, individual interviews, especially as I had no funding to compensate them. As a result, I provided these questions as a document for the teachers to submit in writing on the
first and last class periods. I used Merriam and Tisdell’s (2016) recommendations for “good questions” to elicit “experiences,” “values,” “feelings,” and “background” (p. 118). This was designed as a “highly structured interview,” with the drawback that it did not allow for deeper access to their perspectives on each topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 109). However, these questions did provide an interesting way to consider the teachers’ more concrete views from beginning to end about literacy and families.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 5. Preliminary Questionnaire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What is literacy to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What were your childhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experiences with literacy at</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>home and in school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What literacy practices do you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>engage in now?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Tell me about your expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for families about literacy at</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>their home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What are some ways that families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can help in the classroom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What are some hindrances that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you have seen in families that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prevent them from helping their</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>child at home?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. What do you know about the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>differences between school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>literacy and home literacy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Tell about the best experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you have had working with a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Tell about the worst experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you have had working with a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>family.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Course Discussion Transcription**

Each class period, I transcribed our in-class discussions which became the richest data source for this study. Because the group was small, many voices were heard and different opinions, thoughts, reflections, and questions were discussed. When I listened to their stories, class after class, I began to understand what Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) meant about the task of an ethnographer as one who “is not to determine ‘the truth’ but to reveal the multiple truths apparent in others’ lives” (p. 4). Although not engaging in true ethnography, but by employing ethnographic methods and listening to the teachers carefully in these discussions, I felt that I could begin to hear their “multiple truths.”
Analytic Memos, Field Notes, Photos, and Observations

I took reflective field notes and analytic memos during the planning phases (the first one is dated 4/9/18, four months before the course began) and then after each class, back to school night, teacher interview, classroom observation, and each family visit. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) recommended that I look not only at the setting and the participants but also at “the interactions,” “the conversations,” “the subtle factors,” and my “own behaviors” (p. 141-142). When I left the site each time, I used the voice-to-note feature in my phone to talk to myself about what happened and note the above observations during that event. I found these to be extremely useful and quite raw. Upon later reflection, I was so glad I had done this, for just as Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) noted, “observers tend to lose sensitivity for unique qualities of a setting as these become commonplace” (p. 24) and my site had become commonplace. In these memos, I shared emotions, frustrations, questions, and summaries with myself. I felt freedom in these notes that I didn’t feel in my writing. This notes became an important part of answering how my positionality impacted or influenced the course and the discussions.

In between events, I wrote analytic memos as I transcribed the audio data, gathered my thoughts, and as I planned lessons for the next course period. These became a road map of my study. My favorite, written in a moment of despair (October 24th, 2018) was titled, “What the hell am I doing?!?” This memo ended up as one of the most important to me because I clarified how all of the pieces were coming together and what I needed to do next. As I continued to transcribe, reflect, analyze, and write, I took analytic notes and wrote code notes along the way. These helped me track my own thoughts about the data.

I took photos when appropriate/allowed. I used the photos to remember the site (Amira’s classroom, for example) and to document family related practices that I saw. I used these to add
to the thick description (Geertz, 1973) of the data although most do not appear in this report due to identifying personal data.

**Teacher Reflective In-Class Journals**

Teachers in the course wrote in documents that I created called their “in-class journals” to reflect, remember, and share their learning with me. As Gee (2014) stated, “when we speak or write, we simultaneously say something, do something, and are something” (p. 20). I wanted to capture their enactment of these “somethings.” Each class period, teachers responded to various prompts or activities in these journals. I used this as a way to allow each person to think about the activity before we each spoke. During analysis, I used these to view their responses in the case that they did not get to speak in the group setting, which happened often. These journals were not as useful as I hoped they would be because the teachers did not write as much as I planned. However, I was able to use them to observe their thoughts about a few different topics of discussion, which I will expand upon in later chapters.

**Individual Interview**

One teacher, Maiah, agreed to an individual interview with me as a result of one of her responses in her in-class journal that she did not share with her peers in the course. When I read it, I requested that she speak with me and she did. I went to the interview with a few open-ended questions in mind, as a semistructured design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 110); however, due to the ease and comfort that Maiah exuded, it became much more of an unstructured interview because it was conversational and “essentially exploratory” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 111). In order to be direct, I began with “a verbatim transcript” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 124) of what she had said that made me uncomfortable and asked her in an open-ended way to speak
more about it. The discussion continued from there. The interview was approximately one hour and took place in her classroom after school. Details of this interview are in Chapter Five.

**Classroom Inventory Assignment**

As I continued to reflect on each class period and read broadly on the various topics that surfaced, I searched for activities to encourage teachers to question their practices. On www.tolerance.org (Teaching Tolerance, 2018), I found an article with activities called “Critical Practices for Anti-Bias Education: Classroom Culture” which included an activity for the teachers to examine their classrooms and record what kinds of diversities were and were not represented, as well as their reflective thoughts on this idea. I assigned it as homework to bring in for Class Three. The results of this are discussed in Chapter Five.

**Family Literacy Lessons**

At the end of the course, the teachers created a classroom literacy lesson plan based on incorporating family or family practices. I designed this assignment as a way to collect and analyze an artifact from the teachers and this course. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described document collection as “a snapshot into what the author thinks is important, that is, their personal perspective” (p. 166). This lesson was to be designed as a whole class lesson, not just aimed at one students’ practices. If the teacher had completed a family visit, I asked them to design it with the particular family’s values, practices, and funds of knowledge in mind; however, this was just a suggestion. Teachers read and discussed examples of what lessons like this could look like throughout the course and used the book I provided for each of them, *Literacy in the Welcoming Classroom* (Allen, 2010). These are provided in detail in Appendix B.
Final Interview Questionnaire

On the last day of the course, I asked the following questions in their in-class journals. In line with the initial highly structured interviews, I wanted to understand their thoughts on these topics.

Figure 6. Final Questionnaire

1. Tell me about your relationship with the parents in your class. Is it any different than last year?
2. Have you done any home visits? If so, how did they go?
3. Are you approaching your families any differently since you took the class? If so, how?
4. How do you think about or approach teaching literacy since the course?

Family Visit Transcriptions, optional

Family visits are a powerful way to begin to understand and value home literacies (Allen et. al., 2015). However, due to a specific district request for my IRB to be approved, I had to make family visits an optional part of this study. Four teachers in this course took up the call and began this long-term work to participate in family visits. Although it is unrealistic to expect that all of these teachers will continue to do family visits in their teaching careers, the power of learning about a family and viewing them through the lens of the funds of knowledge was clear in the way the teachers responded to this project (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Teachers in this course were asked to complete monthly visits with a family from their previous or upcoming classroom roster or with one from the local school community. Due to many different circumstances, each teacher carried out one family visit each in this time period. After IRB consent, I audio-recorded then transcribed the visit. As with the transcriptions of the course, I was able to begin to understand the family and teachers’ “truths” about school, home life, and relationships.
Family Visit Field Notes, optional

After each family visit, I took detailed reflective and observational notes about the event, the teacher, the family, and my feelings and thoughts. As with the course notes, I often spoke directly into my phone as I drove home from the visit in order to capture the most recent and raw data possible.

Family Visit Teacher Reflections, optional

After the teachers completed a family visit, I asked them to complete a short reflection in their Google Drive folder. In line with asking them to take an ethnographic stance (I discuss the preparation activities in the next section), I wanted to hear their thoughts and impressions of the visit. I asked them to reflect in an open-ended way, as well as answer these structured questions to get them thinking about the different perspectives of the visit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 7. Family Teacher Reflection Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What were the benefits/drawbacks for the child?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What were the benefits/drawbacks for the parents?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What were the benefits/drawbacks for you?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Follow-Up Visits

Four months after the completion of the course, I returned to Mainwood with the intention of asking follow-up questions. Because I did not have funding for individual interviews, I tried to simply catch them after school and talk. I had leftover grant money from the University, so I purchase another picture book for them as a gift and reason for stopping in. Because these conversations were informal, I was not able to ask very direct questions. Many of the teachers were around other teachers and I did not feel it was the appropriate setting for direct questioning.
Data Analysis

My goal for the data analysis of this study was to examine and better understand the ways that these teachers talked about race, ethnicity, family, and family literacies in the context of their own classrooms and their own literacy pedagogy. The challenge of this analysis was to recognize and contextualize that this course was just a few hours of one day each month, in the course of their very busy professional lives. These teachers have histories, prior experiences, and previous knowledges that they each brought to the question of how they discuss these topics. As a result, I worked to frame my analysis within the context of the course through narrative inquiry, while digging deeper into their words and stories by pairing and examining their narratives with critical discourse analysis. Borrowing methods from the field of ethnography was important as a means to looking at the culture of the teachers and asking the teachers to look at the cultures of their students and families.

Preparing the Teachers for Employing Ethnographic Methods

An important piece of my data analysis came from the teachers engaging in ethnographic methods, or at least taking on an ethnographic lens, to observe and learn about themselves and the students/families in their classes. As Frank and Uy (2004) recommended from their work with pre-service teachers, “we gave them guidelines concerning what events to observe, how to see from a member’s perspective, how to take field notes, how to think about point of view, and how to describe writing instruction by using the language of the classroom” (p. 270).

Because this study was not an ethnography, I was careful not to use this term with the teachers nor in my writing. As a result of this concern, I explicitly talked to the teachers about how I would be using the term “practices” as opposed to “culture” due to the notion that studying culture would be a long-term project. In an effort to prepare them for using this lens, I asked
them to do a few activities each of which are furthered detailed in the findings chapters below. First, they participated in an activity to examine their own subcultures (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012, p. 5), which we returned to a second time in a later class period. Next, we looked at subcultures and familial literacy practices by practicing as a group on sites that were not their own classrooms nor families (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012, p. 78). By watching a documentary and reading a children’s book, we practiced identifying and describing the literacy practices these examples provided. As they watched this documentary, I asked them to answer these questions in their in-class journals, “What surprised me? What intrigued me? What disturbed me?” to track their own assumptions, positions, and tensions (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012, p. 87). After each family visit, I asked them to answer the same exact questions as a form of reflection.

**Analysis During the Course**

Each day after the class, I wrote reflective analytic memos on how the day went. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) explained, “these are not just descriptive summaries of data but attempts to synthesize them into higher level analytic meanings” (p. 95). I reflected on my relationships, my research questions, emerging themes, problems, and direction for the study (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 96). I considered moments of new learning, moments of tension, areas of growth and needs of both the teachers and me. Reflecting on the participants’ “routines, rituals, rules, roles, and relationships” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 6) as well as the stories they told (Schaasfma & Vinz, 2011) was important to answering my research question. In between each class period, I transcribed the previous one. This gave me an in-depth chance to re-listen and re-think about what happened that day. As I transcribed, I wrote further questions, thoughts, and emerging themes in the transcriptions as comments.
Qualitative Data Analysis: Coding

Using Saldaña’s (2016) open-coding as a preliminary step, I identified topics, content, and issues that occurred in the discussions of the teachers (from transcriptions) and from their journal writing. I used “in vivo” coding for specifics quotes that I wanted to keep towards the end of the analysis. This occurred in piecemeal after each class period. Saldaña (2016) recommends that researchers “start coding as you collect and format your data, not after all fieldwork has been completed” (p. 21). As I finished the course, I continued with more in-depth open-coding.

Next, I performed second round coding to group codes into themes related to my research questions. Saldaña (2016) reminded me, “the goal is not to ‘take you to the next level,’ but to cycle back to your first coding efforts so you can strategically cycle forward to additional coding and qualitative data analytic methods” (p. 212). I looked for discussions on families, diversity, literacy, experiences, descriptions, and perceptions. I grouped the data by activity to look across the activities. For example, I asked the teachers to answer the question, “What is literacy to you?” On a separate entry for my analysis, I copied and pasted all of their answers together in bullet points, as I was interested in themes across the whole group as shown in Table Five.

Table 5. Coding of "What is literacy to you?" Answers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Codes</th>
<th>Examples given (books, reading, writing, listening, speaking, music, talking, stories) communication understanding knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In Vivo Codes</td>
<td>“enjoyment-love of reading” “engulfing yourself in written language” “send and receive messages”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My thoughts</td>
<td>They don’t all seem to agree on what literacy is- a common problem. When I talk about literacy, what do I mean? I mean ways of communicating and existing with others in the world, ways of being and knowing and participating. There’s some value in these- especially Amira’s, like you have to love literacy to be literate? Understanding seems to be the most common overarching answer?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Using these themes, I grouped the data into time segments to determine if the discussions and themes changed over the course of the class. In alignment with Saldaña (2016), my goals at this stage of the process were on to construct “categories from the classification of your codes; drawing preliminary models of the primary actions at work in your data; and reorganizing and reassembling the transformed data to better focus the direction of your study” (p. 212). For example, once I realized “race,” was a common code, I grouped all the discussions about race in temporal order to determine if the discussions changed over time. I did not notice significant changes, but I was able to identify that once I began explicitly saying the words “white” and “whiteness,” the teachers’ conversations became more explicit in talking about race. There were other times when I combined open coding with temporal coding to see if the codes changed as a whole, over time. For example, the book Why Am I Me? (Britt, 2017) came up in three different class periods, so I grouped those codes together. I was interested to see if the way the teachers discussed this book and its topics shifted over time.

**Critical Discourse Analysis**

In certain segments of discussion and in the journal entries, I used critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2015; Gee, 2014) to determine underlying power structures embedded in the teachers’ speech, especially during times that they discuss perceptions of families. As described in Chapter Two, discourse and power are important to examine in order to understand power relations and hierarchies that this research is looking to disrupt.

Using critical discourse analysis, I analyzed the data for the content of language used, the type and structure of language used, and the larger connections the teachers made to their everyday lives. As Gee (2014) recommends, I used his Building Tasks (Table Six) to examine
and question the words and phrases through the lens of “significance, practices, identities, relationships, politics, connections, sign systems and knowledge” as he recommends (p. 32-36).

Table 6. Gee's Building Tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building Task</th>
<th>Guiding Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>• How is this piece of language being used to make certain things significant or not and in what ways?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practices/ activities</td>
<td>• What practice(s) is this piece of language being used to enact?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identities and relationships</td>
<td>• What identity is this piece of language being used to enact?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What identity is this piece of language attributing to others?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How does this help the speaker or writer enact his own identity?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What sort of relationships is this piece of language seeking to enact with others?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections</td>
<td>• How does this piece of language connect or disconnect things or ideas?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How does it make one thing relevant or irrelevant to another?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics, the distribution of social goods</td>
<td>• What perspective on social goods is this piece of language communicated as to what is taken to be normal/right/good?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sign systems/ knowledge</td>
<td>• How does this piece of language privilege or disprivilege specific sign systems or languages or different ways of knowing and believing or claims to knowledge and belief?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After questioning through the lens of each Building Task, I reconstructed the statements to see the bigger picture of what the teachers were potentially saying about their perceptions and then I connected those perceptions to the codes of power in the institution of schools and communities as shown in Table Seven. For example, after looking over the answers to the question, “What does it mean for a parent to be involved?” I realized a lot of the responses
involved “identities and relationships.” I used Gee’s prompts alongside the teachers’ words to begin to consider what their answers meant in terms of the enactment of identities of the speakers.

Table 7. Gee's Building Tasks, My Thinking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identities and relationships</th>
<th>Gee’s question prompts</th>
<th>What do you think of re: involvement:</th>
<th>My thinking about the answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What identity is this piece of language being used to enact?</td>
<td>“parents who respond”</td>
<td>Identity of one who talks to the teacher is one who counts-assumes that talking to the teacher is easy, that no one would be worried, afraid, that the teacher assumes they are equals and would be seen that way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What identity is this piece of language attributing to others?</td>
<td>“Asking ‘oh what do we do with this?’”</td>
<td>speakers enact their own identities of people they see as approachable and easy to talk to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How does this help the speaker or writer enact his own identity?</td>
<td>“depends on the child”</td>
<td>Surface level relationship approach is to be equals, to talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What sort of relationships is this piece of language seeking to enact with others?</td>
<td>“daily interaction”</td>
<td>Deeper level is that the parents are accountable to the teacher, that they are expected to reply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What do you think of re: involvement:</td>
<td>“having some sort of conversation”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gee’s (2014) examination of “figured worlds” (p. 94-117) guided my analysis. “Figured worlds are simplified, often unconscious and taken-for-granted theories or stories about how the world works that we use to get on efficiently with our daily lives” (p. 95). Teachers revealed many of these figured worlds about teaching, families, and literacies that were interesting to analyze for power structures and implications in the everyday classroom. Gee (2014) pointed out that figured worlds “embed assumptions about what is ‘appropriate,’ ‘typical,’ and/or ‘normal’” (p. 111). Using “in-vivo” codes, I began to physically map out this idea of the world that they
deemed as “normal.” In analyzing what teachers’ assumptions were, I began to understand how to disrupt them in line with a goal of critical pedagogy (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

Figure 8. My Concept Map of Figured Worlds

Narrative Analysis

To analyze the teachers’ stories, I used methods of narrative inquiry. Throughout my time teaching the course, I either dictated my thoughts into my phone or journaled my feelings and stories as well as those of the teachers. I wanted to remember the feelings and experiences that I had while teaching the course and my own reactions to the teachers’ stories. I wanted to record their reactions to each other’s stories as well. Schaafsma and Vinz (2011) discussed the importance of reflexivity and metanarrative in storytelling (p. 73). As I was a part of this course not only as the instructor but as the “researcher as instrument,” I felt it was important to tell my story along the lines that Schaafsma and Vinz (2011) described, “bringing back the ‘I,’ the long-lost subject of both researchers and the tellers of stories, adds an essential dimension in narrative inquiry” (p. 72).
Along with recording the stories each day, I considered the context and history of the teachers’ stories, thinking about “What histories do the students bring with them that are an important part of the narrative that needs telling? What futures tug them through their daily existence?” (Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011, p. 100). Highlighting the narratives of what occurred before and after the course each day was an important piece of the puzzle, which I collected by asking them to reflect often.

As I sat down to write, I struggled. I had collected all of this narrative data, but I felt that my voice and my presence was too strong in it. I wanted the story to be about the teachers. As I met with my advisor and re-read Schaafsma and Vinz (2011), I was reminded that I was wrong. They explained, “the verb, narratize, suggests strategies of shaping that situate and reveal-within and outside the rendering of the text- the hand of the researcher/writer, context/history, and all the supporting constructions” (emphasis in original, p. 3). As a member of the group, my positionality below is subjective, “subjectivities- ordinarily erased or muted in the cool objectivity of traditional social science research- get highlighted here as part and parcel of the acts of telling. There’s a vulnerability in the telling and in being told about” (Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011). They encourage researchers to describe their own processes and willingness to change (p. 73), which I worked hard to show, even when it felt raw and embarrassing. My process of learning alongside the teachers was important to the overall story.

As I began to narratize this study, the thick, rich description flowed out of me and the story became what it was meant to be, an in-depth examination of my original research questions. I hope to show through this telling, this vulnerability, how the story unfolded and became the story of how the teachers talked about race, culture, family, and family literacy in the
context of our course and what I learned about myself as a white woman and about leading this type of course as a white teacher.

**Conclusion to Chapter Three**

By observing and listening to the teachers’ discussions and stories about race, culture, families, and literacies, I was able to explore my research question, “*In a course on culturally sustaining pedagogy, how do teachers experience race, culture, families, and family literacies?*” in more depth. I was also able to consider, “*While facilitating and mediating in a course in culturally sustaining pedagogies and family relationships, what were my own perceptions and experiences as a white doctoral student and former elementary teacher?*”

Using the methods of qualitative research, critical discourse analysis, narrative inquiry, and ethnography, I was able to group my findings into three main topics. In the next chapter, I will show how the expectations of “real school” and the current models of standardization and testing impact the way teachers discuss and implement culturally sustaining pedagogies in their classrooms. In Chapter Five, I will explore how race, power, and privilege became an important topic of discussion and learning. In Chapter Six, I will outline the ways that I observed the teachers engage in culturally sustaining practices and pedagogies through implementing new practices such as family visits, reading new diverse books, and shifting their think about the role of family in their classrooms.
CHAPTER 4: “REAL SCHOOL”

My primary research question, “In a course on culturally sustaining pedagogy, how do teachers experience race, culture, families, and family literacies?” challenged me to gain a deeper understanding of how the teacher-participants in my study defined literacy and conceptualized family involvement in literacy practices in order to move toward culturally sustaining pedagogy. Findings show that examining the current demands on what counts as “real school” and expectations for “ways of being” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995) led to deeper understanding of why those practices might suppress some students’ cultures. I believe these examinations led to the teachers’ deeper understanding of the need for culturally sustaining pedagogy. In this chapter, I outline where I saw dominant, standardized classroom culture (Ravitch, 2010) embedded in the way the teachers talked and behaved. I show how expectations of how to “do school” constrained their desire to be more culturally sustaining.

When I walked into the classroom on the first day, I was already nervous to start the course and even more uncomfortable to find that no one was there. Amira volunteered to let us use her room, but when I arrived, she was not there. I had previously worked with her, so I felt somewhat comfortable walking into her space. I mentally prepared for what I had planned that day: I wanted to get a sense of what the teachers conceptualized about literacy, how they viewed families and involvement, and their understandings of their literacy practices and sub-cultures. In hindsight, a huge task for the next four hours.

Being alone in the room gave me a chance to look around as I hadn’t during my previous visit, when it was teeming with 4th graders the previous semester. I noticed artifacts that helped me understand the classroom and the context. The room was crowded with posters and sayings, the clear signs of an Advanced Via Individual Determination (AVID) teacher to a trained eye.
AVID is an academic and school-structure program that trains students to “develop academic habits” that reinforce a “college-going culture” (Advanced Via Individual Determination, 2019). AVID protocols teach scripted methods of taking notes and presenting information. Taped to the whiteboard in the front of the room was a poster with horizontal text reading, “SLANT! Sit Up, Listen, Ask Questions, Nod your Head, Track the Speaker,” a common way to teach kids attentiveness. A bulletin board on the wall nearest the outside door was titled “Mainwood Scholars.” It was set up and organized, but had many blank spots, seemingly waiting for the scholarly work that would later hang on it. College attendance is a hallmark of AVID classrooms, reflected by the different college flags that hung across the ceiling from a clothesline. The rest of the room was filled with typical classroom posters—long division math examples, daily schedules, sayings and phrases about attitudes and success. An empty fishbowl sat on the teacher’s desk. I later found out this was for the students to put their daily “tickets,” a newer practice in behavior modification where students are “rewarded” with tickets for good behavior.

The desks were grouped together in pods. There was a SMART Board up front next to a kidney table which I remember vividly from my previous time in her classroom, as that was the place where reading groups took place. I could still hear the minute timers randomly beeping in my head, a constant reminder of the students practicing their “fluency” to pass the rate-based reading assessment each quarter. At that table, the students worked in pairs, reading and tracking each other’s rate and accuracy on their daily “Read Naturally” passages, which resulted in timers beeping almost constantly throughout the reading block. It drove me crazy.

As the teachers filled in to Amira’s room, I was comforted to see two of my former students from the University. They were first year teachers, bright-eyed and excited about the
year to come, full of innocence, energy, nerves, and endless to-do lists. Each teacher brought their planners, their laptops, and snacks and chose seats at the desks. The two first year teachers sat up front along with the new librarian, the two kindergarten teachers sat in back center together; and the two second grade teachers sat together in the back right as well. Eventually, another new teacher, a transfer from another school came in and sat by herself in the front middle. As people trickled in, I introduced myself, sometimes shaking hands, sometimes just an awkward “Hi.” As I started to pull the class together to get started, the teacher whose classroom it was, Amira, came bustling in the outside door and yelled “Sorry I’m late!” We all laughed as she sat next to the two new teachers and introduced herself to them.

Their contract days had not started yet, so this was their first day back to school. When Amira introduced herself, I realized that some of them had never met each other. I felt comforted by this as I suddenly was not the only “outsider” in the room. I lightheartedly introduced myself as “the one who emailed you way too many times this summer” (we had a hard time scheduling our first class date and had to change multiple times). Then I began to tell them the story of my path to this course, including how excited I was to finally be there teaching the course I had only previously dreamed about teaching to “real live teachers.” They laughed politely, but definitely did not understand how important this really was for me. This was my chance to see if what I had thought and believed about families and relationships could really be more than just my individual experience.

As I explained my positionality and my path to this course, I purposefully identified as a classroom teacher by discussing from my previous family partnership experience. I explained to the class, “I felt that we were leaving many families behind, and we didn’t mean to. [I found] it wasn’t really that hard to get families involved; they just needed some different connections.”
The first activity planned was to read the book *Why Am I Me?* (Britt, 2017) and then facilitate introductions by asking the teachers to answer the question “Why am I me?” or by writing “Where I’m From” poems from the template by George Ella Lyon (1999). Because this study involved narrative inquiry, I felt the participants should be speaking for themselves (Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011, p. 109). I began with this book and activity so the teachers could ground themselves in memories of childhood and from being a part of deeply complex family structures and experiences. As I introduced the book, I explicitly told them that I designed the course to be as applicable as possible to their classrooms. I explained that I did not want them to sit in another professional development that sounded great but didn’t fit into their busy schedules. I remembered that dreaded feeling of sitting through “yet another meeting that didn’t apply to me.”

As I passed out grant-purchased copies of the picture book *Why Am I Me?* (Britt, 2017), I explained that I was not interested in this class being another “program” to follow, but instead a way of approaching the relationships in their classrooms. I explained that I would try to give them ideas for what they could use in their classrooms or on family visits. In the moment, I decided to “share the pen” and ask someone else to read the book aloud, as a more subliminal way to de-center myself as the teacher at the front of the room. Lizzie, the librarian, offered to read and so we began…

At the conclusion of the book, Amira said she loved the pictures and the Venn Diagram (on the cover) and Lizzie talked about how the kids might connect to the subway (in the pictures). After that came seconds of silence that felt like eternity. I was hoping they would discuss what made the kids in the pictures who they are, and eventually I hoped they would make the connections to themselves, who they are as people- just like the book asked. I wanted to
prompt them, but I could hear my dissertation committee members echoing in my head, “Don’t direct the class too much; don’t control the research; let the teachers guide it.” So, I moved on.

Because of that silence, I suddenly felt more nervous. Doubts were running through my head, “What if they never talk about anything and I have no research?” Pushing that doubt aside, I explained that I was hoping they could introduce themselves by answering the question, “Why am I me?” but if they were uncomfortable with that being so open-ended, they could follow the template of the poem “Where I’m From.” Eight out of nine chose the template and they silently got to work.

Introducing the Participants

As a way of introducing themselves to the group, they wrote these poems. Below, I share them as a way to introduce the participants of this study. Names of cities and other identity markers have been changed.

Rachel volunteered to read first. Rachel was an outspoken straight-shooter. She was 50 years old at the time of the study and identified as white. She was a Kindergarten teacher of 22 years, a true veteran teacher. Her tone of voice felt effortless as she gave frank, honest input to our discussions. She read her poem with ease and confidence….

I am from laundry
from dishes and pictures
I am from the condo by the park
Purple and relaxing
I am from the wood chips
The pine rug
whose long gone limbs I remember as if they were my own.
I’m from halftime naptime and girl power
from Rachel and Abby
I’m from Bloody Marys [sic] and wrestling and from Democrats
(Laughter in the room erupted)
I’m from “clean your damned room” and “you will outgrow it”
(Laughter continued)
and I Got You Babe
I’m from a big family Christmas
I’m from Main City and Vardje
microwaved chicken breasts and baked potatoes
From my grandma going blind from diabetes
The only person I look like
The old gray suitcase my grandad brought with him from Denmark
in the basement behind the bar.

Everyone clapped as I felt a bit of relief. The activity felt like a success! We got to know more about Rachel as a person and positioned her as a family member.

Next, Rebecca, a 2nd grade teacher with a big smile and a high pitched, sweet voice, volunteered to read. At 58 years old, Rebecca was the most veteran teacher and in her last of 24 years of teaching. She told me later she needed to retire this year because she “was just so tired.”

I didn’t get the sense it was about sleep. She identified as Caucasian.

I am from books
from my iPad and my doggie
I am from the condo and the relaxation of my sun porch
I am from the over growing rose bush
The mulberry tree
whose long gone limbs I remember as if they were my own.
I’m from laughter and Chicago trips
from Rachel, Becca and Ben
I’m from procrastinating and hard work and from being a life-long learner.
I’m from “try your best” and “I love you a bushel and a peck”
and He’s got the whole world in his hands
I’m from Christmas Eve family time
I’m from Fort Carson and Main City
grilled cheese and party potatoes
(Some laughter.)
From kids leaving home from Florida State to the University
I keep pictures in piles and photo books in closets and in many frames.

Everyone clapped as I, an outsider to this region, naively asked, “What are party potatoes?” The room erupted into incredulous shouts of “What!” and “You don’t know what party potatoes are?!” Rebecca explained them as laughter continued. Then it dwindled as we moved on.
remembered this moment fondly as I reflected on this day. It was a perfect reminder of how someone can be an insider and outsider to various subgroups, and neither was right or wrong.

Up next, Jordan, a Kindergarten teacher, volunteered to read. Jordan was a quiet participant, hardly ever speaking to the group. However, she often whispered privately to her teaching partner, Rachel. Although Jordan was 47 years old at the time of the study, this was only her 8th year teaching. She did not share what she had done prior to teaching. Jordan identified as Caucasian. She read her poem quickly and uncomfortably, and qualified it as “from her childhood,” as if she had done it “wrong,” which of course she had not, as there were no directions.

I am from board games
from swimming goggles and sports shoes
I am from the cozy house
with giggles and laughter
I am from the soft grass
The weeping willow
whose long gone limbs I remember as if they were my own.
I’m from travel and exploration
from parents and sandwiched by siblings
I’m from blanket tents and lemonade stands and from working hard.
I’m from “finish your supper” and “quiet now, it’s bedtime”
and you are my sunshine
I’m from holiday gatherings
I’m from Rapids and Western Europe, grilling out and hamburger helper
From growing up young and climbing the ladder, making time for the important things.
wooden chairs that tell our story
sharing around the kitchen table.

The group clapped again. Because she qualified her poem before she started, I explained how I felt there was no right or wrong way, that I grew up with divorced parents in two very different households, so I had two versions of this poem that felt different from each other. I agreed that kids might feel that theirs have to be “rosy,” so it was important to share with them that it did not.
Karen volunteered to read next. Karen identified as Caucasian and was 51 years old at the
time of the study. She was a 2nd grade teacher and had been teaching for 21 years, another
veteran. Karen was very matter-of-fact in discussions and often offered open-ended push back
type questions for the group to consider. She read her poem with a smooth and peaceful tone.

I am from garden gloves
from a dandelion digger and hoe
I am from the green ranch home that turned blue
comfortable
I am from the purple
The lilac bush
whose long gone limbs I remember as if they were my own.
I’m from Christmas Eve with Santa Claus and many aunts, uncles, and cousins
from Grandpa Holet’s and Grandpa Tenley
I’m from knitting and gardening and from drinking a cup of tea.
I’m from “be up early” and “be home when the streetlights come on”
and “a bird will poop on your lip”
I’m from Sunday dinner at Grandma and Grandpa’s
I’m from Stantown and Czechoslovakia
sweet corn and cucumbers
From milking cows to swimming in the cow tank
Family pictures in picture albums
Memories.

Everyone clapped and we laughed about her line, “a bird will poop on your lip.”

Amira offered to read next and introduced herself by stating proudly that she had been
teaching at Mainwood for 17 years. Amira was a 4th grade teacher in her 21st year of teaching.
She identified as white and was 44 years old. Prior to teaching fourth grade, she was a special
education teacher. Amira repeatedly expressed how much she loved this class and would
implement everything we discussed in her own classroom. She was a tiny, friendly woman but
had a very serious demeanor about her that was intimidating to me at first.

I am from books
from shelves and friends
I am from the farm
Fresh outdoor breeze
I am from the daffodil
The willow trees
whose long gone limbs I remember as if they were my own.
I’m from horseback riding and camping
from Glen and Pam
I’m from making faces and laughter
I’m from dreams and prayers
and now I lay me down to sleep
I’m from fires, marshmallows, mulberries, and fireflies
I’m from the Midwest and the farm
Corn and bacon
From Grandpa’s stories when he was little
Visiting every chance I can with my family-Lisa, Jodie, Melody, my husband Pete, and Sailor
my dog

We clapped and I mentioned how I connected to the childhood song she shared, “now I lay me
down to sleep.” Immediately, Laelia jumped in to introduce herself.

Laelia was a bubbly first-year teacher who I taught in an undergraduate reading methods
course. Laelia was 22 years old and identified as Mexican-American. She spoke openly and
honestly about her childhood and experiences. Over the course of the semester, I watched as the
stress and exhaustion of the first year of teaching weighed on her.

I’m from photo albums, from pets and dusty books
I’m from the company of many and smelling the aroma of a home cooked meal
I’m from the Annabelle hydrangea and the sappy pine trees
Whose long gone limbs I remember as if they were my own
I’m from boisterous voices and poor vision.
From Laila and Junior
From long laughs, praying before every meal and lengthy road trips
I’m from “say please and thank you” and “kill em with kindness”
I’m from large family cook outs
From Southwest City and Hispanic culture
From ice cream sundaes and warming up leftovers
From my grandma making sure we ate every last bite on our plates
And from worn out photos that we’ve been through too many times
Stored in our memories, as embarrassing and unforgettable moments.

We clapped again as Lizzie chimed in, qualifying that she did not do the poem template but
wrote her own.
Lizzie was a new teacher to this school but not new to teaching. She was a 48-year-old librarian who had been teaching for 14 years. She identified as white, including that she was “76% British according to Ancestry.” Lizzie participated often and was always searching on her computer, ordering the books we looked at in class, or adding new information from the internet to our discussions. She read her poem confidently and with emotion.

Why Am I Me?
I come from two parents who are musical, thus I am musical.
I come from parents who loved learning and teaching others, thus, I am a teacher.
I come from a family who, even when we didn’t have money, we had books, lots and lots of books, thus, I am a librarian.
I come from a small town in Iowa that was all white, unless you were a foreign exchange student or visiting the prison, thus, I moved to Mainwood.
The world was just too small and narrow-minded there in that small town that I come from, thus, I love to travel.
This life that we are living in and dying in doesn’t seem like it is the end, thus, I search the paranormal.
The stresses of everyday life can get to me, thus, I run.
I come from loving parents, thus, I can emulate that in being a parent myself to a 21 year old son and a 28 year old stepson and 30 year old stepdaughter. My love isn’t limited so I am also a step-grandma to three kids whom I adore.
I come from ambition, but it hasn't always been that way.
I was in a marriage that didn’t work out but at least I have my son.
I tried college twice right after high school but I wasn’t ready until I was ready and then BOY was I ready (undergrad, Masters, Library Science degree).
I’ve learned about myself that I’m never done evolving.
Running and paranormal investigating are fairly new to me.
Library is only 6 years old.
I’m a teacher going on 16 years (I think? Math never was my strong suit!)
Music has been put to the back burner but I can hear it humming to me: come back, come back.
I’m quite the introvert but I can act like an extrovert until I am comfortable with those I am around.
I’m a lover of kids and all that they are and I love digging through their many layers.
I’m a lover of life and a lover of dogs.
I try to experience it in many ways with my forever husband of 16 years and our dog of 14 years.
I’m a daughter, a big sister, an aunt, and a friend.
I am Me.

Everyone clapped and ooh-ed and aah-ed at her poem and the raw emotion and creativity of it.
Next, Maiah shared hers. Maiah was a 6th grade teacher who told me later that she had chosen to transfer to Mainwood from another school in the district so that she could teach in a more diverse place. Maiah was 33 years old, in her 14th year of teaching, and identified as Black. She moved from Boston a few years before the study, so she offered a more urban perspective of childhood (most of the teachers were from Iowa) when it came up in discussions. She was forward and confident.

I am from hot sauce
from encyclopedias and a community tub of Vaseline
I am from the green house on the corner at the bottom of a meadow
Immaculate front room for guests only and a well-worn kitchen floor
Footsteps alerting you to who’s coming without ever needing your eyes: shuffling, stomping, sliding
I am from the buttercup flowers adorning the lawn that I drank from at Tea
The tall tree felled in a hurricane
whose height shrunk, oddly, the older I got.
I’m from school every week day and church every non-week day
From praise Him and dignity and pride
I am from Lawyers and Waters
I’m from straight As and balanced budgets and from big dinners to celebrate every holiday.
I’m from “You were born with 2 strikes against you” and “It’s not what you said, it’s how you said it”
and “Let it resound, loud as the rolling sea”
I’m from Labor Day, landside of Ocean City
I’m from the City of Champions a product of the Great Migration, chitlins and a steak and cheese
From the birth of a miracle child
now grown into a Morehouse Man
Swinging on the gate at Tremont St and jumping over the ditch at Hubert Playing football,
hawking lougies, and cussing with my brother’s friends

(laughter erupted)
make me feel free in my heart.

Everyone laughed again and clapped loudly as Maiah finished her reading.

Esperanza was the last to read and she somewhat uncomfortably qualified that some of her words were in Spanish as if she wasn’t sure if that was ok. I noted she even wrote the translations in her written poem. Esperanza was a first-year teacher, another student that I taught in undergraduate methods as well as serving as her reading practicum supervisor, so I knew her
well. She was smart and quiet, a first-generation college student and an excited but shy teacher.

She was 25 at the time of the study and identified as Hispanic.

I am from my queen-sized bed
from eucalyptus-scented lotion and the scent-free kind
I am from the black, reclining sofa in my living room
Comfortable enough to lay in for hours as I binge-watch something on Netflix
I am from the bamboo plant my mom gave me as a “just because” gift
The garden of sunflowers
whose long gone limbs I remember as if they were my own.
I’m from making homemade tortillas and tamales together
from Santiago and Anabel
I’m from barbeque dinners and loud music on Sunday mornings
and from trips to the corner store.
I’m from “echale ganas” (give it your all) and “eres una princesa” (you are a princess)
and “Las Mananitas” (a Spanish birthday song)
I’m from destroying candy-filled piñatas
I’m from Chicago and Mexico.

I shared mine last. I was uncomfortable sharing, wondering if they felt like I was wasting their time because the class wasn’t about me. In hindsight, I’m so glad I did. I remembered that students want to know who their teacher is just as much as the teacher wants to know them. I believe this applied here.

I am from grass,
from gravel, and TVs
I am from the small, crowded, town
(Skateboards, streetlights, laughter)
I am from the tulips,
the grapevines
whose long gone limbs I remember as if they were my own.
I’m from cooking dinner and short women
from Lucy and Alan
I’m from church and library and from playing at the park.
I’m from ‘go outside’ and ‘Go Cubs Go’
and ‘Down in the Valley’
I’m from beach trips
I’m from Lake Bluff and the Isle of Mann,
macaroni and Poptarts
From Papa’s art,
his smelly markers,
his picture books
in my hands and on my shelves.

They clapped for me and Jordan shared how she connected to “Go Cubs Go!”

As we came back together to discuss the activity as a whole, I thought about how wonderful it was to get to know them in this way, to share details about our lives and be a little bit raw, breaking down some barriers right from the start. I felt warm and happy in the echoic memory of the teachers reading their poems. When I asked how they felt about this activity, a few of the teachers shared their thoughts. In contrast to my warm feelings, Laelia and Amira discussed how hard this would be for the students and how much scaffolding they would need. Maiah connected it to her own learning styles then stated that she appreciated the choice of “Why Am I Me?” versus “Where I’m From” because she felt “choice was important” to students. Lizzie made it personal by stating that she found it so interesting as a new person to the group that she got to know her colleagues this way, that she “wanted to know more about that and connected to this or that” in each person’s poem. Although I wanted to always present activities that they could do with students and families, I remember feeling a tinge of disappointment that we did not have a deeper discussion on how we got to know each other through this activity, as only Lizzie had brought up. My lens was all about building relationships; theirs seemed to be about something else that I couldn’t quite pinpoint.

I decided in the moment that I needed to be more explicit. I shared with them that my goal for this class period was that we would begin to see how some voices in the classroom are sometimes silenced or simply not celebrated or heard. I used the example of Esperanza’s poem being partly in Spanish and said that when I was an elementary teacher, I never told my students, “you can’t speak Spanish,” but it did not often come up in writing or sharing that someone would speak in Spanish. Although I did not say this to the group, this English-only expectation showed
in how Esperanza was not sure if it was acceptable that her poem had Spanish in it. From my explicit connection comment, Karen shared that she would like to read *Why Am I Me?* with her 2nd graders and fill in the Venn Diagram about what makes the kids the same and different.

Thinking about that moment after class, I reflected on the disconnects I felt that day. It felt like we were on two parallel paths that were not crossing, but I could not understand why. While I was studying issues that surround standardization in education, many of the participants in my study had been dealing with the everyday focus of creating classroom activities that met literacy standards. Perhaps Karen felt that students would be able to label or identify that they speak Spanish, that they would add that to the Venn Diagram, but what I was trying to share was that they would actually get to speak Spanish as part of a learning experience, that Spanish would be part of the classroom. I began to realize we were on different planes and I needed to be sensitive to that.

As the class period continued, I read *Duck! Rabbit!* (Rosenthal, 2009) and *They All Saw A Cat* (Wenzel, 2016). Amira said that she could, “totally do a Socratic seminar with this.” There it was again, that feeling of disconnect. At this point, I began to really panic in my head. I was worried that she was thinking so literally as a teacher that I would not know what she felt about these topics as a person. In hindsight, I believe I was asking them to consider things that they have possibly never discussed in school. I was asking them to take a different perspective, one that did not focus on standards but on relationships and cultural knowledges, which is a challenging notion that they were likely just taking in. I needed to remember in that moment that I had been thinking about this, doing this, and studying it for over three years at that point.

As I began to reflect on our first class together, I felt that the teachers seemed constrained by talking only about student activities and applications, and not about culture or relationships.
In their work on analyzing the classroom discourse of a novel discussion, Moje and Lewis (2007) found that students’ learning was constrained by their “unwillingness to speak against prevailing Discourses and cultural models” (p. 43). The researchers discussed that when one’s experiences were positioned outside of the norm of the Discourse, it prevented the students from making their points of view heard (p. 44). The teachers responses suggest that they felt their input should be within the Discourse of school and curriculum. Moje and Lewis (2007) continued on to question if “identity, agency, and power constrain and enable what counts as knowledge as well as who is allowed to own, receive, develop, or disseminate it” (p. 46). Their standards-based responses indicated that the power of the institution of school, or what is expected from teachers at school today, constrained their thinking about what counts in discussion.

As I will continue to describe in this chapter, I began to view these underlying expectations of what school is today as a form of constraint on the teachers’ agencies (Moje & Lewis, 2007) in enacting different “ways of being” in the classroom, or even considering a different way of being in the classroom. I noticed that this constraint contradicted thinking through the lens of culturally sustaining pedagogy. A main constraint was the normalization or notion of the “grammar of school” or what counts as “real school” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995) as an institution. There are normalized, taken-for-granted expectations around homework, the bell schedule, time, materials available, and learning styles. These expectations are all embedded in the “grammar of schooling” or participating in “real school.” There are legal or policy type constraints around testing, standardization of curricula, and underlying English only expectations in school. And finally, there are social constraints of “real school” around what topics are appropriate and not appropriate for classroom discussion, fear of using the wrong terminology or not being “politically correct,” fear of being called racist, and constraints around politeness. Each
of these unquestioned constraints around the bigger picture of the institution of school possibly prevented the teachers from questioning these practices until they were explicitly examined.

The next activity I presented was “Looking at Subcultures” (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012). I read the directions aloud:

We consider any self-identified group of people who share language, stories, rituals, behaviors, and values a subculture. Some subcultures define themselves by geography (southerners, Texans, New Yorkers). Others define themselves by ethnicity of language (Mexican, Irish, Belgian, Filipino, Ghanaian). And others define their interests by shared rituals and behaviors (fraternities, Girl Scouts, Masons, Daughters of the American Revolution, computer hackers). Whether it’s your bowling league, your neighborhood pickup basketball team or group of bicycle-freestylers, your church, your community government, or your school’s ecology club, you simultaneously belong to many different subcultures. With this box, we’d like you to recall your subculture affiliations and share them with others in your class. (p. 5)

As I read this, they followed along on their “worksheet” in their individual Google Doc folders.

Figure 9. Looking at Subcultures Google Doc
As I looked up from the book where I was reading the directions, many nervous eyes looked back at me. I reassured them that it would be hard, but to just try it. Some of the blank stares moved awkwardly to their computer screens where I had recreated the boxes on a Google Doc to fill in for the activity. Even though they were no longer looking directly at me, I sensed confusion. After a few seconds where no one seemed to move, I asked if they would like to do one together which erupted into ‘yesses’ and nods. I asked if everyone identified as an elementary teacher and they agreed, so we began to try that one as an example. After a laughter-filled conversation about the strange things we do as in-group members of elementary school teachers (such as saying “my kids” to non-teachers who then think we have 20 children of our own at home, or asking our adult friends if they need to use the bathroom before going somewhere), they set off to begin.

The teachers identified as being sport parents, moms, women, and members of Facebook groups. I added that they could also think of bigger level groups such as “American.” After these examples, I heard the sound of many keyboards clicking. I was thankful that my committee had
suggested we dig into this idea of our own practices further and could see how it was going to connect to their outlook on family visits and help them see the funds of knowledge of the families. At the conclusion of the writing time, I asked them to share with someone they did not know well already. I asked them to consider themselves from the perspective of the book *Duck! Rabbit!* (Rosenthal, 2009) where one person from the inside sees one aspect of the sub-group and the other sees it differently from the outside. Loud conversations and laughter continued for about ten minutes as the teachers shared their subculture group memberships. Laelia discussed the difficulties of being a second-generation immigrant who only speaks in “Spanglish.” Lizzie described how she is part of a group that hunts ghosts across the country of which she was the co-founder. As they shared back with the whole group, Lizzie’s partner nudged her to share out about ghost hunting. She was clearly uncomfortable knowing that her sub-group was outside of the norm and so when she discussed how the group investigated paranormal activities she added, “Like hi! I’m Lizzie, I’m a weirdo!” and the whole group laughed. I was so glad she positioned herself this way, to show how being outside of what is considered normal can be really uncomfortable.

Maiah and Jordan, who had never met before, connected about their sports cultures. When Maiah told the story of moving to this city and loving a different, rival college football team, laughter erupted in the room. She summed up her struggles with rival fans by saying, “If you moved [there], would you stop loving your team? No, it’s who you are. I’m not changing either, so we are just going to have to find a way to love each other.” Here, Maiah pointed out how important sub-cultures are and how we do not want to be forced to change them. This was an important point that we would return to later when discussing the expectations of Dominant English and standardized ways of behaving in school.
After that, I asked them to turn to the bottom part of the Google Doc worksheet where it asked them to consider the literacy practices they engaged in within those subcultures. The instructions asked them to “Write a reflective paragraph about the literacy practices you see in this subculture. What is involved in terms of reading, writing, listening, speaking?” I gave my own example from being a Chicago Cubs baseball fan. Being a fan meant not simply reading a book about the Cubs but as I shared in my “Where I’m From” poem, I explained how I sang Cubs songs that all Cubs fans would be expected to know. I then shared what I heard from Laelia in her discussions- in her boyfriend’s family and subculture, they were expected to greet everyone in the room with a kiss on the cheek. I explained how I felt that this was a form of literacy because it was communication and it was important to being an insider of that subculture. I set them off to work and quickly noticed Amira could not get started. She asked if she was supposed to do her own subgroup and when I confirmed she said, “How?!” incredulously at me. She felt prepared to look at others’ groups and identify their literacy practices but felt that she could not identify her own. She looked at me with confusion and perhaps frustration and then down to her computer to attempt this task.

Upon examining the written documents of this activity, I was struck by how the teachers seemed to define their own subgroup’s literacy practices in two ways (collated below in Tables Eight and Nine): 1. very traditionally in terms of “school literacies” as if they were going down a checklist of “reading, writing, speaking, and listening,” or 2. in broader ways, more of a Discourse of literacy as if they were conceptualizing the “acting, behaving, and knowing” (Gee, 2014). It is interesting to consider their verb choices (or the implied verbs).

Table 8. Defined as "School" Literacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Amira</th>
<th>Laelia</th>
<th>Lizzie</th>
<th>Karen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subculture</td>
<td>Mom</td>
<td>Mexican American</td>
<td>Ghost hunting group</td>
<td>Mom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Literacy Practices
- **read** books to my daughter
- recommend good books
- discussing books
- **write** letters
- **listen** to their perspective
- **discuss** books with other moms
- **write and read** emails

- **listen** and speak fluent in both English and Spanish
- **read** to learn history
- **write** as a way to document
- **listen** in investigations
- **speaking** to entities
- **communicate** with each other
- **retell** our stories

- **read** books to my children
- use different voices
- **written** info for teachers, notes from home
- **listen** and speak
- fluent in both English and Spanish
- English speaking friends
- **write and read** emails
- listen and speak
- fluent in both English and Spanish
- English speaking friends
- **communicate** with each other
- **retell** our stories

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Table 9. Defined as Discourses of Literacies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Esperanza</th>
<th>Jordan</th>
<th>Rachel</th>
<th>Maiah</th>
<th>Rebecca</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subculture</strong></td>
<td>Transplant to this city</td>
<td>Baseball fan</td>
<td>Liberal Democrat</td>
<td>Bostonian</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Literacy Practices** | - **converse** with people that you don’t know
- **support** cultural events
- **have things** with University [logo] on them
- **make** social media posts [about University]
- **pay attention** to news [about University] [looking and doing]
- **high fives**
- **chants**
- 7th inning stretch
- **singing**
- [read the] program
- **score card rules**
- players cards and autographs
- **history and biographies**
- clothing
- [knowing and behaving]
- **watch** MSNBC
- **door knocking**
- **read** NYT
- too much time on Twitter
- **talk** with candidates at farmer’s market
- **discuss** local/organic food
- **caucus night discussions**
- rally/protest
- **physical representations**
- **lyrics** to Sweet Caroline
- **drop the r’s**
- **know** the streets
- **know** the T system
- **know** Boston
- American history
- silent on subway
- walk fast
- **know** where to jaywalk
- **dress without perpetrating**
- **read** Boston Globe or The Post
| **actions and knowing** | **inside jokes**
| **stories**
| **songs**
| **memories**
| **honesty** |
The verb choices indicate ways in which these teachers conceptualize and define literacy. The first group defines literacy as a form of reading, writing, speaking, listening. As Lizzie for example showed, she appeared to have run down a checklist of “read, write, listen, speak, communicate, retell.” This implies the strong possibility that teachers will define literacy in this way in their classroom activities as well. The second group conceptualizes the literacy practices of their subgroups as looking, doing, knowing, behaving, and with physical representations. As Jordan exemplified, many of her literacy practices involve knowing how to participate in this group as well as what to wear and do. This implied a broader definition of literacy and may also be exemplified more broadly in their classrooms, more in line with the idea of multiliteracies (Street, 1995; The New London Group, 1996).

As we recapped the literacy practices of the various subgroups, I decided to make my point explicit again. I asked them to consider all of these different literacy practices as valid ways to express oneself in the classroom, a push toward multiliteracies (Street, 1995; The New London Group, 1996). I challenged them to go to the family homes and look for these practices to incorporate back into their classrooms. Within the “grammar of schooling” mentality, as discussed in Chapter Two, “real school” literacy is defined by the dominant practices of simply reading, writing, and speaking (in Dominant American English) and measured in standardized ways. However, when a singular view of literacy is valued by the culture of power, that literacy practice becomes the normalized one (Street, 1995, p. 1), or “real school” literacy. The way a teacher conceptualizes literacy is important to her pedagogy because if she views literacy as a neutral skill, such as fluency in written or spoken Dominant American English, she is likely reinforcing one dominant way of being literate. Encompassed in the idea of “verbocentrism” (Siegel, 1995) as discussed in Chapter Two, reinforcing a dominant and “correct” way of
speaking and reading leads to dismissing cultural and diverse literacies. With all this in mind, as I reflected that night on their discussions of literacy practices, I remembered that this is a long process to move from literacy to literacies. I was going to have to make these practices very explicit as they encountered them in the course because they did differ from what the standardization of schools expected from them.

**Defining Involvement**

After a short break and a chance to silently answer the questions I posed to them in their journals, I asked them to discuss families, family involvement, and home visits. Up on the screen, I projected some guiding questions, but I asked them to discuss openly, reassuring them that they did not have to answer those questions.

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**Figure 10. Slide on Board during Discussion**

**DISCUSSION**

Take a few minutes to gather your thoughts in “*in class journal*”:

*What do you think of when you think of family involvement? What does it look like? What do you want it to look like? What about when you think of home visits? What do you want from this course?*

---

I was excited to hear their thoughts. As I posed the first question, there was silence and blank stares in my direction. I knew that many teachers defined parent involvement by examples of physical evidence (Shockley, Michalove, & Allen, 1995, p. 91) so I said, “For example, I
think of how it is really common to ask parents to read 20 minutes a night at home then sign the log.” Amira shyly chimed in, as if she was not sure she was answering the right question, and said, “Um, texts? I rely a lot on texts, texting parents throughout the day. So, I consider that…” Then I overlapped her speech with “Ok, so parents who respond to you?” Amira replied, “Yea, that’s involvement.” She continued to describe how parents who ask her questions about school are considered involved and then she said, “You know, then you have the parents who are not involved…they just don’t respond.” I was reminded in this moment of her poster on the wall and her repeated use of the term, “SLANT!” when I visited her classroom. SLANT was an acronym for “Sit Up, Listen, Ask Questions, Nod your Head, Track the Speaker.” Amira (and AVID classrooms in general) used this “reminder” to the students as a way of attending to the speaker. When Amira defined involvement as the parents who respond, it felt like a version of SLANT: listen, ask questions, track the speaker (although perhaps not physically in a text). As Gee (2014) stated, “we can use language to make certain sign systems and certain forms of knowledge and belief relevant or privileged” (p. 35). SLANT represented a cultural form of communication channels, as not every culture is expected to “nod your head,” nor “ask questions” to show attention (Phillips, 1983). Although Delpit (2006) would argue it is important to teach parents and children these codes of power, it is equally important to legitimize and value cultural communication as well. Amira expected the parents and students to respond to the teacher in this way to be considered “involved.” This indicates she was privileging a cultural form of expectations that the students and parents in her class did not necessarily share.

Karen offered her opinion next by stating that she thought parent involvement depended on the child. She spoke very choppily, as if she was choosing her words carefully, “Some children…need…more…family involvement…at school, because they maybe have some
different struggles and need more support from family members than other children.” I asked her to clarify if she meant some kids were “more needy?” to which she replied, “just supporting and reinforcements at home.” I wrote in my analytic memo that night that I felt that she was “beating around the bush.” She was avoiding a deficit statement that she believed certain families should be more involved than they were. She described that some children in her class needed more family support that she perceived they were not receiving at home. It is important to recognize that she had not visited the homes of these families to know what level of involvement was actually occurring.

Maiah responded, “I think I expect some sort of daily interaction with the kid with their family about school, so not necessarily doing homework together but checking in or having some sort of conversation about what’s going on like are you being bullied or whatever it is. I would feel like, oh a family’s not involved if there’s a day that goes by that no one at home talked to you about what happened at school or did something with you school related.”

I summarized and connected to Maiah’s response then tried to open it up to the other teachers who sat silently in the back of the room, “What else does it look like?” Silence. I added, “There’s not a right or wrong answer here, I’m just wondering what it looks like for you and your school.” Karen chimed back in hesitantly, “Um, I use Talking Points a lot.” Talking Points was a texting app that allows teachers to text or email and the text is translated into various languages. Karen explained that seven different languages were spoken in her students’ homes. A few of the other teachers did not know about this app, so they shared about how it worked and how the parents responded. Amira explained that some of the parents who were learning English really benefited from talking with her and trying to text or email. She described how she thought
it helped them with new vocabulary and how she could tell when they responded that “they had put a lot of work into it.” The group agreed with nods and very affirmative “yeas.”

After a few more seconds of silence, I transitioned into asking, “What do you want it [parent involvement] to look like? If it was your dream classroom environment, with your dream families, what would it be?” Amira responded quickly and dramatically in staccato, “Read. Every. Night. And discuss reading.” Rebecca added, “Bringing in books that they found that they love.” Rachel added enthusiastically, “parent volunteers!” as the group laughed in agreement. Lizzie, the librarian added, “keeping their library books in their backpack [the group broke out into raucous laughter] so they don’t lose them…instilling that they’re expensive.” Karen shared a story about how she felt that parents who buy school supplies demonstrate a different attitude toward school than those who do not “really save and plan.”

In trying to understand how the teachers conceptualized involvement in the scenarios above, I used Gee’s (2014) concept of “figured worlds” (p. 95) to examine their responses. Gee described “figured worlds” as “ways in which people picture or construe aspects of the world in their heads, ways they have of looking at aspects of the world” (p. 95). The teachers construed a world in their heads where parents and teachers communicated openly and had a working, positive relationship (“daily interaction”). These teachers pictured a world where parents were comfortable asking questions of the teacher and reaching out to her (“[parents] asking ‘oh what do we do with this?’”). The teachers also pictured a “figured world” where parents implemented the school expectations when at home, specifically talking to their children about school each day (“having some sort of conversation with the child”). Gee (2014) explained that these “figured worlds” are based in experiences but are edited, more as typical “simulations we run in our minds” (p. 97). According to Gee, we use these simulations to better understand the world.
and to prepare for the future of a similar situation (p. 98). Because many teachers share these similar “figured worlds” about parent involvement, Gee refers to this as “prototypical simulations” (p. 99) where many people see this “figured world” as typical and take it for granted. These prototypical simulations may come from the same line of assimilationist thinking as described before. These parent expectations are in line with Discourses of what good parents do. The danger here lies in what is seen as different from the “figured world.” As Gee pointed out, “‘typical’ differs across social and cultural groups of people” (p. 99). He described that it is dangerous when we use these “prototypical simulations” to interpret when someone or something is different. When a family does not involve themselves in the ways that teachers expect (not communicating, not asking questions, not providing evidence of school expectations at home), they may be seen as “deviant” (p. 100) in a sense. Gee (2014) pointed out that “we can too often thereby translate ‘difference’ into ‘deviance’ by moving from ‘typical’ (which we too often take to mean ‘normal,’ ‘acceptable,’ and ‘right’) to ‘less typical’ (which we then take to mean ‘non-normal,’ ‘not acceptable,’ and ‘not right’)” (parentheses and quotations in original, p. 100). If teachers see these families as non-normal they may be treated differently or with a deficit perspective as Karen described in her story about the Facebook post.

When I posed the question, “What do you want [family] involvement to look like?” I felt that teachers responded with many value-instilling expectations of families. When Rebecca stated that she wanted families to bring in books “that they found and that they love” she implied that a love of reading is a “normal” path to literacy and involvement. Using Gee’s (2014) ideas about the politics communicated in language, I asked myself of their responses, “What is being communicated as to what is taken to be ‘normal,’ ‘right,’ ‘good,’ ‘correct?’” (p. 34-35). Findings imply that “good” families would meet the school’s standards and expectations of valuing
reading at home as shown below in Table Ten. These goods include reading often and expressing the value of reading and school, like when Karen equated buying supplies to the “thinking about the importance of school.” In Karen’s figured world, buying school supplies was communicated to be the “right” thing to do. In the teachers’ ideal worlds, parents would feel the same passion as the teachers do towards literacy (“love,” “value,” “importance”). These teachers wanted the parents to love literacy and share that love with their children.

Table 10. Analyzing Social Goods of Family Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers’ Responses to “What do you want involvement to look like?”</th>
<th>Gee’s Building Task Question (2014, p. 34-35): What perspective on social goods is this piece of language communicated as to what is taken to be normal/right/good?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“read every night and discuss”</td>
<td>It is ‘good’ is to read every night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“bringing in books that they found and that they love”</td>
<td>To love books is the ‘right’ way to be a reader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“instilling that they [books] are expensive”</td>
<td>Valuing books is a ‘good’ thing, parents should teach this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saving money for school supplies to show value “thinking about the importance of school”</td>
<td>Spending money on school equates to expression of value, ‘good,’ ‘right’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When a family does not involve themselves in the ways of this “figured world” regarding valuing and enjoying reading, once again they may be seen as “deviant” or from a deficit-perspective in the teacher’s eyes.

After class that night, I examined their journals where they wrote responses to similar questions as the in-class discussion. Their journals aligned with the figured worlds they described in the discussion about the value of loving reading, which I highlighted below in bold in Table 11. They described this figured world of open communication, just as they did in discussion. Each of these responses, with the exception of Laelia’s, implies a way of doing literacy at home that matches literacy at school, which Rachel explicitly wrote.

Table 11. Written Answers in In-Class Journal about Family Literacy at Home
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Tell me about your expectations for families about literacy at their home.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>Make it apart of their daily routine, use imagination and be creative, <strong>make it fun</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>Would love for the kids to make it an <strong>enjoyable</strong> habit of reading for fun and learning every night. I want kids to see reading in a <strong>positive</strong> light and not just a chore you have to do at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>I want families to model and talk about reading/writing to <strong>show the importance</strong> of both. It is important that many students in 2nd grade still be reading aloud to family members. Family members reading aloud to their children helps to build vocabulary and the <strong>love of books</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maiah</td>
<td>My expectation is that students are reading every day and are communicating with me what their families are reading every day. I will be focusing on novels, but I <strong>understand that novels do not excite</strong> some children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Some families are not literate in English, some have not developed “school” literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esperanza</td>
<td>That they take their children to the library or at least have access to books in some other way for their children. Encourage them to read. If they currently don’t, at least be willing and open to doing so.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amira</td>
<td>Read every night for 20 minutes. Discuss books.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laelia</td>
<td>I can’t really think of any at the top of my head. Just because there are so many ways to define and look at literacy and the definition of what it means itself can be so very different from person to person. I just expect and hope that families are willing to share and learn with me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lizzie</td>
<td>I want kids to always have a book to read. But I also want to teach them responsibility and that if they borrow it, they return it so that they can get something new. I understand that this is problematic but something I hope to work on and <strong>instill</strong> in kids. Books are expensive and still a <strong>privilege</strong>, but I want all kids to love reading and <strong>make good choices</strong> in what they take home.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As written in their answers above, the teachers expected that at home, the parents were reading with their children or encouraging them to read daily and discuss that reading. In the responses, many teachers answered with similar “figured worlds” to the in-class discussion, envisioning that reading at home is “normal” and that “good” readers love and value reading. As noted in Table 11, Jordan said, “make it fun,” Rebecca added “enjoyable,” and Karen added a “love of books.” Not only should parents make reading fun but also they expected that parents will provide access to books and teach their children to take care of them as indicated in Lizzie’s response about books being a “privilege” and Karen wanting the parents to “show the importance.” As Heath (1983/1999) showed, privileging and enjoying reading as its own activity is a cultural practice, not a universal one (p. 231).
In the classroom, the teachers wanted families to volunteer by reading with/to the class, writing or editing with students, and listening to students read. A few times the responses felt like the parent would be a teacher’s aide. Their responses were in line with views of dominant literacy as reading, writing, listening—highlighted below in bold in Table 12.

Table 12. Written Answers in In-Class Journals about Ways Families Help

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>What are some ways that families can help in the classroom?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td><strong>Reading and writing</strong> with kids, <strong>speaking</strong> about their experiences, <strong>sharing</strong> at playtime.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>Come in and <strong>share</strong> books. <strong>Listen</strong> to students read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td><strong>Read</strong> with students or <strong>listen</strong> to students read, <strong>revise/edit</strong> stories with students, <strong>play</strong> math games with students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maiah</td>
<td>Families can help by working with me to establish goals for their students and monitor and support their student in meeting their goals. They can also be a resource for me to engage our school curriculum with real life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td><strong>Reading</strong> with kids, going on field trips, volunteering for family nights, doing cutting/collating work at home, working on special projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esperanza</td>
<td><strong>Ask</strong> students about school and what they are learning, take an interest in the homework they are working on or the books they are reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amira</td>
<td><strong>Read</strong> to children, <strong>discuss</strong> books. <strong>Write</strong> or edit with students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laelia</td>
<td>Being supportive about students learning at home - meaning showing an interest, being there for a student when content gets difficult, etc. <strong>Talking</strong> to their child about school - academic and social. <strong>Reading</strong> with their child at home. Being on the same page with me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lizzie</td>
<td>I would love for parent volunteers to help shelve books or <strong>read</strong> to students! Or come and <strong>book talk</strong> their favorite book.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This data in this table indicates teachers’ related to wanting parents to recreate the literacy that is already occurring in the classroom. Parents would read, write, and listen along with the children in an effort to help the teachers, such as Amira’s response, “read to children, discuss books. Write or edit with students.” A few teachers had responses that were more individualized as they saw the parent as someone who could add to the learning environment of the class or of their student, especially Jordan’s response about “speaking about their experiences” and Maiah’s response to “engage our school curriculum with real life.” Delpit (2006) explained this occurrence, “children from other kinds of families operate within perfectly...
wonderful and viable cultures but not cultures that carry the codes or rules of power” (p. 25).

When teachers recreate dominant literacy norms in the classroom, there is little space for culturally sustaining literacy practices nor family connections.

**Funds of Knowledge Views of Literacy**

I presented Moll’s (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) theory of the funds of knowledge and connected it back to the “Looking at Subcultures” activity (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2000/2012, p. 5). I shared, for example, that Lizzie likely had a whole fund of knowledge about the paranormal that others do not have, that is unlikely to be built upon in the classroom. I also shared that Laelia likely had a fund of knowledge about being a Mexican-American that could be used in the classroom as a connection. Earlier, the teachers expressed concerns about having a purpose of going to a family visits. To reiterate I said, “If you’re worried about that whole, ‘why am I here?’ it is to learn that family’s funds of knowledge and bring it into your classroom.” We then watched a video (Moll, 2015) where Luis Moll shared his theory and applications.

To illustrate a few more examples, I shared some funds of knowledge that became part of classrooms. I offered an example about a former colleague who loved the Beatles and so the Beatles and music became a huge part of their classroom culture. I shared that one of my funds of knowledge from home was that my grandfather was a children’s book illustrator, so I had an in-depth understanding of the process of creating and publishing children’s books that I would share with my class as a teacher. I then shared that as a child, this was celebrated in my classrooms because it matched the love that many teachers had for children’s books. I then asked them to consider their own funds of knowledge that they bring to the classroom. After a few minutes, I noticed that a few were typing but most were staring at blank screens. I thought to myself, ‘Maybe I shared too unique of an example about the illustrator?’ so I added, “Another
fund of knowledge I have is that my dad was a fisherman, so as a kid I knew a lot about how to catch fish, clean fish which was disgusting, [laughter] and cook fish that others might not know.” Maiah laughed and shared that she loved when they would clean fish because it meant “success.” We laughed and they got back to typing, more fingers moving this time.

Upon examining their written responses, I noted that the white teachers in particular struggled to come up with their own funds of knowledge, a contrast from the three teachers of color as shown in Table 13. I believe seeing strengths outside of school was difficult for some of the teachers due to their notions of what counted as knowledge, or “real school.” I was asking them to consider something they had perhaps not considered before.

Table 13. Written Answers in In-Class Journals about Own Funds of Knowledge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Self-Identified Funds of Knowledge</th>
<th><em>I removed explanations of the fund, just listed the fund</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maiah, Black</td>
<td>Football, social justice, gospel music, black church, living in a city, staying on budget, using computers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esperanza, Latina</td>
<td>How to go from an ELL student to college graduate, anime, Hispanic culture and language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laelia, Latina</td>
<td>Breeding dogs, reading, writing, childcare, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lizzie, White</td>
<td>Dramatic reading voices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel, White</td>
<td><em>left blank</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan, White</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amira, White</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca, White</td>
<td>Importance of education, reading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen, White</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The six white teachers focused on their knowledges from school such as reading and math, whereas the three teachers of color described many practices and topics from which they have strengths such as sports, languages, and specific knowledges. This data implies that some of the teachers had not examined their own knowledges and their own strengths whereas other had previously. It also indicates limited definitions of the concept of “knowledge.” When the definition of the word and idea of “knowledge” is created by the institutions of power, that
definition will match the institution’s knowledge. Fairclough (2015) wrote, “white middle-class gatekeepers are likely to constrain the discourse types which can be drawn upon to those of the dominant cultural grouping” (p. 77). At schools, “knowledge” matches the ideas presented above by the white teachers, success in reading and math.

Before discussing their own funds of knowledge as a group, I interrupted and asked them to record what funds might be already celebrated in their classrooms today. I gave the example that as a child, my children’s book fund would have been celebrated but my fishing fund would not have been. Again, more silent typing. Esperanza interrupted the silence and said to the group, “I’ve thought about ‘how to work with people’ [as a fund] not just by yourself.” I nodded, “Yea! How we expect them to be able to work in groups easily…that’s interesting because it’s so not something we expect at home, aside from a sibling, kids do not work with people that they don’t know.” The group chimed in with various responses about the classroom, “being held accountable” and “being self-aware and knowing how to communicate your needs.”

Upon examining the written documents, I found that the teachers who previously struggled had a much easier time with this activity as shown in Table 14. They seemed more comfortable identifying knowledges in the classroom, knowledges that matched the dominant views of what “counts” as knowledge as opposed to when I asked them to define their own funds.

Table 14. Written Answers in In-Class Journals about Classroom Funds of Knowledge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Funds of Knowledge of their Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maiah, Black</td>
<td>Communicating orally, self-advocacy, knowing current events, knowing yourself as a learner and your academic needs, self-sufficiency, ability to make connections between disparate ideas, flexibility, ability to express yourself in writing, staying regulated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esperanza, Latina</td>
<td>Working with a team, how to be self-sufficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laelia, Latina</td>
<td><em>left blank</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lizzie, White</td>
<td>Library expectations, respecting each other including ourselves, seeing books as mirrors and windows, finding the book that leads to more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As with Fairclough’s above statement regarding the gatekeepers of knowledge, these knowledges match dominant ways of being in “real school” such as self-sufficiency, teamwork, thinking, and listening. These knowledges in their classrooms would be expected to match dominant ways of being in the classroom. However, the problem is expressed when a student’s expression of knowledge does not meet the expectations of that of the institution. As described by Gee’s “figured worlds” in the previous section, when students act outside of the norm they might be perceived as deviant and treated as such (2014, p. 34-35).

Due to time purposes, I pushed through to get them to make the next connection, “What are some funds of knowledge you think you might see if you go into a family’s home? Think of a family in your class or last year’s class and write about that.” I was hoping that this string of activities would get them thinking about how they have funds, the classroom has funds, and families have funds- and yet they are not all the same. As they were thinking, I pointed out on the slide displayed at the front about how Moll et al. (2005, p. 73) found that most of the funds of knowledge they saw were around work, religion, and household management.
Rachel spoke up about how her students know how to ride the bus, so I pointed to *Last Stop on Market Street* (de la Peña, 2015) that was displayed by my materials as I was planning to read it next. Maiah brought up caring for pets and the others agreed. We all laughed raucously as I shared how this past summer I bought fish repeatedly and they kept dying until I finally decided to stop buying more fish. I pointed out, “This is not my fund of knowledge!” I shared another example of how my friend’s two-year-old watched her husband build a motorcycle all summer long. The boy had his own play toolkit and pretended to build. As I described this, I said, “That’s a fund of knowledge that he will definitely have going forward.”

Upon examining the written documents, collated in Table 15, many of their responses connect to broad level understandings of culture (food, religion, language); however, Maiah, Jordan, and Rebecca’s responses were more in line with Moll’s theory (2005).

Table 15. Written Answers to Family Funds of Knowledge
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Funds of Knowledge of their Families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maiah, Black</td>
<td>Talking care of multiple pets, soccer, being on competition teams, professor’s kids know a lot about their research, political activism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esperanza, Latina</td>
<td>Food, music, languages, their religion and beliefs, how to ride public transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laelia, Latina</td>
<td>Religion, family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lizzie, White</td>
<td>Parents’ jobs, their religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan, White</td>
<td>Legos, sports, other languages/cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan, White</td>
<td>Books, board games, musical instruments, family dining table, religion, briefcase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amira, White</td>
<td>Lots of kids, busy, loud; food, culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca, White</td>
<td>Video games and systems, iPads and computers, hunting and fishing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen, White</td>
<td>Religion, language</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Maiah, Jordan, and Rebecca pointed to, Moll’s theory of the funds of knowledge (2005) are broader areas to build from in the classroom than traditional thoughts of culture such as food and religion (Banks, 1989). Maiah indicated knowledge bases from experiences, jobs, and activism. Jordan described activities and physical objects in the home from which to build knowledge. Rebecca pointed out activities inside and outside the home. When teachers recognize family’s funds of knowledge, they can bring those knowledges into the classroom as important areas of expertise. As González, Moll, and Amanti (2005) stated, the goal of a funds of knowledge perspective is “to alter perceptions of working-class or poor communities and to view these households primarily in terms of their strength and resources.” (p. x). Each of these funds of knowledge perspectives, as well as those ideas from the other teachers, gave the teachers a place to build from as a strength in the classroom.

Rachel shared that she and Jordan had participated in home visits with newer immigrant families recently and she felt like they did not “have anything” in their homes. She described, “They had a couch, a giant tv, and that was it! I didn’t see toys, I didn’t see books…nothing. So, trying to think of what that is when you just don’t really have, anything. And then you have somewhat of a language barrier, um, trying to get to their funds of knowledge [is difficult].”
Before starting this course, I worried about this deficit perspective of families, so I was prepared for this line of thinking. I had definitely thought this way when I was a classroom teacher. I replied cautiously that I think it takes time to understand a family’s funds of knowledge; it may not be something you see on the first visit. I worried that the group was thinking that funds of knowledge were material things so I replied, “Right away I think a lot of immigrant families have religion and language as funds of knowledge, so building off of those things could be a place to start. But some of these activities, ‘Why Am I Me?’ or ‘Where I’m From’ poems, can help the families think of their funds of knowledge because sometimes they don’t think about them either.” I then shared an embarrassing learning experience of when I went into a home and asked the mom directly, “What literacy practices do you do at home?” to which everyone in the room laughed including me. I continued and gestured with my arm, “I was so out here, and she was like not there, so I was like, ‘Oh, I sound like an idiot!’” I shared how eventually I learned to see the songs and games that they played as a family and build from those. I shared another example about a teacher in my previous project had used the book In My Family (Garza, 2000) to discuss cultural traditions around weddings. The mom from the visit ended up getting out her wedding pictures and showing her daughters. Then they wrote a family book about their cultural traditions around weddings. Amira was enthralled; she was smiling and so excited about this idea, she said “Oh cool!” I felt in that moment that she was hooked.

I reiterated how families do not know their funds in that way, that you cannot just ask them. To this, Lizzie said as an aside, “and that’s where my anxiety kicks in.” Clearly, this was a tough topic for the teachers to grasp and was a scary endeavor for them in the beginning. As Lizzie would soon discover though, she loved doing her family visit and wanted to do another
one immediately after her first. I wrapped up the conversation by explicitly stating how Moll was asking us to shift our thinking from what the families aren’t doing, to what they are doing.

**Cultural Literacy Practices**

To return to the concept of the funds of knowledge and to practice seeing literacy through an ethnographic lens, I paired two unlikely activities, a read aloud of *Last Stop on Market Street* (de la Peña, 2015) with a clip of a documentary called *Harlan County, USA* (Kopple, 1977). I told the teachers I would like them to practice seeing the funds of knowledge or the family literacy practices so that when they participated in a family visit, they might have an easier time. I then explicitly said I would like them to think about how to incorporate these practices back into their classrooms.

Surprisingly to me, only a few of the teachers nodded ‘yes’ when I asked if they had read *Last Stop on Market Street* (de la Peña, 2015) as I showed the cover. Just two years prior to this study, this book about a boy and his grandma who ride the city bus to volunteer at a local shelter, had won the Newberry Medal, a Coretta Scott King Honor, and a Caldecott Honor so I figured it was well-known. I reminded myself how busy teachers are, if something is not in the curriculum or in the budget, it is likely not in the classroom. In the book, CJ questioned all the things they do not have while his Nana pointed to all the beautiful things they do have instead.

I read the book then paused and asked what they thought of it. Many seconds of silence went by, I was determined not to panic and push them this time. However, no one spoke, so I prompted them to think about why it might have won awards. Lizzie, one who had read it before, broke the silence by saying, “It leads to higher order thinking, there’s a lot more to it.” She questioned if students would understand it or need a lot of help. Laelia, another teacher who had read it before, said she had used it in reading practicum to talk about “theme” and the students
“really got it. It clicked.” ‘Higher-order thinking’ and ‘theme’ are terms straight from curriculum and standards, so I pushed her to think about why it worked so well, to which she replied in a high-pitched voice, “I don’t know!”

However, as she continued to explain, she did know. On line four below, she described the transactional theory of reading (Rosenblatt, 1978) where the book and the reader make meaning together, that the meaning is not static on the page.

The book is very telling, it’s almost like it’s obvious except to CJ so as a reader you kind of get like the outside look on his life and you can see how beautiful his life really is even if it’s not the most lavish expensive thing, and the kids really took it in their own ways, so like every person who reads a book, you see it from your experiences and so they got different things like be grateful for what you have, from like respecting people’s differences, like different stuff like that, because you think there’s a lot of ways to look at it depending on who you are you look at it differently.

Pushing the standardized school literacy thinking aside, here Laelia showed that she understood a deeper connection that the students might have with this text. In line four she said, “every person who reads a book, you see it from your experiences” which is important for literacy learning and teaching. Rosenblatt (1978) stated, “the reader brings to the text his past experiences and present positionality” (p. 12). What Laelia pointed to was that students understood the “theme” of this book because they connected to the experiences and positionalities of the character. When the curriculum provides literature that is not diverse nor of high quality as this award winning book is, the students have less of a chance to connect to text and understand the “theme” as Laelia’s lesson plan goal was.
I strongly agreed with Laelia’s statement and then asked how that connected to what CJ’s possible funds of knowledge were. I reiterated, “Funds of knowledge are just like his practices… what does CJ come to school with?” They threw out ideas such as “riding the bus” and “giving.” I connected that as a teacher, you might not know this part of CJ’s life, that he has this heart for giving or even that he volunteers at a soup kitchen. I thought out loud about a family practice of “seeing the best in people” as CJ’s grandmother does. I questioned how we could use that and see that in the classroom. The teachers stared at me blankly as if that did not apply to their everyday teaching lives.

Maiah discussed seeing his learning styles as, “not explicit learning like school is ‘I do, you do, you do,’ he’s used to a different way, he might learn by watching.” I agreed and connected it back to a time when Maiah had said students learn by “our silence” as well. This was an important point to pushing back on “real school” practices again. After Maiah pointed that out, we questioned if school learning was the only learning or best way of learning, which clearly from this picture book, it was not. I then asked how they could use the fund of knowledge of “giving” in their classrooms. No one responded for a while. Then Laelia answered in the form of questions as if she was guessing, “Modeling? [Having a] growth-mindset for yourself?” Again, curriculum and standards-based answers.

To close the conversation, I decided to explicitly use the power I had as the teacher in the room to make this book a “teachable moment.” I connected it to knowing families and students better as I shared that I felt this book was a perfect way to “see kids beyond a certain demographic on the page” and went on to describe how at the school, CJ would possibly be seen as “a poor Black boy, who rides the bus, and lives with his grandma, who knows where his mom is? You know, that narrative” and yet through this book, we could see him as so much more. I
then made the explicit connection that this was why teacher-family relationships were so important to me. Amira responded that she felt this was a perfect reason to “learn from our students, too, about their funds of knowledge…having those discussions, a Socratic seminar or whatever, just getting them talking about their home life…” Amira was beginning to shift her thinking toward listening and questioning the students about their own lives, as opposed to believing she was the only teacher in the classroom, evidenced in how she said, “learn from our students, too” which implied that this was not her current thinking about teaching and learning.

The next activity was to watch a clip of a documentary called *Harlan County, USA* (Kopple, 1977) that I had chosen because of its interesting look at the literacy practices of the women in this community. Because I expected, then later confirmed, that no one in the group would identify with this community of poor, white, Kentucky coal miners, it felt like it might be an easier way to identify community literacy practices because they were not those of the “dominant school literacy.” It is difficult to see normalized practices at first, so I hoped this would be a chance to identify different practices before we dug into the dominant ones. As Lea and Sims (2008) described, “hegemony works through our school system so that our student teachers come to see the traditional, Eurocentric classroom as benign and normal” (p. 188). When something is normal, it is harder to see.

In the clip we watched, the coal miners were on strike and the women of the community were supporting the strike efforts. The women used various songs and call-and-response type interactions to tell the stories of the men working in the mines and the day’s events about the strike. The people sat on their front porches and sang these songs; they sang them on the picket lines, and again rallies about the strike. Each song had a tune that the community clearly knew but the words would change based on the story they were telling.
I asked the teachers to share what they noticed which led Laelia to say, “The music was intriguing. It led me to think about how music was used throughout different cultures and time periods…that it’s used in tough times and tells a story.” I agreed and said that I saw the women as using the songs to tell stories which Laelia connected with, “The music I listen to is storytelling about things in my life.” Maiah connected that she knew this type of singing stating, “that was very familiar to my culture, in my church.” She described how in her church, one person was the leader who “raised the hymn” and the others followed so they would be singing and not know where the song was going next. It struck me in that moment how different my church upbringing was. As a kid, I got in trouble if I did not read the hymn straight from the hymnal book and say the words exactly as they were written. In school, students are expected to read the book and retell the story exactly as it is written, just like my church upbringing, but not like Maiah’s.

I showed another clip and then shared a story from my own experience with this documentary. After I saw this movie the first time, I was blown away by the singing. I called a friend who lived in this area who I knew had seen this movie. I asked him if the schools used those kinds of songs to teach. He laughed at me, saying “no,” as if my question was ridiculous. When I pushed back, “Why not?” he said, “They beat it out of them.” Although I do not believe he meant physically beating the children, the sentiment was clear. I shared with the teachers that I thought about how, “this was NOT ‘school’ literacy. Nothing that they were doing is ‘school’ literacy.”

Maiah shared her thoughts on why these literacy practices might not happen in schools when she stated, “Their moms aren’t the ones working in the schools. The teachers who are working in the schools aren’t part of that culture…if their moms were the teachers, they would be singing
those songs. So, there is that very clear, your parents are sending you literally to another world for you to learn how to assimilate and then you come back home.” I found out later, Maiah had been bussed to another school in Boston as a child. She went from being Black in an all-Black school to being Black in an all-white school in junior high. In this moment, although she was talking about the singing of the Harlan County people, it seemed she was speaking from personal experience. Here, Maiah pointed directly to what I described in Chapter One as the problem in the field: many teachers and students do not come from the same cultural background, as a result, the teacher’s cultural background takes precedent in the classroom as she is the one with power.

I asked the teachers to consider how they might use these ideas in the classroom. I stated that I felt like although I would not know how to incorporate this kind of music in my classroom, this would be a perfect time to invite the grandparents and parents in to share with the class. Laelia answered that her students wrote raps as a connection to their cultural literacy. As she told the story below, the tension between what she considered proper “school writing” and the boy expressing himself through song struck me. She shared about her student:

“[He] wrote the most incredible rap I think I’ve ever read, and I was seriously, like

'please capitalize your Is’ but other than that it’s beautiful [laughter]. It’s so good, it literally blew me away, he’s so talented and here I am like, there’s obviously that balance of writing complete sentences, but like you have to have some outlet of creativity and how to encourage that and I don’t know, like value it more because it should be valued, a lot more.’”

She clearly wanted to value his expression of literacy but felt the need to have him conform to complete sentences and capital Is, as she stated in line two. She described the tension she felt as one who needed to teach “complete sentences” per the state standards and one who wanted to
value his voice and have “some outlet of creativity” (line four). The clash between culturally sustaining pedagogy (encouraging rap and self-expression) and standardized Dominant English (capital Is) was clear.

For another example of a cultural literacy practice, we watched an oral storytelling of Brer Rabbit, told by storyteller, Diane Ferlatte (Ferlatte, 2009). I shared this story to remind the teachers that there are other ways to tell stories that are possibly not in the traditional curriculum. I said, “We often think in literacy, ‘they have to read a book, they have to read books.’” We listened to this very entertaining story and I asked them how this connected to their literacy pedagogy. They hesitantly threw out answers such as “fluency and expression,” “rhythm and song,” and “asking questions and predictions.” I asked them to consider what would happen if they showed this video and then asked their students to tell a story in this way. There was a long pause that indicated they were not interested in doing this with their classes or did not believe that this would be a form of rigorous literacy in the classroom, that it wouldn’t “count.” Karen mentioned that she has tried to get kids to write raps, which Amira added that she also tried raps and “it flops.” They went on to discuss writing raps as the difficulty seemed to be a common problem. In this class, I wanted the teachers to see that there were other forms of literacy that were valid. However, I did not expect that they would suddenly be able to be literate in all of these ways. As they discussed rap, I said, “Don’t try to be someone else’s ways of being literate but understand that there are different ways. I would not force kids to be oral storytellers because I think that that’s really hard. But if there are kids who feel comfortable with this, that want to express in that way, I think that would be so cool to have some kids practice, write a story or tell a story and get the audience involved like that.”
Constraints

Teachers are constrained by the expectations placed on them by their principals, the district, the state and federal laws, as well as expectations from the families and local community. To start a discussion about this, we watched a Ted Talk titled, *Bringing Cultural Context and Self-Identity into Education* (Lozenski, 2012). Lozenski was a Black male teacher who shared about the resistances he faced when trying to implement culturally sustaining pedagogy. He questioned the structure of schools (the bell schedule, the separation of subjects) and students’ possible rejection of this structure. I paused the video and asked the teachers to consider the structures that impede some of their own teaching.

One common constraint was scheduling. The teachers expressed so much frustration at how they did not have the time to add new ideas into their school day. Karen pointed out that because everyone “shares students so much [interventions, pull-out schedules], it’s so dependent on ‘ok we have to move to this next thing’ and we are required to do some of our whole group intervention type things that there’s not that flexibility in the schedule to work on a big project.” Esperanza shared that she had a student that very day reject the read aloud and sit in the back of the room. She quickly realized his rejection was because he knew he was about to be pulled out by another teacher and would miss the end of the story. Rebecca added that “at the beginning of the year when we were doing our minutes [planning the schedule], there were more minutes than we even have in a day, that we’re supposed to teach! So, you just felt that, I don’t know, anxiety, before you even started, like, how am I going to do this?” Amira added that due to increased math minutes she, “can’t even give my students time to read… [I’m] asking them to put their books away!” At this the whole group audibly agreed with “yea” and “us too.” Jordan spoke up and with exasperation in her voice she described the pull-out schedules and the constant interventions, “We have the reading teacher, classroom teacher, then they are required to be on..."
Lexia during reading groups, then I’m pulling kids to test and they are required to be on Dreambox, so I have volunteers to come read but I have no time in the day [to read with them]!”

I verbally recognized their frustration and asked them to consider the rest of the video with a lens of “what you can do, what you can control” but not feel overwhelmed. I pressed play again on the Ted Talk. Lozenski (2012) continued to question what kind of knowledges we retain (his example was the show “Are You Smarter Than a 5th Grader?) and offer alternatives. He mentioned ecological education, student action research and inquiry, and in general, considering other ways of participating and structuring our educational system. He closed by asking educators to “take a leap of faith and reimagine another way of working in our education system.” As the teachers in this study all but said, they did not feel they had the time nor the control to take that leap of faith.

I asked them, “What did you think?” Jordan responded that her Kindergartners had “limited experiences” and she wished she could take them on field trips to “a farm or a pumpkin patch” but due to budgeting, field trips did not happen. Lizzie added that kids “don’t even know how to eat at a restaurant.” I was uncomfortable with the way these examples validated some experiences over others, that somehow visiting a farm meant more in terms of experience than visiting a cousin in Chicago or moving from another country. I knew their students must have interesting, valid experiences from which the teachers could draw upon, but the strength-based mindset was not there yet.

Rebecca added a positive experience with a walking field trip where they went to the public library, the credit union, and the fire/police station. Maiah returned to the restaurant comment and added that she has students “who don’t know what appetizers are, don’t know how to look at a menu…I had teachers take us to fancy restaurants and tell us what the different forks
meant and which water cup was your cup…I remember learning that as a kid in elementary school because I would not have learned it otherwise. My family wasn’t going to take me to a restaurant and teach me all of those things…” Here Maiah was discussing many concepts that were to come up in the next few class sessions. As a child, her teachers were teaching her the codes of power of being in the middle-class.

I wrapped up the discussion by stating that I felt “getting families into the classroom was a way to get some of those field trip [type] experiences that you can’t have. Maybe a family brings in their favorite children’s book at home or cooks a meal that the kids have never had…but also recognizing that you can’t control a lot of it and a lot of it is today’s times and all the pressures put on teachers but [at least] you can control little things in your classroom.”

**Reading Research**

For homework one night, I assigned a choice of four different articles to read, shared in a Google folder with pdfs of each from the University library. I purposefully picked more theory-based articles for this assignment as shown in Table 16. I saved the application-based articles for the next round of homework as shown later in Table 20. I wanted the teachers to experience choice in homework assignments as well, which was something I was prepared to suggest in future discussion for including families in the homework process. As it turned out though, one of the teachers suggested differentiating homework in the following discussion.

Table 16. Choice Homework Assignment Articles

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Amira shared her thoughts from reading Dudley-Marling (2009), which questioned how “African American and immigrant ESL parents living in these two urban communities experience various school-to-home literacy initiatives?” (p. 1713). In the article, Dudley-Marling found that many parents did not think that reading at night was as important as the worksheets because there was not something to turn in; they thought it was “just reading” (p. 1737). Amira shared, “the idea of ‘just reading’ really got me thinking.” As a reminder, at back to school night, Amira was the one who had “Read! Read! Read! 30 minutes a night!” on the flyer. She was also the one who told me that parent involvement means “reading 20 minutes a night.” I was excited for what it might mean for Amira to question her practices. She went on to share how she interpreted from the article that reading 20 minutes a night, “was not part of their culture, it was part of OUR culture.” It was unclear if by “our culture” she meant white culture or school culture, but either way, this was an important step towards questioning her own practices. Later at her family visit, she asked the mom and child what they would want their homework to look like, which led to a fascinating family discussion (details in Chapter Six), a new practice for her that came directly from reading this Dudley-Marling article. She closed her summary of the article by saying that she thought it was important to remember that, “ALL the parents work with their kids and thought that school was important.” This felt like a good reminder to the whole group of us, as so often parents are positioned otherwise.

Jordan added to Amira’s summary, having read this same article. She thought an important piece of this article was how Dudley-Marling talked about how important it was to have “books with their culture in them and so it reflects what the child is.” I felt uncomfortable with the way that culture seemed so static in her reflection (“what the child is”) but quickly remembered that
this could be a new thought or topic for her, so it was important to tread lightly. I confirmed how important it was to “see yourself in a book.”

I wrapped back up to agree with Amira that the first time I had read this article and realized that concept of “just reading” that he spoke of “really blew my mind.” I went on to explicitly point out that I felt this “20 minutes a night” is a “school culture” concept, not a “middle-class white culture” one, but that the middle-class white parents were more in line with copying the school culture. In hindsight, I was beginning to label and question “school culture.” However, I wish I had thought more about the way I made middle-class white parents sound like they were more involved than others, when in reality, I believe modeling the schools’ norms is more about access and cultivation (Lareau, 2011). However, I did finish my sentence, catching a bit of this misstep in the moment by saying, “I think we have pushed this [read 20 minutes a night] onto families and some families have picked it up and some haven’t.” Amira made the explicit connection with exasperation in her voice, pointing around her room, “Look at my bulletin boards, “read twenty minutes, “read twenty minutes!” We all laughed and wondered who decided “twenty” was the magic number. Jordan interrupted the laughing to defend the “just reading” notion. She pushed back that the opposite of just reading would be make reading a structured assignment with a worksheet. She thought this structure would have negative consequences because she wanted parents to teach their kids to “just LOVE reading.” I conceded by pointing out that each family is different and likely needs different things; some families need more structure; some families need less.

Maiah responded to this differentiation idea and I was once again brought back to the constraints of schooling. She stated, “In an ideal world, we would differentiate what that reading homework would be.” She continued to describe her own reading habits and how it is hard for
students to fit one mold. Laelia agreed, but questioned with a tone that seemed as if that was impossible, “But how? How can we do that?” As Laelia questioned this, I thought, *what is holding them back from this ideal world? Why do they feel like they don’t have this ability in their classrooms?* I pushed back, “Could the kids decide what their own homework was, as long as they had reading homework?” There were a few seconds of silence before Maiah said softly “yea… I like that” and then Laelia agreed, “Yea, I would be ok with that…for them to reflect and say, ‘what do I need as a reader?’” They laughed about how they would implement differentiated reading homework immediately that fall. “I’ll try anything,” Laelia said.

At this point, Karen changed the tone a bit by saying that she didn’t believe the parents about the 20 minute a night reading calendars, “Most parents will say they are reading but there’s no calendar signed, so are they really? I don’t know.” As a former teacher, this notion of signing a calendar to indicate that their child read twenty minutes was one of the banes of my teaching existence. When I taught first grade, these calendars were mandatory school-wide, so I had no choice. I waivered on if I believed they worked or not and what my role was in instructing parents do this (or any homework for that matter). I had to push back when Karen brought this up. I was prepared that these calendars would come up at some point in this course, and as it turned out, this was not the only time. I stated with exasperation in my voice, “This is something we’ve been trying for like 20 years, why don’t we give up?” Many heads nodded and a few somewhat shocked “yeas” came out, as if they had not thought of this before but liked the question. I was really beginning to push them to question their everyday practices. Karen pushed back hard. She shared how her own child needed the assignment from the teacher to force him to read and then said, “It’s worth it, even if it’s for a few kids. We don’t have time because our scores are so low.” To me, this felt like a perfect reason for homework differentiation as we had
just discussed, but Karen felt that a blanket assignment was worth it in case it reached all students. In the moment, I sensed that I had pushed Karen too far, so I backed down and moved on instead of pushing toward differentiation by student need.

In a follow up conversation months later, Esperanza told me she had moved away from signed reading logs and now her students were creating detailed posters and presenting about the books they were reading at home. As I walked around her room, her students were laying on their stomachs on the floor all over the classroom, working. They were drawing and writing on big colorful posters and chatting naturally while they worked. As I listened in, they were sharing stories about how much they loved their books and the plot details about them. This marked a sociocultural shift from standardized “real school” expectations of reading logs to the creation and discussion of literature.

**Conclusion to Chapter Four**

As noted throughout this chapter, the teachers often viewed and interpreted the activities of the course through the lens of standards, curriculum, and expectations of “real school.” As they noted in their definitions of parent involvement in literacy, they had preconceived, sometimes cultural notions of what this should look like. As described by the examination of their own funds of knowledge and those in their classrooms, then explicitly looking at different forms of literacy, I documented how seeing outside of what “counts” in school as literacy was hard for many of them. By having explicit discussions of scheduling and outside expectations placed on them, they were able to explain their constraints and I was able to offer a few ideas of ways to incorporate families within those constrained structures. In the next chapter, I look at how discussions of race and culture in the classroom, similar to the standardizations of school, constrained the teachers from participating in more culturally sustaining practices.
CHAPTER 5: RACE AND POWER

In my analytic memo after the first class, I questioned how culture and race played a role in the teachers’ abilities to think from different perspectives about school. I reflected on their limited thinking about their own subcultural practices, as shown by the “Looking at Subcultures” activity (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012). The majority of U.S. teachers are middle-class white women (Macpherson, 2010), who have been represented in the classroom through physical representation (teachers who look and act like them) and by seeing themselves in books and curriculum. Six of the nine teachers in this course identified as white and seven of the nine identified as having grown up in the middle-class. At various times throughout the course, Jordan, Karen, Rachel, and Rebecca (each white teachers) referred to their own upbringings as from monocultural white communities.

Based on the age of many of the teachers in the study, a few of them likely attended college prior to the movement toward culturally sustaining pedagogy. For example, Rebecca attended university in the early 1980s. At the University at which this study occurred, the 1978/80 course catalog showed the first evidence of cultural education courses outside the realm of special education or counseling education. In the Early Childhood program, a class called “The Culturally Different” was offered, as well as the first appearance of a methods course for K-6 educators called, “Multicultural-Bilingual Education.” Three other teachers in this study likely went through the education program in the 1990s where the course was still called “Culturally Different in Diverse Settings.” Outside of district professional development, working on a master’s degree, and seeking their own personal development, these teachers might never have discussed cultures through a lens that was not “othering” as “the culturally different” implied. Despite this, very few deficit views of cultures or race surfaced in discussions. More
common were statements that, upon reflection, felt to me as if the teachers had simply never questioned these topics before.

In this chapter, I consider the activities and discussions that sparked conversations about culture, race, avoiding race, racism, and whiteness. When the race and positionality of the speaker might be useful for the context of the story, I purposefully label it. I examine the discussions related to race and culture that involved power, privilege, and hegemony. Findings show that many of the teachers benefited from explicit conversations about their own racial and cultural identities and discussions about how to address race with their students.

**Reading Research, Again**

Returning to the discussion in Chapter Four regarding various research articles that the teachers read, part of these discussions turned to race talk. The full list of articles they chose from is above in Table 16.

Karen, one of the more veteran white teachers, shared what she thought about Rogers and Mosely (2006). Taken from its abstract, this article, “illustrate[s] that young white children can and do talk about race, racism, and anti-racism within the context of the literacy curriculum” (p. 463). She shared with us, very hesitantly saying she realized, “Teachers aren’t all good about talking about race.” She shared how the article pointed out the importance of the teacher questioning the text. She reflected back to her own practice saying, “Ooh, I don’t do enough of that!” She then said the article discussed whiteness and white privilege. She said she realized, “If we don’t do it here, kids are seeing just what they’re seeing in the media and in life and they’re not getting that and they’re not able to stand up and say, ‘hey this isn’t right’ and become good citizens in that way.” Here, Karen is equating fighting racism to being a good citizen. When racism is defined individually, it puts the blame on the person as something they can fix if they
take action, which obscures the bigger social problem. As DiAngelo (2018) described white people “are taught to think about racism only as discrete acts committed by individual people, rather than as a complex, interconnected system” (p. 3). This individualism allows for distancing and individual defense mechanisms which, according to DiAngelo (2018), “maintained the racial status quo” (p. 4). In order to understand the institution of racism, we must define it more institutionally.

Maiah, a Black teacher, said she also picked that article because when she tells people that teachers need to talk about race, many people speak back to her. She shared that people think kids are too young to talk about racism. As Dyson (2018) pointed out, whiteness “is a category of identity that is most useful when its very existence is denied” (p. ix). When white teachers silence conversations of race, they are participating in this denial, consciously or not. Maiah took from the article that kids are ready to talk about race but “as teachers, we feel really uncomfortable.” Maiah then connected to a presentation that she had attended about white privilege. She shared that laws in the 1600s set the stage for whiteness to be a privilege. As she spoke about these laws, she referred to whiteness as a commodity or “property,” and described how some people could not have that “property.” Lensmire (2017) explained this history: laws passed around the time of the Civil War were designed to separate poor white workers from poor Black workers. These law specifically gave privileges to the white workers so that they would align in solidarity with the white elites. These laws made whiteness a commodity or a form of property to which the Black workers could not have access (p. 12-13).

This was the first of many important discussions of race in this course. I was struck by how important it was for Maiah to say all this, but also by the blank, silent stares of her colleagues. If this was the first time they had heard this about whiteness as property, were they
ready for it? It didn’t appear so. I worried that Maiah was going to be positioned as “speaking for all Black people” in this course, which I really did not want. I wrote in my analytic memo that night, “How much less rich would this course be without Maiah? I’m sure she doesn’t want to be the one who is always explaining this.” I made the decision that night that I was going to have to be what I considered at the time as “brave” and talk more explicitly about whiteness. Talking about whiteness was something I was just beginning to work on from a position of power (their teacher). I was nervous. DiAngelo’s (2018) work showed that many white people get defensive, turn against the speaker, or shut down. For my research purposes, I could not afford for that to happen, but I felt that I had to take the discussion of whiteness on for the real learning of this course.

Returning to the homework assignment, Laelia, a first year Latina teacher, shared that she read the Majors (2014) article. From its opening, this article is about how “it is useful for people in educational contexts to recognize individuals’ cultural border crossing experiences in order to move beyond popular notions of achievement” and how “colorblind discourses that underlie current efforts ironically maintain neutral conceptions of schooling while clinging to explicit and implicit languages and ideologies to evade critical examination” (p. 633). Laelia described how in the article, Majors shared that her own Black child struggled to be placed in honors classes due to staff resistance. Laelia casually, yet profoundly, worked through her response, talking as if she was figuring out what she thought about it as she went on:

[The staff resistance] just lends itself to talking about how…(Trailed off. Sighed
uncomfortably then switched to an unsure questioning mode.) It’s because it’s not talked about? We’re unaware of it? (Seemed to get confidence in her voice and back to statements.) So even though that secretary or that teacher wasn’t meaning to be, like,
racist or rude, she was being racist and rude because she was unaware that she had that bias. So I think that’s just like, a really important part that we should all look at and see, what kind of bias we have before going into the classroom, and I think that’s really hard to do, like to kind of step out from yourself and see yourself from the outside and say ‘ok what’s going on?’ and ‘what do I think?’ and then try to fight that, I guess, in a way? (She ended uncomfortably as a question again.)

I often noted Laelia’s discourse about race came from a place where it seemed she had not questioned these ideas before. Her points frequently aligned with positions of whiteness and privilege, in line with never openly having considered some of these topics. It reminded me of Rogers and Mosely (2006) who wrote, “White teachers can engage with multicultural education without ever having to interrogate the ways that white people are the beneficiaries of inequality in society” (p. 465). She told me later that she was a second generation Mexican-American and her parents did not teach her to speak Spanish growing up. She said in high school that she did not fit in with the Latina girls because of this, but also did not quite fit in with the white girls because her parents did speak Spanish. She felt that she was somewhere in between. As she pointed out in lines four and five above, racism does not have to be intentional. This statement pushed beyond Karen’s earlier definitions of racism as individual and was important for moving our discussion forward.

Laelia continued, connecting Major’s “crossing border” to “the codes of power” from Delpit (2006) that we read in the undergraduate class that she took with me. I distinctly remember her during that class period; she was so interested in the topic, much more than any other student in the class. In the present course, she described how she remembered reading it before [in my class], but now as she described herself as “a real classroom teacher,” she could see the
application. She described a student in her fifth-grade class who raised her baby sister at home, then came to school and switched roles into being a learner, no longer in charge. Laelia said of this student’s life, “to keep that in the back of my mind…just thinking about the kid really…just keeping their whole life in mind.” Reading this article prompted Laelia to look at this student from a larger, more contextual, perspective. In order to draw on students’ funds of knowledge, students must be seen in the context of their lives and families’ histories. She individualized the needs of this student by “keeping their whole life in mind” as opposed to seeing her as just part of the group in her class. Shifting toward individualization moves away from standardization toward a place for culturally sustaining pedagogy.

Avoiding Race

I segued into how I felt that picture books could aid teachers to talk about some of the difficult race-based conversations. As Karen had said, “Teachers aren’t all good about talking about race.” I shared how earlier that day I had an uncomfortable discussion with my undergraduate class. I explained that on their papers, many of the students had labeled the kids they were working with as “Hispanic female” or “Black boy” but none had said “white boy.” I shared how uncomfortable race was to discuss, even as the teacher, but I felt it was important to recognize this. There was equal discomfort and silence in this audience while I told this story as there was in my undergraduate classroom. Talking about whiteness seemed to bring the tension level up a notch. Due to this uncomfortable silence, in line with my own act of protecting white people from their fragility on the subject (DiAngelo, 2018), I quickly switched topics and asked if anyone read Why Am I Me? (Britt, 2017) with their classes.

Laelia shared how she had not read the book but something in her classroom had sparked a conversation about race. She told us, “I was surprised how much these kids know…you know
what’s going on in your world.” She had apparently asked them, prompted by the curriculum question for Constitution Day that day, ‘what should your government do for you?’ She said that the students took it in a direction that she “was not ready for.” Her students talked about the police brutality of the Black community, women’s rights, and Donald Trump. She described how uncomfortable she was walking “that thin line that you don’t want to cross.” She questioned to herself, “What would they go home and tell their parents?” As a brave first-year, Laelia decided in that moment, “It’s worth talking about it.” She then described how she really needed “to educate myself on how to handle those maybe uncomfortable conversations for me, but they [her students] are not uncomfortable to talk about.” This was such an important turning point for our discussions. Laelia had set the stage for how uncomfortable conversations can be and how precarious they are. As a result of the “functions of white fragility,” (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 122) which are to “silence the discussion, protect a limited worldview, take race off the table” and more, even if a teacher is prepared to take these discussions on, many white students and families might enact their privileges and powers against her. Teachers must not only worry about the children in their class, but what they might say at home, how the parents might react, and then possibly complain to the school administrations and put their jobs on the line if something went very wrong. This is a scary position for teachers to put themselves in but Laelia was ready to take it on because she knew how important it was for her students.

After Laelia trickled off, Maiah stated casually, “It’s my personality but I obliterate that line.” Everyone laughed but it was so true. Maiah had a confidence that most people did not. As she shared with me later, as a Black woman in a mostly white school district, she knew how important it was to push the boundaries. She went on to describe that she felt, “if you’re silent about something, that means you agree. If they [kids from minoritized populations] hear that I’m
silent, they’re going to assume that I agree, and I would rather not agree with the thing that’s oppressing you.” She shared how she worked with her students to have respectful conversations in the classroom, although she did not give specifics. At the time of this study, her sixth grade students were currently discussing immigration laws due to a recent murder of a local college woman by an undocumented man. She discussed that it took a lot of work to teach them how to disagree and be respectful.

Esperanza spoke up for one of the first times. She had read the book *Why Am I Me?* with her fifth-grade students. She said they discussed “very surface level differences and similarities.” She told us how she talked with Laelia later that day and then decided to do a game where they created a Venn Diagram on the floor and stepped in and out of it based on different ways they self-identified like, “speaks another language at home.” Then she read *The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001), a picture book about two girls, one Black, one white, whose parents keep them apart, which she stated helped spark more conversation, especially about how much the kids’ parents influenced their thinking. As Esperanza was talking about reading a chapter book aloud with her class, *Brown Girl Dreaming* (Woodson, 2014), I was struck by how Esperanza used this literature as a catalyst to have these tough classroom discussions. I wrote in my analytic memo that night, “This is so much more than just reading a book!” As discussed in Chapter Two, using “real books” in the classroom provided a space for students to analyze, relate, personalize, merge other texts, and perform their creativities (Sipe, 2008, p. 182). Hearing Esperanza specifically share this about their discussions was powerful. When the curriculum provides politically-correct, non-controversial texts (by design), students and teachers perhaps do not have these rich conversations. Esperanza explained that her students were beginning to ask more thoughtful questions like, “Well what if you were Mexican [during the segregation era]? What happened to
those people during that time?” Perhaps Why Am I Me? was too broad of a question for her class at this time, but supplementing it with more specific stories and activities facilitated deeper thinking about this important question.

Karen shared how she had the read book in connection with her lessons on comparing and contrasting characters and the use of Venn Diagrams. She said that she was surprised to find that the students did not have in-depth discussions. The following conversation occurred in our course between Karen and Amira, who were white, and Maiah who was Black. Notice the bold in lines three and four where Amira avoids using the term “race” a function of protecting whiteness and promoting “safe” spaces (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 122, 126).

Karen (w): There wasn’t the conversation that I had hoped would be…they didn’t notice, or didn’t mention, the difference in skin color and boy or girl.

Amira (w): Do you think they’re just not saying that because (hesitates), because, you haven’t said it?

Karen (w): Maybe?

Maiah (B): I think kids are taught…you learn at school, you’re not supposed to be black, you’re not supposed to be different so don’t talk about it…that’s something that we teach very well. When I’m talking at the equity meetings, we can’t figure out how to raise our FAST scores [fluency reading test], but everyone’s quite clear that it’s better to be white than Black. There’s been zero explicit instruction on that, we don’t have any groups running about that, it’s just something that is so embedded in our culture. It’s just clear to every single child. How do we get the thing we’re trying to teach to be that ubiquitous?

Because the stuff we try to teach, we fail, and the stuff we’re not aware that we’re teaching, we’re doing a really good job at it.
No one spoke, including me. In hindsight, I am not confident that many in the room understood the gravity of what she said. I only did as I transcribed it later. Maiah was telling us, and had been telling the district equity group this, and no one was apparently responding. In line seven when she said, “that’s something we teach very well” she was referring to the silencing of race as a form of maintaining supremacy. Maiah made concrete what Lea and Sims (2008) described, “whiteness is a complex, hegemonic, and dynamic set of mainstream socio-economic processes, and ways of thinking, feeling, believing, and acting (cultural scripts) that function to obscure the power, privilege, and practices of the dominant social elite.” (p. 1-2). She went on to describe in line ten that the district knows this and does nothing about it when she said, “we don’t have any groups running about that,” this was another form of cover up. As she said, “the stuff we’re not aware that we’re teaching, we’re doing a really good job as it,” she hinted at the insidious nature of whiteness (Lea & Sims, 2008, p. 12). This statement and the sentiment behind it appeared to have challenged the core of our white privilege and fragility so deeply that white people in the district, including myself at the time of her story, could not even hear it.

Amira responded to Maiah’s statement, but her response felt like she had been waiting her turn to talk, not listening to Maiah. She said that when she brought up “skin color” in the classroom, her students often yelled out “You’re racist!” I replied with DiAngelo’s (2018) notion that white people are expected to cover-up racism (p. 123). In my reply, I realize now that I engaged in this exact cover-up by my use of the term “it” versus the word “race,” in line two below in **bold**. Laelia (Latina), who also engaged in this linguistic masking on lines three and four, and Maiah (Black) responded:

1 **Laura (w):** We are trained not to say someone’s race that it becomes that ‘you’re racist’

2 if you notice it.
Laelia (L): It’s so taboo, it’s such a weird thing when it’s not a weird thing, like we should just talk about it…it just needs to be said.

Maiah (B): I think even the whole, ‘we don’t talk about race’, that’s not a ubiquitous thing either, in my understanding that’s a white middle-class thing, because in my culture we talk about race all the time….that’s mirrored when you come to school, the white people around you are not comfortable. If you were in a different environment, everybody would be comfortable, you would be expected to have conversations about race.

My face felt flush with embarrassment as I uncomfortably clarified that I did need to be careful when I say “we” because I identify as a middle-class white woman. In this very conversation about avoiding race, many of us (myself included) avoided racial terms, marked by the bolded words in the transcripts above. When I examined the pronoun uses (Fairclough, 2015) I could see how often words like “race” and “racism” were left unsaid or masked as noted in the transcript above. As Maiah pointed out, avoiding talking about race is a cultural norm, one that is recreated in the schools and by the white middle-class norms that are the power structures. The teachers and I were able to see this power structure when Amira asked, “Do you think they’re just not saying that because, because, you haven’t said it?” and Maiah’s response in line seven, “in my culture we talk about race all the time.” This exchange showed that teachers have an important role in naming race and talking about racism in the classroom, especially if we expect our students to talk about these topics.

Laelia, a Latina teacher, responded to this idea of naming race in the classroom, connecting it back to her teaching. She seemed to work uncomfortably through her feelings about race aloud, just as she had done when she shared her reading research article:
The kids in my class who are white, let’s say we have that discussion about race, there’s that weird like, how that feels to be a white person and talk about white privilege is something I don’t understand, or I can’t relate or whatever, so I wonder how I can, not that, I mean it’s gonna feel uncomfortable no matter what, *but how can I relieve that stress?* Because it’s just, I don’t know, I don’t know if that’s even wrong to think that I need to relieve that stress.

Here in lines four and five, Laelia is worried about protecting her white students, a function of maintaining whiteness. Maiah and I somewhat simultaneously responded about white fragility (DiAngelo, 2018) in lines two, three, and seven:

Laura (w): Yea, when you read about whiteness, one the things that is said…

Maiah (B): *White fragility…*

Laura (w): It’s like you’ve been trained to **protect** the white person in the room’s feelings which is totally crazy, …

Maiah (B) *somewhat sarcastically like a warning*: You gotta be careful…

Laura (w): For those of us who are white, it’s like, it is uncomfortable, I feel uncomfortable, and part of what I feel uncomfortable about is like this, I feel guilt. There’s a white **guilt** and it, like I don’t want it to be like this, I don’t want to be a part of this, but I am…

Maiah (B): Yea…

Laura (w): So, I think that just recognizing that perhaps? I don’t know how kids will take it, that conversation.

As I continued, I reiterated how white privilege was bigger than one person, that it was societal and institutional (DiAngelo, 2018). Laelia and I discussed how shifting the blame of white
privilege from feeling like it was personal to societal might help alleviate her concerns. Maiah returned us to the discussion of guilt and white people crying over racism. She powerfully and confidently spoke as she almost always did, about a colleague at her former, mostly white school:

I had to say to my colleague, “you can’t cry to me anymore, I can’t deal with your tears.”

We need to move past that so we can get to solutions because if crying is what stops the conversation from happening in the first place, and then the conversation becomes about the crying and we still can’t get to the problem…this is our reality, we need to get to the work. If we stay on our feelings, we can’t do the work, we just need to move forward.

Yea, it’s going get uncomfortable. Something that I say like, [when] we’re looking at reading stats, it’s like, how does it feel to be that parent who knows that your kid only has a 30% chance of learning how to read when they go to school, how awful is that reality? And how bad do you actually feel compared to this mom who sends her kid to school for 13 years and only has a 30% chance of having their kid graduate reading on level? I would cry for that. If you want to cry for that, let’s do that, but don’t give me your tears because your reality is not bad.

Laelia quietly responded, “That’s so powerful…the urgency, we needed to do this, like, yesterday.” I noted how silent and wide-eyed the rest of the group was. In line one, Maiah referred to a common white reaction that DiAngelo (2018) referred to in an entire chapter titled, “White Women’s Tears” (p. 131-138). As Maiah described in line five, her experiences showed that tears prevented action. DiAngelo (2018) agreed, “when we are mired in guilt, we are narcissistic and ineffective; guilt functions as an excuse for inaction” (p. 135). Maiah pointed out
the outcome of this inaction, teachers who are stuck in the guilt do not see the human reality that Black students reading scores fall so much lower than their peers (line ten above).

The weight of the room made me uncomfortable as the white teacher who wanted everyone to be happy. I was living the reality of pushing the boundaries of white fragility. Just as Laelia feared with her white students being uncomfortable, in that moment, I feared it with mine. As Laelia said though, from that point forward, the urgency was there.

As I reflected on the class that night, I was aware of the voices that were not heard throughout these conversations, particularly the white teachers- Rebecca, Rachel, Karen, Lizzie, Jordan. As shown throughout this chapter, whiteness and race are not conversations that happen often among white people. However, Amira, a white teacher, spoke occasionally. Esperanza, a Latina teacher, was quiet but as I knew her well, this was not uncommon for her. Maiah, a Black teacher, and Laelia, a Latina teacher, spoke the most. During the homework discussions where they shared articles they had read, more voices were present, this indicated that “othering” the idea of race was the place to start. I was aware of the fact that as I planned my lesson for the next time together, that I was going to have to structure activities that would allow for more voices to be heard. Although I was not interested in centering the white voices, it was important to me that the white teachers broke the expected silence of avoiding race, especially if we were to move past some of the fear and discomfort. As Lensmire, et. al. (2013) described, the awareness and confession of white privilege sometimes limits action. White people can understand their privileges but never do anything about it. As we moved forward in the class, I desired to move past confession and guilt and into action.
Maiah Interview

During the third class together, I asked the teachers to reflect on what they thought of the course so far. I asked so that I could design lessons to meet their needs for the last two class periods. It proved unhelpful as their responses were pretty general; however, Maiah’s response rattled me. Below, I’ve copied a part of what she wrote. I was struck by the words she used such as, “voyeuristic” in line two, and “unspoken agenda” in line five.

1. I’m not sure I would want to learn more about his family in this way. It still feels too voyeuristic. I shared this project with my parents and my siblings, and they were all turned off by the idea of having a teacher in their homes. I’ve always gone to student events, birthday parties, and recitals - I’ve even gone to family dinners - but I like being invited in the home for a specific reason, not because I have an unspoken agenda.

When I read this entry that night, it frankly horrified me. I laid in bed that night worried that my privileged white perspective on family visits was too presumptuous. I worried that I assumed I would be welcome, but perhaps that was not the way families (especially of color) felt, nor the way a teacher of color going into a family’s home might feel. It was because of these concerns that I requested a follow-up interview with Maiah later that week. She agreed and we met after school in her sixth-grade classroom for about an hour. I prepared the following questions from her written response specifically, although we ended up speaking much more informally and casually about her teaching, her perceptions of families, and the course itself.

Table 17. Maiah Interview Questions

| 1. | You said that you have gone to family dinners before- how did that happen? I’m so interested because I have never heard of a teacher being invited for dinner. |
| 2. | Tell me about how you wrote that you “like being invited for a specific reason, not because I have an unspoken agenda.” |
| 3. | You said you talked to your parents and your sister and they were turned off- can you tell me more about maybe why they feel this? You used the word “voyeuristic” which is so interesting to me. |
Table 17. Maiah Interview Questions, continued

4. To me, it is important for teachers to know their students’ lives so that they can relate to them, how can we do this but avoid this feeling of voyeurism? Is it a power thing?

5. Anything else you want to talk about regarding the class?

I was nervous because I worried that my perceptions of family visits were more driven by my white privilege than I had previously considered. I felt that Maiah and I had a good working relationship. However, as a white woman, talking about race with a Black woman still made me a bit nervous. I worried that I would say something offensive or just plain oblivious.

I began with the first question and she shared how she had developed relationships in the past with families and visited families’ homes. For example, a family with three children she had taught, invited her over for a family “talent show.” In another instance, she developed a friendship with a Jewish mom from her class and was invited over for a traditional Jewish holiday meal. It was within this description that she said, “I feel comfortable in that [because] I know my role in that space.” This struck me as important to preparing teachers for going on visits. Teachers have a clear, definitive role at school. They are the leader of the classroom and have specific objectives to meet every hour, day, week, month, and year. My expectations for funds of knowledge type family visits were not in line with that role.

I brought up her use of the term “voyeur,” and shared that perhaps I had made the class “too much about culture” and that I was not expecting that the teacher would learn something drastically new at the family visit. She replied that “I didn’t feel like that [culture] was my missing piece to figuring you [a hypothetical student] out.” This indicated that she felt she understood culture in a way that the other white teachers and I did not. She grew up and lived in a bicultural world where she admitted she was forced to switched between being a Black girl who spoke in African American Language in Boston, then going to an all-white middle school, and now a professional teacher who spoke in Dominant American English in a mostly white
space. She later described her professional application of this experience when she said, “[A] huge piece of what is missing at school is that the teachers aren’t from the community…when the teachers match the kids, the gains are huge.”

Next Maiah shared stories with me from her childhood about her switch to an all-white school when she was in sixth grade. She told me about how the school had multiple buildings where they would have to walk outside from class to class. She did not want to walk in the rain because it would make her hair frizzy, but she felt that she couldn’t explain that at the time to the white teachers and the white principal, so she got in trouble. (She now wears her hair in braids. I asked later if she flattened it back then to look like the white girls at school and she said yes.) She described that this situation and others like it made the teachers think she was “difficult.” She then told me, “The reason this isn’t working for me is because it wasn’t designed to work for me.” She then described how she has had Black students in her class who need her support. She said, “I know what it’s like to be like, ‘Can I just have someone who gets it please and just explain it to the other people because I’m not sure why they don’t understand.’” Dickar (2008) found that Black teachers faced tension with their Black students because their Black students expected solidarity with them which often contradicted the solidarity expectations of the role of faculty or teacher. Maiah had experienced that same tension.

As the discussion continued, she described how she sits on a lot of committees but does not feel that her voice is being heard. When she mentioned changing a policy so that it worked better for Black students, she mimicked an administrator saying to her, “No, this is the school way to do it, so we’re going to do it.” To which she replied sarcastically, “Well great, you really valued my opinion there.” She made the connection between this feeling of being shut down and the idea of family visits. She stated, as if she was talking to a family with a concern that she had
no control over, “thank you for being vulnerable and sharing but we’re not going to do anything about what you just said,’ that’s a real thing to me.” I responded that I felt a parent who has someone to listen to them and truly hear them would be a good first step. As I transcribed this statement though, it hit me hard. Was she right? Was there nothing we could do about the family’s needs anyway?

Maiah continued and reiterated something she had said to the teachers during our course together. However, this time, she made it more explicit. In her statement, I was floored by how in lines three and four she said that students who are Black in our town subliminally learn that they don’t belong because over and over again they are asked if they are “from Chicago.” The implications of this “outsider” status for those students further “others” them. Black students learn that our town, our schools, are not meant for them, that they are “new” to this space, even when so many were born here. She explained:

1. Even reading, when we teach kids how to read, it’s all about explicit instruction. So much of what we learn is not explicit instruction…There are kids who we didn’t teach to read through years of explicit instruction, but we taught what it means to be Black in [this] School District. So, how did we do that? How did we do that so effectively, that every single one of them, even the black kids who were born here, say they are from Chicago, why do they do that? They learn that at school, that’s not something they learned in their neighborhood. They learned that at school. How did we do such a good job of that and not even know it? Without testing, without FAST [fluency reading test], without all of this stuff, we did that very well. They all learned that. [Only] half of them learned to read, but they all learned that.
In the moment, I know I didn’t hear her, just like the administrators she mentioned previously. It wasn’t that I wasn’t listening though. It was that this was such a new concept to me that it took me a long time to truly grasp what she was saying. As I transcribed her words, and listened to them over and over again, they astonished me even more. As Delpit (2006) described, “those with power are frequently least aware of it” (p. 26). The teachers in power, a majority of whom in this district are white, were unintentionally othering their Black students simply by asking them if they had moved from Chicago. By grouping them by race, and assuming all Black students came from Chicago (as some certainly did), the power structures subliminally said repeatedly, the students who are from here are white, therefore if you are not white, you are not from here.

We continued to talk about the steps toward scheduling a family visit, the upcoming plans for re-districting and bussing students, and a somewhat off topic discussion of the teacher’s union. She shared that she was happy to discuss these topics and was glad we were “on the same page.” She added that she felt she was “in fatigue mode, I can’t keep having the same conversations over and over...I’m all for the next fight, but I can’t keep having the same one.” As Lensmire et al. (2013) described, white confession of privilege is important but often limits anti-racist action. Maiah was stuck in this cycle between the white women’s tears and the push back from the district. Her colleagues were talking about these topics with her but not doing anything.

**Representation**

After reflecting that I wanted to talk more explicitly about race with the teachers, I asked the teachers to do a “classroom inventory” assignment (Teaching Tolerance, 2018). The curriculum that teachers use in their classrooms encompasses their teacher’s guides and books as well as their posters and materials around the room. This classroom inventory was designed to
get them to consider who was reflected in the physical presence of their classroom space. Below are examples of Amira’s and Rachel’s inventories, notice that the main place where diversities are represented is in their books.

Table 18. Amira’s Inventory: 4th Grade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Different...</th>
<th>Where in the classroom? On what? In what?</th>
<th>Your reflection on it?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Races</td>
<td>Pictures of different races, Books for different races</td>
<td>I have a number of pictures and books represented with different races.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genders</td>
<td>I have pictures and books with different genders.</td>
<td>I don’t have transgenders [sic] represented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abilities</td>
<td>I don’t have different books with abilities but I do have the book Wonder up.</td>
<td>I need to think more about have different abilities represented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religions</td>
<td>I don’t have different religions</td>
<td>I’m always nervous to have different religions represented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Structures</td>
<td>I only have my family structure represented.</td>
<td>I’m hoping to take family pictures at conferences or ask for family pictures to put up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages</td>
<td>Adult black man, kids</td>
<td>(blank)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environments</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>(blank)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 19. Rachel’s Inventory: Kindergarten

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Different...</th>
<th>Where in the classroom? On what? In what?</th>
<th>Your reflection on it?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Races</td>
<td>Books, anchor charts, posters, dolls</td>
<td>It’s gotten easier to find more diverse products, but still not as easy as it should be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genders</td>
<td>Books, anchor charts, posters, dolls</td>
<td>Dollhouse people are all stereotypical male and female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abilities</td>
<td>books</td>
<td>(blank)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As we discussed these inventories in class one day, I looked around Amira’s room and noticed an AVID poster that had a Black man working with a group of kids. I pointed out that I was surprised to see it, as I do not feel like there are a lot of positive images of Black men up in classrooms. I stated, “I bet that looks like a lot of people’s dads.” Rachel shared about a phonics program that has people in the pictures and described it as “super white, everything is so white, not a person of color.” She continued on, “So, when we did our anchor charts, we found some people of color to use, even gender-wise the strong character is a man, [we] tried to find a woman to put in there.” Laelia responded that when she tried to do her inventory, “there weren’t a lot of people.” I told her that was one of my expectations of this activity because I felt like, “it’s not even just all white, all middle-class…it’s sort of like the kids don’t exist in our curriculum at all.” Although small, I believe this conversation allowed the teachers to further question their everyday practices and how children were or were not represented in the physical space of the classroom.

Esperanza shared that she asked her students to bring in their own family pictures, as a result of our earlier class discussion and inspired by reading *Brown Girl Dreaming* (Woodson, 2014). She told us how she said to her class:

1. “Here’s a pic of me and my family, bring in some pictures of you and your family.”
2. They’ve been slowly sending them in, so I’ve been putting them up by where their hooks are by their backpacks and they’ve been checking them out and they’re super excited about it and they’re like ‘oh who’s that?!’ cause a lot of them are like their baby pictures
or something… [It] feels nicer because then they ask each other about their families like

‘oh who’s that? Or ‘where were you there?"

As Esperanza added this new practice, she noted that her classroom environment felt “nicer” (line five) and the students are excited (line three) and interacting with each other regarding the photos (line six). From Esperanza’s statement, Amira realized her family (pictured on her desk) represented a middle-class white one and stated, “it’s not typical of most of my kids’ families.” When I later analyzed the inventories as a group, most of the representation the teachers wrote about existed in their books, with the exception of Amira’s AVID posters, the phonics posters /anchor charts up in the younger grades (that they had to change), and the different dolls in Kindergarten. In their classrooms, the main way for kids to see themselves reflected was closed up in the books on the shelves. I cringed as I thought about the discussion from the Ted Talk (Lozenski, 2012) about scheduling constraints because they shared how little time they had to read those books on the shelves. I could hear Amira in my mind, painfully describing, “[I’m] asking them to put their books away!” Without reading, there appeared to be little space for diverse representation or for the kids to be physically present in the room.

Another homework assignment was to bring in their favorite books to read aloud, either now or from childhood, as a segue into the idea of representation in picture books. Also, I wanted to more explicitly discuss whiteness. I provided Larrick’s (1965) “The All White World of Children’s Literature” to read in class. After reading the article silently in class, I asked them to share. Lizzie pointed out that “not much has changed” and Rachel replied, “Kids will shout out if a character in the book looks like them, ‘They look like me!’ so clearly it’s unusual for them to shout out; obviously it’s something they don’t see very much.” As Rachel pointed out, things that are normalized do not get recognized. Here, white characters in books have been so
normalized that they are taken as “common sense” or “neutral” (Fairclough, 2015, p. 113) so when her students see reflections of themselves that are not white characters, it appears out of the norm.

Next, we turned to a conversation that weaved in and out of our own favorite books growing up and favorite ones now and what those books represent. I noted that everyone who mentioned their favorite childhood books, including the two Latina teachers, described a book with either white characters or animals. Due to the age range of the teachers, the favorite childhood books ranged from loving *The Velveteen Rabbit* (Williams, 1922), *The Poky Little Puppy* (Lowry, 1972) and other Golden Books, *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark* (Schwartz, 1981) all the way to *A Bad Case of the Stripes* (Shannon, 1998). Rachel summed it up by saying, “All white. Very white.” From that I segued to some books I had brought in, holding up the book *Mama Miti* (Napoli, 2010) to show the cover. On the cover was an African woman wearing traditional African patterns with a head scarf to match. I explained that I felt like it was important to remember that often African-American kids only see themselves in books about Africa or Martin Luther King, Jr., which might further “other” them from American society. However, because many of the kids at Mainwood were immigrants from Africa, I thought this was a good book. I said:

1. **Laura (w):** I was thinking that a lot of kids’ mom’s probably look like her… what if you had never seen a picture of someone who looks like your mom in a book?

2. *(Amira gasped.)*

3. **Laura (w):** This is the only book that I know of that a woman looks like this, *(I turned to Lizzie, the librarian)* do you know of any?

4. **Lizzie (w):** Not off the top of my head.
Laura (w): What if you went to school and never saw a book that looked like your mom?

But I did…But um, yea I was just thinking about how different it must be to see a book like this if this is what your mom looks like and go ‘oh wow that’s my mom.’

Rachel (w): I love that! We have a lot of African families. We have mothers that dress like that.

As shown in this transcript above, many of the teachers had not questioned the idea of representation in books before. When Amira gasped (line three) at my question and Rachel replied with enthusiasm, “I love that!” (line ten) it was clear that they were excited about this new idea. I continued by showing a few other books I had brought when Lizzie chimed in that most of these books were in their library. I shared a non-fiction picture book called *Emmanuel’s Dream* (Thompson, 2015) about a boy with one leg who is determined to ride a bicycle. Because I had written in my memo after our scheduling constraints conversation that I wanted them to see that this was not another program to adapt or an extra piece to do, I asked them how this connected to AVID to work this idea of relevance into what they were already doing. Amira shared that it fit right in with it, that they could “do an article,” and Rachel added, “the growth mindset.” Lizzie found a video of Emmanuel on YouTube while we were talking.

**Language and Power**

As we continued talking about representation in books, I shared how ubiquitous American, especially white, culture seemed to be across the globe. I shared stories of this happening when I was teaching in Ghana. Laelia replied, “It’s the same thing with learning English…a lot of places around the world learn English and teach English in school, and we as Americans, don’t do that. It’s crazy to think about that.” I explained briefly about linguistic capital by stating, “Yea, English is a form of power, if you have English, you have power.” I was
so glad Laelia said this because it was a perfect segue into the next book, *Stolen Words* (Florence, 2017).

I had provided a copy of the book *Stolen Words* (Florence, 2017) for each of their classroom libraries through extra grant money. To attempt to decenter myself, I asked if anyone else would like to read, and Laelia volunteered. *Stolen Words* is a picture book about a Native American grandfather and granddaughter. The granddaughter asks him why he no longer speaks his native language to which he replies his words “were taken away.” She finds him an old dictionary of his language, Cree, and they (re)learn some of the words together. When Laelia finished reading, the teachers erupted into “ohhs” and “uhhhs” of sadness and shock. Laelia said with despair in her voice, “You didn’t prepare me for that one!” In the background, Amira said quietly, perhaps to herself, “Oh my gosh, that’s such a sad book.” Lizzie, as usual, had Googled “Cree” and found a pronunciation dictionary online to supplement the reading.

For Esperanza this book was a window into her best friend’s life. She explained, “It made me think like about the question you asked before [can you imagine if you never saw your mom in a book?], and I’m like one of my best friends is Native American. I’m like ‘I wonder if she ever sees herself in books either?’ I don’t think I’ve ever read a book, anything with Native Americans.”

Karen quickly made the connection to Spanish and English in our schools. She explained she had Spanish speaking parents in her classroom who would only speak English to their kids so that the kids would learn to speak English well. In the background of another one of Amira’s loud gasps, Karen said in sad disbelief, “To me, that’s stolen words.” In agreement, I pointed out that unlike this book, the process of language acquisition doesn’t have to happen through “an aggressive way of forcing it” for it to still be “stolen.”
Maiah shared that she had a parent come into her classroom and tell her students about how hard it was for that parent to learn Spanish later in life. Maiah shared how this woman’s parents had also suppressed Spanish in their home when she was growing up. Laelia said she personally felt the same way, “I always heard [it] and like my grandma spoke it, my mom spoke it, but it was never taught to me as something that was important. And now I’m like, ‘that is so important!’ And like, I want to learn now and I’m trying!” Laelia connected to the parents who felt forced to teach their children English. She continued on by connecting to the prior conversation about Delpit’s (2006) linguistic codes of power. As she often did while speaking, she seemed to be collecting her thoughts as she went, questioning hypothetically:

1 [What if] there was a language that Americans had to learn, if English is your first language and all the sudden, the world got flipped on its head and now you have to learn Chinese, and if you don’t learn Chinese you don’t have capital or power, like how would that make those people whose first language is English feel? Can you imagine how uncomfortable that is to be so forced to like, you have to learn English or like, you can’t go to your kid’s parent teacher conferences and that would just be crazy.

This transcript marked a time for Laelia when she really began to see the codes of power. As she begins hypothetically in line two with “the world got flipped on its head” she worked into her own reality as a teacher who only spoke English at parent teacher conferences (lines five and six). She was taking a new perspective, that of the parent who struggles at conferences. As we continued, I asked of the book Stolen Words, “What would happen if you read this in your class?” They had mixed thoughts on if the students would understand. They all began to speak quickly at once to the people around them until Jordan spoke up to the group, “That’s what is so
hard with books like this, how deep do you go?” Jordan, a white teacher, was referencing the prior conversation that reflected white protections and avoidance of racialize talk. Maiah responded with an idea, she described that she framed these conversations in sixth grade about “identity” and choice:

1. [We talk about] how you get to decide who you are. We talk about this with race a little bit and LBGTQ and that’s why there are so many letters [in LBGTQ] because everyone gets to decide. So, I think it could be a conversation about how there are people who choose to learn English and only speak English and there are some people who feel like they don’t have that choice. I think that’s something that they’ll understand in terms of identity, it’s better that a person gets to choose [for themselves], and no one chooses for you, that you have to learn English.

Amira replied to Maiah very thoughtfully and sincerely, “That’s a good way to say it; I like that. I’m glad you said that.” Amira heard Maiah in that moment.

I explained that I had originally bought them *Stolen Words* to use on family visits to begin discussions with families about home languages. I explained, “You’re the power. You’re the English teacher, the literacy teacher, and you’re still saying, I kind of recognize this. I think that would be really powerful.” Everyone was silent. I didn’t know if I had gone too far. Perhaps I thought they had recognized their role in this power structure, but maybe they had not quite gotten there. I lightened the conversation a bit by saying I loved that “it’s a book about Native Americans but not about Thanksgiving.” I don’t quite know the connection Amira made in this moment, perhaps back to seeing your mom in a book, but she replied excitedly, “We need to convince ALL of our students to become authors!” which everyone audibly agreed with saying, “I know!” and “Yes!” Here, in opposition to the standardized, white-normalized curriculum,
Amira was officially engaging with the need for cultural authenticity and representation as discussed in Chapter Two (Bishop, 1990; Martínez-Roldán, 2013).

As we approached the next activity, I had planned to “lecture” for a bit because in my original design for this course, I wanted them to read a chapter from Delpit’s (2006) book about linguistic code-switching and codes of power. However, when I actually broke down how much time we had together, there was just too much to read. I shared and explained the points below for about five minutes.

Figure 12. Slide on Screen during Mini-lecture

**Lisa Delpit, Codes of Power**

- The Silenced Dialogue- linguistic codes, “Standard English”
  - Issues of power are enacted in classrooms p. 24
  - There are codes or rules for participating in power; that is, there is a “culture of power” p. 25
  - The rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power p. 25
  - If you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier p. 25
  - Those with power are frequently least aware of- or least willing to acknowledge – its existence. Those with less power are often most aware of its existence p. 26

I explained what “Standard English” was (a former term that Delpit used in 2006 for what I have referred to as Dominant American English) and the “rules” for participating in schools. I connected to how Laelia said that people have power by speaking English. I shared how Delpit saw the schools as a “power” and that there was a “culture of power” in school. I said that my understanding was that Delpit felt if “we only allow Standardized English in the classroom, we are basically telling kids that their English isn’t right or doesn’t count.” I shared that Delpit theorized that students needed to be taught these codes if they did not already know them, so
they have access to that power. I concluded by explaining how hard it was to see this power if you were within or from it.

As I asked them what they thought, Jordan opened up for perhaps the first time. She told the story below and about halfway through at line six, she began to cry while staring intensely at Maiah, the Black teacher in the room. Maiah was not making eye contact back and I was reminded of her previous statement about the low-test scores among Black students when she said, “I would cry for that.” And as I found out in her interview, she was sick of “white women’s tears” (DiAngelo, 2018).

I realized it, I was 20 when I got married and we moved to Biloxi, Mississippi…But then, even down there, the different cultures within Biloxi, and we’re an hour away from New Orleans, it was the best experience of my life coming from an all-white, middle-class, don’t discuss politics, nothing. Like I had parents who protected us from everything. I feel like I missed out because I didn’t… (starts to cry), this is just weird, like (crying through her words) the things that you guys say (looking directly at Maiah), I never experienced that. I was protected by my parents, but I feel like I missed out on so much depth and conversation that I’m learning now that I’m 47-year-old woman.

I noted in my memo that although I’m sure she had looked at Maiah before, I felt that this was the first time she saw Maiah as a person. It was a very strange look that kept me awake that night wondering what had just happened. As I transcribed this portion, it was unclear to me what she meant by “protected” by her parents in line seven. I was surprised to note that Merriam-Webster’s (2019) definitions of “protect” are “to cover or shield” and “to maintain the status of.” In a description of how white people shield an maintain status, Dyson (2018) referenced one of my favorite fictional movies, The Usual Suspects (Singer, 1995). Dyson quoted from the movie...
in regard to the way white supremacy is perpetuated in our society, “The greatest trick the devil ever played was to convince the world he didn’t exist.” Jordan’s parents, like so many other white people were likely unconsciously doing just that; shielding their children through silence as a form of “status quo.”

Another strange moment in this story occurred when Jordan began to cry. She shifted from the past when she was 20 years old to the present where she was 47. She started by talking about how she learned about the “cultures” of Mississippi when she was 20, but then she reiterated that she was “learning now” at 47 that this [racism?] happens to people. DiAngelo (2018) discussed that to remain in power, white people felt that racism must be kept “abstract,” but in this way, DiAngelo pointed out, no real work would get done (p. 124). Perhaps for Jordan, racism had remained abstract until now when she really heard the words of her colleagues of color for the first time. However, as Lensmire et al. (2013) shared, understanding privilege is not enough, white people must take antiracist action. We had more work to do.

After a moment of silence in order to not seem dismissive her emotions, I connected Jordan’s story to Delpit’s (2006) point stating, “That’s what she’s talking about. Those who grow up in the culture of power don’t have to deal with this because it’s our [I paused because I caught myself in that pronoun use], I’m saying ‘our’ because it was me too. I was raised in a culture that existed because of this power structure. I didn’t think about it. I wasn’t aware of it.” Someone in the background said, “No, not at all.” As I continued, “and I grew up outside of Chicago, we went to Chicago all the time…I didn’t have to think about it.” As I thought about it, my white parents were likely “protecting me” as a form of maintaining status quo just as Jordan’s did.
Laelia told a story of how her dad code-switched his voice when he answered work calls from home and they used to tease him about it. But now she said she felt like, “It’s messed up. It’s not cool that minorities feel that need, kind of have to, put on that show.” I agreed and shared that as a child, I was embarrassed about my dad’s blue-collar vernacular when he would call my friends’ parents. I said, “I was afraid no one would want to be my friend,” which Maiah loudly agreed, “Mmmhmmmm.” We continued on about different forms of grammar structures and I explained a bit about the grammar structures of African American Language. Maiah connected back to Shakespeare, questioning who controls grammar, “it cracks me up because everybody digs Shakespeare but he broke all the rules, like every single grammar rule. And created his own words, used verbs as nouns and nouns as verbs, all that crazy stuff, and everyone’s like ‘oh that’s amazing…but you don’t talk right.’” There was loud laughter when Maiah finished by stating, “How come he gets to do it when I can’t?” There was more laughter from the group, but I was struck by how serious this statement really was, and how glad I was that she said it. The linguistic codes of power (Delpit, 2006) were clear in Maiah’s story about her own experiences.

**Whiteness and Power**

Four class periods after the first time, I asked the teachers to return to the “Looking at Subcultures” activity (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012) that had been difficult on the first day. This was another explicit choice I made after deciding to talk more about race and whiteness in this class. I explained that I hoped they could do this activity again but explicitly about their larger subcultures such as “race, religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic status.”

After a few minutes of quiet conversations and intervening with Amira privately to get her started, I overheard someone whisper, “This is way harder.” I decided in the moment to bring the group back together and do the activity as a whole. I noticed when I reviewed their work
though, in that short amount of independent work time, Maiah had filled out her entire chart. Like the first time, it seemed that she had thought about this more than the others. Although the participants did not write much in their charts, this activity began a long discussion about race, power, and assimilation, so much so that at two times during the transcription, I noted there were large audible exhalations, the teachers were doing hard work.

After the teachers struggled to write about their race, especially the white ones, I googled a humorous blog post I had read before about “stuff white people like” (Clander, 2018) to start the conversation. The first example was “picking your own fruit” which the group looked confused until Rachel laughed and chimed in, “it’s true, you can drop a white person off anywhere and three hours later they come back from a farmer’s market!” We all laughed and commiserated about how we (the white people in the room, myself included) liked other things on the list such as camping (Esperanza said, “I don’t like camping!”), dogs, Moleskin notebooks, and “taking a year off.” I admitted out loud that when I read these I thought “doesn’t everyone like that?” Going down the blog list, I read “sea salt.” The six white teachers laughed and nodded in agreement, but I noticed the three teachers of color didn’t. Esperanza said, “Sea salt?” with a high-pitched curiosity as if she had never heard of it. Then the other two teachers of color shrugged their shoulders as if they didn’t know either or at least, didn’t know why white people liked it. As they shrugged, Rachel was in the middle of saying to Esperanza about sea salt, “You gotta try it; it’s way better.” Although no one responded to this small event, it marked an interesting occasion. It was a light-hearted way to point out that stereotypically what “white people like” is not a universal, that it is a subculture. When laughing about these different ideas, from the expressions on their faces, I noted that the six white teachers clearly began to consider
that these things were not common things that everyone liked, that their whiteness was not universal. This activity opened the door for some heavier conversations to follow.

The next subculture I asked them to consider as a group was being female. All of the participants, including myself, identified as women. The teachers shared ideas such as socializing, going to the bathroom together, paranoia or being afraid to go places alone/safety, and feeling like they had to prove their independence. This conversation was light-hearted with lots of verbal and physical agreement and laughter. I then posed this longer question:

Laura: Does that align with the way school is?

(Marked silence)

Laura: Like those examples of being a woman, like, going to the bathroom together, being paranoid of being hurt? Does that align with school? Going to the bathroom together, being chatty…

(Marked silence)

Someone said in a realization type way: Oh…no.

Laura: I would say no. I think that school is run in a “male” way. That you’re expected to be independent, it’s just assumed…

(A little murmuring and agreement began)

Laura: You’re expected to go places alone, you’re supposed to go to the bathroom alone and you can’t be afraid.

Amira with a tone of disbelief: Right.

Laura: You’re not expected to discuss things that you’re upset about, you have to be quiet or raise your hand or talk with everyone about it or no one about it.

(Longest silence yet)
Someone quietly: Whoa.

**Laelia:** (Gestured the popular ‘mind blown symbol’ with her hands and with laughter/disbelief in her voice): I just never thought about it that way before but like, it makes sense…

As indicated by the transcript above in the marked silences (lines two and six) that grew into murmurs of agreement (lines ten, thirteen, eighteen), the teachers were considering the role of power in the institution of school. Laelia summarized the group’s reaction with the, “mind blown” hand symbol and said with disbelief, “I just never thought about it that way before” (lines 19, 20).

We continued to talk about middle-class ways of being like “eating at restaurants,” “owning a house and having a mortgage,” and “both people having a job.” I added, “speaking Standardized English” and then described how I felt it was middle-class “to talk behind someone’s back.” Amira said, in line with the ubiquity of a different form of power, that of middle-classness, “I think that’s everywhere.” I replied, “but I mean not discuss a problem right there in the moment. They would say it directly or use their hands instead of talking, like they would be forceful. Like the way that we deal with conflict is ‘be quiet.’” To which Maiah added, “being passive aggressive.” I agreed and added that “We reinforce this in school when someone gets sent to the principal for fighting, even if it wasn’t a big fight but if somebody was talking bad about someone else behind their back and the other person heard them, we would probably be like ‘don’t do that.’” There were a few audible agreements then Lizzie, a white teacher, questioned her role in changing this:

**Lizzie:** How do we as teachers then [change]…

**Others:** (She was cut off with a bunch of “yeas.”)
Lizzie: So, we have a super loud library everybody is talking all the time, I mean, how do we change that to...come at sort of understanding so that we’re speaking their language, but they understand where we’re coming from too, so we can get something done productively, how do you make that shift?

I felt this question was an important shift in the conversation. She began to question how she could adapt her practices (line one), instead of the students. However, upon analysis, I noted she recreated a middle-class norm within her statement. In line five she said, “so we can get something done productively.” This statement implied that the only way to be productive in school was to be quiet, which is a common middle-class way of being. In the moment though, no one responded, so I described that I believed a first step of simple recognition was important: that some behaviors are not actually defiance, and that middle-class white ways of being are not the only ways of being. I connected back to Delpit’s codes of power stating, “Don’t get me wrong, I’m not saying we should let everyone fight all over school; it’s just that if a kid is not within the culture of power, we have to teach them so they can have access to a job.” From this, she replied with an intertextual connection back to the book, Stolen Words (Florence, 2017):

Lizzie: But then are we stealing their words, are we taking who they are and crushing them into who we want them to be?

Laura: If you expect only the codes of power from them, yes.

(marked silence)

Amira: (audibly exhales as if she had been holding her breath a long time)

The tension in the room, the question about “crushing them” (line one above), and the audible sigh at the end (line six), indicated that the institutional power of school, and their roles in reproducing it, were beginning to be questioned.
The conversation continued into expectations for code-switching and valuing multiple ways of being in the classroom. Amira questioned if she should be teaching code-switching and Maiah replied with her own experiences:

Maiah (B): I think being told to code-switch, I know I responded badly to that, when teachers told me that I had to, I did not like it.

Laelia (L): But maybe if we taught the ‘why…’

Amira (w): Yea, like [teaching] ‘why do we have to code-switch.’

Maiah (B): Even that, that’s what I was rejecting because it was like ‘why should I have to do that?’ like if you don’t have to change for me, why do I have to change for you?

Maiah’s personal story added to the other teachers’ understandings here. Laelia and Amira were able to directly throw out a new idea (lines three and four) and hear Maiah’s personal response (lines five and six). As DiAngelo (2018) stated in her recommendations, white people need to listen (p. 147).

Maiah went on to describe how she felt it was unfair that people assumed someone who spoke “incorrectly” was “stupid.” She bluntly stated, “Why are we putting that on the speaker? Why isn’t that on the audience? That’s what I was responding to, of, if we’re both having to do some work then cool, but if it’s just me that has to do work, I don’t like that. Then that’s reinforcing power. I don’t feel empowered in that space.” This was a powerful statement straight from a colleague that reinforced shifting the power dynamic. She went on to say, “That [institutional] value piece is huge,” and then connected it to how female achievement has been more valued in schools for the last 50 years and how that has changed the number of women in college and today in STEM fields. She wrapped up by saying, “So it’s like that purposeful choice to say, ‘we value females getting an education’ mattered in changing our society and that started
in public schools.” I had never thought about this before and wished I had allowed more time to discuss it, but I was aware there were just three minutes left in class that day. I agreed with Maiah that this was a clear connection then I held up *Stolen Words* (Florence, 2017) in my hands trying to connect back to the idea of valuing students’ home languages that Maiah mentioned and said, “What if you read *Stolen Words* and talked about African American Language in your classroom?” Laelia responded, “I feel like it would almost feel like, that value, and that kind of like, I don’t know, just addressing it. It’s just something you don’t talk about so it just kinda opens the door for that conversation.” With that, there was another audible sigh. I wrapped up class by explaining their homework. I felt exhausted and amazed. As I talked into my phone on the way home, I reflected:

1. When people talk about ‘maybe classes should be all white people so that we [white people] can talk about race, I felt tonight like that was completely wrong. The white teachers needed to hear the stories of the people of color so that they could start to listen.
2. I loved that Maiah pushed back even on Lisa Delpit’s research. I think about how if I had done today’s lesson four lessons ago it would never have gone over the way that it did. It takes time and trust and thinking about things to get to this place.

In my reflection that night, I was beginning to answer my second research question, “*While facilitating and mediating in a course in culturally sustaining pedagogies and family relationships, what were my own perceptions and experiences as a white doctoral student and former elementary teacher?*” My understanding of whiteness and positionality could only take the class so far. Maiah’s stories, as well as Laelia’s and Esperanza’s were vital for the white teachers to hear. As DiAngelo (2018) stated, “an antidote to white fragility is to build up our stamina to bear witness to the pain of racism that we cause” (p. 128). Through hearing Maiah’s stories about being ignored at the district about issues of equity, by
empathizing with children who do not see themselves in the curriculum, by hearing Laelia’s connections to Spanish being suppressed in her home, and to breaking down and identifying how white and middle-class norms are recreated in the classroom and the pain that may cause students, the teachers and I, began to bear witness.

**Conclusion to Chapter Five**

In this chapter, I outlined the discussions around race, racism, whiteness, and power that occurred as a result of various activities in the classroom. By reading research, teachers were able to connect to and examine their own practices. Reading and discussing children’s books together led to important conversations of race and power. When I took an in-depth look at Maiah’s stories through her interview, I was better able to understand her position as well as mine as a white researcher. Activities such as examining subcultures as well as analyzing the contents of the physical space of the classroom led to critical reflections on the power and assimilation present in the teachers’ classrooms. Moving forward into Chapter Six, I look at the practices that the teachers engaged in as a result of this course. By participating in family visits, reading books, and incorporating new ideas, the teachers seemed to use these discussions of race and power to push toward more culturally sustaining practices.
Throughout the course, the teachers engaged in many new practices such as family visits, reading new books, reading new research, and questioning their current practices. These new activities reflected a shift toward culturally sustaining pedagogy and building deeper family school connections. By spotlighting the four teachers who participated in family visits, I was able to consider how these new practices built relationships and shifted perspectives. I could sense a shift in their understanding of the course material and desire to be more culturally sustaining to the families in their classrooms through looking closely at the ways the teachers read diverse picture books and implemented research from the course. At the close of this chapter, I analyze their responses to final questions about literacy as a way to document shifts in their thinking. These shifts indicate new classroom practices and different values related to literacy.

In this chapter, I describe numerous activities that engaged with forms of culturally sustaining pedagogy in the literacy classroom. These activities included the teachers who participated in family visits, as well as their reflection of those visits. From sharing about their visits, I felt that their colleagues learned as well, so this was an important piece to discuss. First, I share Karen’s visit and discuss the ways in which my perspectives of the same visit were so drastically different than hers. After that, I share Esperanza’s story, which also contrasted with my perception of her family visit. Then, I highlight Amira, who excitedly tried new activities throughout the course including a family visit. Lastly, I share Lizzie’s story about a family visit that took place after the course was over.

After detailing the visits, I describe two ways diverse picture books were used in the classroom and the culturally sustaining results. I also share the family literacy lessons the teachers designed at the end of the course. At the close of this chapter, I share findings from their
written final responses that suggest the teachers’ new ways of conceptualizing literacy and family involvement in their classrooms.

**Family Visits**

As expected, each of the family visits was extremely different for each family and teacher. Family visits are not a common practice at elementary schools and as reported in their initial demographics survey for this class, only the two Kindergarten teachers had conducted them. As I reflected on Karen’s visit (shared here first), I noticed that she does not express her own learning in a positive way, however, by the end of the course together, Karen did tell me the visit impacted her communication with the family for the better. As I share Esperanza’s, Amira’s, and Lizzie’s stories below, I highlight the new information they described about the families and the students. These pieces of new learning were not monumental by any means. However, they reflected small but positive perceptual shifts toward these students, and small behavioral and relational shifts in the students and families themselves.

**Karen**

As we came to class on the second day, Karen and I had just conducted a family visit at the public library, and I felt energized and excited about the project. I asked Karen to share, thinking that it might help push the other teachers to initiate family visits.

As Karen started to share, I quickly realized that Karen and I had very different perceptions of the visit. The whole family- both guardians, the boy in Karen’s class, and his little sister- met us at the library. One guardian, the boy’s aunt, was in the process of transitioning genders. He told me they no longer identified as a gay couple because he was living as a man and his partner was a woman. The kids still viewed him as a woman and referred to him as “auntie.”
His partner had adopted her own nephews as well, so they had a large blended family. The aunt was working on her B.A. at the University. They shared that they lived in a duplex and the older woman next door was considered “grandma.” From what I could tell, she was a loving next-door neighbor not biologically related to anybody in the family. We sat and talked for over an hour at the local library. They were quite nervous at first, then opened up so deeply about their family that I was surprised, even though I knew from my past experience that this happens. After talking for almost an hour, we worked on math and reading for a short time at the end.

The memories I was planning to share with the class were all positive. One guardian said to me about reading at home, “Well, we have seven people and seven days a week, we can each just take turns reading with him!” I felt like that was a wonderful suggestion. At one point, the boy said something I felt was profound for a second grader. He described how he had read a book about families. As he spoke, Karen nodded as if she was familiar with the book. Then she asked, “What did you think about that book?” to which he replied, “Family is just who your friends are.” Clearly Karen was surprised because I do not think that was how she interpreted the book. As I got to know this boy throughout that hour, it was abundantly clear to me that they had a wonderful network of friends who were his family.

I wrote that night in my reflection about how their funds of knowledge were managing a large network of family and extending the definitions of what defines family. I later wrote about the difference I saw in the relationship between Karen and the family from the beginning to the end, in just one hour. I reflected on how I was aware that I viewed families differently, which became more apparent when Karen shared with us that day in class. At the start, when waiting for the family to arrive, I remember thinking that I was so tired and Karen must be too. I thought,
“why do I do this to teachers??” My answer came though after this hour and the last part of my memo that night said, “and then I remember that this is why…”

Back in the course, Karen shared with the class what she thought about the visit. She started by saying that she learned that the aunt had anxiety, and that she was surprised that the boy was absent the day after our family visit but “not once did they mention it!” In her figured world of parent involvement, parents inform the teachers of their lives when it impacts school. She then went on to describe how she felt it was interesting to her that “he struggles in reading, that a family member was taking college courses, but they weren’t reading at home. And that was just like ‘why aren’t they reading at home?’” Karen felt if this parent understood the need to read for classes, they would also have the need to read with their child. There were a few seconds of silence when I pushed back. I had an idea of my answer, but I really wanted to hear hers. I agreed with her that they weren’t doing much reading at home, especially because the guardians all but said that. Karen answered that maybe it was “just so chaotic…just so busy? Or was it that this child’s medication has worn off by that time and it’s just hard to do? Or, she [the aunt] inquired about math, is that her strength, is that where she is most comfortable so that’s what she wants to work with him on? And not the reading? I don’t know!” I replied, “I got the sense that they just weren’t really readers so they don’t sit there and read. It wasn’t that they don’t value it. Obviously [the aunt] does a lot of reading for school…” Karen interrupted to point out, as if they were lying, “his calendar came back with several days signed” to which Jordan chimed in agreeing with Karen, “you know, did you really read?” This is a common deficit-based view of parents, that they lie about doing reading homework. I decided to push back. I replied with the story of how the one guardian had proposed the seven family members for seven nights of the week reading idea as a great solution. Karen said she didn’t hear her say that. In line with
Lawson (2003), as discussed in Chapter Two regarding home visits, parents and teachers expressed differences in the way they talk about and define parent involvement. Parents had a community centric focus while teachers had a school centric focus which could result in differing outlooks on the goals of partnerships and schooling (p. 122). I felt that Karen had this school centric focus while the family was much more focused on community.

Karen then went on to describe the stress she felt, “we take on a family’s problems, that emotional part….then I’m not sleeping at night because I’m thinking about their issues, I can’t take that on too.” Amira chimed in, “we have so many kids with trauma, right? In our classrooms, that we take that on.” In the moment, I don’t think I really heard them say this, or heard what they were trying to really say, but this is a powerful and important point about family visits- the teachers stress about their students as it is. Adding more information about the student’s home life might add to the stress of the teacher. In the moment though, I was struck by how differently Karen and I had viewed this family. I did not feel that stress about their home life. I shared how awesome I thought they were and gave the examples of attending college, networking family relationships, and managing with one car.

For the first time that class period, Rachel, who had participated in Kindergarten home visits when they were funded, spoke up to agree with me. She added an interesting thought which made me think more about how it takes time to learn to see a strength-based perspective. Deficit notions of families are so ingrained in the culture of schools we have to learn to “un-see” them. Rachel described a family visit where the family had “no air conditioning, no furniture, no nothing…[now] I think, ‘wow.’ The way that I look at that student now is so different and I really am so much more impressed with her…the things you know, that I thought maybe would be shortcomings or like, wow, I can’t believe [how] she can do this, and she can do this, and…”
Rachel, like me, had learned overtime to see the strengths, not the deficits, what she “can do” as opposed to what she cannot do. As Comber and Kamler (2004) stated, “disrupting deficit discourses and re-designing new pedagogical repertoires to reconnect with children's lifeworlds is a long-term project that can best be achieved in reciprocal research relationships with teachers” (emphasis mine, p. 293). I was reminded that this happens over time.

As I went home that night, worried about the way Karen described the family, I read through her written reflection of the visit. She had written, as she had shared aloud, about being surprised that they weren’t reading and then the added worry about the child. However, she added something that she did not share in class, “the children were so polite, and their guardians had such a calm, tender way with them. What a cool family.” Here, she had seen a positive, strength perspective of the family but she did not share it with her colleagues.

**Esperanza**

As we started class four, I asked Esperanza to share about her family visit from a few days earlier. We met at the public library one evening at the mom’s request because if we came to their house, “the dog would bark the whole time.” It felt like an excuse for the discomfort of having a teacher at one’s house. Esperanza, the mom, the dad, the daughter, and I sat down in the children’s section around a table with small chairs. The fifth-grade girl was the only one who looked physically comfortable. Esperanza had previously told me that the girl was a “great kid” who was “quiet” and might need help with reading. As we sat down, the mom, with her boisterous personality and smile, explained that her husband understood English but not as well as Spanish so she would translate for him. Throughout the visit he smiled and laughed when we did as if he understood, but she also translated for him when needed.
After about fifteen minutes of sharing the IRB documents, explaining the course and the study, and beginning to ask interview type questions, the mom’s face lit up and she began to laugh with relief. She said something to her husband in Spanish. She then explained how she thought that her daughter was in trouble this whole time and she just realized that she was not. We all laughed, and I apologized profusely. I was struck by how ingrained the family’s expectation of school communication was. Commonly, schools contact parents to meet only when there is trouble, in line with so many “one-way models” of parent involvement (Shockley, Michalove, & Allen, 1995, p. 92). As I confirmed later, when Esperanza had called on the phone to invite them to this project, she did explain that she was taking a class and wanted to get to know her family better, that the child was not in trouble. I did explain the project through the IRB forms and again as a summary before they signed the papers. It was only after all of this time, when we began to ask them broad family reading type questions, not discuss trouble, that she truly understood or perhaps believed us about why we were there. I was a bit horrified, but so glad that we were there doing this to build this relationship not based on behaviors or punishment.

Back in our class with her colleagues, I asked Esperanza what she thought of the visit. She shyly responded with a brief summary and then said, “It was good; we just like sat around a table and talked. I don’t know what to say. They were very nice?” Esperanza went on to describe, “I felt weird at first, but after a while it was fine…I felt like I had a lot of similarities with them and their family. And it was nice that I speak Spanish so I could communicate them.” She was downplaying this aspect of the conversation. During the family visit, Esperanza asked the mom about the goals she had for her children. She replied affirmatively, “Finish college. All three of them, finish college.” She asked her husband in Spanish about his goals for them then
translated back affirmatively, “Same.” Esperanza then shared how she herself was an ELL student, a first-generation college student, and how she paid for college herself by working and loans. While Esperanza shared this, the mom’s eyes grew so wide and she had a huge smile on her face. I got the sense that she connected to or was inspired by Esperanza’s success. Esperanza was not just another teacher in that moment. One of the things the mom said to Esperanza was “They [her parents] spoke Spanish to you all the time? Wow!” Her tone was as if she could not believe a teacher could come from a family like her family. I noted that the mom’s posture and ease relaxed at that moment, and realized she connected to Esperanza because of this.

As I shared this part of the story back with the group, Esperanza agreed saying casually again, “Yea I think she was surprised that I was an ELL student, that I went to college, supported myself…which is what the parents want for their kids. So, yea.” Esperanza, in her calm quiet manner, either downplayed the incident as she seemed somewhat embarrassed, or at the time she truly did not see the impact this had on the family. However, she shared at the end of our course together (discussed in Chapter Seven) the student was different from that day forward.

**Amira**

We had a five week break between class four and class five due to parent-teacher conferences and Thanksgiving break. I didn’t have contact with the teachers during this time except that Amira and I did a family visit. In early November we visited a boy, *Darius*, from her fourth-grade class, and his mom. A week later, I observed her class in which he shared a poem he wrote as a result of our family visit.

Amira had chosen a student who she struggled with in class. Darius was a stocky Black boy who she described as “struggling” in class. Amira said she would text his mom, but she often did not respond. Scheduling the family visit took a lot of back and forth and a few
cancellations due to the mom’s work schedule and Amira’s children’s sports schedules, but we finally got a time set.

The mom, Darius, Amira, and I sat in their small living room on a wrap-around couch that took up the whole space. The apartment was clean but sparsely filled, a small kitchen table and a tv were all that I could see. The mom was an extremely friendly, smiley, Black woman. I later learned she was a single mom of five children of two different generations (she had three adult kids and two elementary kids). She had moved to our town from Chicago to be near her brother and to escape the violence there.

Amira came prepared with “get to know you” questions to ask, so after the IRB consent process, she began. I was immediately struck by how Darius, who Amira had described as loud and fidgety, sat with us the whole hour as we just talked. He was as enthralled as I was. His mom described him as “very active, he love sports. He likes outside, play with the peers, you know. He’s funny, love to dance, he’ll dance for you too [turned to me].”

Amira asked her to tell us about her family. As Allen, et al., (2015) stated about the importance of family stories, “many parents (especially families of color and those affected by poverty) do not communicate with the school because they feel that their voices are not welcome” (parenthesis in original, p. 133). Here, by asking this question, Amira recognized that the mom’s voice was welcome. The mom explained that she was from Chicago and grew up in a “wild, wild neighborhood. My mom deceased, my daddy deceased, my grandmother deceased. So basically, I got cousins and brothers and sisters in Chicago and one brother here.” She told us how she works a lot and is trying to go back to school to get her GED with goals of being a licensed certified nursing assistant (CNA).
As she got further into telling us about her life, she described how she left Chicago in 2003 and moved to Mississippi to take care of her great-grandma. She was working in a nursing home when Hurricane Katrina hit and devastated the region. She told us, “I had to drop that and go help out in the hotels.” By 2009, she said her great-grandma was stable and her brother convinced her to move to our state for the “great jobs and schooling.” She summed up her story with, “I been here ten years, hopefully another ten years. I love it.”

We continued to talk as the conversation cycled back to why she left Chicago. I share her story here as a way to humanize her struggles, as they are not often shared in the classroom. Allen (2015) described the importance of blurring the lines between home and school to deepen relationships (p. 123), listening to her family stories at this visit did that. At first, she murmured something unintelligible about the violence in Chicago and then added:

My mom, she ended up getting killed, right in front of me. We was really fitna get out the ghetto because she had gone to school for her GED. She graduated and got her diploma for that…then went to school for a CNA. We was on the step of getting out the ghetto. She was going to school to be a RN and she ended up being killed. That’s what slowed us down. Cause it was like 5 of us [her siblings]. And my grandmother, she had a heart attack, [after] she raised us and took custody…she ended up having a heart attack like a year after my mom passed away, so it left us like [with] my great-great grandmother, who lived in Mississippi. She ended up moving to the city and she wanted to take us with her, but we didn’t know Mississippi and stuff like that, so I just helped out and took care of my siblings, got me a decent job, back then it was really, really poor so, it was just something to get by. I just said, ‘forget it,’ you know, and so I left Chicago.
(She rubbed her hand on a lengthwise line-like scar about 6 inches long across her clavicle that I had not previously noticed as she said the following): I got injured, my kids with their daddy, so it was a whole lot, I went through a whole lot. I made that step to leave Chicago to go take care of my great grandma, just to get out of the hood, the ghetto life, to better myself, and I didn’t want to raise my kids in that environment, and so, I just took that step and left Chicago.

I was floored. The pain and the perseverance that flowed from her was palpable. She had gone through so much. For me, a middle-class white woman who was raised near Chicago, but so far from this violence, it was really shocking to hear a first-hand story about things I had previously just heard reported on the news. I could not believe that she had shared all of this so openly with Amira and me, but I was so glad she did. Listening to her made these kinds of struggles real for those of us (Amira and me) who do not understand the hardships of violence and poverty. I flashed back to Amira telling me how the mom was difficult to schedule with and how she didn’t always respond to Amira’s texts. That felt so miniscule when I considered what she had just told us about her life. I quickly snapped back into reality when I looked at her son on the couch listening attentively. I wondered if he knew any of this part of his mom’s life as it had all occurred before he was born.

Her story came to the present day where she shared that she had enrolled in GED classes but had to drop out because her job expected her to work certain hours that conflicted, and she “had to pay the rent.” She reported that she received no child support, but she felt that she had a good job so now she was “stabilized and moving forward.” I responded that she was brave to pick up and move to Mississippi because I felt like that must have been hard. She told us that she was “inspired” by her mom who had the goal of “getting off DHS [Department of Human
Services support].” She described, “that was one of her goals and when she reached the top, God took her from us and so, I didn’t want to raise my kids in that same type of environment and situation, so I took it upon myself like ‘that ain’t gonna be me.’”

The conversations that followed were not as heavy. We discussed Darius’s last birthday party and how much we all loved Ramen noodles. We talked about school and his favorite subjects. I was surprised to hear his mom say that when he came home from school each day, he would tell her all the things that he did in detail. It felt so opposite from my middle-class white friends who complained that the same type of questions of their kids prompted, “I don’t knows” and shrugged shoulders. He told us that he really liked taking notes in math class, “you know, where we do the two-column thing, I like that.” From the tone of her response, Amira was clearly surprised too. He then shared how he likes “to write about koalas and stuff.” Shockley, Michalove, and Allen (1995) stated, “when we saw children through their families’ eyes in addition to our own, we saw them in ways that helped us teach the whole child more completely” (p. 13). I was so struck by how his mother’s descriptions of him did not fit the stereotypes in my head of the “difficult” and “active” Black boy that Amira had described. We could see him here “more completely” as the authors described.

At this point in the conversation, Amira asked the question she had prepared from our second-class period together when we had discussed differentiating homework. She said to the mom, “What would you like for me to assign him, for him to do at home?” The mom replied definitively, “History. I want him to read about his heritage. Mississippi.” She then added that she would like some sort of newspaper summary-type writing assignment about sports because he liked to read the paper. Amira reminded Darius that she sends home printed news articles for him to read, which his mom said she didn’t know about. The mom told him to bring them home.
Then told us she liked doing homework with them because “They help me. When I go back to school for my GED, the things that I’m helping them, they’re helping me.”

At the very end of our family visit, Amira pulled out the template for Where I’m From. She explained it and showed the original by Lyons, then read her version that she had written in our class together. She explained the template and gave it to him. He was very excited (I wrote in my memo that night that he was “glowing”) and the mom said they would work on it together. She said, “that’s gonna be fun.” As we thanked them and gathered our things, I noticed Darius was enthralled with the poem, reading it over and over again and not looking up at us. Amira and the mom made small talk about the common difficulties of basketball practice as they both had kids to transport around, another small blurring of the line between home and school that can lead to deeper relationships (Allen et al., 2015, p. 123).

The next week, Amira invited me to her class because Darius was sharing his Where I’m From poem. I sat in the back of the room as he began to shyly read his poem that was projected on the screen. Amira asked him to move his hand from in front of his face so we could hear him, which made him laugh uncomfortably. As he continued to read, he got more confident and a bit louder. He explained that he was from “fried okra” and “iced tea,” which made me smile because I could sense the “Mississippi” in it and could picture his mom proudly helping him at their kitchen table.

As he finished, the students all clapped. Amira was clearly so impressed- while he presented his poem she smiled so broadly and encouraged him along in a tender voice. At the end, she asked the class with a little shock in her voice, “Isn’t that so good?” Amira directed the rest of the class to try it, “Since Darius has done this poem already, he’s going to be around helping people.” As he circulated helping his peers, he was so proud. He was standing up straight
and acted like a little teacher. As they set off to start, he said, “Anyone have any questions?” After he helped a few friends, I overheard him say in a very teacher-like voice, “write your name…” as he pointed to the name line just as a teacher would. That day, I noted that both Darius and Amira were beaming with pride and that her opinion of him as a student seemed different. Later, in her course reflection, she described that it had. As Allen et al., (2015) showed, “home and family experiences are indeed relevant to the classroom…it is worth the effort for students and their families” (p. 133). The effort Amira had given to connect to this boy seemed well worth it.

Lizzie

Lizzie had a family visit scheduled after our last class together, so she did not get to share back with her colleagues, nor did I get to hear her reflections of it. However, she had written in her in-class journal earlier that month, “I haven’t even gone to this student’s home yet, but I already feel like we have more of a bond (almost like a special secret) and that it’s something that helps him to feel more comfortable (I think) when he comes to library.”

We arrived at the very clean townhouse and sat down at the kitchen table with the dad, the two elementary boys who both attended Mainwood, Lizzie and me. I smelled sticky rice cooking in a large pot, which reminded me of my time in Ghana. The dad spoke French, Swahili, and reported “a little English,” although he seemed to understand a lot of what we said when it was in English. I had previously translated the IRB documents into French and translated our conversations from French to English in the moment as best as I could. I felt a special connection with the dad, as I did with many local African French speakers. A few have told me in the past that I am the only white person they know that speaks French, although they use word “American” not “white,” which makes me a bit uncomfortable as it excludes the many African-
born French speakers who are Americans. As I have encountered before, the dad seemed so excited when I introduced myself to him in French. He said with a tone of great surprise, “vraiment?! [really?!]”

The dad told us about moving from The Democratic Republic of Congo and how he was a preacher here now at an African church. He invited us to come, which I still hope to do some day. As we continued to talk, I could sense the shift in our conversations toward value literacy events at home. As Shockley, Michalove, and Allen (1995) described of this important two-way partnership, “we were trying to learn from parents what literacy events were important in their lives and share with them the important literacy events in their children’s school” (p. 94). The boys told us how they like school here and that both thought math was their favorite. I had brought some picture books in French, although I found out when we got there that the boys spoke English and Swahili, not French. I noticed that while we talked with his boys, the dad quietly read the French picture books to himself, very carefully and slowly. I remember thinking, “maybe he hasn’t seen a picture book in French in a long time, or ever.” After he read the translation of Where the Wild Things Are (Max et le Maximonstres, Sendak, 1963), he held it in both arms up to his chest for a long time. I felt terrible when we were packing up that I had to ask for it back (it’s my favorite too, otherwise I would have left it!)

Throughout the hour, we talked about school and what the boys like to do at home. We talked a lot about food and our favorite meals. The dad and I shared a love of “Red-red,” a local cuisine of Western Africa. As we were leaving, we stood in their doorway with our coats, boots, and hats on as it was quite cold out, when Lizzie asked him if he had any last questions for her. He replied that he did not understand the bus system. The boys lived within one mile, but right at that one-mile point, so there was no bus for them. He said sadly in English, “We are Africa man,
the snow is very new for us, I don’t understand why the school say, ‘no bus.’” Lizzie explained the one-mile radius rule (as I flashed back to the difficulty for many parents about this topic at Back to School Night) and tried to brainstorm about a carpool solution for them. As I reflected on this statement, it struck me how different his perception of the flexibility and accommodating nature of the schools could be. I cannot be sure, but I think he expected that because they were from Africa, and the snow was harder on them, that the school would accommodate. At the time, and again as I transcribed it, I thought about how much I wished that was the case.

Although Lizzie did not reflect on this visit afterward, my perceptions were that it truly mattered to the father that we came to visit them. As Lizzie reflected at the beginning, she felt a special bond with the students before the visit. I hope that this bond was strengthened afterward.

Using Picture Books

The family visits were a new practice for the four teachers who participated in them. Another new practice that I noted the teachers engaged with was reading diverse picture books with their classes. Each time I shared a picture book in the course, I asked the teachers to consider using the books in the next month and let me know how the kids or families responded.

One time, Amira told the class about how she had borrowed *Last Stop on Market Street* (de la Peña, 2015) from me after I read it in our course. In line with Bishop’s (1990) theory that children connect and feel valued by books as mirrors that they see themselves in, Amira reflected:

1 Amira: Teaching author’s purpose and theme with that book, you know it was so easy!
2 Compared to trying to teach it with the HMH [curriculum] books…But, it just was like night and day. They got it immediately.
3 Laura: Why do you think that was?
Amira: They can relate to it. It’s pretty clear, you know, they were just SO into the book too. It was amazing, I mean, I know you said that but when I actually did that with the kids I was like, ‘oh, yea I need to do this more.’

As Bishop (1990) described, “literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience” (p. 1). Amira described this experience in her classroom with her students that day as indicated by line three, “they got it so easily!” and line five, “the can relate to it.” Not only did the students connect to this book, but Amira saw them reflected in a larger experience as well, “it was amazing” (line six).

On a different occasion, Amira borrowed my copy of Two White Rabbits (Buitrago, 2015) and read it with her class with the intention of teaching compare and contrast of the characters. Two White Rabbits (Buitrago, 2015) is a story about a migrant father and daughter who cross the Southern U.S. border. Amira shared with her colleagues that instead of comparing the characters to each other, a student instead brought up that he compared himself to the characters because he was also a refugee. She then asked her students about being refugees. As I listened to her describe her class discussion, I realized how much she learned about her students by using this book with them, not just what her students learned. At the time of this study, there was divisive rhetoric around immigration happening in the country. Her students’ lives were likely validated in this moment by discussing this. Bishop (2012) wrote, “I argue, however, that for those children who historically had been ignored—or worse, ridiculed—in children's books, seeing themselves portrayed visually and textually as realistically human was essential to letting them know that they are valued in the social context in which they are growing up” (p. 9). In the transcript below I noted how this one book opened up discussions for the teachers to learn about
their students, the importance of sharing family stories, and how students are “so into” stories about their own lives, as Amira said below in line nine:

1. **Amira:** And then I asked, ‘how many of you in here are refugees?’ I had 6 students!

2. **Rachel:** Wow!

3. **Amira:** And then they all went around and told why they left their country and came here. It was really, really eye opening.

4. **Rachel:** So, they all knew [that they were refugees]? Our kids [kindergarteners] can’t talk about it so it’s really interesting to hear.

5. **Amira:** Yea, yea. They all knew why, it was mostly to um, because they were, felt unsafe because they were worried they were going to be killed [unintelligible] so yea. It was really interesting, I couldn’t believe, the kids were just so into this one…

Using this book, Amira was able to elicit family stories as shown in line three. Not only did the students learn but Amira did as well, indicated by her statement in line four, “it was really, really eye opening.” Thinking this topic was finished, I reiterated that I felt that this book allowed for those students to tell their story. Reflecting my own agreement with Bishop (1990, 2012), I said, “Maybe they feel like their stories are more validated or more heard or something.” Amira replied, which led to a further discussion of how books open doors for conversations (line nine) and how the definitions of family are fluid (line 24).

1. **Amira:** I don’t think it ever really naturally, it doesn’t usually naturally come up, you know, ‘how many of you are refugees?’ that was one of the things that they in the similarities that they said, and I was like ‘oh perfect.’

2. **Lizzie:** She shared it with me, and I went and grabbed a bunch of books that we have in the library about refugees and did my book talk on that so that they could get more…
**Amira:** And they were like ‘I want that one! I want that one!’ That was so cool.

**Lizzie:** Was it traumatic for any of them to talk about it? Was it sad? That’s the thing I wondered, what kind of feelings come out of talking about it?

**Amira:** They didn’t but…that would be a great thing to talk about cause I know like you’re reading the book *Refugee*, I read the book *Refugee* and some of my students are, um, reading it, so I don’t know if there’s another book that would get more into that…No, no one really seemed [sad]…they were all excited to tell that they were refugees.

**Rachel:** I wonder if they remember it or if they just know the story cause I know like B (a parent at the school who was a refugee) talked to us…what she said was they’re not there [in the camp] for a month, they can be there for years. She was there for years, and never [left] so I wonder.

**Amira:** I know a lot of times, I bet almost every single one of them has a family member still back, cause I know when they were sharing, and I mean, that’s another story too, they talked about their family that’s back there…that’s very hard for them and so yea, that’s a whole other…

**Karen:** And B (the parent who was a refugee) talked about too [how] you don’t leave as a family… you’re escaping, you’re separating, and so your family sort of becomes the people that you meet here that have those similar experiences or from the same area. So, they often have called those people family when maybe they really aren’t blood relatives.

Amira used this book to learn about her students, and in turn, the rest of our class learned about refugees too. As indicated when Amira shared that it was not traumatic (line 12) and then Rachel shared how a mom had taught them about being a refugee (lines 14-16), the class was learning more about their students. In the end of the conversation, Karen mentioned that refugees might
define family differently (line 24), which was an important piece to remember as we discussed family visits.

As I transcribed this conversation, I was struck by how Amira said that being a refugee, “doesn’t usually naturally come up.” It might be easy to judge her in this moment for not knowing her students, but as I talked about this with a few teacher friends, it rang true to our experiences as well. As the teachers previously discussed in the scheduling constraints conversation, there is very little time in a school day to talk to students about anything outside of the curriculum. Allen (2015) reiterated that in top-down standardized schools are, “teachers spend a significant part of their day teaching students what they are going to learn, why they are learning it, and how they will know when they have ‘mastered’ the learning” (p. 2). As I shared earlier about my memories of being in her classroom, Amira’s room was full of timers beeping because students were frantically practicing fluency drills to pass the state tests. If being a refugee was not within the written curriculum or on the state test, it was likely not discussed until this day.

**New Lessons**

Along with participating in family visits and reading new picture books, the teachers incorporated new ideas into their classroom by reading relevant research. Similar to the previously discussed homework assignment, the teachers again had a choice of four articles that I had provided in our Google folder (see Table 20). Although these articles did not provoke a lot of conversation in the moment, they were used to design lessons later on (see Appendix B). Rachel, Amira, Karen, and Jordan all read Irish and Parsons (2016). Amira summarized that it was about teaching parents to do more discussion during reading with their children. Rachel and Karen added that they would like to simplify some of the parent prompts offered in the article
but that it had good ideas like sending questions as a prompt to get parents talking to their kids about reading. I connected this article back to our discussion of families viewing reading as “just reading” from Dudley-Marling (2009).

Table 20. Homework Choice Articles

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<tr>
<th>Article</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Journal</th>
<th>Volume</th>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Pages</th>
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Rebecca read Louie and Davis-Welton (2016). She shared her main take-away was the idea of “including [parents] and making them feel comfortable.” She added that she had been thinking about our final assignment (to create a literacy lesson) and said, “I was thinking for a project like, names. When you’re going to decide on the name of your child that’s a big decision, you know?” We discussed some name books to read like Chrysanthemum (Henkes, 1991) and The Name Jar (Choi, 2003) when Rebecca connected back to an implicit bias training the district had provided. She told the story below, which to me, reinforced the need for implicit bias training:

1 [Another teacher] made a comment that those were two common white names versus two
2 common Black names, and I thought, ‘oh I didn’t know there were common names for
3 color, ya know?’ like I hadn’t thought of that before, but I thought, I wonder if every
4 culture, there’s probably common names. It’d be interesting to know too, is your name a
5 common name or you know, an unusual name?

As I transcribed this story, I was a bothered by how she had said, “names for color” on lines two and three but I had not noticed it in the moment. Rebecca was the most veteran teacher in our
group and was in her last year of teaching. This story reminded me of how far teacher education programs, and society, have come in terms of understanding and discussing race (as discussed in Chapter Five on race and pre-service courses). When I thought about Esperanza and Laelia, the two new teachers in the room, and the conversations that took place in our undergraduate classes, I felt that it was unlikely someone going through teacher education now could think the way that Rebecca had. Although her use of words felt stressful, it gave me great relief to think about how conversations of race are evolving, even if we still have a long way to go.

I shared that I had read that “Mohammed” was the most common name in the world and how this fact always reminded me (because it is less common in the U.S.) that we “are so centric, but we not the most common people in the world.” Rebecca questioned how Muslims name their students because she has had many “Ali-Ali” type names. I noted that night, the tone of Rebecca’s voice seemed that she had never thought about this before, even after admitting she had so many students with this name. Rachel brought up that Icelandic kids have the name “Son or Dottir at the end” and wondered, “how is it with Muslim names? Does it come from the mothers or the fathers or…?” I then shared how in Ghana the name “Kwame” is a nickname that means a boy who was born on a Saturday. This was an interesting conversation that seemed to get the teachers thinking about their students’ home cultures in a different way, once again de-centering American normalization. I was really glad that Rebecca brought it up.

We spent the rest of the class period working on two other projects. First, as their final project for the course, I asked them to design a literacy lesson with families in mind. I purposefully left it very open-ended but reminded them to plan something that could actually fit into their curriculum that they could actually use. It was important to me that this was a chance for application of the course materials, not busy work.
A few teachers incorporated ideas such as bringing in family foods, sharing traditions, and interviewing elder family members (see Appendix B for details). As described when she shared about reading the article by Louie and Davis-Welton (2016), Rebecca wrote an elaborate lesson plan for a naming project which represented a shift in her curiosity, an expansion of her thinking about the unique value that all families can bring to the classroom. Using the picture book *The Name Jar* (Choi, 2003) as a read aloud, she planned for the students to interview their parents and to invite the parents in to share their stories about the meanings of names in their cultures. This small project represented a large shift in Rebecca, a shift towards valuing the diverse ways of being that exist in her classroom.

**Expanded Concepts of Literacy**

In their written in-class folders, I asked the teachers to answer the same questions I had asked them at the beginning of the course (Table 21). I was interested to see if their answers were different. Over the length of the course, it appeared that many of the teachers expanded their concepts of literacy from more traditional “reading and writing” to a broader concept.

Table 21. Final Questions

- What is literacy to you?
- What were your childhood experiences with literacy at home and in school?
- What literacy practices do you engage in now?
- Tell me about your expectations for families about literacy at their home.
- What are some ways that families can help in the classroom?
- What are some hindrances that you have seen in families that prevent them from helping their child at home?
- What do you know about the differences between school literacy and home literacy?
- Tell about the best experience you have had working with a family.
- Tell about the worst experience you have had working with a family.

When I compared their answers from August to December, I noticed the teachers used different examples that reflected theories of multiple literacies and applications of the funds of knowledge theory as discussed in Chapter Two. As explained in Chapter Four, when asked to
define literacy at the beginning of the course through these written questions, the teachers used words like “reading, writing, listening, speaking” and described ideas such as “communication and understanding.” Rebecca added examples such as “music and stories” and three participants added values to their concept of being literate, such as “enjoyment,” “love of reading,” and “engulfing yourself in written language.”

At the end of the course, when asked the same questions, a few of the teachers expanded their concepts of what counts as literacy in the classroom. They continued to use words such as “reading, writing, listening” and included terms such as “enjoyment” but added detailed examples such as “songs, poems, oral storytelling, rap,” “[children] connecting to the text,” and being able to “critically think.” These examples moved away from dominant views of what counts as literacy towards a broader range of ideas and purposes.

By examining the teachers’ answers to “What is literacy to you?” an interesting finding related to the theory of multiliteracies (Street, 1995; The New London Group, 1996) emerged. According to Street (1995), when literacy practices value only one path to literacy, classroom pedagogy reflects that by “transforming the rich variety of literacy practices evident in community literacies into a single, homogenized, practice” (p. 123). Here, findings show that Esperanza and Jordan, perhaps unknowingly as I will explain, moved away from that single homogenized practice. Embedded in the plural term literacies are the many paths to literacy and literacy practices of different communities, which began to emerge from Jordan and Esperanza’s typed responses. It is interesting to note that, in reflection, I used the singular term “literacy” throughout the course because of my prior experience of negative or confused reactions to the term “literacies” in the plural. Although I feel I have the linguistic capital to switch this term in my own vocabulary usage, I feel constrained by the more common use of the term in order to
communicate with teachers and other community members. Instead of pushing back, I found that I used the term “literacy practices” to encompass the plurality of my concept of literacy.

Jordan wrote, “Literacy to me are a multitude of forms…” and Esperanza wrote “it may look different in different situations, but they are all important in their own way” (emphases mine). At first, this could seem like a grammatical error. However, neither teacher made this error in any other answer, nor did they answer this way in the introductory questions. For these two circumstances in the final answers, the teachers each used a singular subject (literacy, it) with a plural conjugation of the verb or pronoun (are, they/their). Both Jordan and Esperanza used “are” and “they/their” as a plural for literacy, something I did not prompt in the question but implied an interesting finding of the way they were perceiving what literacy is. They seemed to be grappling within their definition for multiple types of literacy but were not familiar or comfortable using the less common term for literacy in the plural, literacies, thus made grammatical errors.

Moll’s theory of the funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) provided another look at expanded concepts and definitions of literacy. When a teacher examines and uses the cultural practices of families and family histories in the classroom, broader concepts of literacy practices can emerge. In Rachel’s final answer to the same question, “What is literacy to you?” she described that literacy is “knowledge in certain areas. I have thought about literacy in the past more in terms of reading and writing” (emphasis mine). This expanded definition directly connects to Moll’s funds of knowledge theory (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) that people have strengths from various family practices. Or, as Rachel said, “in certain areas” that inform the way people learn and create knowledge. She recognized that literacy can be expanded to forms outside of traditional reading and writing.
For the question, “What literacy practices do you engage in now?” Rachel responded initially as, “[I] read a lot, watch the news, talk with family and neighbors.” In the final response to the same question, she wrote that she engaged in “professional and personal reading, lesson planning and plc’s/professional conversations, reading and discussing college wrestling with my ‘wrestling friends,’ too much Twitter, bullet journal full of a ridiculous number of lists.” Particularly interesting here was her connection to the wrestling culture. She recognized the value in that subculture as a fund of knowledge and that it has its own forms of literacy in which she engaged.

As with Rachel above, Esperanza wrote an expanded definition of literacy practices that engaged with the funds of knowledge theory (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). To the question, “What were your childhood experiences with literacy at home and in school?” Esperanza described her childhood experiences with literacy very differently from her initial response to her final one. The first time she answered this question, in August, Esperanza simply stated regarding her home literacy while growing up, “I had only a handful of books.” This response felt very deficit oriented, indicating she didn’t feel there was very much literacy in her home. In her final response she wrote, “My family never really read a lot with me growing up, but my family was able to put me in situations where we looked at the grocery sales papers that came in the mail or things like that. My mom also read things like what her dreams meant and weird things like that.” This example showed an expanded concept of what counts as literacy that engaged with her family’s home strengths.

When I analyzed the final responses to, “tell me about your expectations for families about literacy at their home,” I noticed that the responses were similar from beginning to end. However, it was interesting to consider their answers completely side by side (for full answers,
see Appendix C for details). Especially interesting were Rachel, Esperanza, and Amira’s responses, recreated side-by-side in Table 22 below. Rachel’s response had a very deficit view in the beginning, “not literate…not developed” but shifted to an idea of having “rich conversations” at home. Amira’s final response reflected the Dudley-Marling (2009) article that she read about “just reading” a change that she would make in her assignments, not the parents. Esperanza captured a more detailed shift about writing their family histories, which reflected the research article she read, Zurcher (2016). Because of these responses, it was clear that reading these research articles was extremely important to their learning.

Table 22. Written Answers: Literacy at Home Expectations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>August</th>
<th>December</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tell me about your expectations for families about literacy at their home.</td>
<td>Tell me about your expectations for families about literacy at their home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Some families are not literate in English, some have not developed “school” literacy</td>
<td>My biggest hope is that families have rich conversations with their kids. Reading and writing together would be fantastic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esperanza</td>
<td>That they take their children to the library or at least have access to books in some other way for their children. Encourage them to read. If they currently don’t, at least be willing and open to doing so.</td>
<td>I hope that they feel like reading and writing is important in some way, shape, or form. I hope that families could write stories about their family history, even if it is in their home language, or write informally, like asking their children to write the grocery list down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amira</td>
<td>Read every night for 20 minutes. Discuss books.</td>
<td>I want them to read every night. I have now tried to be more specific about my assignments and what I want them to read and do.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As you can see above and in Appendix A, there were many examples of dominant views of reading and writing that remained, as indicated when Amira said still “read every night,” but a small shift toward valuing family conversations and stories was present.

When I asked, “what are some ways families can help in the classroom?” (see Appendix D for full side-by-side comparisons) many of the final responses were similar to their initial responses. However, Amira, Esperanza, Rachel, and Jordan mentioned the idea of “sharing” and
“discussing family stories” in the classroom (see Table 23) which was a shift from the one-way model of parent involvement discussed in Chapter Two (Shockley, Michalove, & Allen et al., 2015). When teachers want to invite families into the classroom to share their stories, the “figured world” of what is “normal” and “right” for family involvement expands a bit. When I used Gee’s (2014) Building Task regarding valuing knowledge and belief systems (p. 35), I considered their written responses which reflected a wider privileging of knowledge and expanded “figured worlds” on how families can be involved.

Table 23. Gee's Building Tasks Regarding Family Help

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers’ Final Responses to “What are some ways that families can help in the classroom?”</th>
<th>Gee’s Building Task Question: How does this piece of language privilege or disprivilege specific sign systems or languages or different ways of knowing and believing or claims to knowledge and belief?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| o Jordan: share stories “about their family”  
 o Rachel: share activities “about their culture”  
 o Amira: share stories “about themselves”  
 o Esperanza: teacher would change to “incorporate what they do at home into the classroom.” | o Teachers privileging new or different representations of family, culture, history in their classrooms  
 o Teachers recognizing ways of knowing and different beliefs are valid and important |

Sharing these family stories showed that the teachers saw that school knowledge was not the only “acceptable” one. These teachers wrote that families could help in the classroom by sharing stories “about their family,” sharing activities “about their culture,” and sharing stories “about themselves.” Esperanza specifically shifted the power to stating that the teacher would adapt to “incorporate what they do at home into the classroom.” By incorporating families and family stories into the classroom, a wider range of literacies are valued such as oral storytelling, cultural storytelling practices, new and varied voices and viewpoints, and different background knowledges, beliefs, and contexts.
These added ideas of classroom involvement represented a small shift in the power between home and school. They show that teachers were listening and interested in their students’ lives outside of the school walls. As a result, they were privileging new ways of knowing (Gee, 2014, p. 35). When these responses are compared with ideas that were shared in our very first classroom discussion about parent involvement (when they shared that parents should “respond” and “instill a love of reading”) there was a small shift towards valuing the families’ literacies and stories.

Follow-Up Visit

In April of the following semester, I returned to Mainwood to visit the teachers. I was interested in asking follow-up questions. Although no teachers provided direct new answers to my questions, a few did indicate lasting impressions or practices from the course. Esperanza shared that she was no longer asking the parents to sign off on “20 minute a night reading logs.” Instead, her students were creating book posters about the books they read at home and presenting them to the class. They were held accountable to their reading by the expectation of presenting to the class. Amira shared that choosing books that represented her class, and making the time to read them aloud, was a lasting practice for her. For Rachel, the kindergarten teacher who had participated in home visits for many years, she told me that she was taking a new perspective on the visits. She felt that next year, she would go into them as a learning and listening time, not just a teaching time.

Conclusion to Chapter Six

Over the length of the course, I documented new practices that reflected deeper connections with families and expanded notions of literacy and family involvement, each of
which engaged with culturally sustaining practices. When teachers participated in family visits, their perspectives on those families shifted. Reading research and implementing new ideas, including new diverse picture books, led to new practices in the classroom. Through their answers to the final questions, I documented how their thoughts shifted and showed a space for continued growth to culturally sustaining practices.

As I continue into the last chapter, I will report on the teachers’ perceptions of what they learned in this course as well as examine what these findings imply for future pedagogy and research.
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Our fifth and final class took place in December. Winter had arrived and we had come a long way since that first hot August day together. My own thoughts about these topics were growing and developing and I was excited to hear from the teachers. As the teachers arrived at class from a meeting, I noted, unfortunately that Maiah and Laelia did not come. I hoped they would join later but they did not.

I started off by saying in a mock sad voice, “Well ladies, it’s our last day. I’m sad! But I’m sure you’re happy to not stay after school!” Rebecca said, “No! I’ve enjoyed this class.” And Amira replied, “I think this is so much more beneficial than our implicit bias [another professional development course], those kinds of classes. Like, this really makes you think deeper. I wish we could replace that with this.”

Final Discussion

At the end of our time together, I asked the teachers to share what they learned in this course. First, I gave them a few minutes to do a “quick write” to get their thoughts together then asked them to share out. I preferred to do individual final interviews, but I did not want to ask them to give me any of their personal time as I had no compensation for them. As they spoke, and later as I read their entries, I was struck by the new literacy ideas and practices they attributed to this course that they had not mentioned in class discussion.

Karen told us that she learned about “building relationships,” pointing out that she perceived a strengthened communication after the family visit. She stated that she could “see where it really builds some stronger relationships and support systems.” Amira shared about adding a small but important new practice of taking pictures and how that impacted the connections in her classroom. She shared, “I felt like, I had more of a connection doing that and now
just having them, you know, up in the room, as a picture, it’s really cool. Esperanza shared last. She stated that her thinking shifted toward drawing on what families are doing at home and the strengthened community in her classroom, marked by the bold text.

1 I felt like it further emphasized the importance of getting to know our families more, just even that one conversation about what kind of reading you do at home and stuff like that just shows like, what they’re doing and what I can draw into the classroom that they already know about, and that’s pretty powerful to show that, what you’re [the parents] doing is important, and just, it like, challenges me to just keep a more open mind about what literacy can look like because it’s different in many people’s families, so just like, thinking about that, valuing that other people might see it differently. Yea and then just like the simple things, like you said, like having the pictures on the wall of the families, like, I felt like it made us a little bit closer, and the students were super excited to see each other’s pictures and they were like asking questions to each other about who that was, ‘when did you take it?’ They were just like talking more so I feel like just that, community, like that made it so much better, just because everyone was asking about each other in a positive way and getting to know each other more.

As she stated in lines three and four, her point of view had shifted from what parents are not doing or how they can re-create school norms at home to what parents are doing and how they can add to the classroom. This indicates that what Esperanza took from the class was a shift toward seeing through a strength based, funds of knowledge perspective (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). In lines five and six, she stated that she took away an “open mind about what literacy can look like,” another indication of her expanded understanding of literacy practices, as explained in Chapter Six as well. The implication is that she will no longer teach to just one homogenized view of literacy (Street, 1995, p. 123). In lines eight through twelve, she reiterated the new practice of hanging up family pictures that she had employed and its positive impact on
her classroom community as she had shared with the group earlier. When I returned to her class months later, she had created a large tree bulletin board of the photos. As I stood looking at it, many of her students came over to tell me proudly which one their family was.

Next, I asked the three who had completed family visits up to that point (Lizzie had not yet), if they had seen a difference in the behaviors of the students whom they visited. Amira noted an improved perception of behavior in class, a finding Henke (2011) noted as well. She also pointed out that her visit impacted her relationship with more than just the one student she visited. She felt more connected to the students in Darius’ neighborhood because she knew a little bit about where and how they lived. This implies that her one visit had the potential to impact more than just that student. Esperanza perceived that the student she visited was more involved and more talkative in class. She described her as “more open.” Esperanza explained that perhaps the student now understood that she, the teacher, wanted her to participate. This indicates that her family visit had given this student a voice and a place in the classroom. Because they did not all share with the whole group, I was glad I had asked them to “quick write” as well (for full responses see Appendix E). Their responses were interesting from both my researcher and teacher perspectives. As a researcher moving forward with my work, this data provided me with an understanding of what was important to the participants. As their teacher and the one who designed the course, I used this information as an evaluation of the goals and purposes of the course. As I reviewed these responses, there was common interest in a few areas: using diverse and representative children’s books, building relationships, seeing families through the lens of the funds of knowledge, and engaging in expanded literacy practices. As I read through their written responses, I was thankful for a chance to hear from the teachers who did not always speak up such as Jordan, Karen, and Rebecca who each mentioned that they had learned a
lot about engaging with a funds of knowledge perspective. As expected, with different teachers and different backgrounds, each person took something different away from the course.

These insights helped me draw conclusions and understand the implications of this study. Their responses also helped me answer to my original research questions, “In a course on culturally sustaining pedagogy, how do teachers experience race, culture, families, and family literacies?” and “While facilitating and mediating a course about culturally sustaining pedagogies and family relationships, what were my own perceptions and experiences as a white doctoral student and former elementary teacher?” By the end of our five months together, I began to have a sense of an answer.

**Implications**

On the last day of our course together, before the above final discussion took place, I arrived at the school to find a library full of teachers and parents having an intense meeting. I stood at the threshold of the doorway, uncomfortable going in, but not able to pass to get to Amira’s room (the library functioned as a hallway of sorts). I waited and listened. When I noticed that the teachers were all sitting at the tables in the center and the parents were standing around them, I began to identify who was in the room. I could imagine that the teachers arrived first and sat down, the parents filing in where there was space. However, this configuration alone said something important: the teachers were the center of this meeting, the parents were the periphery. As the meeting ended and we made our way into Amira’s room, the teachers were very upset. According to their stories, there had been a lot of behavior issues happening lately and the meeting was designed to be a discussion about Restorative Justice techniques, a method that the teachers felt was not working. Restorative Justice is a school-wide behavior system that shifts from discipline toward a model of communication and community building for problem-
solving. The description below (Rethinking Schools, 2014, p. 5) summed up the main concerns reflected here by the Mainwood teachers and they also aligned with my findings highlighting the difficulty of pushing back on the standardization of schooling:

But simply announcing a commitment to “restorative justice” doesn’t make it so. Restorative justice doesn’t work as an add-on. It requires us to address the roots of student “misbehavior” and a willingness to rethink and rework our classrooms, schools, and school districts. Meaningful alternatives to punitive approaches take time and trust.

Too often, this is not what we see in places that tout a focus on restorative justice. At far too many schools, commitments to implement restorative justice occur amid relentless high-stakes “test and punish” regimens—amid scripted curriculum, numbing test-prep drills, budget cutbacks, school closures, the constant shuffling from school to school of students, teachers, and principals (p. 5).

As with the concerns stated by Rethinking Schools, the concern of the teachers was that, in theory, restorative justice would be beneficial. However, they felt that there was very little restorative justice happening at the school. In our class together, and again after the class period ended, the teachers discussed behavior problems in their classes such as urinating on the floor, throwing chairs, and hitting teachers. The conversation turned, as it often does, to a deficit-type view of questioning the consequences in the children’s homes.

I chimed in that I wished a meeting like this could have happened at a community center, or, for example, at the apartments where Darius lived (Amira’s family visit). I shared my opinion that perhaps parents would take a larger stake in the solution if they did not feel on the periphery. The teachers did not respond to this idea but moved on to discussing how it is often just one student in a group of 20 that can disrupt a whole class, something I remembered vividly as a
teacher. Rebecca said, “It’s hard to put the needs of one [ahead], when you have the needs of all.” This sentiment was reiterated throughout the rest of the conversation. On two occasions, I mentioned how that “one” student might be a perfect choice for building a relationship outside of school with the family. That night, I wrote a memo about not feeling heard because I felt the teachers were too frustrated. I left that night feeling like it would take years for teachers to understand the benefits of family partnerships outside of school, as it did for me as a teacher. I was naïve to think it could happen in one course. I wished that we had more time together.

This final discussion, and the many that occurred prior to it in this course, pointed to the need for more sustained work around the topics of race, culture, family, and literacy in the classroom. As Banks (2016) first described in the 1980s, the preliminary steps toward multicultural education were that, 1) teachers needed to reduce their prejudices and learn that there are a variety of teaching and learning styles (p. 12-15) and 2) teachers would need to come from a constructivist lens, understanding that frames of references influence the way students learn (p. 9-10). Teachers know there are a variety of learning styles and many would choose to teach from a constructivist lens; however, as schools move farther toward standardized education models (NCLB, Common Core), pedagogy moves away from the variety of learning styles and constructivist lenses that Banks (2016) recommended decades ago. For example, as the teachers described in this study, they had no time to read due to highly scripted program expectations. This standardization also moves away from time consuming, community-building programs like Restorative Justice.

As stated in Chapter One, the majority of U.S. teachers are middle-class white women (as those in this study were) who are ready to engage in culturally sustaining pedagogical practices but do not know the cultures of their students. I hypothesized that as teachers built relationships
with families and learned more about family practices, they would be able to better implement
the steps that Banks (2016) described. To understand this journey, in this research I asked the
open-ended question, “In a course on culturally sustaining pedagogy, how do teachers
experience race, culture, families, and family literacies?” From answering this question, I can
now understand and describe how these teachers discussed race, culture, families, and family
literacies.

As the teachers discussed the topics reflected in my research question, two major
roadblocks to implementing the work Banks (2016) described were apparent. First, the
normalized practices of school are embedded in these teachers’ everyday practices and thoughts
about their pedagogy, as well as the actual standardization of curriculum and pedagogy that
make this work much more challenging. Secondly, many teachers felt unprepared to have
conversations about race with each other and in the classroom. No matter how challenging these
topics may have been, a third finding showed that working through these challenges while
incorporating family, family practices, and building those relationships, engaged with culturally
sustaining pedagogical practices in their classroom.

My secondary research question, “While facilitating and mediating a course about
culturally sustaining pedagogies and family relationships, what were my own perceptions and
experiences as a white doctoral student and former elementary teacher?” was answered as well.
As a white woman teaching a course on culturally sustaining pedagogy, I found that I was also
constrained as the teachers were. However, I felt constrained by their school constraints, as well
as the constraints of some of their white fragility behaviors as well as my own. I found that I
engaged in practices that maintained white solidarity and safe spaces (not pushing the teachers,
changing the topics, acknowledging feelings of guilt). This is discussed in further detail in the findings below.

**Finding One: The Grammar of Schooling**

To engage in critical pedagogy, Kim (2016) argued that schools could be “a site of contestation, resistance, possibility, and hope” (p. 40). As teachers in this course began to challenge the everyday normalized practices of school, a space for contestation and resistance to the standardization of schools grew. Findings from this study show that the teachers were challenged by the idea of positioning themselves outside of what counts as regular school norms. According to Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002), teachers who are interested in engaging in critical literacy must question the commonplace and “consider new frames from which to understand experience” (p. 383). Prevailing Discourses of assimilation in the classroom made using new frames difficult, as shown through more concrete Discourses, such as the common roles of teachers, parents, and students, and embedded in expectations around reading, homework, and classroom behaviors. According to Gee (2014), because we typify classrooms and learning into “figured worlds,” these worlds are taken for granted and they prevent change from occurring (p. 90). The teachers appeared to be somewhat stuck in these “figured worlds” that they perceived provided a map of what good teaching is.

In my analysis, I viewed this underlying expectation of assimilationism as a form of constraint on the teachers’ agencies to enact different ways of being in the classroom or teaching through the lens of culturally sustaining pedagogy. The underlying assimilationist expectations of schools constrained the way the teachers talked and acted in various ways. A main constraint was around the notion of the “grammar of school” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995) as an institution-expectations around what should be assigned as homework, the time schedule and pull-out
teacher instruction expectations, time for teaching different subjects and expectations for interventions they must teach, and materials available from the curriculum and on their walls. The teachers expressed so much frustration about how they did not have the time to add new ideas into their school day. Rebecca said they are expected to teach “more minutes than there are in the day literally.” Amira said she “can’t even give them time to read, [I’m] asking them to put their books away.” Jordan said she had volunteers but due to pull out requirements there was “no time for volunteers to read to them.” This time constraint led to a need for me to fit the ideas of culturally sustaining pedagogy into what they were already doing as to avoid the feeling of adding something new.

There were legal or policy type constraints around testing, standardization of curricula, and underlying English only expectations embedded in their processing of activities. For example, in the opening class when we wrote “Where I’m From” poems (Lyons, 1999), Laelia discussed how the templates would help her students with the difficulty of the task and Amira said that her students would need the examples to be able to try it. Just a few minutes later, after I read Duck! Rabbit! (Rosenthal, 2009) to talk about how we all see things from different perspectives, Amira immediately said, “We could do a Socratic seminar with this!” Later in the course, when Laelia discussed implementing writing raps with her students, she described a student who wrote an amazing piece. Then said, “Like ‘please capitalize your Is’ but other than that it’s beautiful [laughter]. It’s so good. It literally blew me away; he’s so talented and here I am like, there’s obviously that balance of writing complete sentences.” Throughout my analysis, I was struck by how much their mindsets were in the application to curriculum (template, examples, difficulty levels, Socratic seminar, capitalizing Is) versus reflection, discussion, and relationships. This mentality felt to me like they viewed these activities as assignments to reach
state standards and objectives, as opposed to building relationships and valuing students’ literacies.

The teachers talked about social constraints expressed around what topics are appropriate and not appropriate to be discussed in the classroom. These constraints were expressed in the fear of using the wrong terminology or not being “politically correct,” fear of being called “racist,” and constraints around “politeness.” These perceptions of political correctness matched the language of white solidarity: fear of being individually called out, fear of offending another white person, fear of going against the normalized discourses (DiAngelo, 2015). Each of these constraints prevented the teachers from implementing new practices until they were explicitly examined.

The implications of this constraint of the normalized expectations of school are broad. As Moje and Lewis (2007) stated, “Identity, agency, and power constrain and enable what counts as knowledge as well as who is allowed to own, receive, develop, or disseminate it” (p. 46). If power structures constrain what counts as knowledge and who can engage in it, families from minoritized and peripheralized communities are likely pushed farther from that knowledge than others. When families, family practices, and family knowledges are excluded from the school, sociocultural and constructivist forms of learning cannot occur. Students’ background knowledges, practices, and cultures will not be sustained. For these reasons, Paris (2012) called for this shift toward diversity, multicultural education, and culturally sustaining pedagogy.

**Finding Two: Preparing for Conversations about Race and Culture**

Using Foucault’s (1975/1995) notion that power structures create and reify “truths,” explicit discussions of whiteness, assimilation, and codes of power helped uncover and examine these “truths” about race and racism in the classroom. As first documented when we read *Why*
Am I Me? (Florence, 2017) the “truths” of assimilation pedagogy were present. In line with avoiding race and naming whiteness, Amira said of the cover picture, “I love the Venn Diagram” and Lizzie said, “the kids might connect to the subway in the pictures.” When this book came up during the second class, Karen stated, “There wasn’t the conversation that I had hoped there would be…they didn’t notice, or didn’t mention, the difference in skin color and boy or girl.” Amira then posed the reflective question to the group, “Do you think they’re just not saying that because, because, you haven’t said it?” The “truth” of avoiding race in the classroom to make everyone “comfortable” became apparent. The need to name race, discuss whiteness, and label power and privilege became an important objective. This longer conversation also framed our discussions as ones that stem from our own cultural positionalities, recognizing that whiteness is a positionality. These topics were also discussed as we completed the “Looking at Subcultures” activity (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012) and when we discussed Delpit’s (2006) codes of power. Engaging in critical literacy includes an examination of “how sociopolitical systems and power relationships shape perceptions, responses, and actions (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002, p. 383). Although difficult, this examination of power was an important step toward using school as a site of resistance (Kim, 2016).

Another important finding from this study that answers my second research question is to reiterate the need to believe and listen to people of color, especially Black women as Maiah pointed out repeatedly. An important dimension of critical literacy is to engage with multiple viewpoints and consider various perspectives (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002). At least twice, I found that as I transcribed Maiah’s words, I heard the power in what she said, that I did not grasp in the moment. The ideas she shared were so new to me, I needed to hear them more than once. For example, when she described the inexplicit ways we teach the local Black
students they are not “from here” by asking if they are from Chicago, or when she said, “when I’m talking at the equity meetings, we can’t figure out how to raise our FAST scores [fluency reading test], but everyone’s quite clear that it’s better to be white than black. There’s been zero explicit instruction on that. We don’t have any groups running about that. It’s just something that is so embedded in our culture.” The concepts she discussed were so new to me, as a white woman who is new to discussions of power and whiteness, that they were hard to understand. I did listen in the moment but did not have the processing speed or background knowledge to digest what she said before we moved on to the next topic. As Ladson-Billings (1998) explained about storytelling, “Stories by people of color can catalyze the necessary cognitive conflict to jar dysconscious racism” (p. 14). Reading her stories for a second and third time ‘jarred’ me, as Ladson-Billings described. This same idea seemed to have happened for Jordan when I described how she saw Maiah for the first time when describing how she grew up. This finding does not provide a useable method to address this. After all, we cannot transcribe everything we hear. But it does remind me that in order to learn and process things, we need to hear and discuss them multiple times. In order to grasp what Maiah said, I needed to engage with her and listen more often. Because white people shelter themselves from these conversations through the guises of white fragility (DiAngelo, 2018), the chance for multiple conversations cannot occur. We must be willing to engage.

At the follow-up conversations after the course, Maiah shared that she has continued to struggle with getting decision-making bodies to listen to her. As we discussed the findings from this study, she indicated that having research to back up her statements would be important to her.
In order to disrupt the damage of white privilege and hegemony in the classroom, teachers must shift their “racial paradigm” (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 141). As this paradigm shifts, teachers might feel “compassion, interest, excitement, humility” and engage in “reflection, listening, believing, and processing” (p. 142). As we push toward culturally sustaining pedagogy, this study shows that some teachers benefit from more work around talking about race, racism, and white hegemony in the classroom.

Finding Three: Connecting to Families

When a teacher teaches through the lens of the family, home, and community life of her students, she is engaging with the theories of sociocultural learning. As Vygotsky (1978) stated, “Any learning a child encounters in school always has a previous history” (p. 84). The teachers in this study took the time to break from standardized practices and learn about the previous histories with which their students come to school. Building off of these previous histories led to more engaged and active students (as Amira showed with the read-alouds and Esperanza showed with her family visit student’s participation levels). Valuing these histories in the classroom (Rebecca interviewing parents about naming practices or Laelia deciding to discuss African American Language and linguistic power through reading *Stolen Words*) can facilitate cultural sustainability.

Engaging with the New Literacy Study’s notions of multiliteracies (Street, 1995; The New London Group, 1996) and Moll’s theory of seeing children through their funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005), teachers began to expand what “counts” as literacy in their classrooms. As they opened up a space for multiple practices, a deeper connection to families occurred. They opened up through family visits, reading research articles and books, and choosing different and diverse picture books to read and discuss in their
classrooms. As Esperanza shared about hanging pictures of the families on the walls, “I felt like it made us a little bit closer…They were just like talking more so I feel like, just that, community.” By participating in a family visit, Karen, Amira, Esperanza, and Lizzie described different ways they felt more connected to the student and family, such as better communication, perceived better behaviors, a more engaged student, and having a “secret” bond in class together. Rebecca began to implement families in her curriculum such as the value and importance of knowing what is in a child’s name. As Freire (1970/1998) noted, “praxis” can occur when people take an active role in their reality, “the more active an attitude…the more they deepen their critical awareness of reality and, in spelling out those thematics, take possession of that reality” (p. 87). Overall, the small but important shifts in learning about, valuing, and celebrating family and family practices in the classroom led to a deeper feeling of connection for the teachers, and perhaps a shift toward the deeper thinking and action of “praxis.”

As reviewed in Chapter Two, culturally sustaining pedagogy asks teachers to embrace the cultures of their students to bring them into the classroom and therefore into the fabrics of a multicultural society; to sustain their diverse ways of being. For teachers who are ready to pick up this charge, learning the cultures of their students may be the most difficult part. As the teachers in this study began to shift their curiosity and frame their thinking in the values of the families, I believe a space for sustaining culture became a small part of their pedagogy.

**Finding Four: The Personal Process Applied to this Professional Development**

A final finding suggests methods for implementing a course like this as a white researcher and former elementary teacher. Findings suggest that new practices that challenge the notions of standardized pedagogy might be difficult to implement in the current classroom structures. Teachers must be willing to stand up to these constraints. As indicated in the teachers’
final responses, building personal relationships and having empathy for the families in their classrooms provided a space for the desire to push back. As a former elementary teacher, my positionality was helpful here. Amira repeatedly said how she appreciated that I understood their everyday lives and gave them “something to do the very next day.” This indicates that professional development must remain applicable to the teachers. By asking them to read specifically-chosen short research reports, providing them with children’s books and an applicable home connection book (Allen, 2010), and supporting them on family visits, kept the objectives of this course attainable. The facilitators also must be prepared to adapt to and push back on these constraints, including the constraints of whiteness.

As the facilitator of the course and a white woman, I learned many important lessons about my racialized leadership position. Findings match research that white people will discuss whiteness with other white people (in this case with teachers of color too) as long as it remains abstract and safe (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 123-124). By beginning to discuss race in the abstract, for example, reading the book Why Am I Me? (Britt, 2017) but not forcing the teachers to directly answer it right away, gave the teachers time to work toward the discussion of race. This occurred when the book was discussed again a month later. As the teachers read research about race talk in the classroom (Rogers & Mosely, 2006) paired with “homework” to read Why Am I Me? with their students, they engaged in the experience of applying the research in small steps. This indicates that sustained, applied work in the area of race and race talk in the classroom might be important. As the teachers moved from the abstract to the personal, the discussions became heavier. One successful way to broach the subject of whiteness and power concretely was to engage with the “Looking at Subcultures” activity (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012) multiple times. As a result of this activity, the white teachers discovered, on their own, that they did not
know how to define or conceptualize their whiteness. As a white facilitator, I was able to empathize and relate to when I had personally gone through this work. However, I was not able to successfully move away from all of the socialized tactics of white fragility.

The success of both of these examples would not have been possible without teachers of color in the room to share their stories. As Laelia worked through her understanding of her own positionality, it was clear to the others in the room that this was something that impacted her greatly. As Maiah shared her experiences repeatedly, it was clear that more listening needed to happen. Because this small group was, by all indications, a safe space, the white teachers and the teachers of color were able to engage and discuss, at least a small bit beyond the abstract toward the personal and concrete. As DiAngelo (2018) showed, white people must “build up our stamina to bear witness” (p. 128). I learned, as a white educator, how important and possible this statement was.

Findings indicate a professional development course that combines past research on family-school connections with culturally sustaining pedagogy can be a place for new learning. As a white woman facilitating the course, I learned that I must discuss my whiteness and privilege openly for the much-needed conversations of the actual work around racism to begin.

**Limitations**

Using a short, professional development course to engage in this work had its drawbacks. First of all, I was an outsider to their school. I was not in their classrooms, nor a part of their everyday professional lives. My outsider status prevented me from seeing the implementation of what the teachers decided to try in their classrooms. As a former elementary teacher, I was fully aware of my positionality as an outsider and researcher coming in to “tell the teachers what to
do” and actively tried to avoid that positionality. However, as the “expert” in the room, sometimes this occurred.

In order for professional development to be sustained, it must take place regularly and be embedded in the real work of the classroom. Fullan (2007) reminds us, “change is a process, not an event” (p. 68) and that “effective change takes time” (p. 123). As this course occurred in five class periods over one semester, it was not enough time to fully engage in this work. The teachers needed more time to discuss and more time to process. Important pieces to engaging in more sustained and effective change could include using research in their everyday lives, allowing space for new practices, and providing funding when needed. Comber and Kamler (2004) stated that “disrupting deficit discourses and re-designing new pedagogical repertoires to reconnect with children's lifeworlds is a long-term project” (emphasis mine, p. 293). Engaging with the shift in thinking toward culturally sustaining pedagogy takes commitment and work. Teachers, administrators, and policy makers would need to value the disruption of deficit discourses and create a space for this long-term professional development process.

**Challenges of the Future Implementation of this Study**

A limitation for sustaining this work comes from access to research journals and the time to read them, as well as the expectation that teachers as professionals will continue to read research outside of assigned school or professional development work. As I noted, when the teachers shared what they had read for homework each picked up on and implemented different things. These research articles carried a lot of weight with the teachers, and I noticed each classroom implementation could be directly or indirectly tied to something they had read for homework. There is a plethora of research in the field of Education, but most articles are kept behind fee-structured databases. This system makes it very difficult for the teachers to read and
keep up with the research without someone like me who has access to sort through them, find accessible and applicable articles, and download the pdfs.

Another challenge comes from funding. School districts are cutting programs due to funding, not adding them. In order to value teachers’ time and sustain family visits or a family partnership project, teachers and families would need to be paid for their time. Family visits are a regular part of pre-K schools, specifically those funded by the Head Start program. A plethora of research in pre-K settings continues to show the benefits of home visits for young students. This model begs the question, why does this practice stop there? Pre-K family visits are conceptualized as a way to introduce families to the school and school system. When new students arrive to our neighborhoods, towns, and country every day it cannot be assumed that they have a built-in relationship with the school. As I witnessed on Back to School Night at Mainwood, many families needed support with language translation, bus systems, homework expectations and more. These needs of learning how to “do school” and the desire to build a relationship with their child’s teacher do not stop after preschool. As each grade and each teacher has new expectations and goals, families deserve to have a chance to build a relationship with open and positive communication channels with that teacher as well. Teachers get new students with new cultural practices in their classes each year. Therefore, they also deserve a chance to learn from those families and see the strengths with which their students come to school.

**Future Research**

From his study, my interest in many areas of culturally sustaining pedagogy grew. I am interested in how teachers learn to implement ethnographic methods of research in order to better understand the cultural practices of their families. This work would include autoethnographic methods (Madison, 2012, p. 197). for the teachers to delve into their own cultural practices and
possible privileges, as well as reaching out to use these methods to learn about student literacies. From this line of research, I would like to look deeper at how teachers learn to talk about race, culture, power, and privilege, especially those who identify as white and middle-class.

I am also interested in how teachers grapple with involving sustaining practices in the current climate of standardized curricula. In terms of sustained school change, I would like to examine how teachers push back against the normalized standardized school practices to make more space for culturally sustaining pedagogical practices. In future longitudinal research, I would like to consider if reading more research and engaging in professional development focused on ways to resist standardization impacts how teachers engage in sustaining pedagogical practices. I would like to engage with the teachers during the school day, as well as after-school and outside in the community.

Finally, I am interested in examining best practices for teachers who are interested in developing deeper family partnerships through family visits if this is not a practice supported at their school. I would like to examine how teachers can most efficiently grow these relationships with the limited time they have available in their already over-scheduled days.

**In Conclusion**

In this study, the teachers and I worked through deep conversations of race, culture, and power. They read research, implemented new ideas, and some visited with families outside of the school. Through this work, they began to question their normalized practices and made small spaces to try new and different ones. In this professional development setting, findings showed that teachers needed and wanted to engage in open, yet supported, conversations about race and power. Findings also showed that by engaging in this difficult and sometimes frustrating work, teachers began down the important path toward pedagogy that was more culturally sustaining for
their students and families. As this study outlined, each teacher experienced discussions and new
ideas about race, culture, family, and family literacies differently, however, each found a place
in this professional development time to discuss, grow, and learn. The sustained work of these
teachers shows the importance of professional development in the areas of family connections
and culturally sustaining pedagogy.
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Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Public Law 89-10 (1965).


http://doi.org/10.1086/499194


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aWS0YBpGkkE


APPENDIX A: SYLLABUS

Course Title: Teaching Literacy Through the Lens of Family Practices
Instructor(s): Laura Szech
Course Dates:
August 13\textsuperscript{th} 12p-4p
September 18\textsuperscript{th}, October 2\textsuperscript{nd}, October 24\textsuperscript{th}, December 4\textsuperscript{th} from 3:45p-5:45p
Credit Options: 1 SH
Intended Audience: elementary school teachers
Course Description: This course merges research and theories of home literacies and family cultures with current methodologies of teaching reading and writing. Teachers will consider points of entry between home and school literacies, exploring what counts as literacy in the current classroom and expanding on those definitions. Using Moll’s (2005) Funds of Knowledge theory that builds on family practices, teachers in the course will conduct family visits to develop a practical classroom literacy unit based on that family’s funds of knowledge.
Course Objectives:
1. Build a deep theoretical understanding of the psychological, social, motivational, affective, socioeconomic, linguistic and cultural influences on literacy development
2. Family diversity influences literacy development
3. Learn to use formative literacy assessment to understand ways of differentiating instruction to accommodate students’ differences and exceptionals in development, language, cultural background, and personal characteristics while expecting engagement and growth for all learners
4. Sustaining students’ differences through differentiated instruction leads to growth for all learners
5. Develop as reflective practitioner by taking a questioning and appropriately critical stance toward ideas, issues, readings, assessment strategies and instructional materials, programs, and mandates
6. Questioning and critically approaching curriculum can lead to multicultural lenses presented in the classroom
Course Materials:
Research book provided:
2. Children’s books provided:
Assignments:
1. Reading: Students are expected to come to class prepared from reading the assigned texts.
2. Journal: Throughout the course, teachers will reflect on the readings and class discussion in a journal. After reading the homework, teachers will write a summary with thoughts to prepare for discussion. After each class discussion, teachers will write about the ways they can apply the learning to their classroom.
3. Funds of Knowledge Family Visit Project: Teachers will work with one family throughout the course.
a. Optional: Teachers will visit the families in their homes/communities to discover that family’s funds of knowledge and family literacy practices.

4. Teachers will develop a school literacy application (3-4 lessons) based on the specific family’s Funds of Knowledge and literacy practices for your (or the student’s) grade level.

**Sequence and Plan of Study:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug 13th</td>
<td>12p-4p</td>
<td>Homework after class: Think about a family to visit, call them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Choose one to read:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Activities: Where I’m From</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Introductory Questions (written)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Looking at Subcultures</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Picture Book Read Alouds:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Why Am I Me?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>They All Saw a Cat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Duck! Rabbit!</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Videos:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bring Cultural Context and Self-Identity into Education (YouTube)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Presentation on: Funds of Knowledge (González, Moll, &amp; Amanti, 2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 18th</td>
<td>3:15p-5:45p</td>
<td>Activities:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Discuss calling families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Share reading homework articles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Share Why Am I Me? from classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Plan 1st family visit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Picture Book Read Aloud:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Last Stop on Market Street</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Encounter</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Video:</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Harlan County, USA (YouTube)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Presentation on: Literacy in the Welcoming Classroom: (Allen, 2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2nd</td>
<td>3:15p-5:45p</td>
<td>Activities:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Discuss family phone calls, visits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jigsaw and present on Allen, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Picture Book Read Aloud:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In My Family/ En Mi Familia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Video:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do one family visit (optional)</td>
<td>Oral Storytelling by Ferlatte (YouTube)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presentation on:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural Literacies + Reading Processes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>October 24th 3:15p-5:45p</th>
<th>Activities:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discuss family visits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Read and discuss All White World of Children’s Literature (Larrick, 1965)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Share classroom inventories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Return to Looking at Subcultures again</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Homework after class:
Choose one to read
Pole, K. (2015). “Why don’t you riyt back to me?”.

Picture Books Shared:
Hot City
Tell Me a Story Mama
Mama Miti
Emmanuel’s Dream

Picture Book Read Aloud:
Stolen Words

Presentation on:
Codes of power (Delpit, 2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>December 4th 3:15p-5:45p</th>
<th>Activities:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discuss family visits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Share reading articles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Final questions, reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Design literacy lessons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Homework:
Implement the literacy lesson
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (four participants did not submit a lesson)</th>
<th>Literacy Lesson Idea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lizzie</td>
<td>Students would make FlipGrid videos to their favorite family traditions, which she connect to various books about traditions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>After reading a Malawian book about toys, Galimoto, students would interview their parents about their favorite toys when they were young, then share with the class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esperanza</td>
<td>Using the page about empanadas from In My Family/ En Mi Familia, students will write and draw about their favorite foods. Next they will be asked to make the food with their families, document it in photos, then bring it in to share with the class (photos and/or the food).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amira</td>
<td>Students will read Emmanuel’s Dream about a Ghanaian boy who reached his dream. They will connect it to their dreams and write about them. They will then take the article she found about him home, read it with their families, and share about how he inspired them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan and Rachel</td>
<td>The students will read “The Family Book” then together they will write a class book that represents their different family types. Students will then make Flipgrid videos sharing what makes their family special.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX C: FAMILY LITERACY EXPECTATIONS AT HOME

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>August</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tell me about your expectations for families about literacy at their home.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Tell me about your expectations for families about literacy at their home.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key</strong></td>
<td><strong>Key</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bold= traditional, read, write, speak</td>
<td>Underlined= new family literacy type practices emerge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>December</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make it apart of their daily routine, use <strong>imagination</strong> and be creative, make it <strong>fun</strong>.</td>
<td>My expectation for families in their home is to at least show the <strong>importance of reading</strong>, the <strong>joy</strong> and <strong>love of reading</strong>, have <strong>fun</strong> with reading, expand their knowledge, help create discussions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would love for the kids to make it an <strong>enjoyable habit</strong> of reading for fun and learning every night. I want kids to see reading in a <strong>positive light</strong> and not just a chore you have to do at school.</td>
<td>My hope is that students <strong>love</strong> to read. I try to show a lot of <strong>enthusiasm</strong> about books and have many books in the classroom. I encourage students to borrow the books and <strong>read their favorites</strong> to people at home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want families to model and talk about reading/writing to show the <strong>importance</strong> of both. It is important that many students in 2nd grade still be reading aloud to family members. Family members reading aloud to their children helps to build vocabulary and the <strong>love of books</strong>.</td>
<td>I want families to spend time reading with their children so they know if their child has chosen a book at their level and so they know if their child understands what they are reading. I also wish for them to read to their children to build the <strong>love of stories</strong> and build vocabulary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maiah</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My expectation is that students are reading every day and are <strong>communicating</strong> with me what their families are reading every day. I will be focusing on novels, but I understand that novels do not <strong>excite</strong> some children.</td>
<td>Absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some families are not literate in English, some have not developed “school” literacy</td>
<td>My biggest hope is that families have rich conversations with their kids. Reading and writing together would be fantastic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esperanza</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That they take their children to the library or at least have access to books in some other way for their children. <strong>Encourage</strong> them to read. If they currently don’t, at least be willing and open to doing so.</td>
<td>I hope that they feel like reading and writing is <strong>important</strong> in some way, shape, or form. I hope that families could write stories about their family history, even if it is in their home language, or <strong>write informally</strong>, like asking their children to write the grocery list down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amira</td>
<td>Read every night for 20 minutes. Discuss books.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I want them to read every night. I have now tried to be more specific about my assignments and what I want them to read and do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laelia</td>
<td>I can’t really think of any at the top of my head. Just because there are so many ways to define and look at literacy and the definition of what it means itself can be so very different from person to person. I just expect and hope that families are willing to share and learn with me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lizzie</td>
<td>I want kids to always have a book to read. But I also want to teach them responsibility and that if they borrow it, they return it so that they can get something new. I understand that this is problematic but something I hope to work on and instill in kids. Books are expensive and still a privilege, but I want all kids to love reading and make good choices in what they take home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I want kids to have access to books (but I want them to learn to take care of them AND bring them back if they are borrowing them!) I want adults to read as well as kids.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX D: WAYS FAMILIES CAN HELP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>August</th>
<th>December</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What are some ways that families can help in the classroom?</strong></td>
<td><strong>What are some ways that families can help in the classroom?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key</th>
<th><strong>Bold= traditional, read, write, speak</strong></th>
<th><strong>Underlined= family literacy type practices</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td><strong>Reading and writing</strong> with kids, <strong>speaking</strong> about their experiences, sharing at playtime.</td>
<td>Come <strong>read</strong> with the class. Share <strong>stories</strong> about their family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>Come in and <strong>share books.</strong> Listen to students read.</td>
<td>Didn’t answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td><strong>Read</strong> with students or <strong>listen</strong> to students read, <strong>revise/edit stories</strong> with students, play math games with students.</td>
<td>Because our students do not have independent rotations during literacy, it is harder for families to volunteer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maiah</td>
<td>Families can help by working with me to <strong>establish goals for their students</strong> and monitor and support their student in meeting their goals. They can also be a resource for me to engage our school curriculum with real life.</td>
<td>Absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td><strong>Reading</strong> with kids, going on field trips, volunteering for family nights, doing cutting/collating work at home, working on special projects</td>
<td>Send in <strong>favorite</strong> books, come in and share activities, books, etc. about their culture, prepare materials for us, read with kids, attend field trips</td>
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<tr>
<td>Esperanza</td>
<td><strong>Ask</strong> students about school and what they are learning, take an interest in the homework they are working on or the books they are reading.</td>
<td>Families can come and see what we are doing in the classroom or make some time to meet with me so that I can show them. Families can also let teachers know if they have any other ideas or ways that they get their children involved in reading and writing at home. That way teachers can incorporate what they do at home into the classroom. Families can also continue to help at home by reading and writing with their children.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amira</td>
<td><strong>Read</strong> to children, discuss books. <strong>Write or edit</strong> with students.</td>
<td>I want them to feel welcome and come in to share about themselves.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laelia</td>
<td>Being supportive about students learning at home - meaning showing an interest, being there for a student when content gets difficult, etc. <strong>Talking</strong> to</td>
<td>Absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lizzie</td>
<td>I would love for parent volunteers to help shelve books or <strong>read</strong> to students! Or come and book talk their favorite book.</td>
<td>Help students learn to be responsible for books. Have routine.</td>
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# APPENDIX E: WHAT DID YOU LEARN

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Learning Points</th>
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<tr>
<td>Amira</td>
<td>I am so happy that I took this class. It has really made me think about <em>children’s books</em> and how I can use them to teach the Iowa Core Standards in a way that my students can connect their own lives. I also loved talking to parents about their child and <em>taking pictures</em> of families for my room. This was such a great idea that I had never thought of. I feel that my classroom is now full of pictures and books that <em>my students can relate to</em> and that more of <em>my students can see themselves</em> in my class. I wish I had more time to visit families and teach families different strategies. I think my parents would love to learn.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Esperanza</td>
<td>I have learned that it is even more critical to involve families within reading and writing so that students not only get more exposure to it at home but so that <em>teachers can learn the literacy practices that go on within students’ families</em>. This way, teachers can build upon what students already know and use it to build upon in the classroom. Teachers need to <em>value the types of reading and writing that may not be usually seen</em> within current curriculum. I also loved just incorporating families more as simple as having everyone’s <em>pictures on our walls</em>. I feel like it makes us just a bit closer because we get to ask questions and <em>get to know each other better</em>. I’m wondering how to incorporate more purposeful writing into the current reading and writing curriculum that is <em>meaningful</em> to students.</td>
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<td>Jordan</td>
<td>I learned that as a kindergarten teacher I was choosing most books that have animals in them. I think that it was hard to find diverse books that kindergartners would understand and be able to have conversation and discussions with or I was afraid that I couldn’t answer their questions. This class has really made me think about <em>my funds or knowledge</em> and to really get to know <em>what my students are bringing with them to school</em>. Literacy comes in <em>so many more forms</em> than I think about regularly with curriculum. Having a <em>partnership with families</em> on a consistent basis is so beneficial.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Stopping to learn about <em>families’ funds of knowledge</em> was a big eye opener for me. I think a lot of our families don’t necessarily feel they have anything to offer to their kid’s education and to our classroom. They are more likely to be involved when they see that they do have something to offer and that their participation in their child’s education is important. Once upon a time, I used to have a social studies center in my room where I would work with families to have items and books to help them learn about where they are from. One thing that really jumped out at me after you pointed it out is how many of our kindergarten level books do have animals as characters. That is crazy. Looking for <em>books with characters of color that aren’t about black history</em> has stayed with me.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lizzie</td>
<td>The <em>Code Switching</em> was SOOO interesting to me. The <em>different books</em> that you highlighted (and the fact that we have so many of them in our library) made me happy. Discussing <em>what it is to be a middle-class white woman</em> and some of our characteristics was very interesting (and not great)! Thinking about <em>how I’m perceived as a teacher to parents</em> of other cultures, race, and</td>
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backgrounds. Thinking about how I am trying to mold these students into MY way of school instead of maybe compromising and helping to learn THEIR way of communicating and learning is very troubling and scary and NECESSARY because I DON’T know how to fix what I know but it looks like I need to shift MY thinking and relearn how to accommodate ALL. I want to learn more about how to relearn my teaching and how kids ARE, but I struggle with WHEN. There are not enough hours in the day and as important as this is, it will take the back burner to everything else that needs to happen (or maybe at least a side burner)? I’m just so tired all the time. This school is draining me. But I’m learning how to exist amongst it. And hopefully some year, I’ll thrive!

Karen
It was interesting to me to really think about families and their funds of knowledge and how we might allow them to share. It was helpful to explore ways to share reading and writing with families and to encourage them to interact with their child to build vocabulary and to share experiences. Central to all of this seems to be building relationships with families. I enjoyed having a home visit and can see the benefits that this has had in communicating with this family.

Rebecca
I have really enjoyed our discussions. I have also loved the new books that you have given us. I do see the importance of home visits and how positive they can be. I think relationship building is so important at school (and in all parts of life). Funds of knowledge is a new way to think about parent involvement. I think it is a good way to include more families. The discussions have been great, because it was an honest and safe environment. Your enthusiasm for learning helped us to feel that too.

1. How to best move past the language barriers? (especially new beginning ELL families.)
2. How to initiate home visits without feeling like I’m pushing my way into someone’s house or being nosey.

Laelia
Absent

Maiah
Absent