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Making Waves with Critical Literacy

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MAKING WAVES WITH CRITICAL LITERACY:

A TEACHER RESEARCHER STUDY

AROUND THE TEXTS, CONTEXTS,

AND RECONTEXTUALIZATIONS

OF AN UPPER MIDDLE CLASS

PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL

BY

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a teacher researcher qualitative study that explores the work of critical literacy in an upper middle class public high school. As a participant and an observer, I studied how a confluence of authority, privilege, curriculum, and pedagogy created context and shaped the meaning and quality of our collective literacy learning experiences. Using the tools of teacher research through narrative inquiry, my study traces school authority figures' reproduction of dominant ideologies, my struggles as a social justice educator to break through those definitions of "normal" with a privileged student population, and the hope that resulted when my students were able to embrace multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural learning experiences as conduits for humility and possible equity for all.

I conducted the study with five rosters of students in my classroom across the 2007 school year. The data emerged from my descriptive and reflective teacher journal, audiotapes, videotapes, personal communications, and student artifacts.

The study reveals how, against a federally-mandated backdrop like NCLB, education can all too easily be reduced to decoding and encoding print-centric, high canonical texts unless teachers infuse sociocultural, multimodal pedagogy around culture and identity.   While often experiencing waves of tension, my students were able to challenge the dominant discourses in upper middle class public education only when they recontextualized their own modalities, literacies, and cultures as part of learning experiences. When they did so, youth produced and consumed their own critical youth texts, gained youth power across many dimensions, and began a journey toward awareness of social justice for all.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

My interest in popular culture in the classroom arose through my career as a

public school teacher and became grounded by the literature around literacy, learning,

and media. Prior to my doctoral work, I taught for nine years as a middle school

English teacher in Taylor, a U.S. northeastern suburban community with a population

nearing 29,500 and which was located approximately forty miles southwest of its state

capital. At that early point of my career, I was assigned a heterogeneous roster of

students as one of four eighth grade English teachers in the district, and we shared the

responsibility with our two middle school principals for implementing English

Language Arts frameworks that met both state and local standards.

I became torn as I saw students struggle --- again and again --- with teacher-

centered curriculum as well as stories of power and identity told predominantly by

white, Anglo-Saxon males. Those narratives were part of what is often called the

western canon: texts comprising a compendium of work that has been influential in

shaping western culture. Student voice and discourse around non –dominant persons --

- those whose race, gender, class, religion, heritage, ability, or sexual orientations lay

outside dominant western practices --- were generally little more than token

occurrences in the Taylor middle school classrooms. Students and non-dominant

persons had been Othered in Taylor, or relegated to status of Us versus Them within a

binary system.

My instructional duties brought me into contact with anywhere from 92-139 students annually, but, as my years of service in the same town accumulated, I became part of a larger system of social and career affiliations. Siblings of my former students often became my students, too, or chose to participate in clubs or grant programs that I facilitated. Additionally, I kept in contact with a number of my former students as they went on to high school, college, and adult lives. All of these youth spoke eagerly and richly about texts, but *their* texts were not *the* texts interrogated in the Taylor public schools. In those years prior to the new millennium, the youth I encountered read magazines, played video games, watched television, participated in sports, talked on the family phone, read young adult novels, and exchanged and built knowledge of their worlds through what I later learned was called "discourse."

By the time I was appointed to professional status, I had begun to incorporate media literacy instruction into my public school English language arts classroom. I thought popular culture texts would provide a meeting place where my students and I could share our expertise, create serious academic discourse, and invite voices of Others into academic studies. My choices for instructional materials and learning events included yet transcended the western canon. Moreover, as I deepened my own understanding of the media's effect on readers, listeners, and viewers, my pedagogy changed, and I asked students to consider ways that popular and media cultures are ubiquitous educational forces that normalize meanings, values, and tastes within a complex of social constructs. I discovered that this pedagogy is called "critical literacy," in which language becomes a vehicle to analyze how society and culture influence human identity formation.

I transferred from the middle school to the high school in Taylor in 2005. At the same time, I was reading Bourdieu (1977), Rist (2004), McIntosh (1997), Anyon (1980), and Greene (1993) as part of my program of studies in the Feinstein Joint Doctoral Program at Rhode Island College and the University of Rhode Island. My major professor also guided me to the world of cultural studies and theorists such as Hall (2003b), Foucault (1972), Fine (2000), and Giroux (P. Freire & Giroux, 1989; Giroux, 1999, 2008b; Giroux & Simon, 1989). As a direct result of my readings and cohort discussions, I expanded the collective and power-laden vocabulary of my public school classroom to include constructs around hegemony, hierarchy, oppression, privilege, resistance, misogyny, and critical consciousness.

The reactions of students, their families, and the school administrators to my praxis became of interest to me, and I called those reactions "waves of tension." I incorporate the metaphor of "waves" throughout this dissertation as a means to analogize the transfer of energy that occurred in my critical literacy classroom and at Taylor High School (THS). As it passes into a new medium, a wave changes speed. Because critical literacy praxis was so different than my students' previous experiences in their public education, I was a new medium that changed the speed of student reactions. Waves of tension arose in learning events when I required students to engage in constructivist thinking; when I asked students to assume critical distance from the western canon; when students juxtaposed popular culture texts and the western canon; when students responded to deconstruction of their real life or favorite childhood texts; or when students interrogated their privileged places within a hegemonic society. I was an obstacle placed in the path of established and

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comfortable learning; we bent the waves of the norms of public school education together through critical literacy praxis.

During 2007, I conducted a teacher researcher qualitative study and came to understand how a confluence of authority, privilege, curriculum, and critical pedagogy created context and shaped the meaning and quality of our collective literacy learning experiences. As a result, this dissertation became a critical text constructed from multiple texts shared between ninety-seven high school students, school authority figures, and me. An expanded definition of "text" fashioned new classroom spaces, and, by valuing and interconnecting all kinds of texts, cultures, identities, and literacy stories, I wrote this dissertation with the intent to coalesce the present and the past in what the narrative researcher Oliver (1999) calls "visions of possible futures" (p. 224).

As a teacher researcher, I analyzed texts through the lens of critical pedagogy; in doing so, I observed youth who divulged their cultural histories and (re)constructed their academic identities. I also was a bystander to and recipient of school authority figures' discourse. The texts transmitted by THS authority figures in our suburban, upper-middle class school developed common definitions of what it meant to be privileged and part of a discourse of meritocracy. THS authority figures' and students' texts revealed how privileged, suburban individuals within the walls of an upper middle class, public high school negotiated space for voice and power in the quest for self-realization and community status.

Most importantly, this dissertation is what cultural and media theorist Fiske (1987) terms a tertiary text, or a text produced by an observer of other texts. This tertiary text is examines how and if critical praxis influenced students within a public

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school: their academic, social, philosophical, and personal positionings. In my study, I respected, valued, and derived my praxis largely from Brazilian educator and liberation activist Freire's (1992) model of critical pedagogy. As a result, "inquiry-based instruction" (p. 74) created the foundation for critical literacy praxis. I encouraged students to ask questions and dialogue with me as their teacher about what they watched, viewed, heard, and read so to embody social justice philosophy within popular and media culture immersion and analysis.

This dissertation is a text about the THS authority figures', my students', and my own texts as we made meaning of other people's texts. In this dissertation, I argue that, in the public school in which I taught and which received high marks from accountability assessors, public education was designed to appropriate texts so as to reproduce dominant ideologies. As I will outline in the data chapter, THS authority figures' texts reflected core values: the power of determination, excellence, tradition, merit, excellence, and ambition. Their ideals, missions, standards, school culture, ways of knowing, and ways of doing reflected excellent standards for academic achievement and, at the same time, reinforced privilege. Although I sought to transcend dominant discourses through sociocultural interrogation of the high western canon and through infusing respect for multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural texts as new definitions of being literate, waves of tensions arose due to my students' entrenched ways of knowing their worlds and knowing the world of public schooling.

In this dissertation, multimodal texts are texts that incorporate listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing and/or representing in integrated and interdependent ways and are used for responding to and composing texts in order to shape meaning.

Multiliterate texts are texts that transcend the genre of literature in the public school and encompass real-life compositions such as web pages, wikis, online newspaper articles, blog posts, e-mails, self-published poems, multiple authored texts, and other prosaic, poetic, and dramatic texts. Transcultural texts extend beyond one culture and often point to the ideal of extending freedom to all peoples of the world. And, as a consequence of this study, I argue that, while often experiencing tension, my students were only able to challenge the dominant discourses in upper middle class public education when they recontextualized *their own* modalities, literacies, and cultures as part of literacy learning requirements. When they did so, youth produced and consumed their own critical youth texts and gained youth power across dimensions that created meaningful literacy structures.

Context of the study

In the early 1990s, Taylor was a small town of white Italian- and Armenian-Americans. Abruptly and reluctantly, Taylor found itself at a crossroads due to the expansion of the hub commuter rail system to its borders. Taylor's population doubled in the next fifteen years. With newfound proximity to the capital city and the then-thriving technology corridor, Taylor became a magnet for citizens with different definitions of what it meant to be "normal" with their upper-middle class world views.

When we fast forward to 2007, Taylor was no longer the site of long expanses of chicken farms; rather, a complicated convergence of highway ramps twisted and fell in three dimensions. Instead of far-reaching fields of apple orchards, a warehouse food supply store sat adjacent to a regional milk distributor. Locally owned automobile

dealerships had become corporate gas stations whose convenience stores pulsed with processed foods.   One middle school multiplied into three middle schools. The single high school's student population burst in surging waves while its technology, physical plant, and infrastructure stagnated in comparison to the newly built or recently renovated middle schools.

In 2007, I was assigned 99[1] students in five rosters of sophomores and seniors in high school English tracked classes, with rosters averaging about 25 students.   A proponent of heterogeneous grouping since my years as a middle school teacher, I bristled each time my colleagues referred to my sophomore students as "the CPs" or my senior students as "Honors" due to the implicit connotation of worth associated with track.   After a serious discussion with my partner early in my high school career about language use and its ability to denigrate individuals, I decided to refer to my students as "the sophomores" and "the seniors."

Other distinctions among the THS student body caught my attention. In the Taylor youth[2] community, a "normal" high school student lived in a $390,900 home[3]; was college-bound[4]; was Catholic[5]; played sports or participated in music/ theater arts; commonly traveled with family members outside the region; obtained a driver's license at age 16; had a Facebook page; and brought a cellphone to school. Eighty-

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[1] **Two students and/ or their families chose not to participate in this study.**
[2] **I refer to persons aged 16-25 in this dissertation as "youth" rather than "adolescents" due to the connotation of 'adolescent' as "an overgeneralized image of immature, emotional, hormone-driven young people" (Hinchman, 2007).**
[3] **U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey**
[4] **At the graduation ceremonies, the previous principal stated that 94% of THS students went onto college.**
[5] **According to the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (2009), 79% of the citizens in Taylor's country practiced Catholicism.**

nine percent of the participants lived with 2 or 3 adults in the home.[6] Almost all the

participants lived in a home they owned and reported that they were white. Ninety-

seven percent of my students solely had European heritage. Fifty-two percent of my

students had fathers who were college graduates, and fifty-five percent of my students

had mothers who were college graduates. Every THS student I taught had access to a

computer in the home[7]. The participants had median family household incomes of

$100,678[8]. Thus, this dissertation is a text of what it meant to become literate and

educated in an upper-middle school in a U.S. community in upward socioeconomic

shift, and, given these demographics, I call the majority of THS students "privileged"

because they benefited from the dominant systems, structures, and institutions of

American society, especially as regards race, gender, and socioeconomic class. The

participants experienced what anti-racist activist McIntosh calls "unearned advantage

and conferred dominance" (1997, p. 79) through specific cultural, social, and

institutional processes that were reinforced in their public school lives.

But it was not just this study that illuminated me about the Taylor community.

Longevity in the Taylor school district allowed me to narrate texts through special and

subjective insider perspectives about Taylor culture. Through contextually situated

local ways of knowing, I built upon and translated what the postmodernist scientist

Haraway (1988) calls "different --- and power-differentiated --- communities" (p.

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[6] I defined "adult" as anyone over 18 years of age. Thus, the definition included older brothers

and sisters who called the family home their permanent residence, probably during their college years.

**[7] Brandy, who lived with her single mom in Section 8 housing, had not owned a personal
computer when I first had been her teacher two years earlier. At the beginning of this study,
however, Brandy reported that she now owned a computer in her home.**
**[8] U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey. The 2007 U.S. median
income was $60,374, and the county in which Taylor was located was $78,654.**

580). I wanted to create classroom dialogicality where each student had a voice and where a flow and ebb of ideas would emerge. I wanted discourse in a variety of modes to become a textual, unifying pattern in our classes. Importantly, my explorations needed to take on specific meanings in the context of a mandated curriculum of high canonical western texts, my juxtapositioning of revisionist, popular, and media texts, and a standards-based environment.

As a teacher researcher, I told, read, watched, and listened to texts about waves of culture and culture's influences through the lens of critical literacy pedagogy. I have included in this dissertation extensive texts from the school authority figures, students, and me by using the genres of ethnographic reporting, classroom inquiry, and teacher as participant perspectives. I integrated doing "thick description" of the high school classroom and public spaces, as urged by cultural anthropologist Geertz (1973); critical discourse analysis and the influence of power on social relations, as modeled by Fairclough (2003); and teacher research into learning as outlined by teacher researchers Knoblauch & Brannon (1993) and Hubbard & Power (R.S. Hubbard & Power, 1993, 1999; R. S. Hubbard & Power, 2003). This teacher research dissertation applies a cultural studies approach to understanding privileged youths' public school lives, and it incorporates cultural texts outside a mandated curriculum to examine issues of gender, race, and class. This is a text consistent with what social justice educator Shor (1996) calls a "Dewey-Freire model of power relations" (p. xii). Unlike Shor, though, who taught working class students on Staten Island and "nearly lost the class" (p. 4), my privileged students expressed resistance in nuanced and controlled rather than overt ways within the classroom walls. Wielding what French sociologist

Bourdieu (1977) described as social and cultural capital, the students often reacted to critical literacy praxis through backdoor channels available to them through institutionalized privilege.

The important shared cultural work of critical literacy pedagogy did instill numerous opportunities for my students and for me to reflect and revisit our senses of self, our worldviews, our relationships to authoritarian officials, and our roles as literate learners, world citizens, and humans. Praxis, a process that involves continuous movement between reflection and action, was central in this study toward my goals of enhancing youth critical consciousness through our dialogue. I utilized critical literacy tools to help my students analyze messages in a wide variety of texts and to understand how structural features -- such as media ownership and political ideologies --- are built into message design. It was my goal to have conversations with my students about numerous classic, media, and popular culture texts so I could help them to see beyond the glimmer, glamour, and romance of textual messages. I wanted to demythologize dominant structures in U.S. society through the texts of their own lives, rather than simply those texts traditionally allowed through public schooling, so youth could decide for themselves whether textual messages were valid, worthy of goal-setting, and ethical.

I did not pretend to have all the answers, which sometimes surprised, pleased, dismayed, and also empowered my students. My critical literacy praxis revealed opportunities for students to be skillful producers and consumers of their own media messages, and it facilitated understanding of the strengths and limitations of each medium. I learned alongside my students in a delicate dance of infusing my own

educational and life experiences into the knowledge base that my students brought to our learning events. Conversely, because of what British cultural theorist Hall (2003a) calls the "decentred" (p. 105) combination of culture, language, textuality, and signification, my students sometimes had difficulty discerning direct and immediate assess to networks of interrelated meanings, even after my explicit instructions. I came to understand my students' confusion as a consequence of the prevailing New Criticism approach to literacy instruction at my school: English teachers revealed messages within texts as if authors buried hidden meanings in their compositions and readers were contemporary Sherlock Holmes as they mined for clues to solving literary mysteries. Sure, some teachers incorporated Reader Response (Daniels, 1994; Rosenblatt, 1938) to extend textual analysis to personal, historical, author, language, and other layers of interpretations.

Allow me to say that, while conducting this study, I did follow the mandated curriculum, which included out-of-context vocabulary and grammar instructions. I made attempts to relate to, understand, and respect the many highly competent, intelligent, and qualified English and other subject area teachers who did not infuse a wide array of texts and ideological textual interrogation into their classroom instruction. However, I also sought out ways to dialogue and establish a middle meeting ground with others who were interested in literacy but who did not value multiliterate, multimodal, and transcultural texts as curricular tools. I intended this dissertation, ultimately, to stimulate conversations and thought in others about new definitions of appropriate texts for curriculum, about how education can be meaningful in its relation to literacy outside of school, and about the authentic literate

lives of today's youth, who are what learning and education writer Prensky (2006) coined "digital natives."

At the beginning of the year, students wrote about their experiences within the walls of public education. Sam, for example, remarked, "As I spent more and more time in school and began progressing through my educational career, I began to question the curriculum in most classes." Eileen divulged, "Something about memorizing textbooks and teaching to standardized tests has always seemed tedious and unnecessary to me." Donnie realized, "If I didn't put forth a whole lot of my time and effort, that I was most likely not going to take anything from my education that was worth a while lot of time and effort." Daria reflected, "I always felt as if the school and everyone within were isolated from normal life, like a boat floating lost at sea." For these students, public education had been separate from the literacies and ideologies of their lives. Comments revealed dissonance about "curriculum" [Sam], "memorizing," "teaching to standardized tests" as "tedious and unnecessary" [Eileen], and education as a "lot of time and effort" for uncertain gains [Donnie].

Students also described the literacies and ideologies that they valued outside school. Jimmy reflected on his childhood: "Whether it was scooters or Pokémon cards I felt I need to be up to date with the latest trends." George declared, "I love music; it gears my life." Benny, too, spoke about a "mad passion for music, mainly the guitar." Kyle forecast, "I plan to go to school for film." Darren unveiled his quest to reconcile nationalism and identity: "I have aligned myself and come to terms with my American heritage and how it is the most important part of me" (September 12, 2007).

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These youths celebrated authentic literacies and ways of being, but their public school curricula rarely did so.

As a result of the pleas of youth to reconcile their real-life and public school literacies, this dissertation chronicles an approach to instruction that was unique at my school. Yet, the messages inherent within my critical literacy pedagogy often contradicted the messages that my privileged students received from THS authority figures, who seemed oblivious to shifts in literacy research[9]. My students learned to be literate within a framework created and approved by THS authority figures. The public performance texts[10] that the THS authority figures composed and disseminated, the print texts to which they referred, and the other digital/ audio/ visual texts they publicly embraced were explicit and implicit communication devices through which dominant ideologies of American society were transmitted. The American Dream was alive, well, and embedded in THS mythology through recontextualizations.

Recontextualization is a process that extracts text, signs, or meaning from its original context and molds it into another context. THS authority figures' recontextualizations as tools for reproduction of dominant ideologies in U.S. society had the potential to circumvent dialogicality within my classroom. Dialogicality is a

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[9] **Interestingly, as I drafted this dissertation, I had to advocate for conversational time with THS authority figures about the study I was assembling. I sent e-mails and attachments; I inserted into hallway chats the revelations about disengaged youth I had discovered; and, I submitted my literature review as a part of my alternative professional evaluation pathway. Matthew, the new 2008 school principal, recommended it for its "excellent standard English conventions" but did not comment on its content (June 12, 2009). In 2010, the new superintendent of schools denied use of my dissertation for my professional development pathway, as she did not deem its publication at the university library as adequate for compliance with Taylor evaluation standards.**

[10] **"Public performance texts" in this dissertation refer to speeches, formal and extemporaneous, that were uttered with explicit purposes to convey messages about expected behaviors, values, and norms. "Public performance texts" became as important and sometimes more important that other texts to establish and reinforces rules.**

view of language that is dynamic, relational, and engaged in a process of endless redescriptions of the world. To move ahead with critical literacy pedagogy against this backdrop was risky, controversial, and exhilarating, in part, because critical literacy pedagogy challenged the American Dream mythology that the Taylor community and schools perpetuated. Rather than benignly adhere to beliefs that each U.S. citizen has the potential to rise in status according to her or his individual capabilities and wherewithal, I suggested that a world of institutional constraints existed outside upper-middle class Taylor.

For example, I felt saddened by the statistics of U.S. youth who did not complete high school, who felt disconnected from the gift of formal education, and who rejected U.S. public education due to its perpetuation of dominant ideologies that did not reflect their own lives. Yet, I did not construct a utopian vision of my students' lives, paint a dark portrait of non-dominant U.S. youth, and ask my students to embrace binaries as truth. Instead, I set myself the task of unveiling layers of possibilities about youth and society, youth journeys, and the relationship of texts to culture, learning, and an equitable social world. I yearned to inspire youth to a consciousness aside of materiality. Could I introduce the beginnings of a shift in youth from thinking to awareness through new definitions of textuality?

One of the reasons I came to concentrate on "texts" is that texts are ubiquitous cultural forces through which U.S. citizens make meaning. Texts of all kinds and modalities touch the lives of humans across age groups, genders, heritages, sexual orientations, races, and religions. Windows on the world open through texts and disclose social, economic, political, and ideological ways of being. In this

dissertation, I considered texts as social events, and youth filtered social events according to recontextualizing principles such as "how concretely or abstractly social events are represented, whether and how events are evaluated, explained, legitimized, and the order in which events are represented" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 139). Literacy was tied inextricably to personal, relational experiences formed through a variety of textual experiences. Literacy researchers Strauss and Irvin (2000) suggest that, when alternative types of texts became center stage, interconnections among language, literacy, and culture became stronger. Multiliterate, multimodal, and transcultural texts, set alongside the high western canon, integrated semiotic knowledge into traditional literacy and altered what student engagement looked like in the English subject area classroom.

Therefore, this dissertation draws on an expanded conceptualization of literacy. In this dissertation, literacy is a process of accessing, analyzing, evaluating, and creating messages in a wide variety of media and popular culture modes, genres, and forms. Freire (cited in Lincoln) refers to "critical and liberating dialogue, which presupposes action" (p. 52) as essential to engaged and authentic learning. Through dialogue and problem-posing, youth engage in acts of cognition that unveil a new awareness of reality. In the context of critical pedagogy, I invited students to gain structures to think differently, to consider options, to work through dilemmas, and to decide for themselves.

Instead of focusing exclusively on a lengthy, curriculum-mandated text and its associated vocabulary and grammar applications, I designed other learning events around a varied series of small texts. I asked students to question what a "text" was. I

conveyed to students that literacy celebrates many forms of symbolic expression, and that symbols convey meaning to readers. Importantly, and in order to help students to rethink what it means to "read" beyond decoding and encoding print texts, we deconstructed sign systems within video, audio, digital, and performance texts. We circumvented the accepted ways of thinking and knowing within Taylor's privileged institution of public education and stepped into the digital era. We claimed transcultural ground that had the potential to open possibilities for greater equity in education, citizens, and society. And, as will become apparent in the data chapter, critical literacy pedagogy, due to its new definitions of texts and alternate frames on the world, could also cause tensions and conflicts with my students, their families, my colleagues, and THS authority figures.

A significant component of my critical literacy classroom was shared power, in which the teacher is a facilitator and guide but is also a recipient of new knowledge. I wanted to establish a reciprocity of meaning-making quickly, so, on the first of 180 instructional days, I stood before my new B period roster and abandoned my meticulously planned welcome speech. "I'm actually kinda nervous. I've been looking forward to seeing some of you again, and I also want to get to know the rest of you. We'll learn a lot together this year" (August 31, 2007). The students quieted, and I was glad I had decided to relinquish a façade of hierarchical professionalism. I described my twelve years as a Taylor teacher; my doctoral work; my interest in popular and media cultures; my small business lakefront vacation retreat; my status as a wife, semi-vegetarian, and owner of a golden retriever.

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And we were off. A brief interlude about our first project together surrounding the summer reading requirements illustrates an important context for the chapters that follow. The mandated sophomore text was *Breaking through* (Jiminez, 2002), and the mandated senior text was *Ceremony* (Silko, 1986). THS authority figures had selected these texts to coincide with recommendations from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) accreditation committee to increase students' understanding of the world's peoples. With a 95.3.5% white, 1.7% Asian, 1.1% black, and 1.1 Latino population[11], Taylor lacked racial and ethnic diversity. Solving a lack of community diversity within the existing summer reading program was consistent with what educational policy researcher Elmore (1996) calls the goal for schools to "legitimize themselves with their various conflicting publics by constantly changing external structures and processes, but shield their workers from any fundamental impact of these changes by leaving the core intact" (p. 15). THS school authority figures outlined that all teachers would link instruction to the summer reading program. The English department head, Sheila reinforced the announcement, commenting, "All departments are responsible for reading" (September 25, 2007).

The Jimenez text looks at the experiences of a male adolescent migrant farm worker, and the Silko text moves the Native American narrative forward to the twentieth century by examining the effects of war on an individual who lives outside the white mainstream culture. I knew from previous teaching experience in Taylor that few students received state or federal assistance in the form of reduced or free

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[11] **2000 U.S. census**

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lunch, Medicare, or public assisted housing[12]. Only a handful wrestled with family financial needs. Additionally, as whites, few had been treated in oppressive ways due to their race. I knew my students would be surrounded by the discourse of war[13], but I also wondered the degree to which youth nationalism, patriotism, and discourse around protecting U.S. soil would arise. What invigorating iPOD selections, insightful cinema, intriguing cartoons, or progressive graphic novels could I infuse with these two summer reading texts? I conducted research. I remembered the youth print text I had loved, *Bury my Heart at Wounded Knee* (D. Brown, 1972) and found a film version available through Netflix. I sought digital documentaries that examined cultural practices of different Native American tribes. I ordered the children's book, *Thirteen Moons* (Bruchac, 1997) and a compilation CD of Native American chants (*Tribal Winds,* 1997). I surveyed books of poems from Native American authors, reread Zinn's first chapter of *A People's History of the United States* (Zinn, 2009), planned a prior knowledge bulletin board about "The Americas," sought *You Tube* clips about stereotypical depictions of Native Americans, located a peer-reviewed article (Rony, 1994) that interrogated film representations of Native Americans, considered lessons about sports mascots, and researched how language creates symbolic meanings. I had a repertoire of texts and learning events to marry mandated summer reading requirements with critical literacy pedagogy.

As example of the complex interplay of texts among authority figures, privileged students, and me as a social justice educator, I unveiled the unit to my seniors.

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[12] **131 families of 10,642 in Taylor received public assistance**
[13] **This study took place during the U.S. occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan.**

Robin: What does someone do who hasn't read the summer reading book?

CF: I have a bunch of magazines[14] in the room. Hand in your work. Then you're welcomed to check 'em out (August 29, 2007).

I was angry, astonished, embarrassed, and circumspect in waves when I realized that, led by the class president's modeling, most seniors had not completed the summer reading mandated by district school authority figures. Over the summer, as I had mapped the year's core curriculum, standards, and my ideas for infusion of media and popular culture texts, I had decided that district required summer reading would take the lead. I had wanted to validate reading in its various forms, and, yet, I was a paid public school teacher with specific responsibilities. Organizational sociologists Coburn & Stein (2006) help to explain my desire to accomplish multiple goals as a teacher. "How teachers shift their practice --- that is, how they learn in response to their engagement with policy --- depends on their shared history of practice" (p. 26). I had felt the need to position myself in the public sphere as compliant with administrative mandates so my critical explorations with my students around social justice issues could occur without much administrative oversight.

After a few hours of realistic reflection, I discarded the classplans I had designed around summer reading. Teachers, too, must be ready to change plans with little to no advanced signs, in the same way that linguistic anthropologist Heath (1999, p. 378) explains how qualitative researchers must be able to adapt to contextual factors. "Research is richly layered, flexible, and adaptive to social constraints; moreover, this work stresses the multiple life worlds which any individual young person occupies

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[14] *Wired*, *Technology Review*

within a single day." I acknowledged that my seniors had anticipated the hidden curriculum of THS in ways that I had not. To them, summer reading was an artificial contrivance; no assessments were linked with summer reading; and, acquiescence to summer reading signified school officials' authority over youth. Resistance to summer reading requirements was a form of youth rebellion. Had I insisted that students comply with my original, scaffolded series of learning events, I would have superimposed a literacy climate that lacked meaning for students and would have duplicated the very pretences of literacy learning that I intended to counter with critical literacy pedagogy.

The dilemma over summer reading requirements was one of many dilemmas that I confronted in 2007 as a social justice educator. This dissertation, then, outlines the ways that THS authority figures, students, and I recontextualized our life narratives. Processes inherent within critical literacy pedagogy were so foreign that they required my students to reconsider their statuses within a tracked classroom and their futures as literate learners. Some students did not adjust to critical literacy at all; others acquiesced; and, some embraced and relished the opportunity to engage in a dialogic classroom space. To describe that journey over a series of high waves, low currents, surges, flattened expanses, and splashes, this dissertation is broken into chapters.

In Chapter Two, the literature review, I trace literacy research and practices over the past thirty years. I link a preponderance of print-centric, high canonical texts to students' contemporary ennui about reading. I argue that, when literacy practices coincide with sociocultural knowledge about identity, teachers can more closely assist youth toward gaining literacy structures necessary for the twenty-first century.

In Chapter Three, I describe my journey as a qualitative teacher researcher who incorporated narrative inquiry into data analysis. I outline the study, my research questions, the participants, the contexts, the data collection tools, the coding, and the categorization that led to my ultimate analysis.

Chapter Four, the data chapter, is divided into three parts. In the first section of Chapter Four, I argue that THS school authority figures chose, designed, and referred to specific texts as means to maintain and transmit principles of dominant culture to students. I describe the ways that THS authority figures used texts to advance definitions of "normal" and "privileged" so as to assuage the upper middle class community they served. THS authority figures' texts embraced consumerism as a collective mechanism of privilege. They also decried youth as a force to be feared and from which adults needed to be protected. I end by referring to tensions that arose in my critical literacy classroom due to the context of learning as a subset of THS authority texts that reproduced dominant ideologies of U.S. society.

In the second of three sections of Chapter Four, I argue that critical literacy as praxis often conflicted with privileged students' conceptions of what literacy learning should entail. I outline how youth popular and media culture texts transmitted messages of a patriarchal society; how students within different academic tracks reacted to critical literacy learning contexts due to their preconceptions about academic ability via socioeconomic status; and, how critical literacy praxis placed me in tenuous positions as their guide and as a public sector employee.

In the third of three data sections of Chapter Four, I argue that critical literacy praxis, although frequently stressful for my students and me, did awaken many

privileged youth to broader and more vital definitions of "normal" in the U.S. I describe how youth epiphanies occurred about freedom and equity in society when students composed with real-life popular and media culture texts in the public school classroom. Meaningful literacy tools enabled many students to distance themselves from dominant structure of privilege and to interrogate social and cultural influences on identity and behavior.

In Chapter Five, I outline conclusions that arose from my data analysis of this study. Three distinct conclusions from this study contribute to the literature around critical literacy pedagogy. First, U.S. educational reform efforts must include new definitions of valuable public school literacy practices in the digital era of the twenty-first century. Second, youth require repeated opportunities to recontextualize their own learning within the framework of sociocultural theory. Third, social justice pedagogy can infuse awareness of equity issues when students interrogate their worlds through original, popular, and media culture texts. The dissertation ends with implications for future educational reforms that include pathways in which multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural textual practices across disciplines can promote social justice for all.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Overview

The exploration of relevant literature surrounding my areas of interest began during my doctoral coursework, evolved as I wrote my dissertation proposal, and took on new meanings as I wrote my dissertation. My initial area of interest was media literacy, and I came to understand many of the debates over the intrinsic effects of media on readers and concurrent problems of consumption, leisure, and the industrialization of the mind (McLuhan, 1955); between print and media (Postman, 1985, 1994); within media literacy praxis (Hobbs, 1998); and, around the constructed nature of media texts with embedded representations (Buckingham, 2003). Later, I drew on approaches in cultural studies by Giroux (P. Freire & Giroux, 1989; Giroux, 1991, 1999, 2002, 2004, 2008b; Giroux, Shumway, Smith, & Sosnoski, 2001; Giroux & Simon, 1989) in attempts to understand the ways that popular and media cultures are ubiquitous educational forces that normalize meanings, values, and tastes within a network of social constructs. Finally, while I collected and analyzed my study data, my previous investigations into the literature continued to inform me (Giroux, 2008b; R. Hobbs, 2007), but I also realized that discourse around all kinds of literacy and the way actors manipulated texts for specific purposes had become my central areas of interest. Thus, this literature review seeks to reconcile how media, literacies, texts, and social practices are integrated in public schooling and the literate lives of youths.

Through the studies of semiotics, popular culture, and social and cultural

production and reproduction, researchers in secondary literacy have recently argued

two related points (Alvermann, Hinchman, Moore, Phelps, & Waff, 2006; Dressman,

McCarthey, & Prior, 2009; J. Gee, 2000; R. Hobbs, 2007; G. Kress, 2003; L.

Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Leu, et al., 2007; Meacham, 2000; Strauss & Irvin, 2000).

The first argument is that contemporary youth experience literacy dissonance when

they try to read and write in public schools which prize print-centric literacy practices;

yet, when youth literacy instruction is digitalized and made personally and socially

empowering across a broad range of texts and formats, these same youth become

engaged. The second argument is that contemporary youth are in the process of

preparing for multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural lives of higher education,

work, play, and citizenship, but traditional literacy practices of public schooling do not

capture the power and possibilities of the literacy practices that youth will need as

twenty-first century adults. Student literacy dissonance as derived from the traditional

literacy practices of U.S. public schools is central to the second data section of this

dissertation. My own work adds to these debates by delineating how a multimodal,

multiliterate, and transcultural learning environment grounded in social justice

pedagogy challenged students to rise above traditional literacy practices yet also posed

contradictions to the recontextualizations of school authority figures.

Functional and cultural literacy in contrast to multiple and digital literacies

Traditional conceptions of literacy describe an individual's ability to read, write,

communicate, and comprehend. One notion of traditional literacy rests within

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functional literacy, or the process and content of learning to read and write in preparation for work and productivity of the individual. Since functional literacy prepares youth for the kinds of interactions that are based on clearly defined workplace roles and prescribed objectives (Endes, 2006), institutionalized schooling has an integral relationship with the economy. Social and educational policy researcher Anyon (1980) argues that classrooms transmit relationships "of ownership of symbolic and physical capital, to authority and control," (p. 87) and to productive activity; classrooms reproduce social class as evolved ways of "doing" life that teach people about what work is of value, how to succeed, and who will fall short (R. McDermott & Varenne, 1995). Literacy plays a key role in this.

As interconnections among language, literacy, and culture become stronger, institutions of education select the questions and issues that matter most based on their own cultural concerns, values, and knowledge, as well as their reactions to the times (Ravitch, 2000). Within this second notion of traditional literacy, known as the cultural literacy model, content mastery and reading for print-centric disciplinary knowledge are prized. Certain culturally relevant knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values are passed from person to person or from culture to culture for functional literacy and effective national communication (Adler, 1997; A. Bloom, 1988; Hirsch, 1987). Many U.S. schools ground literacy learning within a cultural canon of high western literature in mathematics, science, poetry, drama, fiction, biography, history, philosophy, and theology. Cultural literacy models contribute "to the reproduction of the structure of power relationships and symbolic relationships between classes, by contributing to the reproduction of the structure of the distribution of cultural capital

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among these classes," according to Bourdieu (1977, p. 487). Bourdieu's argument is also consistent with English educational researcher Smagorinsky's (2001) descriptions of the interrelationships among signs, texts, reading, and culture. Smagorinsky states that only when "readers have been enculturated to recognize the codes by which the texts are produced" (p. 146) will they reach the transactional zone, or a relationship that forms between text and reader. When youth cannot access the transactional zone, they can be cast as what adolescent literacy researcher Alvermann (Alvermann & McLean, 2007) calls "circumstantial outsiders," or youth who have weak literacy self-efficacy, lack of literacy confidence, and a self-perception of ill-preparedness for complex literacy tasks (Alvermann, et al., 2006).

Moreover, many youth have difficulty with literacy that is contained within an "idealized, print-centric environment" (Alvermann & McLean, 2007, p. 10) as well as within historically situated practices and organizational systems in schools (O'Brien & Bauer, 2005). Yet language within the U.S. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation has defined and limited "literacy" to an individual's ability to decode and encode print texts (Bullen, Robb, & Kenway, 2004; Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson, 1991; Valencia & Wixson, 1999; Wixson & Pearson, 1998). Annual U.S. assessment requirements in reading for students in grades three through eight and high school examine students' ability to read only from print:

> The term "reading" means a complex system of deriving meaning from print that requires all of the following: A) The skills and knowledge to understand how phonemes, or speech sounds, are connected to print. B) The ability to decode unfamiliar words. C) The ability to read fluently. D) Sufficient background

information and vocabulary to foster reading comprehension. E) The

development of active strategies to construct meaning from print. F) The

development and maintenance of motivation to read (NCLB, 2002).

Since public schools are held accountable for mandated standardized test gains

year to year (Cuban, 1992; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Fullan, 2001; Honig,

2006a; McDermott, 2004), public schools often consider literacy practices as a process

of "mining of extracts of texts for fixed meanings and correct answers" in order to

meet accountability mandates, according to literacy researchers Bousted & Ozturk

(2004, p. 56). Students' responses tend toward "a literal, often superficial level with

little evidence of inferring, evaluating, or critical reading," according to reading

researchers Walsh, Asha, & Sprainger (2007, p. 51). Based on print-centric research,

standardized assessments are widely used to ascertain literacy levels in classrooms in

the current era of accountability (Darling-Hammond, 2004; R. F. Elmore & Fuhrman,

2001). For example, the National Assessment on Educational Progress (NEAP)

administers the same sets of print test booklets across the U.S. The NEAP 2008

results were higher than in 2004 but show no change in average reading performance

of twelfth graders since the assessment was first administered in 1971 (NCES, 2009).

This and other large-scale assessments such as the Programme for International

Student Assessment (PISA) have fostered even more assessments, but educational

assessment researchers Allington & Dennis (2007, p. 76) argue, "there is no evidence

to support the claim that increased testing at the high school level has a positive

impact on student achievement." Teachers' instructional practices have changed based

on the increase of standardized tests, leading to concern with breadth rather than depth

(Certo, Cauley, & Chafin, 2003) of instruction. Print-based literacy has what

Alvermann & McLean (2007, p. 12), call a "stranglehold on the mindset of U.S.

educators at large." Print-based literacy is not typically viewed as contextual (Bruner,

1986; Dyson, 2003) and fails to prepare students to be meaning-makers in today's

environments of multiple, digital-based literacies (Tierney, 2007)**.** Given that so

many public schools situate print as solely responsible for conveying meaning or

information, youths' literate identities and positionings as citizens in a global and

transcultural world are fragmented and elusory.

Gaps in western research on literacy

Literacy in the new millennium is *so* complex --- being able to navigate in the

digital age across genres and disciplines; calling upon inventiveness and critical

thinking skills; being productive and effective at interpersonal communication and

cooperation; and, applying learning to real-world applications and problems, among

others. Yet twentieth century literacy research traditions in the U.K. and U.S.,

according to Meacham (2000, p. 181), perceive literacy in "structurally singular,

exclusively written language." This is a problem.

School-sanctioned literacy often does not match the literate lives of students out-

of-school (Alvermann, et al., 2006; Scot, Callahan, & Urquhart, 2009; Smith &

Wilhelm, 2002) and leads many youth to approach school-sanctioned, print-centric

literacy and associated standards-based assessments with little enthusiasm (Hynds,

1989). The goal of assessments should be to provide a teacher with a student's current

instructional level from a variety of texts including but also extending beyond

classroom texts to inform instruction. "Standardized assessments cannot provide reliable information on the appropriateness of different texts for different students," according to Allington & Dennis (2007, p. 80). Incongruities exist between the tests used to measure reading comprehension and the standards that teachers are expected to use (Underwood, Yoo, & Pearson, 2007), as many valuable indicators of student learning progress are difficult to assess via multiple-choice or open response. Allington & Dennis (2007) argue that high-stakes reading assessments typically "offer little advice" (p. 75) on the sorts of texts or types of reading practices that develop reading proficiency in the workplace, in higher education, or in life and "rate very low on the validity scale" (p. 82). Until schools are released from federally mandated accountability structures that emphasize print-centric reading and response, youth's authentic literacy needs will continue to be neglected.

"It is ironic that our research community has largely ignored the extensive changes to literacy taking place in a digital, networked, multimodal, and multitasking world of information and communication," according to new literacies researchers Leu et al (2007, p. 37). While research on reading comprehension of traditional print texts to inform practice is becoming extensive (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; RAND, 2002), research on reading comprehension as it applies to new information and communication technologies is quite limited. Education and technology researchers Abbott & Shaikh (2005) concede that new literacies researchers find "little recognition of a need for such work" (2005, p. 465). Leu et al (2007) argue that a false assumption exists that reading comprehension is fully "isomorphic-- offline and online" (p. 38). For example, using a regression model, new literacies researcher

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Coiro (2007) found that, while offline reading comprehension and prior knowledge contributed a significant amount of variance to the prediction of online reading comprehension, additional and significant variance was contributed by knowing students' abilities in online reading comprehension. Walsh, Asha, & Sprainger (2007) indicate that, although participants were highly motivated to work with digital texts and were able to use basic skills to navigate sites, they did not transfer reading practices from print-based to digital texts, neither could they "discriminate and critique these messages" (p. 51). Traditional notions of reading comprehension and assessment will not be sufficient to prepare youth adequately for twenty-first century literacy needs.

Thirty years of literacy research

Of course, all of this research is embedded in an historical context. In the early 1980s, literacy studies shifted from New Criticism, in which only that which is within a text is formally accepted as deconstruction of the meaning of a text, toward perspectives derived from cognitive psychology and cultural studies, in which meaning-making is central to the reading process (Damico, Campano, & Harste, 2007). Schema theory (Jofer & Pintrich, 1997), redesigns of Rosenblatt's reader response theory (1938), and transactional perspectives (Smagorinsky, 2001) revisited reading as a relationship between reader and text. Eco's (1976) contributions to this discussion are significant. Eco argued that literary texts are fields of meaning rather than strings of meaning. In this way, literary texts are open, internally dynamic, and psychologically-embedded domains. Eco asserted that the New Criticism approach

was too limiting for a reader's potential understanding and the least rewarding of all possible interpretation methods. Eco felt that textual examination in which the reader was actively engaged among mind, society, and line was the liveliest.

Over the next thirty years, perspectives on literacy advanced thinking about how readers engage with texts and how teachers help students to become more keen readers. The field of literacy included studies of literacy events (S. B. Heath, 1983), Discourse and discourse (J. Gee, 1996), reading as situated practice (Street, 1995), culturally relevant instruction (Ladson-Billings, 1994), multiliteracies and new literacies (C. Lankshear, Knobel, Bigum, & Peters, 2003). Sociocultural perspectives now extend understandings of literacy, moving literacy from an autonomous model where skills are neutral and isolated, to ideological models where literacy practices are highly contextualized and culturally informed around issues of power (Street, 2003) and can draw upon a variety of contextualizing disciplines, including cultural studies, curriculum theorizing, feminist studies, critical pedagogy, multi/interculturalism, queer theory, and symbolic interactionism (Steinberg, 2008). Critical literacy educators (P. Freire, 1992; L. Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; McLaren, 1992; Shor, 1992) also argue that literacy education is inherently political, that schools induce conditions of social control, and that public education fosters deficit perspectives which, paradoxically, perpetuate myths of the possibility of a fully literate society.

New definitions of reading and linguistic acts

During the 1990s, postmodern perspectives (Foucault, 1980; Giroux, 1991) assumed "a dominant role in the discourse of reading education" (Underwood, et al.,

2007, p. 91) with the result that the term "reading" came to be replaced with the broader and more contextualized term "literacy" (J. Gee, 1987). The New London Group introduced the idea that new literacies are multiple in nature and vary according to contexts (2000). The New Literacies Group (NLG) described literacy as mastery of a set of plural and diverse signs, called New Literacies Studies (NLS). NLS is "any form of social communication that requires a semiotic code and are not mode-specific" (Archer, 2006, p. 450). In the same way that, in the 1980s, the New Criticism approach gave way to reader response approaches to literacy instruction, NLS now offered educators a new framework through which to view the possibilities within literacy instruction.

NLS introduced conceptions that being literate is neither about acquiring a set of discrete skills, nor is it about learning the values and ways of a culture. Literacy requires a critical ability to call upon structures (Dole, et al., 1991); to decipher embedded messages through an active process by selecting from a variety of codes (Hall, 2003a); and, to rise from context in order to share insights with individuals in person and virtually (Leu, et al., 2007). Being literate involves a rich and complex array of processes around navigating multilayered texts, images, and sounds; linking together patterns and ideas; and, considering the meanings that are constructed (Cope & Kalantizis, 2000; L. Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Street, 2003; Tierney, 2007). NLS foreshadowed the emergence of popular culture and online technologies as valid sites of literacy studies as well as the phenomenon of students who multitasked at their computers across popular culture genres and electronic media. A gap continues, however, in U.S. public education, which tends to block opportunities for students to

use their multiple ways of knowing through literacy instruction and which fails to consider and validate multiple ways of youth knowing and being literate.

Linguistic acts are not singular or monomodal; linguistic acts take place within multiple modalities, or more than one mode or channel of communication. Contemporary literacy is tied inextricably to personal, relational experiences formed through multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural experiences. Multiliteracies are "modes of representation much broader than language alone… [that are situated within] increasing local diversity and global connectedness" (Cope & Kalantizis, 2000, p. 7). An emerging body of literacy research conducted primarily outside the U.S. examines the role of literacy through a multimodal, multiliterate, and/ or transcultural lens (Adams, 2006; Bousted & Ozturk, 2004; Lotman & Uspensky, 1986; Rezabek, 2002; Sweeney, 2006; Walsh, 2006; Walsh, et al., 2007). For example, Abbott & Shaikh (2005) determined that a "shift in ontological significance is possible with synthesizing technologies from one of reference to one of signification, that is, from referential to creationist or production practices" (p. 465). Bousted & Ozturk (2004) found that "viewing is never a passive process and that viewers bring to the media text a range of interpretative strategies which enable them to read 'signs' in the text" (p. 55). Archer (2006) argued that reading, writing, and meaning are specific social practices within specific discourses, and youth approach "texts as sites of struggle over discourse, meaning, subjectivities, and power," and that multimodal texts are "crucial sites for investigating access to academic literacy practices" (p. 453). Interested in the contexts of "hermeneutics, multiliteracies, and multimodality," Mor (2006, p. 127) found that, when students did not possess familiarity with the common

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codes of multimodal genre conventions, they were unable to "make any meaning at all" of the text, and, "given the increased presence of visual multimodality in present-day communication systems --- not least the World Wide Web" (p. 134), the reciprocity among multimodal and critical literacies deserves recognition and value in the twenty-first century.

Several research studies involving multiliteracies, multimodality, and/ or tranculturalism are underway as of this writing. The Media Lab at Temple University (Hobbs, 2009) uses a multidisciplinary research agenda to explore the broad educational impact of media and technology, with a focus on media literacy education. Since students need to be trained in Internet reading comprehension due to the increase in Internet use taking place in the workplace (Leu, et al., 2007), online reading comprehension research at the University of Connecticut is being conducted with the *Teaching Internet Reading Comprehension to Adolescents Project* (http://www.newliteracies.uconn.edu/iesproject/). The "Developing Minds and New Digital Media" component of the *Good Works Project*, a Harvard/ MIT collaboration, http://www.goodworkproject.org/research/devminds.htm), delineates how certain habits of mind around attention, memory, and comprehension may be impacted by youth's immersion in new digital media. An aggressive research agenda is necessary to fully explore what it means to be literate in the new millennium.

What is a text, and how do texts transmit sign-systems?

The first step toward reconciling the need for new public school definitions of literacy (Alvermann, et al., 2006; Dressman, et al., 2009; Stevens & Bean, 2007 ;

Tierney, 2007), the ubiquitous nature of new information communications technologies (Collins & Blot, 2003), and multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural representations in our society is to pose new questions. What is a text? How do different texts produce certain meanings? How do literate identities emerge within certain sociocultural contexts?

For the purposes of this dissertation, "texts" transcend print, are multimodal, and encompass a wide variety of twenty-first century literacies. Texts comprise written, visual, audio, digital, and performance texts and include such artifacts as speeches, assemblies, films, television shows, commercials, cartoons, music lyrics, music videos, video games, e-mails, web pages, social networking, instant and text messaging, children's books, satellite radio broadcasts, comic books, graphic novels, magazines, advertisements, and full-length novels. According to Fairclough (2003), "Written and printed texts such as shopping lists and newspaper articles are 'texts,' but so also are transcripts of (spoken) conversations and interviews, as well as television programmes and webpages" (p. 3). Essential to definitions of 'texts' is Fiske's (1987) three levels of textuality: primary, secondary/ cultural production, and tertiary/ reader texts. Fiske (1987) argues that a contextual relationship exists among these three levels, and the contextual relationship among these three levels constitutes their intertextuality. These levels "leak into each other," demanding, in a sense, to be read together. Kress (2000)concurs that the reader is also a maker of texts and, so, transforms the text and helps the text maker to achieve agency.

Vincent (2006) found that students who worked "multimodally, integrating words with other semiotic modes" (p. 55) created expressions through artistic, verbal,

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motivational, and musical creativity, "plus a less easily defineable element that comes

the way in which all the various semiotic modes combine to convey the messages" (p.

55). Texts are imbued with signs. Meanings and messages in sign-systems are a

specific kind of communication (Hall, 2003a) that exists in all texts. Sign-systems,

including interpersonal language, other media, and other areas of discourse, create a

social reality to which youth respond, according to educational progressive Dewey

(1989), as "natural." However, reality cannot be separated from the sign-systems in

which they are experienced (Chandler, 2002), and the "natural" social reality of youth

is relative to the signification practices of their community and culture.

The notion of semiotic reality is complex. Eco (1976) argued that, through

conventionality, iconic representation appears to be more true than the real experience

(p. 204). Semiotic reality is a means of perceiving an entity whose juxtaposition to

actual life is determined by its state of being understood. Words, which are lexical,

operate in the context of utterance. Words as individual and isolated units carry

entirely different connotations than do ideas that have relationships to each other

through semiotics. Eco (1976) offered a framework for literacy through semiotics

when he offered the ideas that meaning-making is an interplay between expectation

and fulfillment of meaning.

Public schools rarely integrate semiotic knowledge into pedagogies around texts,

literacy, and student engagement, as many adults question youth's ability to choose

wisely among the many social forces that confront them daily, as will be described in

section one of Chapter Four. Bakhtin (1981) argues that individuals turn outward,

choosing and reaccenting signs among public and social groups to which they have

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access. Public school authority figures often harness the complex messages contained with the pervasive icons of popular culture to impart a discourse of educational excellence and middle class behaviors (Anyon, 1980; Delpit, 1995; hooks, 1994; Howard, 2007; Nagle, 1999; Schutz, 2008). "The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one thing in terms of another," according to cognitive scientists Lakoff & Johnson (1980, p. 5). A metaphor is a circumstance where a person describes one artifact, concept, experience, or idea in relation to a different but known artifact, concept, experience, or idea.

One of the most important aspects of a metaphor is the set of roles it creates for self and others. Metaphors in education contain within them beliefs about knowledge and the expected role of the student. The anti-racism educator Delpit (1995) contends that the role of public schools is to accentuate linguistic and cultural competence as well as to gain familiarity with codes of dominant culture through educational experiences. Codes are sets of symbols and rules that are manipulated through metaphors and symbols made to carry information. Hall (2003b) argues that certain codes may be "so widely distributed in a specific language community or culture" that, when youth reproduce them, they appear to be 'naturally' given" (p. 511). All communication is coded.

When U.S. public schools neglect to invite students to uncover the hidden meanings of codes within society, U.S. public schools fail students. Students do not learn to perceive the relationships between knowledge, power, and desire (Freire & Giroux, 1989). They do not learn the degree to which the economically privileged and culturally dominant homes have greater access to the sorts of textual pleasures that

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index the educated classes (Bourdieu, 1977; Dyson, 2003). Uncovering layers of codes within culture could assist youth to claim literacy status, to challenge authority, and to document social allegiances (Finders, 1997). If U.S. public schools transcended a print-centric focus and included a literacy foundation of identification and deconstruction of codes, a transformation of what it means to be a literate and educated citizen of the U.S. could begin.

Central to this dissertation is the notion that codes are embedded in discourse. Discourse comprises the ways that people communicate in verbal and non-verbal ways: spoken, written, signed, and body language and through multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural forms of communication. Discourse is a dynamic that creates tensions between language, structure, and agency. The relationship between discourse and social practices is dialectical in that elements are internalized by other elements. Youth today in America comprise a heterogeneous group, in some ways, but are also marked by hierarchies defined by ethnicity, gender, race, and class (Ghosh, Mickelson, & Anyon, 2007). Fairclough (2003) suggests that discourse figures as part of social activity within a practice, in representation, and in ways of being. Discourse in this sense, as part of social activity, constitutes genres, which are diverse ways of acting and producing social life in a semiotic mode. Discourse as representation of social life is positioned to reflect different ways of seeing social life. Discourse as part of ways of being constitutes styles, or ways of using language. Social practices are networked in ways that constitute social order, which is a social structuring of semiotic differences, or ways of making meanings. Past practices and

imaginative futures become embedded in social practices and networks and are enacted as genres.

Importantly, social institutions both create and sustain these discourses (Fairclough, 2003). In the U.S. public school classroom, critical discourse analysis can help to unveil the culture of student voice and silence, of advocacy and resistance. For example, how do youth negotiate difference through literacy and come to understand democracy? To what degree do youth understand themselves to be literate citizens who participate altruistically in community-based duties and responsibilities? How are youth developing national and political identifications through literacy practices? What does it mean for a new literate generation of U.S. citizens to share common democratic values? How does a high canonical literate identity, a circumstantial outsider identity, or a new literacies identity play into definitions of national, regional, and group identifications? These questions, at the core of contemporary research about schools and youth literacy, are central to this dissertation.

The place of media literacy and popular culture analysis in literacy studies

To position today's youth within a broad wave of literacy structures, communication channels, textual representations, and recontextualizations across genres and messages, it is important to recognize and incorporate media literacy into the discussion. Media messages are, by nature, recontextualizations, or messages that have extracted text, signs, or meaning from one context and molded it into another context. Media literacy is an expanded conceptualization of literacy and is slowly

gaining momentum in U.S public education. It is a process of accessing, analyzing, evaluating, and creating messages in a wide variety of media modes, genres, and forms (R. Hobbs, 1998). Media systems provide the majority of texts through which students view themselves. Contemporary communications media include television, cinema, video, radio, photography, advertising, newspapers, magazines, recorded music, video games, and the Internet.

While dominant domains of textual representations often feature privileged, idealized, and print-centered childhoods through school-like materials and practices (Dyson, 2003), media influences do not just exist separately for students on neutral screens. Media and all messages are ideological. However, media literacy can increase classroom dialogicality; enhance students' comprehension of dominant representations in U.S. society as depicted through media; address the issues of analysis, pleasure positioning, and audience; deepen students' interactions with the high western canonical texts, and uncover multiple meanings of textuality.

Several theorists have offered critical mechanisms for media literacy education delivery. Buckingham (2003) outlines three of these media approaches. The first intends to protect students against "false values" (p. 8) that might push youth away from their literary heritage, language, and values. The second challenges the boundaries between high culture and popular culture toward a definition of lived experiences so as to acknowledge both realms of social life. The third encourages students to explore their own media culture. Also, Fiske (1987) points out that "screen theory" invites media textual analysis through a variety of lenses --- Marxist, feminist, semiotic, psychoanalytic, etc. --- to examine how media reproduces particular

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ideologies. However, Tyner (2000) argues that ideological, interventionist methods of media literacy instruction create barriers between students and teachers and do not allow students to discuss the pleasure they derive from experiencing media texts. Another perspective targets the consumerist foundation of media (Giroux, 2000; Killeen, 2007; Schor, 2004) and zooms in on the youth shift, through media exposure, to "power, not merely as citizens but also as consumers; and indeed the two may have become impossible to separate" (Buckingham, 2003, p. 22). Additionally, media production can invite students to discern the impact of medium and message on audiences (Abbott & Shaikh, 2005; Trifonas, 2004), but media production requires adequate equipment and technology to be effective (R. Hobbs, 1998).

Regardless of the foundational theory behind it, media literacy education provides tools to help students analyze messages in media texts and to understand how structural features (Roberts, 1996) -- such as media ownership--- create particular and often dominant social meanings and norms. By transforming media consumption into an active process (Hobbs, 2009), students gain critical distance from the pervasive texts of their lives in order to acknowledge their reasons for enjoyment (Barthes, 1975; Giroux & Simon, 1989; Hamston, 2004), the potential for persuasion through symbolic representations (Chandler, 2002; Eco, 1976; Lotman & Uspensky, 1986), and media's ability to re-create the world (Elliott, 2003; Oliver, 1999; Ross, 2003) in fictional and non-fictional ways.

Today, although all fifty American states incorporate media standards to some extent, media literacy is not viewed as essential to literacy instruction. Perhaps this is because media literacy education encompasses a wide variety of approaches,

philosophies, and goals. According to Hobbs (1998), debates range from philosophies about protecting children from possible adverse effects from the media; the degree to which media production should comprise an essential feature of media literacy education; the percentage and focus of popular culture texts; explicit political and ideological agendas; subject areas foci for media literary; and, financial support by media organizations. While controversies about media literacy education may still persist in the age of new literacies and inventive communication possibilities, such pedagogy does encourage consumers to examine several aspects of media messages. Hobbs (2007) suggests that media literacy practitioners should encourage students to ask questions about texts' authors, the author's purpose in composing particular messages, which techniques are used to attract and hold the reader's attention, how cultural values and points of view are represented in texts, how different people might interpret messages differently, and which discussions are omitted from texts.

To assist students to interrogate media texts, Hobbs further suggests that teachers can offer explicit instruction about the reciprocity of media texts and embedded messages. They can relate how all messages are designed carefully through language and images; describe how texts contain symbol systems with codes and conventions; reveal how texts have messages that are embedded with cultural values and points of view; explain how different people interpret messages in text differently; and, convey how text messages are constructed to obtain objectives like cultural transmission of knowledge, profit, and/ or power. To support teachers and researchers interested in promoting media literacy, media literacy strands exist at the American Educational Researchers Association (AERA) and the National Council of Teachers of English

(NCTE) annual conferences, among others. The National Association for Media

Literacy Education Media (NAMLE) is a network of media literacy educators who

share texts, lessons, insights, and epiphanies. The attention to media literacy by these

national organizations exposes the relevance media literacy has in our contemporary

moment.

Media literacy education can demythologize the world, encourage students to

solve as well as to pose problems, and introduce youth as skillful creators and

producers of media messages, both to facilitate understanding as to the strengths and

limitations of each medium and their embedded messages as well as to create

independent media. As will become evident in the data chapter of this dissertation, I

incorporated media culture and examination to shift the discourse of literacy education

from identification of narrative structure and literary devices to analysis and critique

of relationships among texts, language, power, social groups, and social practices.

Sociocultural theory and worlds of literacy

The process of making meaning, in mediated or print-centric texts, is a continual

process of negotiating, internalizing, and constructing meaning (Rogers & Fuller,

2007). Transformation of thought and behavior does not arise from individual

development, but, rather, according to Vygotsky (1978), occurs within cultural

constructions of ideas and relations. "Reality exists outside language, but it is

constantly mediated by and through language," according to Hall (2003b, p. 522).

Youth absorb knowledge about, gain access to, and become actors within discourse

communities. The world of discourse is "an element of social life which is closely

interconnected with other elements," according to Fairclough (2003, p. 3). Yet competing and shifting affinities, such as those from parents, peers, careers, passions, college, sports, and academics (Lesko, 2001), yield a maze of contradictions (Hinchman, 2007) as youth develop literacies needed for communicative competence.

Literacy is embedded in specific contexts requiring different practices and serving different purposes. As learners, youth "have opportunities to make and remake themselves, their identities, their discursive toolkits, and their relationships," state new literacy theorists Moje & Lewis (2007, p. 20). When learning is situated within discourse communities, many youth struggle over access to resources. Youth in discourse communities vary according to their "access to or control of tools, resources, or identities for full participation and control of Discourses and material goods" (Lewis, Encisco, & Moje, 2007, p. 17). Youth who already have or can obtain access to tools of competence within discourse communities are the youth who control systems of youth power and who are more likely to access to adult power networks.

Sociocultural theory can offer a way of recognizing youth learning processes and practices associated with literacy acquisition as a significant part of the social and cultural world. However, in an era of accountability in literacy education, do sociocultural perspectives have a place in the public school classroom?

In a classroom where multimodalities, multiliteracies, and transculturalism are overarching and recursive themes and ways of being literate, the nature of learning, agency, and associated constructs of ideologies, meanings, and institutional actors create a specific sociocultural climate. Sociocultural theory draws attentions to histories and interpretive frames that produce knowledge, including misogyny, racism,

heterosexism, religious intolerance, and classism. Texts can also create what literary critic and semiotician Bakhtin (1981) calls "new ways of being" when critical sociocultural theory draws on a range of theoretical perspectives to reconcile identity, agency, and power in literary practices and studies (Lewis, Encisco, & Moje, 2009) and to identity how those practices and studies produce knowledge (Jofer & Pintrich, 1997; Packer & Goicoechea, 2000; Polanyi, 1958). "Social and linguistics codes and practices shape relationships to texts," according to Lewis, Enciso, and Moje (2009, p. 6). For example, positioning of texts can support or refute the institutionalization of high canonical culture --- or the appropriate place of horror fiction or *YouTube* in the classroom --- in ways that can support particular material effects and social identities.

How can a sociocultural approach to public school literacy instruction assist contemporary youth to reconcile the many literacies that encompass their lives? Sociocultural literacy instruction can enact a culture of power (Delpit, 1995) where narratives become recontextualizations of what narrative researcher Andrews (2006, p. 502) call the "imaginative and transformational potential of identity." Opportunities include deconstruction of dominant language (hooks, 1994), television discourse (Fiske, 1987; Postman, 1985), magazine narratives (Elliott, 2003; Kilbourne, 2002), advertisement subtexts (Katz, 1999; Kilbourne, 2002), video game semiotics (J. P. Gee, 2003), and the grammar of films (G. Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001).

Moreover, because "cultural forms and tools are mediated alongside a narrative of production and transformation," (Enciso, 2007, p. 53), when youth compose their own sociocultural and original multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural texts, new narratives of contemporary life can inform their identities. U.S. public schools should

include sociocultural literacy instruction as a new wave of recognition of youths' authentic literacy identities.

Social justice classrooms

A sociocultural approach to literacy attends to issues of identity, agency, power, and history, and a sociocultural approach reconstructs how literacy can be conceptualized and understood. "Within any community of practice there are available designs --- the histories of participation, discourse, styles, genres, dialects, cultural models--- that people bring with them into a shared social space," argue literacy education researchers Rogers and Fuller (2005, p. 81). Schools are shared social spaces with specific designs which also represent multiple and sometimes competing epistemological and ontological positions. School authority figures' texts are expressions of culture and agency, and, through symbolic, discursive, and material reminders, school authority figures transmit chains of meaning for teachers and students (Cope & Kalantizis, 2000). Youth literacy is closely linked to both community and individual development in the context of public school authority figures' discourse, class stability, and further upward mobility.

Rather than acquiescing to a dominant institutional voice and dominant institutional cultural values that back that voice (Gutierrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995), teachers can help students move beyond the present, "to include the historically formed frames of reference that continue to limit what can and cannot be seen, heard, or felt" (Encisco, 2007, p. 68). New frames of reference can emerge when teachers employ multiple representations of knowledge that use students' own lived

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experiences as a means to connecting new knowledge to school, home, community, and global discourse (Irvine, 2003). Such multiple representations of knowledge can emerge through social justice pedagogy, which seeks to conceptualize a society in which justice is achieved in every aspect of society, rather than merely through the administration of law. A socially just society, ideally, would be a world in which each individual and group could expect and receive fair treatment and an impartial share of the benefits of society. Social justice classrooms can redesign chains of meaning through cultivating new communities of practice by recognizing paradoxes, divergent interpretive frames, and multiple histories "that whisper alongside very action and object we are able to see or hear" (Encisco, 2007, p. 72). Social justice praxis can draw upon new conceptions of multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural literacies to examine degrees of economic equity, human rights, and legal equality, and how and whether persons designated to positions of power distribute advantages equally to all members of that society.

Social justice classrooms that create space for storylines about what school is and should be also "challenge unproductive storylines" (R. Rogers & Fuller, 2007, p. 77) of dominant culture and become counternarratives. The sociocultural literacy theorist Gutierrez (2007, p. 116) confirms that students who confront counternarratives in social justice classrooms are required "to participate in a range of practices across familiar, new, and hybrid contexts and tasks." Social justice classrooms can become a "third space that is hybrid and open to intersections of multiple, divergent cultural resources and meaning" (Encisco, 2007, p. 70) which disrupt discursive channels and boundaries. Rather than institute a dichotomy that oversimplifies home and school, or

in-school and out-of-school literacies, teachers who ascribe to social justice praxis can create dialogical spaces where a multitude of lived experiences and worldviews can be heard. Teachers of social justice pedagogy can create waves of self-empowering conditions that allow youth of all walks of life to brighten with new conceptualizations of what it means to be literate agents in an equitable society.

Privilege as counternarrative to social justice pedagogy

But what happens when the social justice practitioner is assigned to teach a core group of youth endowed with privilege? Privilege is, generally, hidden with U.S. society, yet class systems pervade what it means to be designated to a U.S. class hierarchy (Howard, 2007). "Privilege" in this dissertation utilizes McIntosh' definitions (1997) of "unearned advantages" and "conferred dominance" (p. 79). Schools reproduce dominant ideological structures of society (Anyon, 1980; Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Bourdieu, 1977; Brantlinger, 1991; Ghosh, et al., 2007; Oakes, 2005; J. Rogers & Oakes, 2005). Culture gives value and meaning to a life; is a constantly evolving entity; and, is molded by a variety of forces. Moreover, an individual's identity arises from interpretation of collective cultural experiences. According to socioeconomic class researcher Howard (2007), "Individuals form particular ways of knowing and doing, values, beliefs, assumptions, and relations with others and the world around them that reflect their social class positionality" (p. 17). In the same way that ideological resources operate to reproduce relations of domination, school authority figures create structures that reinforce privilege through upper middle socio-economic class ways of being and knowing the world.

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The privilege of being part of the dominant culture has influenced the identity development of whites in the U.S. (Rich & Cargile, 2004). Upper middle class public school authority figures often use discourse that reinforces Freire's "education as banking" theory (P. Freire & Macedo, 1987) to reproduced structures in society that mask many "unearned privileges" (McIntosh, 1997). When U.S. public schools promulgate narrow and dominant definitions of what it means to be an "American" and what it is to possess an authentic "American" identity, social justice definitions around inclusivity, freedom, and voice often become subverted or silenced. However, if U.S public schools can come to recognize and embrace a twenty-first century multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural learning model, U.S. youth will more easily rise up in waves of informed global citizens who share visions of equity for all.

Conclusion

On the one hand, vast possibilities exist to expand students' literacy levels when U.S. public schools acknowledge that modes of representation transcend print and are transmitted through new communication channels and new methods of signification. On the other hand, schools as reproductive mechanisms of dominant ideologies of society resist adopting not only new pedagogy, curricula, and assessment procedures but, also, broader definitions of culture, linguistics, and achievement. That resistance conflicts with the journey of twenty-first century youth toward authentic literacy competency. In the chapter that follows, Methodology, I outline my data collection process through my narrative inquiry as a teacher researcher, with the goal of describing these contradictions around texts, contexts, and recontextualizations.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In the third chapter of the dissertation, I describe how I came to decisions

regarding methodological choices, procedures, techniques, data collection tools,

coding, and analysis for the dissertation.   As I reveal this pathway of my research

strategies, I foreshadow how I envisioned moving literacy learning beyond an

entrenched tradition of the print-centric high western canon and into a complex

schema where students' analysis of texts of all kinds and of layers of texts would

create expanded literacy meanings. I set the groundwork for the subsequent data

analysis in Chapter Four, where I describe how I attempted to assist youth to study and

compose multiliterate, multimodal, and transcultural texts and, as a result, to transform

their own literacy learning into greater appreciation of social justice for all.

As I moved through my doctoral courses, I thought about ways I could research

and understand public school students' waves of tension when popular culture was

infused into learning. Certainly, in the tradition of qualitative research (Bogdan &

Biklen, 2003), I could have envisioned myself functioning as an ethnographer by

observing and recording other teachers' public school classrooms. With over a decade

of affiliation with the National Writing Project, I had established links to teachers in

various subject areas and even states. I also had come to know many teachers in

Taylor. Through outreach, I probably would have been able to locate several potential

sites for U.S. public school classroom research. Yet, as I reviewed the literature of research on teaching, I noticed what teacher researchers Lytle & Smith (1990) call a "conspicuous absence" (p. 83) of the voices of teachers—the questions and problems teachers pose, the tools we use to interpret and improve our practice, the ways we define and understand our students' academic and social lives, and the waves of tensions when we question traditional public school instructional practices.

As I considered my research options, one thought loomed above all others: *I* was a classroom teacher. I had been weaving popular and media cultures into my instruction since the late 1990s. Would another teacher's classroom satisfy the questions I had about the intersection of public and private texts? After all, my praxis *was* unique in Taylor and, periodically, had consequences. It was I, not another teacher, who had been summoned to the principal's office, interrogated on parents' night, and pestered by a local newspaper reporter. I had received phone calls and letters from families, memos in my permanent file, and e-mails containing lightly veiled concerns from upper level administrators. These waves of tension were happening all around me.

I realized it was my own students in whom I was invested and whose experiences I wanted to understand more fully. Due to my familiarity with Taylor school and community culture, I knew I would be able to draw upon what Haraway (1988) calls "agency in the world in knowledge" (p. 593) within the upper middle class, European-American Taylor population. It was not enough for me to teach for 180 days of a particular school year and then forget the individual students, their learning, and their lives. I wanted to comprehend why things happened the way they did in my classes. I

yearned to balance what epistemologist Polanyi (1958) terms "tacit knowledge" and "heuristic passion" (p. 159) with reasoned and analytical interrogation. I believed that ethics required researchers to give back to participants rather than merely take from them. I wanted to be a "critical scholar drawn into the borderland with narrative inquiry" (Clandinin, 2006, p. 62) as a qualitative teacher researcher (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Caruthers, 2008; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Craig, 2007b; Hankins, 2003; R. S. Hubbard & Power, 2003; Klem & Connell, 2004; Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1990; Olsen & Kirtman, 2002; Ritchie & Wilson, 2000; Weber & Mitchell, 1995).

The teacher research approach is naturalistic. Teachers like me become researchers who use classrooms as research sites and students as co-teachers and co-learners. By looking at the classroom systematically, teachers can use research to raise questions about what we think and observe. We can do so through stories we tell about the contexts of teaching, our own teaching, and our students' learning. We accept the close relationship between the learning process and the human social growth process. Teacher researchers can pursue difficult subjective features of the social world by seeing student work as data to analyze and describe. Teaching and learning become more keenly intertwined as teachers become more judicious and reflective about our own practice. Labeled "a quiet form of research" by language and learning theorist Britton (1987), teacher research emphasizes discovery, enables teachers to observe our own students in a variety of situations, and, importantly, empowers teachers like me who are committed to social justice to study and narrate how students resist, acquiesce to, or embrace arguments about equity in society.

Narratives incorporate metaphoric language to describe human experiences as they unfold across time. The focus of narrative inquiry is "an exploration of the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences were constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted --- but in a way that begins and ends that inquiry in the storied lives of the people involved," according to the narrative researcher Clandinin (2006, p. 586). Narrative research on teaching rises in a slow series of waves when teachers tell stories about their work; takes on momentum, force, and urgency when teachers dialogue with one another; sparks with rising motions of light and intensity when students reveal their stories; coalesces with evidence from teaching materials; and peaks with teachers' reflections of themselves. Drawing on Dewey's theories that describe how representations rise from experience and return to experience for validation (1963), narrative research moves from access to interpretation and analysis of experiences.

Teacher researchers must have an awareness of large-scale social systems; of the centrality of place as boundary for the inquiry and the events that take place; of the ways that temporality in human experience draws from the present moment to inform future experiences; and, of sociality as a human concern about personal and social conditions (Clandinin, 2006). Narrative researcher Elbaz-Luwisch (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2006, p. 376) reminds teachers that narrative research takes "into consideration a complex view of teaching that privileges body, feeling, and emotion as well as thinking, planning, and acting." Thus, teacher research and narrative inquiry require a commitment to listening, empathy, and collaboration.

Additionally, a story constellation approach (Craig, 2007a) examines phenomena through multiple clusters of stories and interwoven stories narrated by multiple tellers. Story constellations create intentional spaces within which to negotiate how people and texts of critical literacy pedagogy relate to one another. In this dissertation, I hold the various texts together in the story constellation through a progressive interaction of different strands of evidence that accumulated through my research on teaching and literacy, through my own pedagogy, and through my numerous encounters with school authority figures, community members, colleagues, and students.

As a teacher researcher, I had to acknowledge that I possessed different parts of my self that were "split and contradictory" (Haraway, 1988, p. 586). For example, I was obliged by contractual agreements with the Taylor school administration to assign grades. Grades, as tools of authority, necessarily designated to me certain power and persuasiveness in my relationships with students, even if I attempted to separate and categorize learning as distinct from assessment.

On the other hand, I also had special, local knowledge that would facilitate a rich understanding of events as they unfolded; a researcher from outside the THS faculty might not accurately perceive and interpret the shared meanings of certain Taylor community cultural clues. I draw from Freire (1992) to support my teacher-researcher positioning, as he asserts that investigations into another's world cannot emerge from points predetermined by an outsider. He proposes a model where the teacher is a facilitator, and the learner travels alongside the teacher. Freire's concept of participation helped me to resolve social science's concerns over the colonial nature of research and provided me with the basis for theories and methods of participatory

research (Reimer, 1994). As a participant, I could be a teacher researcher who sought to make meaning, to achieve what cognitive psychologist Bruner (1986, p. 63) calls "a kind of solidarity" with others, to work together toward common goals, and, yet, also to acknowledge and to appreciate individual choices and difference.

Teacher research creates a dialectical tension in which the teacher is a participant in the study. "The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly and *therefore* able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another" (Haraway, 1988, p. 586). We must examine our own assumptions and biases while constructing "a multivocal narrative that gives free play to all the voices" (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2006, p. 377). The teacher researcher must interrogate positionings, be accountable, and construct and join rational conversations. The recognition of "borderlands" (Andrews, 2006; Clandinin, 2006) between narrative and critical-theoretical scholarship is necessarily embedded in a practice of "objectivity that privileges contestation, deconstruction, passionate construction, webbed connections, and hope for transformations of systems of knowledge and ways of seeing" (Haraway, 1988, p. 585). Thus, the teacher researcher's journey to understand "the other" must be founded on an acceptance that analysis is mediated through our own interpretive lens and can only be a partial knowledge. Teacher research tells the story of one set of participants in one setting through one set of observer's eyes. Yet its rich description is illustrative and illuminating, narrow so as to be precise, and powerful due to its relevance and revelations. Teacher narrative research is truly unique.

When silences mask the life spirit of marginalized individuals, oppression is reinforced. Through cooperation and trust, teacher researchers can give voice to oppressed persons and contribute to the transformation of oppressors (Clandinin, 2006). Of course, silence creates power struggles over whose voices are worth listening to, and, as researchers, we are "bound to seek perspective" (Haraway, 1988, p. 585). The narrative imagination, Andrews (2006) argues, is the most valuable tool among the narrative researcher's exploratory possibilities. "We must be willing and able to imagine a world other than the one we know" (p. 489). Teacher researchers must see beyond the immediately visible. As we imagine the "fantastic" (Haraway, 1988, p. 586), we reveal the "possible lives --- our own and others" (Andrews, 2006, p. 510) within the otherwise familiar contexts of public education. Clandinin (2006) observes that inequality and injustice are partially sustained by the ways that privilege insulates individuals from the suffering of others. "Attending to the narratives of marginalized groups can disrupt this insularity" (p. 62), she contends. Acknowledging systems of inequity, identifying false consciousness, and reveling in climates of caring are ways that waves of new voices can be heard to dissipate an otherwise insular dominant discourse. Teacher research is a way inside the silence.

As in any story from human experience, a narrative inquiry can never be fully complete, and, moreover, the context of U.S. public school institutional research specifically makes teacher research unfinished. "The reality of life in schools is that it is both ongoing and constantly interrupted" (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2006, p. 375). Identities are created in a social milieu outside our own making. Structures and discourses of agency are a negotiation of identity through self-awareness, historical experiences, and

recognition and positioning of social and cultural ways of being, knowing, and thinking.   A teacher researcher can only expose the particular dynamic ways of culture within one set of study contexts, and, so, many questions must remain unanswered. However, a teacher research study also opens up ripples and currents of unexplored worlds that other researchers and other research studies can continue.

Study contexts

As a result of my deliberation over possibilities for methodological considerations, this dissertation draws from data I collected as a teacher researcher in the context of my position as a public school teacher at Taylor High School during the school year 2007-2008. I was randomly assigned two sections of Sophomore College Preparatory and three sections of Senior Honors English classes. Within a critical literacy framework, I extended the definition of reading for my students to include multimodal, or digital, audio, visual, and print texts. I wanted to study the events that sparked "waves of tension:" why they occurred and what meaning they had in the context of students' lives.

My role as a teacher, narrator, and researcher created specific contexts for this study. I understood that public and private spheres complicate any teacher relationship with youth. For example, in one moment in this study I was a cult-like supporter of the Boston Red Sox major league baseball team, and, at another juncture, I was a master English teacher prepared with an arsenal of classroom management strategies. I brought many levels of biographical nuance to my critical literacy pedagogy. I was slightly overweight for my athletic body type, politically progressive,

and a profound nature lover. I had not eaten red meat since 1980 and was an agnostic. I was a woman who vociferously rejected the category of gender, a partner by law to an intellectual yet multi-income stream male, and an individual who never produced progeny. I was a small business owner of a vacation retreat from my rural lakefront home nearly one hour from Taylor, and I was confounded by the apathy of U.S. citizens during the tenure of President George W. Bush. Each of these had what popular culture researcher Storey (2003) calls "an appropriate mode and context of articulation" (p. 80), forming a particular hierarchy of self that I incorporated into my critical literacy classroom and the research I conducted.

As a teacher, I designed, organized, and implemented learning events so students would have numerous opportunities to become successful readers of their worlds. I wanted experience in an academic setting to be innovative; to be rich in ideas; to demand critical thinking; and, to broaden the cultural contexts students would share in the classroom. I wanted to ask the students to imagine a world that was different and onto which they could place their imprint.

As a researcher, I recognized that my study of my own classroom and school needed to comprise systematic, intentional inquiry. I wanted to peel back the layers of hidden culture that determined why students reacted in the ways they did to my teaching, which I have always considered one teacher's individual educational reform. Teaching is personal and individual, so, for research on teaching to be valid, I felt the study must include both the subjective and personal elements of student-to-student and student-to-teacher interactions as well as conclusive and objective evidence.

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As a narrator of contextual experiences, I drew upon the same career goals that I had voiced meekly to the Catholic school nuns at age ten when I said, "I want to be a journalist." In this study, I would be a purveyor of information from a contemporary audience and society. I would be aware that the journalistic value of objectivity was largely a myth. I would take notes, shoot photographs, and write up a story that would later be recontextualized in content, style, genre and format. I would self-edit and, importantly, adjust to the responses of my major professor, my personal editor.

Preparing to do the research study

I knew that intense groundwork was necessary to create, develop, and, eventually, to defend the foundation of my teacher research project. Reflecting on cultural and cognitive theorist Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (1978), where adults assist children to accomplish new tasks, I designed learning events for my upcoming students. The learning events scaffolded so as to build in waves of increasing learning intensity. Scaffolded learning events are systematic sequencing of readings, experiences, tasks, and teacher and peer support. Conversely, I anticipated that students' behavior would be fluid, dynamic, situational, contextual, and personal, so I reminded myself during these summer planning stages that I would also gain unanticipated and important insights about teaching. I molded in ample opportunities for lesson plan refinement and redirection as the school year got underway and the weeks became months.

I also delegated time prior to the research study in order to familiarize myself with the technology and data collection devices I intended to use to gather data. I

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organized my classroom office filing cabinets for anticipated student artifacts. My personal laptop with CD/ DVD drive, two audio speakers, VCR, and SMART Board, with a district-provided projector, would allow me to incorporate the Internet and its repertoire of other digital, audio, and visual texts into lessons. I was already familiar recording with and uploading my Sony digital audio recorder. I was unhappy with the performance of my Kodak Easy Share digital still camera, so I purchased a Sony Cyber Shot 7.2 digital still camera as replacement. Additionally, the sound quality of my old boom box was poor, so I upgraded to a retro-design, Emerson compact disc player. (Later, I realized that it did not have the capacity to play cassette tapes.) My grand, materialistic splurge was to replace my noisy analog video recorder with a Sony Handycam digital video recorder. With its hard drive disk and Carl Zeiss audio, the digital video recorder allowed me seven hours of recording time without need for ancillary tapes or external microphones.

My most important data collection device was fairly low-tech, however: my teacher journals. I applied my birthday gift certificates to corporate bookstores to the purchase of four ornately covered journals. (I would need to add two more journals to complete the school year's observations.) I knew that the teacher journal would be imperative for me to create an account of classroom life where I could record dialogic discourse, note remarks, outline lessons, depict the essence of administrative sessions, and chronicle student social conversations (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Craig, 2007b; Hankins, 2003; R.S. Hubbard & Power, 1999; R. S. Hubbard & Power, 2003; Mohr & MacLean, 1980). Similar in some ways to ethnographic field notes, teacher journals would capture the immediacy of my teaching and praxis. Moreover, because

my teacher journal would be a permanent, written record, it would provide me with a vehicle to revisit experiences over time and in relation to broader frames of reference.

Introduction to data collection in the setting

Since most of my doctoral program of studies took place at Rhode Island College, I had pursued and received approval from Rhode Island College's Committee on Use of Human Participants in Research (CHPR) to conduct the study. The CHPR insured that I had made plans to fairly protect the students I would be studying, that I would provide sufficient informed consent, and that the study would be conducted by adequate and appropriate methods. On the second day of the school year, I introduced my study to my new students, described their potential participation, and distributed the consent forms. All but two of ninety-nine students and their designated guardians returned the forms and granted me permission to incorporate them anonymously into the study.

It didn't take me long to begin to collect data. Teachers looked at me quizzically on Professional Development Days as my pen scribbled in my teacher journal. Several students paused without blinking for a few seconds when I made it known that, during our second week of classes together, they would be discussing the texts of their lives, and I would be videorecording their conversations. Students submitted formative as well as traditional summative assessments for my review. After only a few weeks, most students vied to speak into the digital audio recorder, and, later on, chose small group digital audio sessions more than any other alternative assessment option. While I was able to make some use of my pricey digital video recorder, many

students never truly became comfortable with this type of data collection. According to Heath (2005), the "sense of participation matters to the intensity of observation, willingness to make efforts, and openness to failure" (p. 352). Due to my students' resistance, I needed to rethink and refine when the digital video camera would provide data that no other device could and, so, I used it sparingly. The teacher journal became my preferred method of depicting students, their classroom experiences, and the larger school systems, and I accumulated hundreds of pages of teacher journal notes.

Outside the classroom, I downloaded and cataloged my audio and video files. I typed my teacher journal into dated and double spaced Word files. I tried to remember to check off student names to make sure I had artifacts from all, including those who had been absent. I added a new step to my former assessment process, which previously had been to respond to a student's submission, to enter a grade into a field in an electronic grade book, and to return assessments and responses to each student. During the research study, I transformed into Xerox Queen --- and became adept at fixing the Xerox machine--- due to my goal to have copies of all student artifacts. As I conducted my teacher routines, I analyzed the totality of daily experiences, reflected, and interpreted dialogic interactions around me. Building in time to take critical distance from the classroom invited me to assume interpretive perspectives through construction and reconstruction of data (Gilligan, 1977; Lesko, 2001; D. Miller, 2002; Tesch, 1990).

Preview of data analysis

Initially, I divided my research into three chronological phases. Phase I comprised late August through November. The beginning of the school year was a time when students moved from sociohistorical to more local models of identity in the English classroom (Wortham, 2006). Phase II comprised December through February. Students interacted with critical literacy pedagogy by reorganizing their own cultural knowledge and negotiating interpretations through academic and social discourse. Phase III comprised March until the end of the school year. Here, students' academic discourse, identities, and the youth-saturated public spheres collided. As a whole, each of the three phases of research was exploratory, and each unveiled discoveries. As teacher, narrator, and researcher, I observed the public high school world through the lens of culture. I watched students as they constructed and recontextualized shifts in the THS landscape through their individual and collective cultural experiences.

By the second chronological phase of my data collection, it occurred to me that I was collecting data that seemed to point to tensions between private and public spheres. Students seemed to pose as one person in school and as another person outside school. But, due to the amount of data I was collecting, I was not certain of my deductions[15]. I realized that I was collecting a lot of data, and many possible directions for analysis were emerging. I knew I needed to create additional layers of organization for my data, and my time as a full-time teacher restricted me from

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[15] I requested and was denied a sabbatical to pursue my doctoral studies, even though the teacher union contract included such a line item. The Assistant Superintendent, who would become the Superintendent in 2009 but who, during this study, was a spokesperson for the then-Superintendent, said she was supportive of my work but that fiscal constraints would not permit the funding for my request.

engaging in additional organization. Thus, with consent of the school principal and assistance from the school career guidance counselor, I advertised for a research assistant from the THS community. It made sense for me to hire someone from within, as no travel to the work site would be involved; the pay was minimum wage and would appeal almost exclusively to an entry-level worker; and, the skills required were limited. I ended up hiring a sophomore student, who consented to confidentiality. Her task was to alphabetize files according to student last name. She worked weekly through the end of the school year and again during the summer.

In the third phase, students conducted and presented their own research on an area of interest interconnected with the mandatory curriculum. Students published some of their multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural compositions on a blog, using pseudonyms. In this way, the students' audiences extended beyond me as sole reader, as other students or anyone with Internet access could follow along and comment, although I insisted that students use comment moderation. As is appropriate with research contexts as well as internet publication to insure confidentiality and anonymity, I asked students to name themselves via pseudonyms. Students and I collaborated so their non-de plumes were consistent with their almost exclusive European ancestry and their individual personalities. Many students chose their new names imaginatively and artistically, as if the opportunity created a chance to build separate student personas. The pseudonym list included "Debbie," "Casey," "BJ," "Arlene," "Mary," "Martin," "Abby," "Aubrey," "John," "Lucas," "Roger," "Donnie," and "Betty," among many others.

As the school year was coming to an end, I took small steps toward data analysis. I reorganized files of student data; categorized audio and video recordings; sent typed journal entries back to participants for data checking through focused questioning; and, examined co-occurring activities across journal notes, student artifacts, and audio and video recordings. Immediately after the school year ended, I began the work of coding, planning, and writing. I knew I needed to search for themes and holistic features so as to analyze repetition of sociocultural patterns in the public school. Tacitly, I remembered witnessing waves of tension in the classroom (whole group academic discourse, small group social discourse, student/ teacher academic and social discourse) and outside the classroom context (student social, adult social, adult academic). To move beyond memory, I conducted multiple readings of my teacher journal, student artifacts, still photos, audio files, and video files. I remembered that multiple readings render multiple meanings (Brown, 1987), so I returned to my typed teacher journal, re-read it again, and began to code constructs into categories. Codes like "academic," "accountability," "discipline," "career," "fear," "American Dream," "popular," "artistic," "alternative," "gender," "materialism," "identity," "family," "war," "sports," and "digital generation" emerged.

As I mined the data, the stories of students across rosters and months arose and flooded my consciousness. A multiplicity of voices and evidence led to a new sense of my awareness. I determined that three discursive sources were colliding and retracting like waves of energy. I titled the first source "Authority." This pulse was comprised of systems, structures, and rules that sought to reproduce middle class

behaviors. Within Authority was the omnipotent requirement to adapt to national

NCLB regulations as enacted by state and local government departments of education.

Authority was comprised of hierarchies of people and power who pointed students to

preparation for careers and to dominant ways of understanding U.S. culture.

The second discursive source was my "Critical" pedagogy and the ways in which

it manifest itself as a pervasive, meaning making entity. Critical was a coil that

transported non-mainstream, progressive vocabulary, ideas, and texts. The Critical

force began as a low energy wave: subtle, calibrated, and meticulously related to the

new form of energy it transported. Thus, while at the beginning, Critical looked like it

merely comprised new definitions in regard to classroom management, goals for

education, and acceptable topics for discussion, by the end of the school year, Critical

had become elastic, with a greater pulse of a fair, equitable, egalitarian and often

harmonious society. By creating dialogic discussions with the intent of understanding

oppression, Critical rode a high wave built on new definitions of social, educational,

and economic opportunities.   By the end of the school year, students became teachers,

and they chose the degree to which they would harness Critical amplitude.

The third discursive source was that of the "Student." The discourse of the

Student world was comprised of identity work through questions about gender, power,

pleasure, and present positioning in youth society. Students expressed worldviews on

their goals for the future, the politics of war, and a nostalgic childhood not so far past.

Student was the voice of the digital native (Prensky, 2006), alternately pulsing with

consciousness and ennui about privilege and individual cultural capital while

manipulating multiple technological gadgets into an equation of learning. Even when

curricular themes provided categories for youth activism against social injustices, their social identifications and academic discourses had deep interdependences and stymied Students' rising up.

As I came to initial clarity about the possibilities within my data, I began to feel that the data deserved to be organized into stories in the same way that lives of humans are storied. Yet, as an inexperienced researcher, I realized that I needed to know more how to approach narration in research, so I spent a good deal of reading about the narrative inquiry method over the summer after my data had been collected. I sought specific insights into narrative inquiry and story constellations. As a result, this dissertation reflects my acknowledgement of the place of teacher research and narrative inquiry within the realm of qualitative methodology.

Conclusion to methodology

I used qualitative data in this dissertation as more than just a technique for data collection. Teacher research allowed me to reflect on the meanings my students made of their personal literacies through the institutional setting in which those meanings were created. I observed behavior in a natural environment and in the context in which the behavior occurred. To some degree, then, my interest lay in the relationship *between* culture and social structure but also the ways in which individual youth biographies evolved *out of* culture and social structure in what I think of as sociology of youth. I sought to unveil the complexities of one school's culture through its texts, contexts, and recontextualizations.

I am an ethical researcher. While I do not intend to generalize that all my findings apply to all U.S. students and school districts, I do hope to suggest that the work described in this dissertation in its specific context has potential applicability and validity when recontextualized across other contexts. Contradictions around literacy definitions and practices will become evident in the findings sections of Chapter Four, as will be my determination to help students transcend modernist thinking about literacy so as to meet their own twenty-first century literacy needs.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Section one: School authority figures reproduced dominant U.S. discourses

In the previous chapter, methodology, I outlined my data collection process through my narrative inquiry as a teacher researcher. I described the path I took from an early personal interest in media literacy to my later view of the classroom as an ideological site that could more keenly prepare my students for their twenty-first century literacy needs. In this first of three data sections of Chapter Four, I introduce the THS context that framed and restricted my praxis and my students' literacy learning experiences. I argue that THS authority figures recontextualized public and political U.S. discourse as means to maintain and transmit principles of dominant U.S. culture and ideology. This context of teaching and learning is imperative to understand as overview to the two data sections that follow in Chapter Four. THS authority figures' recontextualizations were in opposition to my critical pedagogy, which interrogated the social construction of selfhood, the identification of ubiquitous power structures, the discourse around new ways of seeing and being, the goal to embrace "Others" and difference, and the commitment to humility. As will become apparent, I would need to find a pathway around THS authority figures' recontextualizations of dominant U.S. culture and ideology in order to create a classroom climate of social justice for all through multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural learning.

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THS authority figures' recontextualizations reproduced dominant culture and ideology for the following reasons: a) a national, conservative climate of standards and accountability created the contexts around and prescribed particular goals for U.S. public schools; b) in order to streamline support from the upper middle class constituents, it was necessary to advance commonly-held community definitions of "normal;" c) restricting information flow to faculty within a top-down delivery mechanism created particular definitions of what it meant to be a "good teacher;" d) subtexts of consumerism as a collective way of being infused additional funding while also reinforced a rarified climate of "privilege;" e) prevailing media messages of youth as a generation to be feared created a climate of "Othering" any non-conformist, non-middle class behaviors.

I support these claims via THS authority figures' specific and implicit cultural messages that were contained within their recontextualizations. School authority figures' texts (such as public speaking performances, full-length print texts, popular and media culture references) were recontextualizations, or texts that had extracted text, signs, or meaning from an original context and molded it into another context. School authority figures' recontextualizations contained messages that represented privileged lives as normal while, simultaneously, glossing over the rarified world of privilege that those texts implied (Bogad, 2002; P. Freire & Giroux, 1989; Giroux, 2000; Giroux, 2002, 2008b; Giroux & Simon, 1989; Howard, 2007; McIntosh, 1997; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998)**.** These texts were deeply symbolic: they evoked images of a dominant western life that was appealing to and which achieved enormous symbolic capital with the upper-middle class Taylor community. I borrow from

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Foucault's (1972) analysis of power to describe how THS authority figures

disseminated messages about ways of "being" at THS. Their recontextualizations

"controlled, selected, organized, and redistributed" (Foucault, 1972, p. 1) so as to

maintain public sphere impressions of safety and security, of excellence and rigor,

and, of achievement and standards, which soothed a privileged upper-middle class

community. Embedded in school systems, structures, and processes, the discourse

from school authority figures around and through texts was close to the dominant

culture (Bourdieu, 1977), and, so, the production of discourse from Taylor school

authority figures averted "its powers and its dangers" and evaded "its ponderous,

awesome materiality" (Foucault, 1972, p. 1). Recontextualizations were mental

models for faculty and the student population and were direct conduits of what it

meant to be Someone (Said, 1978) who possessed an appealing social identity in

Taylor. Someone in Taylor was privileged.

"Texts" in this chapter encompass written works, conversations, public speaking

performances, screen visuals, and webpages (Fairclough, 2003) and, as such, are

multimodal, or emerge across print, digital, audio, and visual modalities (Archer,

2006; Jewitt & Kress, 2003a; Kist, 2005; G. Kress, 2000; Walsh, 2006). "Normal" in

this chapter is a point of view in which members of one cultural group believe that all

members of other groups conform to comparable social standards. "Privileged" in this

chapter is defined as a person or community who a special advantage, immunity, or

benefit not enjoyed by all, or who has a right reserved exclusively by a group as

obtained through hereditary or conferred right. These three terms --- "texts,"

"normal," and "privileged" --- are anchors in the analysis that follows.

Taylor schools were like most other upper-middle class public schools that have existed over the last century in the United States, as they were structured with components of social Darwinism, capitalism, and business management (Apple, 1975; Apple, 2004; Bullen, et al., 2004; Honig, 2006b; E. Smith, 1998). The texts that the THS authority figures incorporated were rife with cross currents of embedded rituals, with the necessity of meeting mandates within NCLB legislation, with dispositions of privilege, and with reproduction of the structure of the distribution of cultural capital among classes (Bourdieu, 1977). Texts were central conduits for the THS authority figures' authority, which established "the form and content of values and purposes" and which outlined initiatives aimed at achieving the school's "own destiny" (Sergiovanni, 1996, p. 103). While THS authority figures had the capacity to create a climate where each student was a unique and celebrated individual, where dialogicality could flourish among all members of the THS community, where students were engaged with academic and real-life experiences as reciprocal components of a formal public school learning process, where community-based aesthetic and spiritual goals were as important as were traditional core academic standards, where teachers were essential elements of school decision-making, and, where Taylor youth were representative of an informed and reflective citizenry, THS authority figures, instead, wielded their authority through recontextualizations as culturally-accepted ways of behavior, learning, and being.

THS authority figures' recontextualizations of metaphors of dominant ideologies actually suppressed educational reform (Darling-Hammond, 2004) rather than created equity for all. Though embedded metaphors, Taylor school officials prepared students

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to follow rules (Caruthers, 2008) of dominant society rather than to engage in critical interrogation of the dominant structures in society that created and reinforced their privilege, which was among my goals as a social justice educator. As a result, I argue that the texts of the Taylor school officials conflicted with my attempts to interrogate structures of privilege through critical literacy pedagogy.

Reproduction through metaphors of the western world

The data that emerged for this chapter were interesting, in part, because they illuminated a newly hired high school principal who positioned herself within an upper-middle class community through particular texts. Her texts were recontextualizations that established her as the new principal amidst "changing social relations of power" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 9). I argue that the new principal at THS recontextualized discourse about school reform as means to move teachers and the community toward her particular vision of educational reform. I also argue that the new principal's vision of educational reform was little more than a recontextualization of traditional policies and practices and, so, perpetuated the Taylor status quo of privilege as normal.

After three years of an interim principal, numerous candidate interviews, disappointments in the search for a replacement, and copious local press coverage, the Taylor School Committee approved Pat Grayson as THS Principal. She assumed her responsibilities as the top building administrator in June, 2007. For many of us, the first opportunity to see Pat in her capacity as school leader was on August 29, 2007 when we, as teachers, participated in orientation activities called a Professional

Development Day. At 8 a.m., we convened as a full faculty in the cafeteria, which was set with over a hundred hard blue plastic chairs, angled in half-moon rows. We chatted, sometimes with familiarity, other times with courtesy, and, occasionally, with nervous tension in our voices. Our seats pointed toward a twenty-foot high wall splashed with larger-than-life student-composed popular culture cartoons in bright primary colors. The mural, which itself was a text, reminded us that students were the ultimate reason we were assembled. Its inscription read: "This mural was inspired by the modern painter Roy Lichtenstein, a pioneer in pop art. Like other pop artists, Lichtenstein parodied popular culture by using images drawn directly from it (in this case, comic art)." Rather than foreshadow a new cultural climate, the mural's alternative art actually stood as a text in stark contradiction to the vision of education reform that Pat was to divulge.

As will become evident, although Pat positioned herself as a voice of change, as a proponent of student-centered education, and as someone who embraced alternative approaches to traditional public education, Pat's leadership would lead to unfulfilled programs, dissatisfied students, and incomplete promises. She would remain in the principal's position only eighteen months and draw upon recontextualizations that reproduced dominant ways of being in education. Importantly, reproduction of dominant ideologies of U.S. public education would be important for Pat. She would be able to position herself as a leader who produced standardized testing results, and that leadership legacy would invite her to waves of notoriety and prestige and would allow her quick entry to a higher level of public school authority.

We quieted as Pat, dressed in a tan pants suit with a white blouse, moved behind the podium. She was Caucasian, about 40 years old, with bouncy dark blonde hair that framed her round face. She leaned forward as she spoke.[16] A cartoon in the mural --- a female Caucasian student with brown hair who was peering into a microscope --- framed Pat. Pat's public speaking performance was important, as it recontextualized leadership at THS by strategizing her educational reform objectives, by differentiating her administration from those that had preceded it, and by revealing opportunities for faculty to (re)position themselves within THS power structures that Pat would value. Yet she immediately recontextualized hegemonic society when, in her welcome, Pat publically recognized only heterosexual faculty marriages. How did Jackie --- a history teacher and musician who toured from Cambridge to Provincetown --- feel as a proud lesbian?

Pat's reproduction of dominant society continued when she introduced each of the new faculty members and spoke in patterns where her words "excited" and "passionate" became refrains around attitudes and dispositions. Pat's ubiquitous metaphor to describe the new faculty was that he/ she had "seen the light" by joining THS: he/ she left a Taylor middle school, another district, or industry, and now the new faculty members were situated to achieve the best possible career success ever. Pat's terms of "excited" and "passionate" were adjectives that implied that the new teachers were infused with positive energy, were invested in their career choice to (re)join the Taylor school district, and were relieved to be working at the upper middle class THS. Pat's phrase, "seen the light" had a distinctive religious connotation in that

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[16] Months later, we learned that Pat had started the school year with a broken foot.

the sensory perception of light plays a central role in spirituality. Vision and enlightenment were represented through the metaphor of "light" as opposed to its absence, or darkness. Thus, Pat called upon common western metaphors of good and evil/ knowledge and ignorance to define the faculty as a refined, select, and, by default, elite cultural community. Instead of re-envisioning the THS culture as a site of inclusivity through multicultural metaphorical recontextualizations, Pat actually validated the dominant Christian viewpoint as the only truth; she perpetuated existing ideological, epistemological, and political positions. How did Ms. Zimikand and Mr. Amirpour feel as two of the several faculty members who were not Christians?

Print recontextualizations and messages about social class

Couched within light banter --- "So, Mr. Ferenzia, I see that the social studies teachers told you that you had to wear a tie today," "We'll be having a raffle at each faculty meeting, and gas cards and Dunkin Donuts cards will be among the prizes," "Thanks to the coaches who've been here so much over the summer, getting the teams ready" --- Pat recontextualized mainstream full-length print texts as necessary mechanisms for delivery of high educational performance standards and corresponding accountability results. While Pat's public performance texts suggested high levels of empathy, compassion, and individualism, her explicit and sole use of print texts ----- *Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, *Breaking Ranks*, and others ----and their embedded messages about dominant middle class behaviors ushered students toward privileged access to dominant truths and consciousness. Print, privilege, and a single set of truths about normal ways of being refuted my critical

literacy praxis and my multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural student learning experiences as mechanisms for social justice.

> Pat: The new mission for our school will be personalizing learning for each high school student. Are we doing the best possible to prepare the students for the future? Students need to feel that they belong. So Drake. And Matthew. And Theresa. And Frank. And Gregg. *(Arms motioning)* Each AP[17] will teach portions of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens* (Covey, 1998) to the freshmen classes (August 27, 2007).

The Covey text is broken into seven habits that embrace personal responsibility, goal-setting, prioritizing, success for all, understanding through listening, collaboration, and renewal. One of the core explicit tenets in the Covey text is that there are two types of people in the world: the first type of people is the proactive, or those who take responsibility for their lives and who make things happen. The second type of people, according to Covey, is the reactive, or those who blame others and who are recipients of others' actions. According to Fairclough (2003), "Meaning-making depends upon not only what is explicit in a text but also what is implied" (p. 11). Covey's text has implicit discourse whose essence is interwoven with dominant U.S. ideology: individuals can achieve goals due to the meritocratic U.S., and youth can empower themselves once they accept dominant definitions of behaviors. Pat's recontextualizations through Covey were driven by her reflections about the manner in which public institutions must, to borrow from educational policy analyst Radin, "operate within a changing world" (Radin, 1997, p. 214). Pat also desired to make

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[17] **Assistant Principal**

clear to her staff how our work fit into her larger vision for the organization (Goleman, 2000). A national climate of neoliberalism --- with a focus on economic growth, a shared sense of community, and efficient educational practices modeled after business principles --- and neoconservativism – with emphasis on order, continuity, community morals, and limited federal funding (Edmondson, 2004) --- dominated and molded Pat's recontextualizations. This national climate of neoliberalism and neoconservativism constantly presented challenges to my social justice pedagogy due to its repeated media messages about a "liberal bias" that indoctrinated U.S. citizens into a left-wing ideology and discriminated against conservatives.

No matter how well-intentioned she may have been, by recontextualizing Covey, Pat denied the important abstract concept of social class behavior as a salient ingredient of western life. Pat correlated school behavior with life outcomes (Martinez, 2009), and yet social class is the single most significant predictor of a child's educational career (Goldthorpe & Jackson, 2008). Bourdieu's "habitus" (1977) includes the concept that social practices are a form of capital. The habitus at THS was a set of acquired patterns of thought, tastes, and behaviors which internalized cultural and objective social structures. Thus, while Pat implied that change was a wave ready to draw students together to a higher tide of efficiency through the Covey text, she was, actually, reinforcing what it meant to possess habitus so as to be a well-behaved upper middle class student and future participant in a capitalist economy. This contrasted with my social justice pedagogy in which each individual, regardless of socioeconomic class, deserves to live and learn within a society that celebrates each human and fosters opportunities for all.

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Metaphor of breaking away as recontextualization of hegemony

Although neoliberal and neoconservative frames of knowing rise from different arenas, each seeks to achieve global hegemony. This hegemony acts, according to critical educational theorist Apple (1975), "to preserve and maintain, through the process of schooling, existing social, cultural, political, economic, and structural arrangements in society." In the next data sample, Pat recontextualized a print text aimed at teachers that performed what historical educational researcher Cuban (1992, p. 233) describes as the "valuable social, political, symbolic, and economic" function of presenting ideological orientations and sustaining existing power relations.

> Pat: And you. Teachers will receive *Breaking Ranks II* (NASSP, 2004). During
>
> faculty meetings, we'll talk about different chapters. (27 August 2007)

Pat's use of the pronoun "you" directed her remarks specifically to us, the teachers in her audience. By adding in the "we" pronoun, she indicated that she intended to function as a colleague who would share in conversations about what it meant to be teacher. *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform* (NASSP, 2004) is a text framed around concerns that high school students tend to devalue their required academic studies as disconnected from learning in contexts outside school. *Breaking Ranks II* explains skills, habits, and convictions for success in U.S. culture and a global workplace. Reform measures outlined in the text include collaborative leadership among administrators and teachers; personalization of the high school experience for students; and, alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to standards.

Through discourse of "breaking," or emergence into new paradigms, and "ranks," or participation in collective yet possibly stagnant unity, Pat drew on metaphors where THS teachers would shift away from accepted pedagogical practices, would align themselves in transformational learning processes, and could then address the increased complexities of teaching and learning in the twenty-first century. At first glance, this might seem consistent with my own mission to bring in-school and out-of-school learning together in my classroom. However, according to critical theorists Lankshear and McLaren (1993, pp. xvii-xviii), the complex ideological work within Pat's recontextualization "reflected and promoted values, beliefs, assumptions, and practices" which shaped the way teacher life was to be conducted within the given social milieu of THS. Such a prescription for dominant decision-making power within the THS institution was oppositional to the shared power, collaboration, and dialogicality within my own critical praxis.

Moreover, while *Breaking Ranks II* (and other reform texts) focuses on student achievement and collaborative leadership, it also exhibits several problematic programmatic assumptions. The recommendations are primarily conceptual in design rather than operational. Costs for resources for implementation are not addressed, and the 2007-2008 Taylor Schools' budget was transitional at best and tenuous at worst, as would be revealed by the end-of-the-year fiscal report. Reforms in *Breaking ranks II* require teacher action before the reforms reach the students, and, yet, the basic decision-making and systemic learning structure under Pat's tenure at THS did not change (Smith, 1998). All academic classes continued to be assigned to academic tracked classrooms (Oakes, 2005). Core curriculum under Pat's tenure remained

nearly identical to previous years. Teaching that promoted success in standardized testing was emphasized. Thus, Pat's recontextualization through *Breaking Ranks II* negated my vision of literacy instruction whereby students would analyze various aspects of media communications, including key elements of the works themselves, the audience and production codes and practices, and how media texts are designed to influence audiences and reflect the perspectives of their creators. Through the ideology of conservative accountability embedded in Pat's recontextualizations, there would be few opportunities for THS teachers to become what educational policy analyst Odden (1991) calls "street level bureaucrats."

Superficial at best, Pat's recontextualizations were thin veils over what peace activist Solnit (2004) calls a "dark" present: Pat's public recontextualizations empowered her, excluded and disempowered others, and performed the function of self-promotion that is all too common in public and political discourse that displaces certain constituent groups in the service of power. Pat recontextualized education reform in ways that positioned her as a visionary, which would serve her well in the back story of her ambition and subsequent administrative promotion to an even more elite district. When Pat was hired, I thought that, perhaps, we, as a THS community, were to be immersed in and "transformed by things we could not have dreamed of" (Solnit, 2004, p. 2) in previous years. I yearned to see Pat as our new principal use recontextualizations to transcend the incongruities in contemporary public education reform; to change what it meant to be a THS teacher; to invite dialogicality; and, to consider social justice approaches to education. Pat had the capacity to create a THS culture where Everyone would be welcomed through reconceptualizations that invited

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new types of analysis. I was skeptical as to how a year of some students' study of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens* and faculty members' discussions[18] of *Breaking Ranks II* would invite distance from dominant codes within texts. How would these print texts assist us to deconstruct dominant assumptions about, constructions of, and orientations toward the world?

I also was concerned about the definitions of success within *Breaking Ranks II* as limited to U.S. middle class achievement toward the global workplace. To me, all forms of literacy are ideological, as they help students to form particular worldviews and value systems with specific consequences for people's well-being (L. Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). The literacy messages embedded in *Breaking Ranks II* retained models of what it meant to behave, believe, and live within structures consistent with dominant discourse that emerged from mainstream popular culture, news organizations, and political institutions. This seemed a disappointing subtext to Pat's discourse around educational reform.

Thus, Pat's textual discourse at the beginning of the school year contained a few gleams of hope for educational reform and school change that could lead to social justice for all, and, yet it also contained a murky undercurrent of reproduction of dominant U.S. ideologies. Pat's recontextualizations as reproductions of dominant contexts would rise up throughout the school year in ways that challenged my critical literacy praxis as I sought to help students interrogate constructs of "privilege" and "normal" in U.S. society through multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural texts.

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[18] **Pat had not secured any professional development monies to pay faculty to read the text, so she asked the faculty to read it on personal time. Ultimately, we discussed two chapters only.**

Reform without a pedagogy of collegiality

To assist Pat as she unveiled her primary agenda for the school year, the five APs took turns presenting Professional Development information. These public speaking performance texts were pounding waves of one-way communications that comprised three hours of information We heard about administrative procedures, roles of department heads and curriculum enhancement teachers, parking availability, opening day protocols, communications with families, the online grading program, Xeroxing, 504 reminders, duty assignments, skip lists, evacuation reminders, sick call lesson plans, student absence make-up policies, and confidentiality of student records. These public performance texts also helped to establish the culture of "normality" at THS. As this data sample will reveal, teachers were prohibited from questioning ideologies and practices that we might have considered oppressive, as school authority officials did not encourage liberatory collective and individual responses to the actual conditions of our own lives as teachers and individuals. Such an approach would have been consistent with critical pedagogy.

As a staff, we listened attentively to the speakers' public performance texts rather than interacted with them or each other, and we often jotted down notes.   While we as faculty had been welcomed with charismatic claims of our special qualifications, there were no mechanisms for us as 120+ individuals to create our own tertiary texts (Fiske, 1987) where we might exchange our cultural, class, and educational backgrounds and our philosophies about education. Due to the vacuum of opportunity for collegiality during this and other professional development seminars and faculty meetings, we as a

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THS faculty had to locate a culture of adult social learning outside spaces organized by THS authority figures. "Collegiality" is defined here as a relationship that embodies mutual learning and shifts the center of attention from authoritative disseminators of information-based texts to the participants and back again. Collegiality invites all persons involved to become members of a community of learners. To know the school culture, a teacher had to study THS adult behaviors and to listen keenly for cultural cues. At THS, adult interpersonal interactions were, primarily, conscious and voluntary exchanges: between classes, after school, during the twenty minute lunch period, in voluntary planning meetings after school, in mentor/ protégée communications, or on weekends with each other.

A discourse of collegiality would have created a critical environment in which real education reform might have been fostered. We could have established a cultural setting with waves of open and free exchanges of ideas. Through collegiality, we could have examined and valued our life experiences as sources of knowledge and embraced active learning and critical and creative thinking. Instead, we more closely resembled Shor's (1993) "empty vessels to be filled with facts, or sponges to be saturated with official information, or vacant bank accounts to be filled with deposits" (1993, p. 26). Recontextualizations of education as collegiality could have responded to shifting demographics that valued diversity; could have enriched joint decision-making and collective learning; and, could have transformed professional development at THS into something people did, not something done to people. THS authority figures had the capacity to use texts to represent the complexity of public education beyond dominant western models of education delivery, but they chose not

to do so. Top-down information dissemination recontextualized dominant ways of being a "good teacher" and became models for teachers for reproduction of top-down information dissemination to students.

Thus, instead of creating contexts of public education where all kinds of voices merged into dialogicality, THS authority figures modeled beliefs and practices that corresponded to a dominant institutional hierarchy according to the social structure of their public (Bourdieu, 1977). My critical literacy pedagogy stood in opposition to this approach, and, as will be unveiled in the second data section, my students and THS authority figures compared my social justice pedagogy to the false consciousness modeled by THS authority figures. Often, my calls to challenge power, domination, and the beliefs and practices that dominate were perceived as problematic.

Positioning through sports heroes, dress-up, and bling: The class ring assembly

In the third data sample of section one, THS authority figures signified through metaphors that consumerism was an implicit measurement of life success. Without any accompanying discourse around the consumerist cycle of acquisition or the gratification that drives people back to ever more frenetic acquisition, THS authority figures' metaphors of consumerism reproduced dominant structures in U.S. society and recontextualized an "Us versus Them" binary system contingent on socioeconomic class and structures of privilege.

Metaphors are circumstances where an individual uses one conceptual category, experience, or object to describe or define another conceptual category. In literature and in life, the essence of metaphor is observing and experiencing one thing in terms

of another. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) suggest that the metaphors through which

people conceptualize abstract concepts influence the way in which they understand

them. In public education, metaphors are representations of collective student identity.

Metaphors construct social features through which youth experience their own

identities and their relationship to other youth and adults. Metaphors of symbolic and

material conditions are significant contributors to youth positionings among peers.

In an upper middle class community like Taylor, the ability to consume specific

products and services aligned youth and their families to desired levels near the top

social hierarchical structures. Many of my students had the family financial capability

to afford an elite university tuition, a recent year car for the student, season ticket

access at the Boston Red Sox or the Celtics, private jazz/ violin/ ice skating/ gymnastic

lessons or clinics, trendy clothes from Abercrombie & Fitch, vacations to Disney or

the Caribbean, and seats at top music concerts at the nearby outdoor amphitheater.

Students possessed "unearned privilege" (McIntosh, 1988) and "capital" (Bourdieu,

1977). Dominant youth culture was, according to youth consumer critic Schor (2004,

p. 40), "constructed around consuming" to the point where connections to brands and

products signified which THS youth were insiders and which THS were outsiders.

Moreover, THS perpetuated "inequality and exclusion" (Schor, 2004, p. 47) through

systems that codified youth as consumers. THS student status was commensurate

with collaborations with others who held prestige through consumerism, and

consumerism offered THS youth the pathways to dominant systems and structures of

U.S. society. Indeed, consumerism as a metaphor of being was supported by THS

authority figures and anchors the analysis that follows in ways that directly challenged

my efforts at encouraging social justice in my classroom.

In late autumn, a din filled the lecture hall as over 350 sophomores entered,

waved to each other, yelled across the room, and located a seat next to a friend or two.

A bass boomed and punctuated the air in rhythmic pop music pattern. As the class

officers shuffled awkwardly on stage, a white screen, drawn down from the 30' high

ceiling, transitioned a series of slides: "dream," "believe," "achieve," "remember."

The class president: I'm Josh. I want each of you to buy a ring. Support our

class. Here's Mr. Ford.

Mr. Ford, a white male in his early thirties, wore a sunflower yellow long sleeved

shirt with collar and no tie. He held the microphone in his right hand, bounced his left

hand across the air, and engaged in a public performance text that promoted youth

consumerism.

Mr. Ford: Thanks, Josh. You guys can sit down. That would be cool. You get

your rings after Christmas. We give a pizza party so everybody can share

getting their rings together. When you graduate, there's always something

you're going to take with you. There's a lot you'll spend money on before

you graduate. Very few items represent your high school experience like a

class ring.

The class president, age 15, publicly embraced materialism as a means to

maintain his role and power[19], yet the positioning of the class officers as youth in

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[19] **Two years later, I would teach Josh as a senior. He told me that, after a discussion with
his family, he decided not to buy a high school class ring and, rather, to await graduation from
college for such a purpose. He also expressed reluctance to make the decision not to purchase a**

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charge of the fundraiser was a façade. Mr. Ford quickly substituted himself as

information disseminator and chose an affirmative imperative verb tense --- "you get

your rings" --- to suggest that everyone present would participate in the process of

purchasing a class ring. Purchasing was implied. Through the simile of "few items

represent your high school experience like a class ring," the salesman embodied ideals

of the American Dream through metaphors of individual success and egalitarianism.

He also connected a quintessential favorite adolescent food --- "We give a pizza party"

--- as a persuasive means to build anticipation toward the moment of ring acquisition.

What sophomore would want to miss that day of appropriate consumerist milestone

and feast?

> Mr. Ford: If you're here in New England, you're pretty lucky. You have the
>
> Patriots, Celtics, and Red Sox. We've worked with the Patriots for all three
>
> of their championship rings and the Red Sox with their one ring[20]. Of
>
> course, Tom Brady has a few more diamonds in his ring than you will.

Mr. Ford connected the geographic vicinity of Taylor to area professional sports

teams. Sports heroes are metaphors of success and play an important role in social

construction of national identity. By naming Tom Brady (quarterback for the New

England Patriots) and his rings, the salesman implied that parallels existed between the

class ring and youth potential for later life success. Media sports heroes offer a key

site for confirmation of particular social memories through images and narratives.

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class ring as a sophomore, as he had attempted in his role as class leader to persuade his classmates to do so. (September 7, 2009).

[20] This assembly took place before the Red Sox went on to win their second World Series Championship in late autumn, 2007.

Through purchase of class rings, students were one step closer to their own future heroic glory.

> Mr. Ford: The Signature Collection. You can probably tell these are more popular with the girls. They want to dress up and still connect with the class.

In the same way that Fiske (1987) suggests that texts leak into each other and demand that they be read together, Mr. Ford's public performance text linked one design of class ring to dominant definitions of the female gender. He switched from the familiar pronoun form of "you" to "they," thus directing his remarks to the males --- "you" ---as primary audience and to the females --- "they --- as more distant or secondary audience. Mr. Ford's pronoun selection represented what Fairclough (2003) calls social relations that vary according to dimensions of "power" and "solidarity," or social hierarchy and social distance. In this case, males were represented as dominant to females within dominant structures of consumerism.

> Mr. Ford: All your wallets tell a different story about your choices for a class ring. The Varsity Collection is popular with some students who like the bigness and bling. If you wanted to add a little more bling to your ring, you can add diamonds.

Explicitly noting that some students must sort through their "wallets" to narrow "choices for a class ring," the salesman acknowledged that youth today belong to different social strata and have families with varying economic buying power. With the former statement, I thought Mr. Ford was helping students with less economic capital to feel pride in their modest ring through its intrinsic value and symbolic power. In the latter statement, however, he repeated the word "bling" twice (including

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once in rhyme with "ring"), which is a slang term that originated in the hip hop music culture and refers to flashy or elaborate jewelry and ornamented accessories. Thus, with a quick reversal, the salesman incorporated discourse of social class division through youth culture to call upon an "Us versus Them" binary system. With the opportunity to infuse language of fairness and acceptance of difference, the salesman, instead, implied that students whose families possessed the greatest economic capital should visibly demonstrate it through their class ring selection. Youth across socioeconomic statuses tend to share television texts like MTV and VH1 where music celebrities flaunt in dramatic fashion their "bling." Mr. Ford incorporated the term "bling" into his public performance text as a means to Other lower middle class students at THS --- a minority --- within contexts of youth consumerism.

> Mr. Ford: For an additional $19.95 at the time of purchase, if the ring is lost or stolen, the ring will be replaced.

To protect themselves from threats of theft, students learned that additional money would insure their original purchase and degree of complete satisfaction. Using his role as what mass media analyst Glassner (1999, p. 208) calls a "wannabe expert," Mr. Ford drew upon a "trick of the fearmonger's trade" to imply that an incident of theft would be probable. He tapped into a U.S. culture of fear permeated through disproportionate media messages about terror. Mr. Ford's own career stability relied on tapping into "moral insecurities" by supplying his audience of youth with "symbolic substitutes" (p. xxviii). Mr. Ford seemed keenly aware that sensationalist media stories of fear fed youth in ways that enhanced their consumerism.

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Appropriated via the visible, unifying symbol of one's high school class and culture, consumerism provided THS youth with a metaphor for belonging. A ring is a circle with no beginning and no end. Buying a class ring was a generational Taylor tradition which united students to each other as a unique community. The class ring would do more than simply create community connections: it would solidify a place for each student within a dominant set of definitions of gender and class. I argue that many other experiences outside the consumer realm actually represent one's high school years, such as meeting new people, hearing voices that express discourse around different world views, or developing intimacy with another human. None of these other rites of passage, however, is material-based.

Consumerism, moreover, when situated as a means to protect a vulnerable self, sheltered THS youth from the U.S. reality of increasing economic downturns and unemployment nearing Great Depression numbers. Economic shifts would soon dramatically impose "devastating costs on society and on those without a job or unable to find full-time work" (J. Miller, 2009). Paradoxes inherent in a culture of consumerism masked structures that perpetuated inequality and poverty in the U.S. more than any industrialized nation (Howard, 2007), and THS authority figures endorsed such inequities with the school ring assembly, Mr. Ford's discourse, and the implied divisions within youth as consumers. Market capitalism promoted stratification of resources and social and cultural practices that reflected dominant cultural patterns. THS upper middle class public education was a marketplace and a site of disjuncture and contradiction (Saltmarsh, 2007), in which the privileges of school consumption became a complex interplay of school, media, identity, texts,

contexts, and recontextualizations. THS authority figures produced a range of cultural and institutional practices duplicating and reinforcing the stratification of dominant U.S. society. Consumerism within THS promoted the purchase of class rings with a subtext of consumerism and a collective identity of being "privileged." This set a context that made education around critical literacy difficult and laden with tensions, as will be outlined in the second data section of this chapter.

Dogs' teeth, administrative lockdown, and a climate of youth mistrust

In this fourth example of data section one, I extend the argument around a consumerist promotion of youth as a pathway to privilege. Tensions arising from and responding to codes of privilege also arose in direct ways at THS that would point to youth as estranged from accepted adult behaviors. A cultural climate existed at THS in which youth were more than simply carefree or apathetic: youth were to be feared, and the Taylor community had to be protected from its own youth. Fear of youth --- whether blamed on media entertainment, new communication technologies, the information age, or other sources --- is founded on the notion that contemporary youth are different from previous generations. Selling safety from youth to parents and guardians has also been a driving consumerist force, as home and school security systems, cellphones, and video surveillance are increasingly sold to schools on the premise that youth are not to be trusted. I argue that, because power lies not in individuals but through people as it circulates through social relationships (Foucault, 1972), THS authority figures' public performance texts recontextualized youth in hierarchies of power through labeling youth as corrupt and trustworthy. This kind of

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recontextualization that promotes adversarial relationships with youth sits in direct conflict to my social justice pedagogy.

On time for my duty assignment as substitute librarian, I settled in for my responsibilities. I would monitor students as they signed in, answer the library phone, and supervise the students as they used the computers and hung out in the 120' x 40' room. I thought it was a great duty assignment. Within a few minutes, Marlene and Lillian, two other faculty teachers, and one student arrived. I welcomed the quiet atmosphere, logged into the front desk computer, began lesson planning, and looked up periodically to assess the goings-on.

"This is a lockdown. This is a lockdown. This is a lockdown."

The warning litany repeated over the school-wide loudspeakers. Bands of lights flashed in sickening waves inside the library and outside in the main hallway. My body lurched in reaction.

"Oh, shit," I exclaimed aloud. *Where are the keys?* In a lockdown, I needed to secure all the doors. Marlene rose from her computer and darted through the library's labyrinth of rooms, shutting doors. I pushed aside stacks of papers, rustled through drawers, poked under desktops, peered into private cabinets, and reached around printers. *Where are the keys?*   Marlene found the bank of circuit breakers and attempted to shut down lights, with partial success. Lillian appeared from a far room within the library complex, nestling an armful of cognitive testing paperwork.

A blur of motion caught my eye, and I turned to peer through the glass wall of windows at the library entrance. Two armed police officers, Theresa[21], and a German shepherd dog on a taut leash hurried down the main hall. Noticing me through the window, the mottled dog yanked away from its handler and leaped into the glass library door with teeth bared, saliva dripping, and claws scraping. Instinctively, I tripped backward into the counter where the sign, "Return books here" rested. The handler pulled the tense dog back into formation, and the SWAT team entourage maneuvered down the hall and out of sight.

"This is an administrative lockdown," the announcement rang and echoed throughout the building again. "Do not leave your room. You may return to regular class work. Again: do not leave the classroom." The single student who had arrived to use the library prior to the lockdown approached me. "I'm supposed to go back to class," she announced to me. Her chocolate eyes were wide and unblinking.

"Hi. I'm Ms. Fortuna." I extended my hand to her. "You have to stay where you are --- here, in the library --- in a lockdown. I'll be sure to tell your teacher when it's all over that you were with me. Okay? You and me? We're gonna be pals 'til this is over. Do you have anything to do?"

She shook her head. I suggested a *Rolling Stone* magazine and ushered her to a section of the library away from windows and doors, per protocol. Marlene, Lillian, and I conferred. "We can use the computers. We can do whatever we were doing," Marlene insisted. And, so, with my head turned constantly out to the hallway, I tried to write lesson plans. Mostly, I also scanned the school e-mail, my AOL e-mail, and

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[21] One of four APs

local newspaper websites for information that might inform me as to what was happening at THS. I could find no media information on the lockdown.

As the period was about to end, a final announcement bellowed: "The lockdown is over. You may pass to the next class. The lockdown is over."

According to critical theorist Giroux (2008b), school resource officers, who are armed and unarmed enforcement officials charged with implementing safety and security measures in schools, "are one of the fastest-growing segments of law enforcement in the United States" (p. 85). THS had two school resource officers on site. We usually passed them in the cafeteria, hallways, and in the administrative offices, but today we had been witness to their militarization as a major component of the public sphere of schooling (Giroux, 2008b).

U.S. public school education had morphed into an authoritarian discourse following the aftermath of the attack on the World Trade Towers on September 11, 2001. Caught in a wave of pervasive terror, THS youth became represented in broader contexts of politics and power. Forty-eight percent of television news texts about youth were connected to crime or violence, and forty percent of newspaper news texts made the same connection (Dorfman & Schiraldi, 2001). "Signs of identity only come to have meaning in context," according to identity theorist Wortham (2006, p. 36). The context of surveillance events in U.S. public schools created authoritarian cultures of paranoia and distrust that have affected U.S. youth identity formation. Foucault (1980) calls discourse around stigmatization like this "the form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning" (p. 114). Such power when wielded against youth has reverberating waves of consequences.

I concur with Giroux (2008b) that the greatest threat to education rises from a society that refuses to view youth as a social investment. Through legal and social mandates, public education at THS was reduced to a culture of reaction, enforcement, and regulation. THS was immersed in a cultural climate in which fear drove policy, and youth were seen as possible enemies to be investigated. This had serious implications on the teaching and learning activities that we, as teachers, were able to conduct, and the consequences for my social justice pedagogy, which embraced youth voices as equivalent to my own, were even greater.

After school that day, I waited with other faculty members in the cafeteria, which smelled lightly of trash barrels and remains of discarded food. Pat, the high school principal, sat atop a cafeteria table that was ringed by chairs and other round tables. We were in attendance at an "optional faculty meeting." I looked around the room, still in a relative daze as I recounted the day's events. For the first time in my dozen-year career in Taylor, we had an administrative lockdown. Two-dozen police officers and about a half dozen dogs had patrolled the building. A department director had escorted police representatives to designated wings of the building. Sheila, our coiffured, oldest, and diminutive English department head, aged 50-something, led a team of police and dogs into our B House wing. The dogs had sniffed lockers, cars, and, after students stepped into the hallways, random classrooms with their handlers by their sides.

Pat: Let's start with the background of where it began. We had an administrative
       one this summer, so that was a good thing to practice. Where the concept of
       canines came up --- and I'll admit they're controversial. My first PCC

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meeting, a parent asked me flat out, 'What are you doing about the drug

problem at the high school?' There is a problem here. We've already

suspected some students in first term for drugs and alcohol. I am not stupid to

think that we're going to stop drugs and alcohol. No, you didn't know about

it. It's got to be of a surprise nature. We did get some hits. We arrested one

student for cocaine in the car. I talked to the mother: she's distraught,

horrified (October 26, 2007).

When had public education become a culture of reliance on zero-tolerance laws?

When had we as teachers become subordinated to roles as adjuncts of the local police

department? To what degree was THS "responsible for largely apprehending,

punishing, and turning students over to the police" (Giroux, 2008, p. 94)? A war on

youth in contemporary public education society was now evident in lock-down drills.

"Educators now turn over their responsibility for school safety to the new security

culture, and minor infractions once handled by teachers are now handled by the

police" (p. 85). When did I, as a conscientious and trained adult, become incapable of

discerning dangerous situations in my classroom? How did recent laws supersede my

local knowledge and designate authority figures to substitute their deliberation and

judgment in place of my own?

Pat's public performance text recontextualized THS youth within an epidemic of

drug use. My observations of classroom situations at THS suggested that, as is

indicative of U.S. society (Dorfman & Schiraldi, 2001), a fraction of students

transported illegal substances to school. However, by bringing law enforcement into

the physical building, the illusion of youth as a mass of rule-breakers and risk-takers

permeated THS. One teacher expressed that he felt the lockdown "sent a message to the students." Another teacher said that, while he was in agreement with the search, he felt that the use of the term "lockdown" was confusing. "Students might run to their lockers to get drugs and get sprayed by bullets from a gunman," he explained. She agreed to discuss it with the SWAT.

According to Foucault (1972), "Every educational system is a political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and the powers it carries with it" (p. 2). Knowledge and power at THS had changed over decades from what Giroux (2008b) calls a "vocabulary that focused on children's current and future social importance" to reconceptualization of youth as law breakers and dangerous citizens. Instead of "recognition that how it educated youth was connected to the democratic future it hoped for and its claim as an important public sphere" (p. 89), THS had become an institution "based on fear, surveillance, and control rather than with a culture of shared responsibility" (p. 3). Militarization at THS was more important than social justice. Recontextualizations as social constructions --- which are stereotypes created about particular groups--- of THS youth as objects of fear were dependent, in part, on the extent to which others would "approve or disapprove of the policy's being directed toward a particular target," according to educational policy analysts Ingram & Schneider (1991, p. 335). THS youth were socially constructed as targets of possible criminal behaviors. Pat, the APs, department directors, and the SWAT identified, described, and relied upon dominant definitions of youth so as to influence the social construction of youth with

the larger Taylor community and school committee. Decrying youth contradicted my critical praxis in which students and teachers were co-learners about the world.

> Pat: The school committee found out at the same time you did. Some are on board, some are not (October 26, 2007).

> Taylor School Committee Minutes: Chief Woodrow, along with Officers Bill Chuner and Alvin Master discussed their preparedness for a school lockdown. All schools in the district have had practice lockdowns, and the police reported that they went very well ("Lockdown Drills," February 12, 2008).

In the months after the search for drugs, the Taylor town government reviewed, approved of, and published the school lockdown drill procedures. Symbolic tools of safety and security such as the lockdown drill procedures relieved the Taylor community of greater goals such as addressing, in a bottom-to-top approach, actual possible areas of student dissatisfaction. The consequence of such a militarized social order, according to Giroux (2008), is the problem "of losing a generation of young people to a system of increasing intolerance and moral indifference" (p. 101). How could my critical literacy pedagogy reach these students who had been targeted as enemies of the public? How could I open students' points of view to that of oppressed persons when the students, too, were objectified persons within structures that perpetuated dominant ideologies about youth and youth behavior? It is in this very context that my study of critical literacy took place.

Conclusion to data section one: How did THS school authority figures

recontextualize so as perpetuate dominant ideologies?

In this first data section of chapter four, I discussed how THS authority figures recontextualized educational reform in ways that explicitly perpetuated dominant ideologies in U.S. society. On one hand, THS authority figures were caring adults who sought only the best for the student population they led. But, even as they created and implemented policies to assure a safe and secure school learning climate, THS authority figures attempted to mold youth's worldviews so that a common vocabulary of messages represented upper middle class, privileged lives as normal. Moreover, recontextualizations glossed over the rarified world of privilege and the reproduction of dominant ideologies in society.

Texts that advanced definitions of "normal" and "privileged" supported the Taylor upper middle class school and community culture. Pat, as a new school authority figure, unveiled her vision of educational reform, but her changes were so limited that they served to reinforce the pre-existing dominant definitions of public school education and primarily promoted her own career. Her vision was so narrow that it prohibited pedagogy of collegiality that might have introduced other definitions of a normal life. THS authority figures embraced consumerism as a collective mechanism of privilege and upper class status. A salesman's public performance text leaked into other texts about sports heroes, goal acquisition, and a pervasive U.S. culture of fear. Thus, class ring consumption was an opportunity for students to perform constructions of a privileged identity. The aesthetic effect of the salesman's

multilayered recontextualizations soothed and circumvented value assumptions about consumerism as paths to success.

THS authority figures *were* designated to educate in a time of national mandates through NCLB and heightened national security measures. Components of those responsibilities required school authority figures to ascertain when obstacles to learning or threats to youth and adults might occur. But masked within those mandates was a subtext of a privileged life as a political life with associated values of individualism and subservience to power and dominant authority. School authority figures held perceptual barriers that distorted definitions of youth and rejected youth behaviors that challenged dominant definitions of middle class life. Moreover, seeking out possible illegal drugs and paraphernalia on the THS school grounds constituted an overt act of political and social significance in which the "backgrounding" of youth dissatisfaction with privileged life was a matter of "delicacy and euphemism" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 149). Until youth rejected non-conformist behaviors and embraced a "normal" life as privileged, youth were Othered through recontextualizations at THS.

Because youth were segregated as a force to be feared and from which adults needed protections, THS youth capacity toward agentive action was subordinated to the affects that youth actions might have on others. By never naming particular youth as individuals, school authority officials dehumanized all youth at THS, representing them as elements of a social organizational structure of youth rather than as individuals with particular identities, motivations, and worldviews.

For the students in my critical literacy classroom, then, learning was a subset of school authority texts around being "normal" and "privileged." "Normal" and "privileged" are social categories that carry tremendous weight of identity constructions in this context, and here I am suggesting that being a youth at THS was defined by more than just a social space for learning. As I noted in the introductory chapter, Taylor was a setting in transition, and the borderlands of working class life and its accompanying struggles were fresh in many Taylor citizens' memories. In the next data section of chapter four, I will turn to my critical literacy classroom to see how THS youth approached social justice pedagogy against a larger school background where authoritarian texts reproduced dominant ideologies.

Section two: Tensions around critical literacy

In the first section of my data analysis, I argued that THS authority figures recontextualized the overarching school culture so as to reproduce dominant ideologies of U.S. society and to achieve the highest possible symbolic capital within an upper middle class community. In this second section of data analysis, I argue that, while messages of social justice and equity were central to my praxis, the youth in this study had prior literacy educational experiences that conflicted with my critical literacy praxis. Students recontextualized their worlds by extracting text, signs, or meaning from an original context of their previous public education experiences and molding it into the context of the critical literacy classroom. As a result, students sometimes reacted negatively to multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural literacy

learning experiences that were founded within a social justice framework because the students felt these experiences were foreign, confusing, and contradictory.

Resistance occurred for two central reasons: a) institutionalized academic tracking systems recontextualized messages of what literacy instruction should comprise; of correlations between track, grades, and self-worth; and, of the necessity of youth to cloak their full repertoire of literacy practices rather than to find voice and reveal how literacy practices migrate across settings, and, b) my critical literacy praxis pushed against classroom boundaries of literacy practices and opened up discrepancies among popular culture, high canonical, historical, social, and personal definitions of gender and youth sexuality.

I support these arguments in the following ways. First, high tracked students resisted messages about new literacy practices. Their upper-middle class socioeconomic status positioned them within a literacy education that almost exclusively valued print and the high western canon. Higher tracked students tended to resent hearing worldviews about ways that texts, contexts, and recontextualizations altered access to economic, cultural, and symbolic capital. Moreover, lower-tracked students often questioned their own literacy capabilities and possibilities to perform at higher thinking levels due to institutionally-driven negative self-images.

Second, and, in large part, because students' favorite popular and media culture texts transmitted messages of a patriarchal society and gender roles where males are dominant and females are subordinate, students had come to view media representations of gender as "normal." When I required students to interpret textual representations of gender and to play gender definitions forward to contemporary

society, most students insisted that gender distinctions were part of history and that contemporary females and males in U.S. society possessed equal opportunities. Thus, students rebelled against my social justice praxis when I challenged classical views and qualities of the "feminine" as compassionate, maternal, nurturer, receptive, understanding, patient, and renewing (Noddings, 1985).

Throughout, I argue that my critical literacy praxis placed me in tenuous positions that included personal discomfort, collegial questioning, and administrative oversight. These waves of concern ranged from embarrassment when I didn't share students' media texts or youth literacy practices, to fear of censure by THS authority figures or the community when I required my students to interrogate overarching social justice themes that did not align with community cultural ways of knowing the world. As a result, my critical literacy praxis was necessarily in conflict with the worldviews of youth whose lives were defined by dominant structures of U.S. society and its correlating institution of public education.

Upper-level tracking as a structural barriers to critical literacy

Students' resistance to critical literacy praxis was a result of the THS structural divisions of tracking and traditional definitions of what literacy looked like in the higher tracks. At THS, families with upper middle class socio-economic status adhered to a what educational equity activist Oakes (2005, p. 300) calls a "moral platform of merit." Families believed their children were deserving of enhanced school opportunities, lobbied the school district for individual consideration, and gained their children's admission to upper track classes even when students' past

performance would not ordinarily qualify them. In the community of Taylor, where privileged families controlled community systems of power, tracking appeared to be individualistic when it was, actually, founded on an "intergenerational transfer of social, economic, and political status" (p. 248). Tracking at THS assigned individual youths the labels of prestige and status that implied superior academic prowess. However, due to my completely different expectations for students to demonstrate literacy achievements through "reading the word and the world" (P. Freire & Macedo, 1987), upper tracked students frequently resisted critical literacy praxis.

As I collected data, youth's recontextualizations took shape, vibrated, gained speed, and sometimes collapsed as they interpreted their former reliable representations of reality, community culture, and academic literacy in contrast to the social justice worldviews which I infused into the classroom. What seemed to me to be innocuous learning events created student uncertainty. For example, seniors enjoyed reading *Motel of the Mysteries* (Macauley, 1979) and observing the misinterpretations of culture by the protagonist. However, they were subdued when I asked them to explain the metaphorical, social, and cultural significances of the text. When sophomores settled in to watch the pilot episode of the television sitcom, *Cheers* (Pollack, 2003), they were enthusiastic; they were reluctant afterward, however, to describe how the characters reflected contemporary life. When seniors watched a segment from the *Providence Poetry Slam 2007*, they clapped and cheered; many students, though, slouched over their desks during their own poetry slam composition process. When sophomores debated which candidate for the U.S. presidency was the best, they were animated. They were recalcitrant later when they

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were required to research and define the platforms of their favorite candidates and write letters to those candidates with questions and commentary about candidate positioning on controversial issues. In these moments, I had to constantly assess and reassess students' recontextualizations of messages within texts. Our various waves of meaning crashed into each other and formed constant crests on which we all were precariously balanced due to critical literacy pedagogy.

My students were a series of low currents, pulsing waves, crescendos, and rippling tides. Marty --- round-faced, blonde, with sparkling blue eyes and a bubbling enthusiasm --- volunteered too frequently in large group discourse.[22] "I'm good in English," he confided to me, "but not so much so in math and science." It was a dilemma as to how to support Marty's energy but also to infuse other student voices into the mix and to create a context of me as facilitator in a way that would offer a forum for all of us to be co-learners (P. Freire, 1992; P. Freire & Macedo, 1987). Lana and Arlene volunteered to participate only when I called on them. Garth and Benny missed many homework assignments and generally giggled when I asked them to contribute to the classroom discourse. Audrey --- with her brown disheveled pixie hair and deep piercing eyes --- and Brandy --- about five feet tall and 165 pounds, with strawberry curly hair and tortoise shell plastic glasses --- were social Outsiders who, in the cafeteria at lunch, sat at a socially stigmatized table with other Outsiders away from the revered tables adjacent to the windows. The field hockey members --- Mary,

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[22] **I remembered two conferences about Marty when I had previously been his teacher in eighth grade. In the first, the principal had admonished another teacher in front of the teaching team about calling on Marty too much during class discussions. In the second, I remember the Mom Conference [she and Dad were divorced]. I felt quite fortunate during Marty's senior year that he presented a Self in the classroom that was free of any lingering animosity over the plagiarism incident.**

Sheila, Eden, and Kerry --- chatted as a running undercurrent during whole class discourse and were excused periodically by THS authority figures to discuss an issue with a coach. Roger and Mike often chose to sit with the field hockey teammates, linking side conversations to laughter in patterns of disinterest, double-tasking, complacency, and ennui.

Over half the students had a form of status, whether it arose from familial legacy or acclaim within ritualistic structures of success at THS. As the year progressed, I also learned that students with status extended their influence from collaborations with other persons of position and power within dominant institutions at THS. The athletic persona of being on one or more varsity sports teams, the family financial capability to afford expensive luxuries, or the matter-of-fact nature of having private lessons: students possessed "unearned privilege" (McIntosh, 1988) and "cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1977). Students with status attempted to recontextualize my authority as public school teacher by exerting their own power in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. As they moved in waves of positioning and performance, their desire to engage with social justice learning events flowed and ebbed. Sometimes they pulsed forward in motions that included eager hands raised, cheery façades during our shared side conversations, and occasional intrigued inquiries about learning events. Unfortunately, and all too often, the students with status also hunched forward with their heads resting on a stack of books, or stared without blinking out the window, or reluctantly and with dramatic flair engaged in the academic discourse of the moment.

The students with less status reacted as if they were the ubiquitous New England white-tailed deer, caught in the descending darkness, when I suggested that they share

their wealth of knowledge. Their faces held panicked expressions. Their contributions to academic discourse were comprised of faltering sentences and ideas that, as shared academic discourse, in no way represented the complexity and nuance indicative of their private academic writing to me as audience.

But I already know how to read! Structural barriers to critical literacy

In this first data sample of the second section, as an example of ways that new approaches to learning through multimodal, multiliterate, and/or transcultural textual analysis caused waves of tension, I assigned to the senior honors students the task of reading Hall's *Encoding and Decoding* and answering questions about the text. This was a pre-assessment tool which I explained to the seniors would allow me insights into each individual student's ability to decode scholarly research, which would be imperative later on during their own multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural compositions.

Arlene called me over. She wore a white t-shirt; an 18" two-roped necklace of bronze lines and light blue plastic beads; a white headband, and brown plastic glasses.

"What is the purpose of this?" she interrogated me, even though I had already outlined the learning event's purpose. Through her question, Arlene divulged her recognition of a hidden curriculum of formal schooling (Sambell & MacDowell, 1998) in which, from the student viewpoint, assessment and teaching procedures actually involved memorizing facts and theories to achieve success. Her eyes looked sideways at Catherine, and Arlene had a thin grin on her face. Her face rotated around the room so she could harness the attention of other students.

"It's a scholarly/ academic article pre-assessment," I repeated. "Do you have any other questions?" My tone was firm. I acknowledged to myself that this G period class of twenty-eight youth might become an "incessant struggle" (P. Freire, 1992, p. 33) and that I had to establish my pedagogical authority (Buckingham, 2003) with this strong, vibrant, and possibly confrontational mix of varsity athletes, club presidents, lead actors, accomplished musicians, and high GPA students.

"So, it's, um," she paused, tilting her chin and looking me directly in the eyes. "It's for reading comprehension?"

"Yes, in part," I answered. Arlene studied me briefly. Mary coughed in a long sound that filled the otherwise quiet room of pens scratching on paper. I leaned behind Mary on the radiator in what was now a second attempt to maintain classroom management. Carissa signed in a series of deep and long patterns. Sheila turned the page over by raising her arm in an arc over her shoulder, toward the ceiling, and back at her desk.

Steph: So, if we don't get it, it won't affect our grade?

Garth: *(giggled)*

Roger: It's kinda hypocritical. He's talking about communication but he's not
    giving both sides of the situation.

Roger was dually attempting to align himself with Arlene and her rising youth rebellion as well as to draw out my interpretations so he could reproduce my ideas and gain early success in my class. I reminded Roger that we would have a full class conversation after all students had completed their independent deconstructions. I intentionally moved to another physical place in the classroom.

Arlene, Roger, and the other students resisted the learning event for a variety of reasons. These upper tracked seniors came to class with prior knowledge, preconceptions, and expectations about what textual analysis in the context of literacy instruction should be. Possessing little familiarity with pre-assessments, which would point to individual strengths and opportunities for growth, students would have preferred it if I had given a lecture about the essential concepts within the Hall text and then followed up with a test comprised of some multiple choice questions and a short essay to demonstrate their comprehension. Those tertiary texts would have reproduced my secondary teacher-as-authority text but would not have demanded students' interpretation and original thought. As students labeled "good" readers by the institutionalized tracking at THS, these seniors knew what was valued in Taylor community schools and, moreover, often had home literacy practices that imitated the schools' literacy practices.

Additionally, rather than serving as a mere pre-assessment of each student's ability to decode academic texts, the learning event contained ideas that contradicted the accepted texts of what literacy public education at THS should be. In the assigned article, British sociologist Stuart Hall (2003a) proposes a model of mass communication that calls for active interpretation within relevant codes. He rejects textual determinism, a stance that the form and content of a text determines how it is decoded. Hall discusses discourse as knowledge that is produced in relations to social conditions. He argues that certain codes of early language learning are so widely disseminated that they appear natural and universal but are actually culture-specific. Media messages, he continues, are embedded with dominant cultural codes that the

receiver can reconceptualize, if he or she so desires, within some alternative framework of reference to join a "struggle in discourse" (p. 517). But my seniors had little to no familiarity with the jargon of decoding, encoding, or codes. They were accustomed to a literacy learning environment in which they would encounter, organize, and integrate new material into an already-developed knowledge base, and they found my new expectations vague, varying, or unstated (Levine, 2008). Hall argues that reading is a cultural practice that contains layers of codes that can reproduce dominant ways of being in society. The seniors' knowledge of the reading process was prefaced by a series of standards-based tests that relied on textual determinism. By incorporating Hall's text as a measure of prior student literacy learning, I was actually implying that these seniors had not become fully developed literate learners because they did not recognize codes, among other semiotic textual features.

Thus, in contrast of my benign expectations to conduct a pre-assessment with a text I valued about textual representations and messages, my students experienced academic pressure. They seemed to realize that the pre-assessment signaled what would evolve into a year of multimodal, multiliterate, transcultural learning experiences. No longer would acquisition of facts and information in the lower levels of Bloom's educational objectives (1956) suffice. No longer could my students predict how to behave in the classroom through comparison to previous social and literacy experiences of public schooling. No longer would it be okay to assume that knowledge was neutral. Throughout the year, youth would interrogate what constituted valuable knowledge, voices, and texts in contemporary U.S. democratic

society. Students would have to evaluate a text's message, purpose, and effect on its intended audience to become critical of their own society. Hall's article had set a foundation for my social justice pedagogy. It forecast a new and unsettling expectation of textual analysis in my classroom in which we would be interrogating our U.S. society today through the THS mandated high canonical texts.

Through using this particular scholarly article as a pre-assessment for the seniors, I challenged them to think about the teacher-as-authority, the validity of tracking, the infusion of alternative methods to deconstruct texts (including print-centric texts), and the previously assumed "natural" ways of being within a culture. These themes, as embedded in my critical literacy praxis, became patterns that unsettled and unnerved my students.

In the following data sample, which is another instance of institutional upper level tracking expectations around literacy learning, I asked students to consider a new "society of normalization" (Foucault, 1980, p. 107) and, in doing so, challenged them to reflect on and recontextualize their literate lives. This example does not merely support the difficulties outlined above: rather, it describes a hidden curriculum of the higher track in which high grades, not learning, are the expected outcome of an upper level THS literacy education.

Grades as a conduit to college: Isn't that the goal of high school?

Because I recognized that multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural analysis of textual representations were different ways of being literate in school, I planned numerous scaffolded classroom learning events for my students to build expertise with

critical interrogation of texts. Sure, we reminded ourselves of components of the

narrative structure, literary terms, reading strategies that good readers use, note-taking

options, and organizational strategies. But we also drew visual representations of our

birth names and nicknames. We defined, "What is a text?" by surveying the

multimodal texts of our lives outside school. We created continuums of the realistic

and non-realistic texts of our lives. We brought to class and shared artifacts that

symbolically represented our identities. We visualized in writing, drew our

impressions of, and dramatized various kinds of texts. Students viewed short films

and film clips, read short non-fiction, studied works of art, analyzed children's

storybooks, and listened to podcasts. We spoke about our own culture and families in

connection to texts. We defined sociocultural constructs so as to have a new, common

analytical vocabulary. We consistently used a tool called "Questions for critical

literacy" to distance ourselves from textual messages. Students discussed, and I

facilitated and guided their academic discourse. We celebrated successes in

publications of students' original tertiary texts.

But, in all this rigor and excitement, waves of tension simmered.

This second example from the second section of data is an example of such a unit

and the way that scaffolded critical literacy learning events created tension because of

embedded expectations around tracking and grades. To preview the curriculum-

mandated *Heart of Darkness* (Conrad, 1997), my seniors and I brainstormed

associations with repeated words and themes[23] they would confront in the text. We

---

[23] Africa, heart, horror, surrender, darkness, savage, light, primitive, red, ambition, wild, forest, truth, despair, obsession, civilization, evil, wilderness, Congo, colonialism.

drew from memory a map of Africa and its features.[24] I narrated the background

research I had conducted about the author, and we previewed the text for structural

elements. We read the poem "Gunga Din," by Rudyard Kipling, watched a streamed

film on the SMART Board about colonialism across the centuries, and shared ideas

about why dictators like King Leopold did and can rule. I wrote and distributed a

series of three study guides to help students decode *Heart of Darkness* as pathway to

interpret eventual secondary and tertiary texts.

     After the students read more, completed the second study guide, and designed

colorful schematics that captured essential layers of Conrad's textual messages, I

modeled the structure, conventions, and possibilities for textual messages within a

different genre: a children's text. Then I asked the seniors to compose four pages of

their own texts with children as a target audience and with the goal to capture

overarching *Heart of Darkness* themes. Students culled essential excerpts, coded

them, created visuals to symbolically represent each excerpt, wrote memos about what

they perceived, designed each page in an aesthetically appealing way, and molded all

the components through revision into a final composition. I designated homework and

classroom time for the outlined process.

     One day, while the *Heart of Darkness* children's book process was ongoing,

Marcia, one of four THS guidance counselors, visited during my prep period.

     Marcia: I want to talk to you about Connie. She's feeling like there's some…

          well, tension between the two of you. That didn't exist before in the class.

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[24] **Continent, countries, cities, oceans, rivers, mountains, deserts, vegetation types, resources, events, famous people, wars, political groups, religions, ethnicities. Adapted from a lesson plan available at www.edsitement.neh.gov.**

Connie was a senior who had a round face, cherry cheeks, straight blonde hair, and a vivacious laugh. She was also driven to achieve high grades. She seemed to have difficulty in class when I asked her to transcend analysis of texts for narrative structure and, instead, to interpret textual representations about society and culture. Coding, the transformation of observations into sociological categories and classifications, had been a specific obstacle for her, although she and I --- like many of the seniors --- had conferenced individually during several classes and outside of class before and after school[25]. Connie continually seemed frustrated about my responses to her coding, and her grade hovered at the high B range. While I empathized with Connie, having experienced my own academic struggles --- albeit with quantitative reasoning --- I felt that she would find a middle space where traditional and critical literacy composition could merge.

I explained this background to Marcia and reminded Marcia of my approach to grading, which I described as mastery learning, or grading that allowed students, within a specified time frame, to revisit and revise for additional grading credit.

Marcia: She's received deferments from her first four schools.

CF: So, she needs to submit second term grades.

Marcia: Yeah. The schools have suggested that, if she gets good second term grades, she'll probably be accepted (January 10, 2008).

Marcia's concern for Connie was as her guide toward and liaison to college admissions. Marcia recontextualized her own tensions about Connie's college

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[25] **Summer: "I do not remember any previous English teacher (in my high school career) offering to stay after for extra help as much as Ms. Fortuna. This made me feel more comfortable because I knew that if I was ever struggling I could easily set up an appointment to meet with Ms. Fortuna" (May 11, 2008).**

applications into discourse that questioned the quality and ultimate benefit of my

pedagogy to Connie and, by default, other seniors.   In this text about literacy,

curriculum, grades, and pedagogy, Marcia revealed the pervasive metaphor about

tracking: high tracked students were high achievers. Grades were semiotic indicators

of success, and Connie had not been able to simulate her previous success in honors

tracked literacy education because of my multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural

expectations as embedded in social justice pedagogy.

Grades were more important in the context of the classroom from Marcia's point

of view than were the critical literacy learning foundations of citizenship, the debates

of democracy and its relationship to schooling, or educating students to be intellectual

thinkers (Giroux, 2009). A current cliché of public education points in two directions,

with each side looking toward opposite goals and outcomes. One goal is that of a

democratic, inclusive, socially aware world view derived from multiple sources of

knowledge. The other goal is for students to recognize and adhere to a "standardized,

exclusive, socially regulatory agenda that serves the interest of dominant power and

those students most closely aligned with the social and cultural qualities associated

with such power," according to critical theorist Kincheloe (2009, p. 1). As a social

justice educator who believed that youth needed to carry and recontextualize their

literacy practices out-of-school, in-school, and back again, rather than accumulate

grades, I was an easy target for THS authority figures.

Thus, I came to a new understanding through Marcia's visit that any senior who

received less than high honors equivalent grades in my class might come under

guidance department scrutiny. The guidance department was an arm of the

administration and, so, the guidance department recontextualized concerns of THS authority officials. The guidance department and THS authority figures had frequent meetings and recontextualized students' and families' educational experiences. Because literacy learning events that challenged honors students' abilities to achieve high grades were unusual at THS, my praxis became a topic of administrative conversations, and my praxis pointed back to the delicate relationship between school authority figures and critical literacy practitioners like me. Tensions around tracking, which had begun with upper level students' resistance to new ways of analyzing texts, now deepened to new levels with the intervention of THS authority figures and their concerns around my critical literacy grading policies.

Due to administrative oversight, if I were to feel secure in my career and my positive influence on students as citizens at THS, I would have to take strong and confident stands about my social justice praxis as embedded in deconstruction, discourse, and composition around multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural texts. Moreover, as described in the following data sample, my critical literacy praxis would cause tensions not only with the upper tracked students but, also, with the lower tracked students. Their previous literacy instruction exposed a different kind of hidden curriculum: one that contained, according to educational equity theorist Anyon (1980), "complex but not readily apparent connections between everyday activity in schools and classrooms and the unequal structure of economic relationships in which we work and live" (p. 90). Thus, while Taylor school authority figures rallied around a discourse of "good to great," "being an elite member of the state's communities," and "being superior" as the objective for Taylor schools, (Jim, school committee chair,

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August 27, 2007), the reality for many of my students was that tracking created hierarchies of "who's who." As the next data sample indicates, tracking was an institutional barrier to my social justice praxis due to tracking's subtext of some individuals as more worthy and others as less capable; of some individuals as elite and most as ordinary; and, of some individuals as exceptional and the remainder as common. Authoritarian messages contradicted my social justice messages about the fragile circumstances in which human action and subjectivity can become possible.

Tracking's inevitable consequences on youths' identities

Since I had no choice at THS but to teach in a tracked academic environment, I had always made it known at department meetings that I welcomed students into my honors classroom who had been assigned to lower tracks in previous years. I recognized that social justice pedagogy brought voice to marginalized persons. Tracking invited THS youth to be educated based on their social capital rather than through a social justice perspective of equity for all. Systems of tracking resembled the exact class divisions within U.S. society that I sought to help my students to interrogate. A false glass wall of meritocracy through the institution of tracking made socioeconomic class inequities invisible at THS, so, by modeling alternative routes to literacy success, I hoped to highlight THS fallacies about ability, capability, and worth across class systems.

It was my goal to celebrate youth who accepted my challenge: formerly lower tracked students could harness democratic avenues through which to oppose semiotic recontextualizations of lower track as having lesser worth. However, as this third

example of the second data section will indicate, two students who grasped my invitation to participate in honors English for the first time in their senior year experienced tensions that can be traced back to their former lower track and the accompanying self-esteem issues that a lower track education produces.

> Donnie: At the beginning of the year I was rather frustrated with my previous
> learning experiences because I felt unprepared for the class. Although I had
> done extremely well last year, being given the academic article at the
> beginning of the year and was told to 'socio-culture analyze' it was a bit
> overwhelming (May 18, 2008).

Donnie had the desire to achieve in a higher track, but his family power or interest in advocacy was limited. I felt that a student like Donnie could be successful in my critical literacy classroom due to its numerous possibilities for multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural textual analysis. Donnie reflected back to his disappointment due to his "previous learning experiences," which Anyon (1980) describes as an environment in which "answers are usually found in books or by listening to the teacher. Answers are usually words, sentences, numbers, or facts and dates; one writes them on paper, and one should be neat" (p. 77). Donnie felt "unprepared for the class" because he had not been previously expected to engage in creative activity that involved "individual thought and expressiveness, expansion and illustration of ideas, and choice of appropriate method and material" (p. 79). Yet Donnie's presence came to take on extraordinary semiotic importance, as, throughout the school year, he painted a mural in my classroom that chronicled his worldview around media culture. That mural remains as a testament to my dedication to critical

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literacy praxis in conjunction with multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural learning

events as well as to his importance as a co-learner and explorer of the world with us.

In order to help formerly lower tracked students like Donnie and traditionally high

tracked students like Connie, who I described in the previous data example and who

also had little exposure to sociocultural textual analysis, I offered lots of guidance. As

will be supported in this next example by Casey's revelation to me, I also needed to be

assured that these "digital natives" (Prensky, 2006) were reading the assigned primary

text --- rather than relying on secondary textuality sources ---- in order to move toward

authentic analysis. I sometimes gave reading checks, as did other English teachers.

One day, as I circulated the room, I noticed that Casey, who, like Donnie, had chosen

to rise from a college preparatory English track, had an amazed expression on her face

as she reviewed her reading check for Act I of *Our Town* (Wilder, 1938/ 2003).

> Casey: But I read it!
>
> CF: It asked you to make a "critical" summary. To step back and distance
>   yourself from the text.
>
> Casey: I know. I know. I really didn't know what that meant.
>
> CF: It's okay. We'll be doing lots of that this year. You'll be fine
>   (September 26, 2007).

The "that" to which we had referred was the repertoire of sociocultural constructs

I explicitly taught and embedded within my praxis so we would share a common

language about the influences of social and culture on ways of being. Rather than

experiencing education as part of a scripted social position, youth in my critical

literacy classroom had to investigate cultural worlds as knowledgeable and committed

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participants (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). Casey had to inquire how, across cultural traditions and social forces of power and domination, people could invent and locate spaces to newly narrate their lives. By default, I was implying that she and my other students could also recreate their cultural worlds. Through saying that "we'll be doing lots of that this year," I wanted Casey to recognize that, although she had not yet fully absorbed sociocultural textual analysis, I perceived her learning as a series of spiraling waves where one learning event is embedded in another and in which she would have repeated opportunities to demonstrate mastery. In adding that "you'll be fine," I wanted to assure Casey that I was confident she could access sociocultural analysis in meaningful ways.

But, about two minutes later, I noticed that Casey's head was down on her desk. Her long brunette hair was splattered across the beige Formica rectangle.

CF: Casey, it's just a quiz. We have a million grades in this class.

Casey: *(no response)*

Jeff: I don't think it's about English class.

CF: Is she crying? (*whispered*)

Jeff: *(shrugged)*

CF: *(looking around at the other students)* Chairs!²⁶

I glanced over at Casey, who was wiping both her eyes with the backs of her hands. As the bell sounded, I exited the classroom, turned left, and walked to the three windows at the end of the hall. In this way, I didn't embarrass her by glimpsing her

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²⁶ Chairs were placed on tops of desks at the end of day for custodial purposes.

stained face. A long few minutes later, the students were released, and I returned to my classroom to pack up for the day.

Casey appeared in the doorway. The tiny diamond stud in her nose glittered along with her tear-brimmed, deep brown eyes.

Casey: Ms. Fortuna, I came back to apologize. I'm sorry I lost it in class.

CF: Casey, there's no need to apologize. Come in. We'll talk.

Casey: Jeff and I have been going out for three years. He's always been so smart! He doesn't even try, and he just gets good grades. He just sits down, writes an essay, and gets a good grade. Half the time he just reads *Spark Notes*. I read *Our Town*. I really did. I stayed up late reading the night before. And Jeff gets the good grade. This is the first year I've been in Honors English. I've always been a CP student.

Casey acknowledged that, in her transition to a higher track,[27] she was encountering unfamiliar ideas, facts, beliefs, or ways of knowing through the challenge of creating meaning with new material. Casey feared that her previous years of instruction were less rigorous or more limited in depth and breadth of subject matter covered than had been the same years of upper level tracks for her peers. She also revealed that Jeff had lied to me about Casey's perception of my class and his engagement with the primary Wilder text.

Casey: Jeff and I are competitive, but, you know. In a good way.

CF: A healthy way.

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[27] **Casey told me in a later conversation that she had self-advocated for the change of higher track against the advice of her junior year English teacher. The teacher said to Casey that, although she had a good work ethic, her writing was not strong enough for senior honors English.**

Casey: Yeah. But academic stuff doesn't come easy to me. I really have to work

at it.

CF: I'm going to tell you something. Because I've seen it before. These

students who have been in honors throughout high school *(waved arm)* won't

get as much out of this class as you will. They will experience what I call

'ennui.' *(Dramatic sigh)* But you. You'll keep on learning throughout the

school year. They'll get to a certain place, and they won't care anymore, and

they won't try. But you'll continue to try. And when you head off to your

freshman year, you'll be so ready! You'll be ahead of them, because you'll

care.

Casey: You think so?

CF: Definitely. Right now, it's going to be tough for you. As a former CP

student, you haven't been exposed to the same types of activities that the

honors students have. It's stupid. You can tell I don't believe in tracking. I

think that all students should have the same classroom experiences and come

to it in their own time and way. Casey. I'm so glad you came to talk to me

today.

Casey: I didn't want you to think badly of me.

CF: I wouldn't think badly of you! But I want you to come to me anytime in the

future you have a problem with class, and we'll talk it out. If I wouldn't get

sued, I would hug you right now.

I blinked, and in the second my vision was blocked by my eyelids, Casey flung herself at me. We had a strong hug, fleshy and warm, and we released with big smiles on both our faces. She departed, and I could feel my heart.

Formerly lower tracked students like Casey often felt stymied by different higher level classroom instructional methods, expectations for learners, and peer dynamics. I acknowledged to Casey that school knowledge is political by saying that "you haven't been exposed to the same types of activities that the honors students have." I divulged that schooling can be transformed beyond an ideology of the dominant social class when I said that students should "come to it in their own time and way." As will be discussed in the third data section about meaningful literacy practices, Casey was able to interrogate the reproduction the ideas, values, and norms that maintain the relations of dominant society. Casey would create spaces where her voice would be heard. Moreover, Casey would draw upon her talents as a singer and songwriter and infuse her real-world literacies into her academic discourse so as to create reciprocity of literacy between school and life.

I include the previous two examples to illustrate how lower level tracking had shaped Donnie's and Casey's identity, status, and self--- as well as societal --- expectations. It was a label that might have silenced them and their academic possibilities by conveying implicit messages of overall ability and worth (Oakes, 2005). Linkages between the form and content of the curriculum, the system of economic production, and the reproduction of class relationships in educational systems (Apple, 1975) had the potential to diminish Donnie and Casey's next transitions to college literacy studies and adult literate citizenry.

Thus, as result of these correlating data examples, I argue that tracking had a third consequence of tensions for my critical literacy classroom: formerly lower tracked students who made the leap to high level studies experienced anxiety because of the effects of their former lower tracks. Portions of these waves of disturbances occurred because lower level tracks were not as embedded in independent reasoning, rigor, conceptual thinking, design, or individual expression as were the higher level tracks. Possibly more importantly, however, was a misconception on the part of the former lower tracked students that they had been restricted to a single, narrative method of textual literary while the honors level students had always engaged in sociocultural analysis. As was illustrated in the first and second data samples in this section, such was not the case. Due to my unique critical literacy praxis at THS, which concentrated on coming to understandings about how we have we been shaped by the social and cultural textual messages, contexts, and recontextualizations we use and encounter in our lives, virtually all my students experienced waves of anxiety. Language use became a vehicle to question the social and cultural construction of the self; my students had never previously thought about language use with these goals.

Linking the data in samples one, two, and three, I argue that tracking created interrelated tensions about what elements should comprise a literacy classroom, about correlations between high grades and the high track, and about discrepancies and misconceptions about literacy practices within tracked classrooms. Youth who experienced failures in my classroom and who perceived failure as a threatening situation might also have been halted from agency. I had to be cautious so as to assist all students to successfully accommodate, organize, and integrate social justice

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materials into their already-developed bases of knowledge (Levine, 2008), as this was likely the first time that youth had encountered ideas about why some people have agency and others do not.

I'm so stressed out about this project: Just give me multiple choice, please

After my early years of teaching and seeing lower tracked students blandly learn literary conventions via print texts, I united my own love for media and popular culture with my motivation to infuse social justice into the classroom. Those initial recontextualizations and learning events morphed into new literacies assignments and assessments. By learning to read and write in multiple forms of texts, students came into contact with messages embedded in the world outside school. Sometimes this approach, however, was alien and stifling to students who had achieved good grades in lower tracked classes, like Martin.

It was the last period of the day. The sophomores had lined up at the door and were ready to leave. I was sitting off to the side on my tall chair, against a wall, as I didn't want to get knocked over by the surge of exuberant youth. Martin, with a curly crop of brunette hair and strong athletic frame, leaned over to speak to me.

Martin: I'm getting so stressed out about this project.

CF: But you're going to do really well on it. Look at all the research you have.

Martin: No, I'm not. I can't do this.

CF: Martin. Would you rather have a short story that you read and then answer questions at the end by filling in a blank?

Martin: (*two second pause*) Yes. I really would.

His dark wide brown eyes were storm clouds.

CF: Why?

Martin: Because it's what I'm used to. And what I'm good at.

CF: But how would you use a multiple choice activity when you're out in the real world? Like, do you use multiple choice when you're playing football?

Martin: Yeah. *(one second delay)* Sometimes. Before the game.

CF: To see if you've memorized the play?

Martin: *(smiling)* Yeah. Like that (October 15, 2007).

I did my best to explain to Martin how learning is about thinking and how important it was for him and the other sophomores to be able to use the ideas from my classroom in their own lives. I told him I wanted him to learn more than to tell me which character is related to which other one. I described how my seniors were watching the beginning of *Pirates of the Caribbean* (Verbinski, 2003). I explained to Martin how Johnny Depp, who plays a pirate, "swaggers back and forth, but he swings his hips to both sides." I told Martin that the seniors had to stop and think about the choices that Depp, the actor, made to depict the protagonist in this particular manner over that of a traditional western depiction of a colonial pirate. None of this decision-making was available --- either to Depp or to the students who were doing this analysis --- through multiple-choice format.

Martin nodded politely and then darted left in a wave of motion with the other students as the bell rang. His afternoon would be a celebration of kinetic prowess and prestige on the football field. Martin seemed not to realize that he was having a series of successes with his multimodal English class project. Martin's reactions to new

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types of literacy experiences emerged from his classed location at a particular moment in time (Walkerdine, Lucey, & Melody, 2001). Like many students, Martin identified the range of opportunities that had been made available to him in his previous tracked education and his socioeconomic class location (Mickelson, 1990). Martin was not ready to diverge from an institutionalized system that had served him well academically. I found this quizzical, as he had become part of a new literacy culture in which alternative assessments, connections to texts other than print, and his own real compositional voice allowed him to explore his out-of-school literacies within his public school literacy education.

Martin's response to multimodal learning reflected the attitudes of many of my other two sections of lower-tracked sophomores who felt that their identities as literate learners were weak. Their lived experience of social class (B. Bloom, 2007, p. 348) as embedded within lower level tracking had shaped their perceptions, experiences, and decision-making processes about their own literacy capabilities. So different than their other literacy education experiences, my critical literacy classroom often seemed as just one more chance to fail in a literacy environment.

Taken together, the four components of data in this section --- which describe the critical literacy tensions as consequences of tracking --- point to significant dilemmas about the literacy goals of a public education. When will literacy educators transcend identification of elements of narrative structure and an author's purpose into "rewriting the relationship among knowledge, power, and desire" (P. Freire & Giroux, 1989, p. vii)? Why do print-centric literacy practices continue to take the lead in public school literacy education when multiliteracies help youth to gain insights

into "the new and changing knowledge components of literacies under contemporary social, economic, cultural, political, and civic conditions" (L. Lankshear & Knobel, 2006, p. 17)? How can the climate of literacy learning morph beyond a mastery of strategies to earn high grades, which is rarely the same thing as understanding the course material (Sambell & MacDowell, 1998)? When will U.S. public schools rethink systems of tracking so that no longer will students be educated in response to the different segments in society from which they emerge and which "emphasize different forms of knowledge as most valuable for that society" (Kliebard, 1995, p. 7)? These questions coalesce and take on new shapes in the next data sample, which, at first glance, seems to be another indicator of the discrepancies embedded in tracking, the heavy influence of powerful family members on their children's assigned track, and a rebellion of youth against literacy learning when designated to a lower track.

However, the next data sample is much more than a simple dismissal of tracking. It is a also a segue to a broad discussion of ways that traditional literacy education masks the authentic literacy needs of students outside the classroom, especially as regards youth sexuality and media depictions of youth sexuality. It questions whether literacy practices, as currently mandated by NCLB, set up artificial gauges of literacy successes. It also reinforces the difficulties I discussed in my introduction for teachers when they embrace multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural texts as support for social justice pedagogy. The next data sample introduces a new layer in which the hybridity of literacy practices in my classroom became a conduit for discussions about issues of gender, feminism, differences in personal and social identities because of gender, and the contested meanings around gender definitions within youth sexuality.

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The hybridity of literacy practices in my classroom also brought the attention of school authority figures to my classroom again and challenged the pedagogy that I found so relevant to our times and so necessary for my students to become critical, literate participants in our democracy.

What's grades got to do with it?[28] Hidden literacy needs of contemporary youth

In this fifth example of the second section of data, I describe how parental influences surrounding traditional literacy classroom successes can actually mask youth real-life literacy needs, especially the needs for youth to locate information about specific texts and literacy practices. Hidden literacy needs, which arose within a multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural composition unit with my sophomores, caused tensions between my students, their families, THS authority figures, and my classroom. As a result, in this transitional section, I suggest that social justice educators must be ready to negotiate and recontextualize students' literacy practices with family members, the latter of whom may be unaware of the depth of their child's need for literacy support. Access to an array of materials in the critical literacy classroom can assist youth to broaden their real-life literacies but can also complicate the school/ home/ school authority relationship.

Such a need to negotiate youth literacy needs arose during my unit with my sophomores on Ancient Greece, *Oedipus the King,* and *Antigone* (Sophocles, 2002). Using backwards design (Wiggins, 1999), I wanted students to create multiple-authored blogs or wikis. I also needed to help the sophomores transcend the *Oedipus*

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[28] **With apologies to Tina Turner.**

relatively silly plot[29] so as to play forward underlying messages to contemporary society and youth's own lives. We began by thinking about mythology as it exists in contemporary society. I previewed themes via a PowerPoint slideshow with embedded film graphics of *Star Wars* (Lucas, 1977), *Harry Potter* (Columbus, 2001), and *Lord of the Rings* (Jackson, 2001). We moved into individual and shared written definitions of "myth." We discussed if myths could be both historic and contemporary, and sophomores told me about a television show they viewed frequently called *MythBusters* (Lenthle & Dallow, 2003). We reviewed previous discussions about communications, various media technologies, and the potential impact of media messages, and then we accessed prior knowledge through brainstorming about ways that the media may spread mythology. Students broke into self-selected groups and surveyed magazines they had brought from home for images and print texts that would serve to answer several driving questions.[30]

Midway through their magazine explorations, I reminded students about the categories they had decided upon in their initial brainstorming: gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, class, and ethnicity. Students created a collective composition called "Myths of the image culture" in which they described how media messages transmit stories about our culture through experts who depict certain people in certain ways, often negatively. We had a full class discussion as to why the media creates

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[29] **Haven't read it? The plot can be summed up as follows: what happens when you murder your father and marry your mother?**

[30] **Who are the experts? How are women represented? What does a normal couple look like in the U.S.? What do people who live in the U.S. think of their bodies? What makes people who live in the U.S. happy? What age group do most people who live in the U.S. want to be? Adapted from an activity created by Leslie Grinner called SCWAMP (Straight, Christian, White, Able, Male, Property owners).**

these kinds of messages, and we ended with a synthesis of why it is important to study media and what the process of media interpretation can be.

Then we read *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone* (Sophocles, 2002), chunking out the text in sections and reading with accompanying story guides. Throughout the decoding process, we identified themes that emerged and had relevance to today's world. Next, students narrowed research themes to play forward Sophocles' texts to contemporary society. Students self-selected groups based on collective issues of interest: the nature of war, female identity, teen pregnancy, drug use among youth, political systems and their influences, racism within judicial systems, and class systems. The unit encompassed and merged traditional literacy research, practices, and investigations into multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural tertiary compositions which were posted on our blog. I was largely pleased with the students' thinking and application of the difficult high canonical texts to contemporary society due to their small group power sharing, their co-teaching of digital platform elements, and their extension of issues in ways I did not originally foresee yet admired.

Thus, I was caught off-guard when Jenika, a guidance counselor, contacted me with a request from Betty's dad to convene a parent's meeting.

Jenika: Thanks for getting together for this meeting today. Mr. Rocco just had some concerns he wanted to discuss.

Mr. Rocco: Betty came home. And told me how embarrassed she was in your class. That everyone heard you ask her about her project.

CF: Everyone heard? We were conferencing. But. Geez. Of course. You're not

familiar with the computer lab set-ups here. Thirty computers are in a circle.

Students are looking away from each other at their screens.

In retelling the experience that Betty and I shared around her teen pregnancy

project, I was recontextualizing the voices of Betty and my other students and our

dialogicality. As I spoke to Mr. Rocco, I was torn: can a teacher rob her students of

their words and worlds through recontextualization? Was I, despite my good

intentions, contributing to the disconnection and disempowerment of youth, and

particularly those whose voices are sometimes hidden? Or, was I providing a vehicle

to Betty through the partnering of our voices in which her discourse might be heard by

her parent, whose own worldviews about the importance of education might otherwise

reinforce silence about her authentic literacy needs? These are the types of waves of

turmoil that I and other critical literacy educators experience.

Mr. Rocco: Betty does not have great self-confidence. We're trying to help her

to become more focused on grades. It's right for us to get involved. We

nurture her but push her farther and farther away at the same time.

CF: She's a great kid. She's fully capable of doing this multimodal project. It's

probably because she's been absent a few times over the past two weeks.

All discourse is orientated towards an answer or a response (Bakhtin, 1986). Mr.

Rocco contributed his observations about Betty's lack of "self-confidence" and lack of

focus "on grades" in order to push me to offer my commentary as teacher-as-observer

of her academic performance. Thus, my role in this communication chain --- with

Jenika sitting quietly, listening but not contributing as designated THS authority figure

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--- was to act as mediator or translator of the thematic content of the dialogicality that Betty and I had shared. I gave the parent meeting compositional structure and style in that I complimented Betty --- "She's a great kid," "She's fully capable" --- as well as addressed background concerns--- "she's been absent" --- that specifically anticipated the Mr. Rocco's response.

> Mr. Rocco: She doesn't have great self-esteem. She gets a guilty conscience and immediately assumes guilt.
>
> CF: By the way. I want to thank you and Mrs. Rocco for signing the permission slip. So Betty could join the other girls in her group? They were so interested in women's issues, but I wanted to make sure it was all right with you if I shared with them some particular texts.
>
> Mr. Rocco: *(clearing his throat)* Oh, yes. Well. Betty's been concerned about her friend. Who got pregnant. We've been dealing with this at home for quite a while (June 5, 2008).

Like so much of the hybrid construction of critical literacy that we incorporated during our year of learning together, Betty and I had engaged in a variety of voices. She had balanced utterances to her father about the world of academic literacy learning alongside the dialogically-interrelated but divergent voice of a youth seeking information about youth sexuality practices through my critical literacy classroom. In the context of the parent meeting, it was as if Mr. Rocco and I each knew about the various voices that Betty used in her separate conversations with us (M. Bakhtin, 1981). When I requested family permission for their daughters to survey *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (Norsigian, 2005), *Dr. Ruth's Encyclopedia of Sex* (Westheimer, 1994), and

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The Feminine Mystique (Friedan, 2001), among other short texts I would locate, I attempted to created dialogicality with families so they might influence the compositional structure of the classroom. Yet, the dissonance between my voice as recontextualizing Betty's in-class literacy persona and Mr. Rocco's voice as recontextualizing Betty's academic persona via constructions of grades actually rerouted Betty's real literacy concerns. Her friend's youth sexuality decisions were a component of a recontextualization chain in which Betty was only a distant voice in a critical encounter of youths, teacher, family, and school authorities.

The texts that Betty and her blogging group shared with me about youth sexuality through research about contemporary and Ancient Greek teen pregnancy were glimpses into contemporary youths' out-of-school literacy needs. Betty's own texts demonstrated her commitment to a friend, her desire to merge public school and real-life literacy, and her courage to discuss her multimodal project with her father, whose emphasis was directed more to her grades than her actual life experiences. Her texts had the ability to transform each of our senses of self and to recreate our worlds (Freire & Macedo, 1987). I recognized that my ability to fully interpret Betty's recontextualizations was impacted by my class, gender, age, and language use, but, through critical literacy praxis, I had the tools to reconcile her father's concerns about her academic prowess while, at the same time, to demonstrate my humility and commitment to the literate life Betty was leading outside the contexts of my classroom. Although the parent conference with a THS authority figure present as observer was stressful to me, I listened intently to the cultural, personal, and political assumptions through which Mr. Rocco filtered his words. In doing so, I became a

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more caring and invested listener to Betty's literacies and life. To this day, Betty waves and calls out to me each time we cross paths in the THS halls.

Dominant definitions of youth sexuality were transmitted, in part, generationally, that is, from Taylor parents and step-parents to children and step-children. THS had an embedded and written culture[31] where discussions of sexuality were largely restricted to health and physical education classes, popular culture texts in subject area classrooms too infrequently addressed youth sexuality. Thus, tensions youth sexuality emerged in this study in ways I did not expect and sometimes found disconcerting.

In the next data sample, I describe how tensions arose when I allowed dialogicality around youth sexuality in the classroom through popular culture texts as well as the high western canon. Popular culture can be a powerful mechanism for creating dialogic spaces in the public school classroom in which co-learners come to understand self and others. Highly visible, accessible, and appealing, popular culture allows individuals pathways for identity construction and reconstruction and for new lenses to understand how different people have different identities (Guy, 2007). Indeed, popular culture, when viewed as a complex interplay of cultural products and meanings inserted into mass culture by differently positioned persons, can open up a large variety of conversations about race, class, gender, religious beliefs, and sexual orientation. Popular culture texts that targets youth audiences are typically splashed with waves of sexual visions where males are aggressive, confident, and, occasionally, predators, while females are submissive, withdrawn, voluptuous, and eager recipients of male sexual attention. Popular culture can challenge institutionalized inequalities

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[31] The student handbook restricted films in the high school to the highest rating of PG.

and social injustices but can also cause significant classroom tensions around youth sexuality, as will become evident in the next data example.

Pervasive media messages about dominant youth gender roles

This sixth example of data section two describes the way that tensions emerged around critical literacy when I welcomed discourse around a popular culture text which my students invited me to view. As I noted in the introduction, many teachers resist curriculum changes that support media as literacy and media literacy education as an important component of public education because they do not share the popular culture of their students. Like many of my students, I had been compelled by popular culture when I was a youth. Popular culture invited me into worlds that exceeded the imagination I was able to invoke from print. I traveled to new settings, encountered new ways of being, and listened to discourse that simply was not spoken in my provincial small town through popular culture texts. Unlike Finders (2000), I felt ready to encourage rather than silence youth discourse around popular culture when a "discussion became too uncomfortable for me" (p. 4). What I did not anticipate, however, was how deeply that media representations were glued to students' worldviews about gender nor how those worldviews would conflict with my social justice philosophies.

"Ms. Fortuna," Kyle announced. "Have you seen *Superbad*?"

"Uh. No, Kyle," I sputtered. It was a warm and sultry early September afternoon during the last period of the school day. From my vantage point at the last of twenty classrooms in my wing, I could see out the windows to the queue of current year sport

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utility vehicles already lined up and pointed outward toward the four-lane town central

corridor. "I haven't. Should I?"

"Yeah. *Superbad*," Kyle continued, leaning forward. His curly sandy brunette

hair bounced in the afternoon sun. His beardless face was pale and shiny. "It's a *great*

movie."

Several of the students were grinning broadly. I felt raw and exposed. I

wondered if I --- so new to all these students in the first term of the school year, so

much of an outsider to the dynamics of "who was who" and "what stood for what" in

the youth culture of these students --- should continue on. Was Kyle targeting me as

the only adult in the room as a method to establish his own place within the dynamics

of his upper tracked, English class peers? As someone nearing her 50th birthday, as

someone who had behind me decades of disparate media experiences, I was hesitant to

address the caliber of *Superbad*. I was more than 30 years older than these students in

a class size of fifteen, which was my smallest class. I had the potential to create a

warm and collaborative class climate, as I could adjust learning events according to

the individuals' particular needs. But, confronted with Kyle's suggestion, I was

perplexed. Could I, too prematurely, relinquish my power to my students? I *had*

announced that this classroom was going to be a climate of co-learning. If I obliged to

this request, would I, as a result, struggle to establish authority with other texts and, in

doing so, challenge school institutional and community constraints? Sure, I wanted to

infuse many popular culture texts into my curriculum, but would I smash my face into

the sand with this unexpected wave of acquiescence?

Was I being set up to be the Outsider in this room of youth and youth culture?

I swiveled my head and looked at Aubrey, whom I had taught five years earlier at the eighth grade middle school level. From our shared--- if distant--- history, I felt I could trust Aubrey. Yet, unlike my relationship with Aubrey --- and ten other students I would teach this year[32] ---- I knew nothing about Kyle: his personal, academic, and social histories were an absolute blank to me. I was not unique: most teachers know few facts about their newly assigned students. But Aubrey and I had a cooperative relationship during our last time as teacher and student, as co-learners. I felt certain her expression would tell me if I was in trouble with this avenue of conversation.

Aubrey recognized my non-verbal plea. "No. It's alright," she assured me. Her brunette ponytail was pulled back with a Scrungie, and her brown eyes shined as she responded. Her THS blue and white volleyball jersey was crisp and ironed. "It's an okay movie." She nodded.

"Ms. Fortuna, if you really want to get to know us," Terry offered, jumping into the conversation, "Watch *Superbad*." Terry, with his long and lean frame and wide brown eyes, yearned to be part of the mainstream clique at THS. Terry listened to what was said in the multiple layers of discourse that occurred beyond the daily learning events. His presentation of self was an awkward daily metamorphosis that was dependent on the classroom dynamic of the day. He planned and linked his own classroom discourse almost exclusively to other students' classroom discourse as a means of establishing an academic identity and as a way to attempt to create a coherent sense of self.

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[32] **I had previously taught the following students who are described in this study: Aubrey, Dick, Marty, Jill, Jonathan, Audrey, Jeff, Darren, Eva, Paul, and Brandy.**

Enthusiastic about the invitation from Terry, Kyle, and the others, I did watch *Superbad,* which presented me with an interesting window into the mélange of youth that was the C period senior dynamic, and, from the *Superbad* text, I learned a lot about the frames of how these students saw their worlds of youth and youth sexuality. *Superbad* is a coming-of-age teen sex comedy. Two high school males invent an idea to get two high school females drunk so the females will engage in intercourse with the two males. With the backdrop of awkward interactions between genders, the eponymous James Brown song symbolizes the feeling of "cool" that the two unpopular males seek. *Superbad* is one of a series of comedies, according to Denby (2007), that are "elegies for the dissolution of a male pack, the ending of the juvenile male bond" (p. 32), and the looming adulthood that threatens Seth and Evan's relationship is analogous to the "shadow of the Fall darkening their dork's Eden," according to Routhat (2007, p. 57). After watching *Superbad*, I knew why Kyle had suggested it and Terry and others had followed along. First of all, my students had admitted in the public space of the classroom that *Superbad* represented a ubiquitous text of their private spaces. They were testing me to see if I was genuine: did my professed public sphere interest in them as media consumers translate into my private sphere life? Would I spend my own time watching a film with youth characters and themes of youth sexuality? And, if I did watch *Superbad*, would I freak out, chastise them, and/ or implore them to watch one of my own "real" films?

"Good morning, class. How are you?" I asked in greeting at the beginning of next Monday session, intentionally selecting "class" as a collective pronoun, as was my habit, rather than the gender specific "ladies and gentlemen."

"Good morning, Ms. Fortuna. Good. How are you?" some students answered in random return greeting. Others quickly speeded up their side conversations.

"I'm good. Thanks. And --- are you all serious?" I asked, invoking the plural, gender-neutral 'you.' "*Superbad*? I gotta think that you can find some better relationships than those. A life in pursuit of getting --- well, of having sexual intimacy? At any cost? And please. Promise me. If you want to drink alcohol, brew your own. You'll be safer. It's cheaper. And you won't have to go to such lengths to get it." The students looked at each other, tilted their heads, and squinted their eyes. My stream-of-consciousness reply was real, and they didn't know what to make of me.

Did I gain some entry into the lives of these youth by participating in their youth media experiences? Did my lack of censure and, instead, advice open up future opportunities for other discussions about issues in their lives as youth?

A little.

But viewing films here and there wouldn't suffice solely as a pathway to goals inherent within social justice education. More was at stake here. Students expressed real affection for films in which dominant media images of male sexuality were, according to youth and gender researcher Smiler (2009) "natural, promiscuous, and power-oriented." Male sexuality in films was juxtaposed with dominant images of female sexuality that were "sexually appealing, sexually chaste, and responsible for limiting men's sexuality" (Smiler, 2009, p. 364). Again and again throughout the course of this study, dominant media images of sexuality would rise up as barriers against the tide of caring and compassion I was hoping to instill as a ubiquitous means for youth to envision a new tomorrow.

Media representations of youth sexuality such as contained in this data sample, however, presented constant obstacles of tension to my social justice education goals. As is described in the next data sample, discontinuity existed between my intended sites of critical inquiry and sites where youth sexuality was represented. Youth constructions around gender and sexuality emerged as tensions during recontextualizations of *A Doll's House* (Ibsen, 1971) when students "had to unpack how sexuality is socially and historically situated" (Finders, 2000, p. 4). Students' tertiary texts reflected an uneasy alignment among media representations, classroom academic performance, and individual gender constructions. Those tensions underlay a deep and profound reciprocity among youths' in-school and out-of-school literacies and their sexual identities.

Constructions of gender: Literary or contemporary present tense, or both?

In the seventh data sample of section two, I outline how dominant definitions of the female gender reinforced male patterns of behavior that operate beneath a classroom façade of equity between genders. In particular, this sample points to a dissonance females experience in academic settings when organizational, literacy, and cultural objectives create dialogicality about female agency but contemporary social constructions reproduce and reinforce male hegemony.

This data sample occurred during a senior honors unit surrounding *A Doll's House* (Ibsen, 1971). The primary text follows the female protagonist, Nora Helmer as she awakens from her culturally acceptable position as a subjugated Victorian era wife and as she evolves into a newly independent human. I wanted to help students to

distance themselves from the historical contexts of the plot, to draw contemporary associations with gender divisions and expectations, and to try to envision new and richer definitions of constructed gender roles. Particularly, I wanted to offer students a variety of opportunities to interrogate the role of women in a patriarchal society. How can a society function as a healthy system of individuals and families when dominant systems reduce females to mere objects and playthings? What worth does anyone's life --- female or male ---- have when that individual does not examine the meaning of one's life? Should women live with lies if it benefits their children? What is the highest cost an individual should pay for freedom? Can individuals begin again outside dominate definitions of gender and have hope for a better future? My praxis included a set induction about Victorian era gender roles and expectations, clips from a film version starring Claire Bloom and Anthony Hopkins (Garland, 1973), and a peer-reviewed research article about gender binaries (Mendick, 2005).

Kyle: He often talks down to her… calls her a squirrel.

Sam: Helmer is describing all women into one stereotype and fitting them into the Victorian role.

Abby: It seems like it's not looked down upon as it is today.

Dan: It's acceptable for her not to be happy with it… it shows that the marriage isn't like today, when people can talk openly (December 5, 2007).

After assigning reading of Act One of *A Doll's House* by Ibsen, I modeled a version of a Socratic seminar with inside/ outside circle conversations that I termed

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"fishbowls[33]." Students were graded according to a rubric I provided prior to the

discussion and which I designed so as to embed collaboration, critical inquiry, and

socio-cultural textual analysis. Each student had prepared talking points previous to

the conversations as jumping off points for her or his own participation.

As a female who has been passed from her father to her husband, Nora has been

treated variously as a child, toy, pet, sex object, maid, mother, and simpleton. In the

data section above, Kyle noted the power imbalance that exists in the play between the

protagonist, Nora and her husband, Torvald Helmer: "talks down to her." While

Sam's comment pointed to nineteenth century historical ways of being --- "one

stereotype" and "the Victorian role" --- Abby's comment referred not to Sam as

immediate previous speaker but to Kyle. She used his phrase "talks down to her" to

play the idea forward to contemporary society: "it's not looked down upon as it is

today." Abby's reaction to Kyle was, in part, due to their shared personal, intimate

relationship.[34] Dan's contribution to the conversation drew both on past --- "It's

acceptable for her not to be happy" – and contemporary society --- "the marriage isn't

like today, when people can talk openly." Dan and Sam positioned themselves as

mediators between Kyle and Abby, engaging in the rules of the learning event I had

outlined for academic purposes but concurrently negotiating the youth social world

around them.

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[33] A few months later, another English teacher took me aside. Caleigh, aged 28, asked me if I knew the youth meaning of 'fishbowl.' I said that, other than an informal version of the Socratic Seminar, I did not. She smiled, cleared her throat, and informed me that that a 'fishbowl' takes place when a group of youth close the windows of their automobile so that no marijuana smoke is released and so everyone inside gets a full opportunity to breathe in the smoke.

[34] Abby: Ms. Fortuna. Did you see what Kyle got me? *(fingering a necklace with heart charm)*

CF: *(looking at Kyle, smiling):* This guy? (private hallway conversation, February 10, 2008)

Kyle: She has to accept the fact that men are above her.

Sam: He almost takes back what he says. He likes to think he's exerting

           control.

Dan: There's a money theme: I'm interested to see how this plays out in the

           rest of the book… as they say, money kinda talks…

Kyle: Mrs. Linde. She admits she married him for his money.

Dan: She's more mad he didn't leave her any.

Kyle: Mrs. Linde points out that Nora always loved to spend money.

Abby: She is saving money for a once-a-month loan. It's a bit different.

Kyle: Women are dependent and men are independent (December 5, 2007).

In the data section above, Kyle controlled the conversation, taking four turns; Dan took two turns; and Sam and Abby each took one turn. Kyle focused strictly on female behaviors: Nora "has to accept that men are above her;" Mrs. Linde "married him for his money;" "Nora always loved to spend money;" and, "women are dependent." Kyle described females in a manner that transcends literary present tense verb use and applied the present verb tense to contemporary society: females were people who needed to acquiesce to their gender roles in society, who seek to manipulate males for their material wealth, and who do not possess self-sufficiency. Sam, conversely, focused on Torvald; he read between the lines to suggest that, because he "almost takes back what he says," Torvald's power over Nora is more of a game than a lifestyle. Dan picked up Sam's thread about females looking to males for support when he said, "She's mad he didn't leave her any." Abby's silence ended when she reminded the group that Nora "is saving for a once-a-month loan." Although Abby

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had been the closest reader, she had allowed the males ample space to establish their positions before she entered the conversation.

Abby's position in this discussion was central to the gender dynamics in our classroom. In the first act of *A Doll's House*, the reader/ viewer must attend to background details divulged between Nora and her newly reacquainted childhood friend, Christine Linde. We learn that, in order to revitalize her husband's ill health, Nora borrowed money in an era when it was forbidden to do so. She forged her father's name and has ever since contrived ways to pay back her loan so that her husband will never know. Abby's view of female representations in the play was from a compassionate standpoint, one female empathizing with another, whereas Kyle and Dan viewed females from a suspicious standpoint. Sam was the sole student in this data sample who deconstructed Ibsen's male representation and tried to make sense of it beyond a power/ no power binary. Ibsen was not advocating change (Cummings, 2003) but, rather, pointing through the contextual symbols of Nora's life to the reality of the lives of Victorian women.

Like Ibsen, my students identified the reality of gender pragmatically. Moreover, their conversations pointed to differing gender constructions as a historical phenomenon: they acknowledged that Torvald oppresses Nora, but they did not allude to contemporary comparisons with the exception of "the marriage isn't like today, when people can talk openly." The lack of familiarity and comfort with such discourse within the classroom, however, impeded the students in this data sample to extend the social and cultural constructions of gender forward to contemporary U.S. society so as to interrogate how Nora's life did and did not resemble the lives of

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contemporary western women, as described by the rubric. After twelve prior weeks of scaffolded learning events during the *Our Town* unit as described in the third example of this second data section, I had explicitly required my students in this series of fishbowl exchanges to offer "interpretations of sociocultural norms in the text." They did not offer examples of contemporary patriarchy; comment on contemporary notions of youth sexual practices; analyze the influence of media representations of gender on contemporary youth; identify how identities become constructed around gender; or, express confusion about contradictory feelings of arousal in conjunction with the possible victimization in media depictions of youth sexuality.

Of course, such discussions would have required a heightened degree of confidence or even bravery around academic discourse, and youth history of academic discourse seemed not to have included topics around gender-bending, cyber-rape, pornography, or personal gender identity (Fullerton, 2004) in juxtaposition to the high western canon. Public school educators can no longer afford to confine discourse around youth, gender, and sexuality to the realm of sex education; rather, we must extend these efforts to address youth across a wide range of classrooms and schooling contexts. I began to understand after this data sample and other Act I fishbowl conversations how deeply students held views of gender consistent with dominant ideologies, which were in contrast to social justice definitions of gender where "a vision of mutuality is the ethos shaping our interaction" (hooks, 2000, p. x). I needed to explore the problematic dynamics of sex, power, authority, and knowledge inherent in constructions of gender throughout the school year in delicate yet deliberate ways so as to engage in "thinking which perceives reality as a process, as transformation"

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(Freire, 1992, p. 81). As a social justice educator, I accepted the challenge of acknowledging and molding the energies of such a volatile and emotional subject matter as gender and its extensions to youth sexuality so it could function within the pedagogical constraints of THS institutional authority.

Yet, as will become apparent in the third data section of this dissertation, students did sometimes interpret and compose through critical literacy worldviews that interrogated youth, sexuality, and gender definitions. Other events, such as the data that emerge in the next example, however, refuted our classroom discussions and reproduced dominant definitions of gender and sexuality. A THS school-sanctioned pep rally where youths participated in a culture of gender as social institution reinforced a dominant U.S. culture where males are powerful and females are submissive. The full-school assembly challenged my classroom definitions of social justice and equity for all.

The Thanksgiving pep rally: A ritual in framing gender expectations

This eighth data example of section two takes a look at a THS ritualized public performance text of gender and reconceptualizes it as a reproduction of dominant constructions of U.S. society. In doing so, I argue that it was no wonder that my critical literacy praxis often seemed silly when set against the larger school context of upper middle class "normal" behaviors and ways of being. Certainly, females have created and used "countless alternative and participatory communication channels to support their struggles, defend their rights, promote reflection, and diffuse their own forms of representation" (Gallagher, 1995, p. 9). However, as a veteran teacher, I ask

two questions that reside at the intersection of theory and practice: What can we learn about youth and sexuality through dominant constructions of gender by situating public performance texts within the realm of sociocultural inquiry? How can social justice educators encourage students to raise disciplined questions about the sources of power in a patriarchal society if school contexts reproduce that patriarchal power?

As the students, faculty, and staff jostled each other to get into the field house, its main narrow doorway and dark metal doors forced us to breathe in bad breath, locker room aromas, and some overzealous perfume. The boom-boom-boom of bass speakers pummeled the crowd. Merging into the next larger space, I filed right and saw the band of four males who were dressed in oversized sunglasses, tight jersey shorts, and long sleeved Taylor jerseys. It was their raucous contemporary music that had been our greeting. The 50' high ceiling was punctuated with light bulbs in metal cages and long rods of metal structural work. I turned left and right to observe the configuration of class groupings: the risers of bleachers on three sides were split a bit unevenly according to each of four student grade levels and their coordinating colors of yellow, green, red, or blue. Students called to each other across the vacuum, teachers circulated and implored students to sit down, and the din grew and took on a life of its own as the full population of 1550 or so THS students found their places (November 21, 2007).

Today was the annual Thanksgiving Pep Rally, a Taylor narrative drawn from the ritual realm. Among the events for the afternoon prior to break for Thanksgiving recess were a parade of Taylor athletes; an alto female's resonant rendition of the National Anthem better than at most sporting events; a teacher-student volleyball

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game in which a female teacher who was a former collegiate champion declined to participate; a tug of war; and, a jostling contest between the three male and one female class presidents, who were ensconced in oversized and disproportionally weighted animal cartoon costumes.

After the lithe, athletic, and all-female cheerleading squads ran, leaped, catapulted, stood in tiers of three, yelled in unison, and turned in synchronization to the background techno music, the Senior Boys emerged from four quadrants of the field house onto the matted stage. In a way that makes clear the links between ritual and spectacle, the pre-Thanksgiving Pep Rally was complete only after the final performance of the Senior Boys' Dance. An historic tradition at THS, this event drew out males from the senior class across a mélange of high status individuals who represented sports teams and cliques and who created a parody text: a dance/ cheerleading/ performance space composition before the assembled THS student body. They mimicked the female cheerleaders in an appropriation of attire and deportment. They were dressed in black sunglasses, long sleeved t-shirts, and too-small workout suits over tights. The Senior Boys thrust themselves across the mats toward each other in a series of hip undulations, chest shakes, somersaults, cartwheels, tummy rubs, butt squeezes, and lifts without proper support or dismounts. The crowd roared. Mr. McAllister, who had recently uttered to his senior classes, "If elected, Obama will arm the Green Team,[35]" wandered out of the field house. He never saw the display. I found his departure interesting, as Mr. McAllister spoke openly and frequently in his classroom about his dismay over progressive political agendas. It

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[35] The "Green Team" at THS initiated school-wide recycling.

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seemed to me that, if anyone present, Mr. McAllister would approve of the Seniors

Boys' dominant constructions of the female gender.

The Senior Boys' Dance at the Thanksgiving Pep Rally was an event that

depicted ritualized and patriarchal ways of knowing and intertwined history, myth, and

ritual. The Dance was a performance that spoke to many texts of what it meant to be a

youth at Taylor High School, and it dealt with serious and raw energies of youth rite of

passage. Three areas of sexuality emerged in the Senior Boys' Dance: homophobia,

sexual performance, and concern with the loss of virginity. The dance reinforced the

condition of being male by denigrating the condition of being female. In the

patriarchal context of the dance, the female identity as wondrous or the satisfaction

that comes from having relationships with females were irrelevant. The Senior Boys

posed with hands on hips and strutted. They leaned forward and shook their chests.

Clawing each other as they mounted into a haphazard tier, the boys grimaced with

masks that were drawn with contempt and which decried the aesthetic possibilities

within linked human forms.

Indeed, in the days preceding the performance, the female cheerleaders had

assisted the senior boys to master (pun intended) the acrobatics; thus, females with

expertise fell victim to the dominant male paradigm. Reciprocally, the Boys'

supposed ability to appropriate the cheerleaders' moves with a scant few practices

before the pep rally reinforced a false notion of feminine activities as simplistic and

lacking in athleticism. By extension, cheerleading and other feminine physical

competitions and activities were incomparable to superior and dominant, thus more

appealing male competitions.

I use this data example to fix attention on the relationship between the social domain and the construction of gender subjectivity. Students' own "inside' versions of sexuality as relating to ritual knowledge of youth sexuality, which were often private or restricted from adults, were exposed. Gender difference is constructed in society and language, and there is nothing "natural" about gender at all (Connell, 1987). The Senior Boys' Dance performance remained faithful to the "inside" socialized and trivialized texts around the female gender. Privileged male students moved in worlds where the dynamics of conscious and unconscious oppression went unnoticed. Male power, gender inequity, and female disadvantage were institutional features at THS. The THS school authorities' institutional policies and practices allocated privilege and advantages to males and subordination and disadvantages to females. Power differentials were manifest in the recursive practice of the Senior Boys Dance, and the power differentials oriented, constrained, and facilitated the gestalt of student body glee over the Seniors Boys' Dance performance. The Boys' social positions were highly prized and provided all youth males at THS with power over the less prized positions of females at THS.

In an era when gay bashings and violence against women were everyday practices, privileged students --- both males and females ---- at THS had not been invited to challenge the cultural imprints and educational practices that had served to define dominant heterosexual masculinity. With local cable television video and numerous private still cameras rolling, the Senior Boys taught the audience the text and the pathway for socially acceptable behavior in both the ritual and social realms of youth sexuality and gender expectations. Why did THS rely on being an institution

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that was "internally consistent, conflict-free, fixed, and unchanging" (P. Y. Martin, 2004, p. 1253) while conflicts, internal inconsistencies, and change were roiling waves of patriarchal power, gender inequalities, privilege, and disadvantage within its institutional features? Why did infusing fun for the student body prior to a five day recess take precedence over dialogicality about the body as material representation of identity? Why did THS reinforce gender constructions "of moves in a fully textualized and coded world" (Haraway, 1988, p. 577) instead of resisting them?

It is logical then, as a result of this context, that my students resisted my efforts at gender deconstruction and social justice pedagogy. In the data sample that follows, I continue to analyze how gender, youth sexuality, and popular culture continued to be so inextricably intertwined that they nearly halted the multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural foundations of my critical literacy pedagogy.

But I saw it in a movie! Digital video, youth sexuality, and privacy issues

In the ninth example of this second section of data, I learned a lot as a teacher researcher about how youths in Taylor used popular culture texts and communications tools for sexual exploration; such tools challenged my critical literacy goals. Much work on youth contact with sexuality in the mainstream media and popular culture has been framed according to media effects upon the sexual self-concepts, attitudes, and behaviors of youth (Hawk & Vanwesenbeeck, 2006). However, in this data example, I observed how media representations provided youth with depictions of gender behaviors that translated into comparable public sphere behaviors around gender.

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I asked the E period students seated around me where Kyle was, as he had been absent for a couple of days. Absences change a class dynamic. No one answered my question. A lot of shuffling of papers and pages substituted for a response to my question. Abby was also absent. Thinking little more about it, I reviewed for the students present the previous day's learning events in conjunction with *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston and broke the class into small groups. As the small groups began to collaborate, I took a seat next to Jill.

Jill: *(whispering)* Kyle's been out 'cause he's been embarrassed by something. It happened outside of school.

CF: I don't get it. What happened? …. But you don't have to tell me if you're not comfortable.

Jill: *(mouth pointed toward desk)* He was caught videotaping some girls.

CF: Abby?

Jill: It was on the news last night (March 10, 2007).

I did not live in the community in which I worked, and I realized it was likely that local families had seen area news broadcast recontextualizations. E-mails, instant messaging, texting, and Facebook walls had probably followed as hot virtual communications. I found an online daily newspaper article that described Kyle as a "17-year-old Taylor High School senior" who "police say secretly videotaped two girls in his bedroom" in "sexually revealing situations" by using a "Creative Web camera he set up in his bedroom." The online newspaper called the females "victims, both Taylor High School students, in his room and either nude or partially nude." Kyle was "facing charges for the unlawful recordings" including "photographing an

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unsuspecting nude person and disseminating photographs of an unsuspecting nude person." The "search of Eldridge's home Dec. 17[36] uncovered a desktop computer with five videos of the two victims." While the three underage youth were all consenting participants in the sexual activities, the two females were not aware that Kyle was taping them nor that he would share the tape of their sexual activities with others.

A film called *American Pie* (Weitz & Hertz, 1999), with which the youth in this study were keenly familiar, contains a strikingly similar narrative to Kyle's melding of youth and genderized definitions of sexuality. In *American Pie*, four high school senior males in suburban America are anxious to cast away their labels as "virgins," so each pledges to have sexual intercourse with a woman in the three weeks before senior prom. In order to fulfill his promise, Jim attempts to seduce a foreign exchange student. His methodology includes a webcam text where all his attempts and successes will be broadcast live to a select group of his social networking inner circle. The video broadcast of his sexual rite of passage, however, is inadvertently sent to a larger user group than was Jim's original intention: anyone who happens to be on his school address book has full view of his and his partner's sexual escapade.

The narratives in *American Pie* and the local newspaper about Kyle were nearly identical. The collective and unspoken knowledge of Kyle's original and formerly secret films brought a new dimension of tension to the E period students. Jill had repaid me several times over for the extensions and extra help I had previously

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[36] **The police had delayed the release of the original findings while they investigated the case.**

extended to her[37]. What would the classroom have been like if I had not known? Without Jill, I would have been more of an Outsider than I already was by virtue of the adult/ youth, teacher as authority/ student as recipient model that I had tried to absolve. I differed from my students in so many ways: my age, life experiences, education, family background, and leisure time activity preferences. As linguistic analyst Edley (2003a) notes, "discourse and practice are inextricably bound up with one another" (p. 192), and my students' particular "discourses of the "self" and "mind" (p. 224) structured how they thought, felt, and talked in the classroom. When Jill opened to me a particular knowledge of Kyle, she had offered me an important means to understand and help my students throughout the remainder of the school year. I understood much more how Kyle's academic discourse about gender and youth sexuality had been framed by his private sphere media and interpersonal experiences. He had bought into dominant media representations of youth and sexuality and had melded the lines of sexual representation of self so that media became life.

While I had already known that parents and guardians are important sources of messages about sexuality and gender constructs (Sutton, Brown, Wilson, & Klein, 2002), without Jill, I would not have been well-informed enough about youth media culture to step back and to look at the students' lives through youth media culture influences. Sure, I recognized in general terms that the media and television in

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[37] **After the article, the guidance department counselor assigned to Kyle, Rick offered brief tidbits information about Kyle when I noted that the classroom was "experiencing a lot of tension." "The school knew about it since last May;" "police were deciding how to handle the situation;" "somebody leaked the story early;" "he's staying home for a few days to let the situation cool off;" "Abby seems to be sitting with a new group in the cafeteria."**

particular play a critical role in sexual socialization among youth (Arnett, 2002). I

knew that youth turn to one another for support and counsel; I had done the same

when I was a teenager. What I hadn't realized was how some youth used the media's

compelling story lines and appealing images as role models for their own behaviors.

Media messages serve as a meaningful source for the acquisition of gender

awareness, expectations of gender roles and conduct, self-evaluative standards, and

self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 2001). Because youths' lives are characterized by

increased independence from parents and guardians, and because there is much sexual

activity during this age period (CDC, 2006), the media's role in youth sexual behavior

is crucial: media tend to associate positive consequences from youth engagement in

sexual intercourse (Eyal & Kunkel, 2008). Relatively inexpensive Internet-based

video cameras, called webcams, allow youth an additional form of nonsexual

entertainment and communication. Sometimes, though, youth use webcams to

"experiment with seductive, voyeuristic, and exhibitionistic sexual behaviors that were

not as readily available prior to the availability of the webcams," according to youth

sexuality researchers Delmonico & Griffin (2008, p. 432). Kyle had transferred highly

accessible media examples of sexual and romantic interactions such as models of

dating, initiating sexual activities, sharing sexual interactions after-the-fact with peers,

and infusing gender-appropriate sexual behaviors into his own sexual practices.

Kyle's attitudes, judgments, and actions were likely guided by media exposure to the

point where real-world gender-based beliefs and behaviors became indistinguishable

from those portrayed by the media. While Kyle never explicitly named *American Pie*

as a direct influence,[38] the information about youth sexuality drawn from popular

culture helped Kyle to construct his perceptions about sexual relationships as well as

gender roles.

Through critical literacy praxis, where my students were co-learners, I created a

safe place for Jill to share her knowledge of the youth culture of the classroom. My

guidance into interrogations of patriarchy also had to be reconciled with an

understanding that youths' "developmental journeys are shaped by the social and

symbolic material of their own childhoods, much of which comes from the popular

media" (Dyson, 2003, p. 330). After Jill's revelation, I was vigilant to incorporate

teaching moments as they arose in order to deconstruct media examples of gender and

youth sexuality. Without local knowledge, I never really would have been able to

challenge oppositional locales from which dominant masculinity, patriarchal power,

and privilege (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998) rose.

But critical literacy praxis had failed me in another dimension: How could I

continue to frame literacy learning as sociocultural analysis through multimodal,

multiliterate, and transcultural learning events when the students before me had

recontextualized media depictions of youth sexuality into their own lives in ways that

were contrary to my social justice pedagogy? Wouldn't I become just another

artificial educator who professed to be an expert in literacy when students understood

explicitly that their lives contained many more complex and undisclosed literacy

practices and needs? Moreover, how could I talk about deconstructing media texts

when the local media newspaper had reconceptualized Kyle and Abby's sexual

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[38] Kyle offered in a September survey that his favorite film was *The Butler Did It*.

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experience in such a way that the entire Taylor community became voyeurs? How could I communicate my concern, not with how women are portrayed in the media or how many women work in the media, but, also, with what kinds of lives we lead and what status we have? Would my goals to finish the year by illustrating how the fusion of media information and entertainment, software and hardware, and production and distribution also stifle resistance and creativity for youth of both genders to recreate identities outside dominant definitions of gender?

It was Abby who helped to smooth my way with the E period class for the remainder of the year. Our Junior Miss representative for Taylor, she strode into the classroom a few days after the newspaper article that I described previously. As she had before the media reports of Kyle's films, Abby positioned herself within the classroom dynamic as vibrant and energetic: she held her shoulders back, her makeup was carefully applied, and she wore a bright smile on her face. Her cleavage was exposed and elevated with a push-up bra, and her faded denim skirt was hemmed to her upper thigh. After one class period of reticence, in which the class respected her silence, she regained her voice and rejoined the academic discourse. She was Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in her reemergence to her community in a strong and vibrant way of being. In her public performance texts, she recontextualized media narratives of the female who is appealing to the male gender through overt body sexuality, yet she also infused our classroom academic discourse with rich insights, epiphanies, and experiences that challenged and resisted patriarchal dominance. Importantly to me, she also served as a gatekeeper of revelations about the duality of women's lives as they enter into the adult world. As a co-teacher, she empowered me.

She deepened my understanding of and built upon new methods to create alliances across multiple manifestations of female ways of being, of additional recontextualizations of media messages around gender, and of females and males who struggle for a more diverse and democratic world of literacy, information, and communication about gender representations and messages.

Kyle returned to the classroom after about two weeks. Although I was alternately shocked, angry, frustrated, concerned, confused, curious, and dismayed by his private sphere actions, I did make conscious efforts to include him in discussions, to solicit his opinions, and to offer him pathways to engage in the academic discourse. I wanted to continue to be a co-learner with him. Rather than, as some might argue, playing to his male privilege, I wanted Kyle, like all members of my classroom community, to be welcomed, whether their life choices were those I agreed with or not or felt complemented my social justice pedagogy or not. As an educator, I felt Kyle was a raw youth: he was still constructing his identity and had likely been acculturated in a single dad household[39] that fostered misogyny. I regarded his participation in my social justice classroom as an opportunity for him to have a guide in his life who embraced alternative lenses through which to see his world, especially that of the female.

Kyle shifted his original seat away from Abby, Dan, and Sam and joined Donnie, Terry, and Reggie in small group learning events for the last two terms of the school year. While these males never seemed to condone Kyle's private sphere actions in which he had recontextualized a popular culture depiction of sexuality, they did draw

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[39] **He referred to his father in our classroom conversations as "Papa Eldridge."**

him out. As will become evident in the next section of data analysis, they and other students also modeled for Kyle what meaningful practices can emerge from critical literacy pedagogy when youth distance themselves from dominant messages of U.S. and, so, challenge basic relations of power in society. After the senior graduation, Kyle came by the classroom to visit, along with Benny from my G period roster. They were the only two students to do so. I hope that I was at least partially successful in helping Kyle --- and Abby, Aubrey, Donnie, Benny, Arlene, and my other students --- through mediated action to become aware of the pervasive and insidious role that systemic forces, in the form of recontextualization of cultural tools and resources, play in promoting and promulgating both oppression and privilege. I also hope that I helped Kyle, particularly, to see the possibility for a brighter, more hopeful tomorrow for all through social justice pedagogy.

Conclusion: How did critical literacy pedagogy create tensions in youth?

In this second section of data, I discussed how waves of tension arose in my classroom through recontextualization processes. Recontextualization, a process that extracts text, signs, or meaning from its original context and molds it into another context, directly affected my critical literacy praxis. Since the meaning of texts and signs depend on their context, recontextualization implies a change of meaning and, often, communicative purpose. Recontextualizations reproduced dominant ideologies of U.S. society around traditional literacy practices and definitions of gender. Conflicts emerged when institutionalized academic tracking and dominant constructions of gender conflicted with my social justice pedagogy.

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Although my advanced planning for a critical literacy classroom was process-oriented, researched, and scaffolded, many of my students did not readily embrace new ideas about equity, justice, freedom, and culture due to their assigned academic track. For the higher tracked, or honors students, social identifications as privileged citizens of the U.S. were too engrained. Many of my honors students recontextualized their former literacy education practices as more significant than my requests for them to mediate and transform hegemonic youth public sphere practices. My college preparatory sophomores felt unprepared for creative and original classroom literacy multimodal compositions. They had difficulties accepting what they viewed the complex interactions and essentially separate processes (Wortham, 2006) among their academic and non-academic literacy activities. Moreover, while I had hoped that social justice messages would serve as means for youth to envision a new tomorrow, discontinuities emerged between my intended sites of critical inquiry and media sites where youth ways of being were portrayed, especially as regards youth and sexuality.

Thus, the institution of tracking and the ubiquitous media presence in students' lives crashed and foamed in chains of genres that were parts of an interdependent discursive relationship between text and context. When Arlene, Catherine, and other youth read about rejection of textual determinism, they resented the implication that their previous and privileged literacy instruction may have been a too narrow means of ascertaining their own youth literacy abilities. Connie experienced dissonance between the literal narrative textual message and embedded sociocultural patterns of textual messages and recontextualized her difficulties through her guidance counselor as school authority figure so as to influence her GPA. Through Connie, I learned that

higher academic tracks implied nearly automatic high grade equivalents. Donnie and Casey had to invent and locate spaces for themselves to narrate their academic life texts in new ways so that their inner voices of failure wouldn't be prophetic within a tracked classroom. Conversely, Martin had to reconcile his previously high literacy learning grades as a lower tracked student with my request to look within himself, to reflect, and to accept the challenge that, regardless of assigned track, he had the intellectual wherewithal to excel at higher level thinking tasks that involved choice in literacy assessment, to connect messages across texts other than print, and to infuse his own unique voice into the classroom. All my students, regardless of academic track, were required to be critical evaluators of texts, textual messages, textual purposes, and textual effects on audiences, which caused youth academic anxiety. The critical literacy classroom typically caused tensions among tracked students because my praxis was new, unsettling, and conflictual with previous literacy experiences.

When Mr. Rocco intervened on behalf of his daughter's literacy goals, it seemed like he was seeking assurance that her literacy education was consistent with his family's socioeconomic class. However, my critical literacy classroom--- through multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural learning events --- actually unveiled real-life tensions in Betty's life around literacy and propelled Betty to recontextualize her real-world literacy concerns into different texts depending on her role as a daughter, student, youth, or friend. Mr. Rocco and I, in turn, recontextualized Betty's narrative in ways that mirrored other recontextualizations of embedded generic formats, especially as regards youth and youth sexuality. When Kyle, Terry, and Aubrey offered me their enthusiastic invitations to view *Superbad*, I learned that youth worlds

of sexuality were embedded with media representations of rites of passage. Those dominant definitions of gender were in contrast to social justice definitions of gender that I hoped would be overarching themes for the year. When Kyle, Sam, Abby, and Dan debated Nora's role in *A Doll's House,* they revealed the reality of specific gender divisions in their own lives as constructions of identity. Problematic dynamics of sex, power, authenticity, and knowledge inherent in constructions of gender arose, as a result, in our critical literacy classroom. The Senior Boys' Dance at the Thanksgiving Pep Rally recontextualized and depicted ritualized and patriarchal ways of knowing and intertwined history, myth, and ritual. The Senior Boys' Dance remained faithful to the 'insider' socialized and trivialized texts around the female gender. When Kyle recontextualized the narrative around youth sexuality from *American Pie,* he revealed how his academic discourse about gender and youth sexuality had molded so that media art had become life to Kyle.

Tensions occurred in this study when tracking created interrelated recontextualizations about what elements should comprise a literacy classroom, about correlations between high grades and the high track, about individual worth and educating based on class, and the controversial subject matter in U.S. public schools of gender and its extensions to youth sexuality as literacy. Yet my students did not always challenge themes around social justice; in fact, many students had epiphanies around issues that targeted dominant ideologies in U.S. society. In the next and final data section of this chapter, I describe how many students did make personal meaning of critical literacy praxis and why they did so.

Section three: Recontextualization as meaningful literacy practices

In the second data section of chapter four, I argued that, while messages of social justice and equity were central to my praxis, many youth in this study had prior literacy educational experiences, a privileged status, identity associations developed from systems of tracking, or dominant worldviews around gender and genderized ways of being that created dissonance when situated within a critical literacy framework that promoted equity and agency for all. In this third and final data section of chapter four, I argue that, through critical literacy praxis, many contemporary youth awoke to broader and more vital definitions of what is meant to be a literate learner and "normal" in the U. S. Regardless of their academic track, many students embraced critical literacy pedagogy that incorporated original, popular, and media texts of their own choosing. They became hope-filled when they were able to read and recontextualize their worlds in meaningful ways through critical literacy pedagogy.

Students' optimism about their own literacy practices and their worlds emerged for several reasons. Our sociocultural interrogations of high canonical texts permitted students to question Taylor's print-centric curriculum, thus shifting a school culture of fear of youth to celebration of youth's authentic literacy practices and worldviews. Moreover, deconstruction of popular and media culture texts transcended traditional school literacy practices by linking topics, issues, and learning events to youth's vital, exuberant, and rich lives. Students recontextualized by extracting text, signs, or meaning from the original context of their own worlds and molding that meaning into the context of authentic learning experiences in my critical literacy classroom.   Thus, students who had been labeled as less worthy because of assigned track sparked with

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enthusiasm when they discovered previously hidden literacy strengths. Importantly, instead of suppressing youth voice, critical literacy pedagogy invited collaboration and dialogicality. As a result, I released my teacher authority to my students and endowed the youth to both rise with strong authorial voices and to be positioned as knowledgeable experts. Critical pedagogy empowered youth through meaningful literacy practices.

I support my arguments in the following ways. First, many seniors demonstrated how they were able to shift discourses about curriculum-mandated, high canonical literature after an intensive popular culture investigation. Through a critical evaluation of industrial era and contemporary society, dialogic exchanges, and interrogation of collective cultural metaphors of the western world, I repositioned popular culture, the high western canon, history, ideology, and cultural studies as interconnected and necessary inquiries within the field of literacy education. Second, when offered new ways to envision themselves as literate learners through multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural analysis and composition, most sophomores who had institutional labeling as "average" or "low" achievers responded positively to high canonical texts and related learning events. They drew on authentic literacies from their real-lives to conduct sociocultural research and analysis. Third, sophomores recontextualized Shakespeare through processes of producing and consuming, thus rising to new heights of meaning around a classic text. Fourth, seniors whom I designated as formal co-teachers assumed and welcomed positions of power through interrogation of sociocultural constructs across their real life texts and found voice to challenge dominant definitions of gender, youth, and sexuality.

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Ultimately, I relate how, though highly imperfect and ill-structured (Spiro,

Coulson, Feltovich, & Anderson, 1994) for the larger Taylor instructional climate

from which the students emerged, critical literacy praxis created contexts of

meaningful literacy practices and offered students new perspectives on their privilege,

on previously opaque ways of seeing the world, and on opportunities to transcend their

traditional literacy instruction so as to acknowledge real-world literacies within the

public high school. This chapter, then, discusses the meaningful practices that

emerged when I compromised among new, old, and shifting literacies. It describes

how my philosophies about teaching literacy, culture, and citizenry within the context

of multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural learning events created meaningful

literacy practices that inspired epiphanies about literate self-worth. As a result, I argue

that social justice educators must not lose hope when confronted with school authority

figures who reproduce dominant ideologies of society nor when tensions result from

youths' initial reactions to critical literacy praxis. Critical literacy praxis can infuse

hopeful literacy learning for many twenty-first century youth.

Melville's existential assumptions and deconstructing Disney

As described in the second section of data, many students at THS, regardless of

status, came to my class with pre-existing ideas about what literacy instruction should

look like and about what the consequences of that literacy instruction were. I sought to

harness the seniors' energy and wherewithal so that their discourse could be a

"material force able to mediate transformation" (Shor, 1996, p. 3). If I channeled the

students' confidence, positionings, and inner strength so that a discourse of politics,

race, class, gender, subjugation, domination, exclusion, marginality, and 'Otherness"

could take on new meanings, youths' own recontextualizations might divulge

"questions of power and the political" (Hall, 2003a, p. 108). I wanted youth to

embrace literacy learning as a marvelous pathway toward reading their worlds in new

ways. Rather than floundering in despair over high canonical, print-centered

curriculum, I wanted students to envision swells of liberation. If students could regard

classroom texts as foundations for authentic shared personal meanings, then joy in

being literate might pervade our journeys together. I accepted the challenge to make

my students act upon their own literacy learning through textual engagement, a

worldview of interconnectedness, and invigorated interactions.

In this first example of data section three, I perceived the curriculum-mandated,

high canonical text, *Billy Budd* (Melville, 1924/ 1998) as an opportunity for me to

infuse multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural foundations for social justice in the

classroom and help students to create meaningful literacy practices. To plan for the

unit, first, I revisited Melville's existential assumptions (Fairclough, 2003) as

contained in the *Billy Budd* primary text. Existential assumptions are meanings which

can be logically inferred from features of language. Melville described the world

according to binaries, or pairs of unequally valued terms in which the higher value is

associated with masculinity and the second with femininity. Mendick (2005) argues

that young people locate themselves in a series of inter-related gendered binary

oppositions. Remembering how McLaren (1992) contends that "one cannot simply

give primacy to experience without taking into account how experience is structured

and power produced through language" (p. 7), I decided that, through dialogicality,

my students and I could gain distance on experience, power, and language and begin the process of transformation (Shor, 1993) through interrogation of Melville's existential assumptions around a world of binaries.

Second, in a small pool of midnight light over my desktop, I researched and considered a wide array of *Billy Budd* recontextualizations including digital sources, newspaper and magazine articles, song lyrics, comic books, and video games. To conduct my research, I identified key terms that might connect Melville's high canonical print text to my students' contemporary popular and media culture texts. I wanted my students to think about culture, that is, their own shared ways of knowing, thinking, and believing in a symbol-saturated (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) world. Themes around "maritime," "justice," and "identity" pointed to key terms of "mutiny," "rebellion," and "resistance." Borrowing from Hall's (2003a) argument that seemingly straightforward media telecasts decode in a "hegemony of the dominant code" (p. 515), I chose Disney's *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* (Verbinski, 2003) film to introduce *Billy Budd.* In the first two minutes of the film recontextualization of colonial maritime life, a many-masted sailing ship eerily enters and envelops the misty frame. A young girl sings softly to herself from the bow. A sailor comes forward and hushes the child, Elizabeth Swann. Her father, the Governor appears. The sailor mutters about having a female on board. An officer states, "Any man who flies under a pirate flag will get what he deserves."

Abby: This is the best film! Everyone should watch it.

Debby: It's a film about pirates.

Reggie: Ships. Hanging. It puts us in the action of the events involved. It's

written in a pirate narrative. Next: it's 'English' words. They're imaginary

characters.

The topic of "pirates" reached to Abby's imagination, to what Giroux (1999)

states is an innocence that "becomes the ideological and educational vehicle through

which Disney promotes conservative ideas and values as the normative and taken-for-

granted" (p. 34). Debby and Reggie began to interrogate the Disney text by drawing

upon strategies that had proven successful in their previous English classes. My goal

was to act as their facilitator so they might begin to ask critical questions.

Donnie: Are we to take this as a learning activity or entertainment?

Lisa: To entertain (October 15, 2007).

Lisa's formative experiences with Disney had been appealing and, so, she

transferred pleasure to the classroom. "Through the experience of entertainment, the

world wires us for involvement," according to anthropological psychologists Hunter

and Csikszentmihalyi (2003, p. 29). Donnie, though, stopped to pose a question

about pedagogical goals. Donnie and Lisa's interpretations differed due to the

pleasure principle, in which engagement with a familiar, comfortable text contrasts

with a text that unsettles the reader or which produces a bodily reaction such as fear or

resentment (Giroux & Simon, 1989; Hamston, 2004). Donnie was ready to create

critical distance from the text.

I interjected that students should consider the contextual elements of the film as

they conducted their analyses.

Dan: What is 'contextual'?

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Dan needed his knowledge base to be activated, constructed, and made

meaningful (Polanyi, 1958), so, instead of rejecting a term that was not part of his

inner vocabulary, Dan asked a question. He was invested enough in the popular

culture textual analysis to take an academic risk in front of his peers

BJ: 'Who sets the standard for the text?' So, do you mean people in the text?

Jonathan: So, 'who sets the standard for the text? The characters in the text?

No? So, it's the people outside in our society? Like the producer? Like

Disney?

Through dialogicality, BJ and Jonathan transcended traditional literary analysis of

characterization, stepped outside a Disney revisionist world of history, and began to

consider how composers create characters according to particular ideological views

and through the capacity to exercise social power, domination, and hegemony. As

will be described in the next data example, these early conversations offered

metacognitive awareness and shaped seniors' interpretations of implicitness and

assumptions within ideologies.

Critical analysis of the first two minutes reveals hegemonic messages of youth

and mistrust (M. Apple, 2004; Brantlinger, 1991; Ghosh, et al., 2007; Raby, 2002),

patriarchal structures as dominant in western society (Gilligan, 1977; J. R. Martin,

1994), hierarchies of power as means to negotiate identity (Foucault, 1980; McIntosh,

1997; Shor, 1992), and colonialism's ugly roots (Giroux, 2008a, 2008b; Solnit, 2004).

Disney recontextualized the *Billy Budd* narrative by re-envisioning colonial history

(Zinn, 1997, 2009); by drawing on its entertainment goodwill --- derived from

corporate monopolies of theme parks, toys, clothing, television, and film--- through

the pleasure principle (Barthes, 1975; Giroux & Simon, 1989; Hamston, 2004); and, by invoking metaphors of a golden era of the western world that, according to Giroux (1999, p. 5), was grounded in an "ability to tap into the lost hopes, abortive dreams, and utopian potential of popular culture." Because culture is "coded, copied, and simulated by technological means" (Ahponen, 1990) in the postmodern society in which we live, youth today forge views of the past through the ubiquitous popular culture. My students, however, moved from frames of viewing as pleasure toward distance and critique through critical literacy questioning.

Benny: We made a spectrum. Here to the left are the characters that most adhere to the society.

Brandy: Governor Swann contrasts against his daughter. She seems more willful. She's more likely to come out of character and say, like, 'Hey, how are you?' to Will Turner and others not in her class. The governor doesn't approve of that. He wants to impose English traditions and beliefs, like the dress, which is the latest fashion.

Audrey: A pirate is expected to be the lowest of the low. And there are even expectations for this lowest level of society. Yet it is the pirate's genius and confidence that they are able to recognize. He doesn't regard rules at all, but he keeps his own set of rules. Which is strange, because it seems that the other level of the spectrum loses themselves. Individuality through all that gets reached through disobedience rather than obedience.

Benny, Brandy, and Audrey recognized the paradoxes of upper class (aristocrats), middle class (soldiers), and lower class (tradesmen) as depicted in the

film. These would be the same types of paradoxes students would later critically identify in Melville's *Billy Budd*. Through a "spectrum," they indicated that each Disney character had distinct qualities that placed her or him on a special point on a social hierarchy. Gender distinctions in which father "contrasts against his daughter" point to patriarchy within family dynamics and led Brandy to describe imposition of "traditions and beliefs." Audrey extended the group discourse to apply stratification, in which the pirate "doesn't regard rules at all" but also reaches individuality "through disobedience rather than obedience." Their tertiary texts are important in this data section as the youth translated their own lives within social hierarchies to the film, identified ways that gender distinctions played out in a narrative of rituals that play forward to today's society, and reconciled rebellion through class struggles as necessary for resistance to hegemonic ideologies of conformity. Critical literacy allowed them to question reproduction of dominant ideologies, such as was described in the first section of this chapter when school authority figures recontextualized upper middle class life as "normal" and thus created meaningful literacy practices. In this case, mapping these dominant ideologies and hierarchies set the stage for *Billy Budd*.

Next, Casey and Connie --- each of whom was a talented, handsome, and intellectually curious individual --- interrogated gender power imbalances. They argued that women had "less power --- expected to just sit there and look pretty --- they aren't given much of a voice --- they were sometimes maids --- passive observers." Men had "more power --- all men were either lieutenants or guards --- push the women around." This data example is important in this section as it demonstrates how Casey was able to assert her own academic identity through a newly

discovered strong voice, in contrast both to the depiction of the heroine of the film as voiceless and her own early struggles in my classroom as an uncertain new student to the honors track. Connie was building a foundation of knowledge in which she would move from identification of gender divisions, female designation into lower strata careers, and lack of agency to more precise coding, thus, eventually, acquiring the high grades for which she yearned so badly. By interrogating gender power imbalances as institutional tensions among the British Navy, government, women, and servants, Casey and Connie drew upon their own life knowledge and literacies in an academic and real context to form cultural constructions of meaning. By interrogating the film, they engaged in meaningful literacy practices: they invoked their own complex communicative abilities and their own worldviews through a hybridity of literacies and literacy achievements.

My students and I were invested in a process through which we, as co-learners, separated ourselves from textual representations and messages of hegemony regarding race, gender, class, and sexual orientation (Freire & Giroux, 1989; hooks, 1994; Katz, 1999; Kilbourne, 2002). Next, moving deeper into sociocultural analysis, they read the high canonical text, *Billy Budd* and decoded its outdated structure, complex sentence design, archaic vocabulary, elusive symbolism, quixotic allusions, and unfamiliar maritime terminology. We set a background for reading, offered hints for decoding, paraphrased methodically, shared close reading, guided through advanced questions, read in short chunks, and reflected through interpretive writing assignments. We constantly referred back to our critical analyses of *Pirates of the Caribbean* and made connections among constructs of power, class, and gender. Moreover, I

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explained how the protagonist represented thousands of historically impressed

European sailors. To consistently play forward the primary and secondary film texts

to the students' own worlds, we read articles in *Yes*! Magazine about the large

numbers of hard-working and intellectually talented contemporary youth who fight

impoverishment, experience daily racial stereotyping, and possessed few opportunities

for meritocratic success as mirrors to protagonists' dilemmas.

We connected "prejudice, race, gender, the media's presentation of the Other"

(Linn, 1996, p. 137), their own discourses, and disparate definitions of physical

appearance to dominant societal structures.   Critical literacy praxis invited what

Giroux and Freire (1989) call "webs of possibility within shared conversations" (xii).

Our dialogicality produced layers of revelations about subjugation, hierarchies, power

distributions, racism, and misogyny. Students' end-of-the-unit tertiary compositions,

through the platform of a scientific research poster ---- whose novelty of format was

partially derived from its multimodal nature (Kress, 2000) drawn from popular and

media culture sources[40] --- comprised an argument statement, textual and peer-

reviewed research excerpts, artistry/ creativity/ graphic compositions, and a public

performance text. Multimodality extended language use to include signification and

communication through visual images, also called semiosis. Collation (Fairclough,

2003), in which keywords appeared across texts, occurred as students' backboards

reinforced their public performance messages.

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[40] Events were mediated through practices of student presentations and practices of assessment in public education. Thus, students' controlled their selection of "certain structural possibilities and the exclusion of others (Fairclough, 2003, p. 23).

> Casey: Claggart…his urge to push Billy to failure… Billy Budd is just a young
> and innocent boy who is forced to take place in fictitious life, and
> Claggart forces him to participate in that type of life. He knew nothing
> about creating false stories. Although innocence is commonly viewed
> as a positive attribute, it often leads to demise. He knew nothing about
> creating false stories as Claggart did, or trying to get his way. He was
> dragged into a conjured situation created by Claggart.

First, Casey interrogated "innocent" Billy as a metaphor of a human with a "fictitious life" due to his inability to narrate his life in "false" ways. By arguing that "Claggart is trying to justify his lie" and "he's creating more lies," Casey interrogated innocence as an appealing and false mechanism of power. Gaining contextual knowledge of power structures through the popular culture text, *Pirates of the Caribbean* invited Casey into critic analysis of *Billy Budd* and the real-world tensions that people experience outside a culturally-supplied belief system. The structures she interrogated were based on dominant ideologies to which Billy Budd, Elizabeth Swann, and Casey --- as a former college preparatory student --- were Outsiders. By linking popular culture to a high canonical text, Casey linked power and integrity to dominant culture barriers. She transcended the academic fears she confided to me in example three of data section two of being less prepared, qualified, or capable. Instead, she offered a dynamic and fascinating recontextualization of a world in which power invites corruption, in which a mythology of innocence perpetuates hegemonic societal structures, and in which many individuals are prohibited from achieving agency through disparate distribution of social justice.

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Many other students created meaningful literacy practices when they linked popular and high canonical textual analysis. Caleb, for example, described himself as "one of the only people in school that actually feels comfortable with themselves; so much, to the point where they are able to identify with their sexuality at the age of sixteen. I am a white, middle-class, American, gay teenager" (September 6, 2007). Without naming it as such, he was able to use queer theory, or the idea that gender is an essential part of self, through hermeneutics to read and recontextualize the *Billy Budd* text.

> Caleb: Throughout the novella *Billy Budd*, Herman Melville is able to portray
> that men are not exclusively one way or the other, but rather they can express
> many qualities both male and female (November 26, 2007).

Titled, "The Real Man," Caleb's research poster was rich was imagery: magazine cut-outs of male torsos, a white policeman in uniform, a white male with cloth biker jacket over jeans, a white male with rippling stomach muscles, a white male with a mop of blonde hair, Jacoby Ellsbury of the Boston Red Sox at bat, a white male in camouflage with green beret hat tipped to the side, and a pigpile of football players. Another magazine cutout says, "Wild." The middle section of the tri-fold is titled, "Billy Budd" with accompanying picture of a white heterosexual couple and subtitle beneath: "It will never be me." Caleb challenged the validity and consistency of heteronormative discourse and focused in his critical analysis to a large degree on non-heteronormative sexualities and sexual practices. Major aspects of his critique included discussion of the role of performance in creating and maintaining identity and the constructed interrelationship of sexuality and gender. Caleb transcended

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traditional literary analysis to engage in discourse that surrounded how identities

change or resist change in relation to power relations and heteronormativity.

Moving from the new meanings he gained about power, hegemony, and dominant

ideology by analyzing *Pirates of the Caribbean*, Jonathan --- captain of the Mock

Trial team, avid history student, lacrosse player, and looped student of mine ---

transcended a revisionist view of colonial history to play forward how *Billy Budd* was

more than a historical text: Billy Budd exemplified institutions, systems, and

structures within contemporary U.S. society.

> Jonathan: Members of society are transformed into machines that only see the
>
> actions and are incapable of understanding emotions, thought, and reasoning
>
> behind one's actions. Also this shows that societal ideology limits one's
>
> response to situations, allowing for only one acceptable way…. They are
>
> tools of society and hierarchy… As society continues to move away from
>
> and destroy nature due to technological advances, modernization, and
>
> imperialistic ideology, humanity loses its organic identity, innocence, and
>
> individuality that are embedded in its coexistence with nature, resulting a
>
> mechanical, corrupt, and unnatural society. People are forgetting and turning
>
> away from their natural identity and finding a false security in the structure
>
> and conformity of society (November 24, 2007).

Jonathan melded his *Pirates of the Caribbean* sociocultural analysis into his *Billy*

Budd interrogation by illuminating behaviors, dispositions, and ways of being imposed

by "societal ideology." Jonathan decried the objectification of humans and

subjugation of some individuals for the betterment of dominant power. "Members of

society are transformed" from an essential, natural self into "machines" altered by messages. He called upon constructs of nature and of society to analogize a society gone awry into anarchy. Jonathan fluidly interconnected media messages, technology, persuasion, terrorism, and "Othering" so as to acknowledge that symbol systems were enforcing a "mechanical, corrupt, and unnatural society." Jonathan interrogated the ideologically driven society in which he lived through multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural learning in order to become a richer, more complexly literate adult.

Brandy --- one of five students to live in a single-parent home, one of three students whose family rented their residence, and the only student who never met her father --- drew together Depp's non-dominant depiction of a male in *Pirates of the Caribbean*, the all male ensemble in *Billy Budd*, and her own social experiences to created meaningful literacy practices.

> Brandy: Society views itself as civilized, seeks to eradicate all trace of behavior that might suggest otherwise (i.e. mutinies). Vere, Claggart, and Billy show signs of latent homosexuality, an aspect that would divide them from regular "civilized society" if disclosed. Vere and Claggart attempt to suppress their true desires due to societal customs, while Billy is either oblivious or unaware of the sexual circumstances. Capital punishment/ human sacrifice is a tool used by a judgmental society to oppress the weaker or undesired human subgroups (i.e. homosexuals). Billy's individuality continues even in death --- his corpse does not display the common muscular spasm (erection) that a hanging induces (November 26, 2007).

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Sexuality as a cultural construct and topic of public school conversations is rare. In the critical literacy classroom, however, popular culture became a conduit for discussion of sexuality and a way to give voice through textual analysis to Brandy. According to Brandy, a "civilized" society elicits conformity of sexuality behaviors to the point where it "seeks to eradicate," can "divide," "suppress," "sacrifice," and "oppress" those who act according to their "true desires" of sexuality. No longer were sexuality's institutionalized character and emphasis on profound sociality, the centrality of the material body, and the weight of practice/practicing forbidden topics for Brandy. Instead, the critical literacy classroom became a site of information, intrigue, and interrogation for Brandy, who was able to read *Billy Budd* through her own world and engage in authentic and meaningful literacy practices.

Thus, in this first example of data section three, I sought to unveil with students how society's "detrimental effects can be mitigated if not eliminated" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 203) and to believe in youth as capable, passionate, and hope-filled citizens of the world. I articulated particular ways of using language so that social change could promote greater social justice. Critical analysis of a contemporary Disney text about military and maritime life assisted students in their decoding difficulties of the Melville texts and, so, opened up spaces for dialogicality. More importantly, I led the youth to positions of awareness and vision when they gained accentuated distance from the hegemony of values and assumptions in the popular culture text, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, as well as the high canonical text, *Billy Budd*. Students variously analyzed principles of power, subjugation, patriarchy, classism, and sexual orientation. As I describe in the next example of data section three, such small successes gave me

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insights, strength, and new ideas as a social justice practitioner who believed in multiliterate, multimodal, and transcultural learning.

How do classic television shows represent society? Inquiries and multimodalities

In the first data section of chapter four, I described how students resisted my grading system that required them to demonstrate mastery of sociocultural literacy analysis and tertiary composition, as it was new, foreign, and contradictory to them. Like several other students, Connie had summoned THS authority figures to argue her case, and Martin had implored that I return to multiple choice testing. I did not lose hope. As a teacher who rejected authoritarian education, I strived against fitting students quietly into the status quo; I recognized tremendous possibilities in my students and wanted them to illuminate a self that was seldom recognized within their public school literacy educations. I describe in this second example of the third data section how I invested belief and confidence in lower tracked sophomores' literacy abilities. I demonstrate that, once students experienced multiple learning events around dialogicality, sociocultural interrogation of high canonical texts, deconstruction of popular and media culture texts, and tertiary composition as assessment, they not only understood the academic expectations for these new kinds of literacies but, also, extended their classroom literacy learning into their real, literate lives. I empowered sophomores to question traditional literacy practices that denied new literacies and communication channels. I asked students to imagine alternatives, to find their academic literacy voices, and to begin to recontextualize the world according to a vision of social justice.

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Theresa[41]: Cellphones. iPods. Playing cards. It will be taken away. You will get

a detention or get an ADP[42]. Leave it in your locker (August 29, 2007).

THS systemic rules forbade my sophomores and the other students from incorporating their own technology devices into the school environment. Feeling strongly that my critical literacy classroom needed to allow students to draw on their real life literacies but, also, acknowledging that students had to follow the THS handbook regulations, I engaged in a small act of civil unrest. I designed scaffolded instruction that required sound, visuals, digital texts, and print into their tertiary compositions; sophomores would have to use their real-life communications. Also, as important to my social justice pedagogy, I anticipated the sophomores' definitions of "normal," which included the epistemologies, behaviors, ways of being, social affiliations, and community influences they carried with them as identity markers.

Beginning with ice breakers and surveys about their present, real-world literacies including popular culture, non-fiction print and digital articles, we moved into *YouTube* clips, impromptu television newscast viewings, short writing-as-thinking activities, digital research, visualizations, resume writing, and sketching as brainstorming. We inched daily toward defining our own culture and identifying dominant cultural institutions and practices. By the middle of first term, we were ready. I designed a unit (adapted from Hobbs, 2007) called "How do classic television shows represent society? A multigenre research project." Students identified essential contextual and intertextual elements about five self-selected classic television shows

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[41] **Assistant principal**
[42] **Alternative detention penalty**

through a Webquest, and then I modeled the same elements through my own textual choice of the classic television show, *I love Lucy*. Together, we viewed an episode of *I love Lucy* and noted how humans are characterized directly and indirectly.   We read an article called "Family on television' (Speigel, 2005) and defined new terminology. Students chose one classic television show, conducted research, and used a Venn Diagram to identify the similarities and differences between the characters in the classic television show of choice and that of the society in the time in which the show aired. Students watched one full episode of their classic television show and, using additional templates and materials I provided, engaged in more thinking and analysis.

Through direct instruction and guided discourse, we built toward an understanding of media as an important marker of dominant ideologies and reflections of particular constructions of individuals, families, communities, and society. While comparing television representations to society, we incorporated and extended traditional research and mandated core writing through tertiary compositions that recontextualized across multimodalities.

Lucas --- whose mom had described as "really intelligent but not really invested in academics" (September 28, 2007) ---   critiqued the singular, authoritative literacy (Flores, 2007) of his previous public school literacy studies by extending discourse around gender to that of class systems.

Lucas: I did *The Flintstones*, which aired from 1960 to 1966….They're a non-
nuclear family because they didn't have children[43]. A nuclear family is a
family that has a mother, father, and two children. It's a lot like society at

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[43] **In season one, Fred and Wilma Flintstone were not parents.**

the time. The father had a day job. Wilma was a housewife. A lot of people

in this time have cars, and they had pets… They acted a lot like a 50s and

60s family. They're not real but they do show a lot of what happens in the

1960s. Like Kennedy got assassinated after WWII. People were trying to

resolve those issues and make it a more perfect society (October 24, 2007).

Lucas appropriated classroom terminology when he compared "nuclear" and

"non-nuclear" and attached personal meaning to family composition. By citing "a lot"

three times (i.e. "have cars;" "like a 50s and 60s family;" "what happen in the 1960s"),

Lucas extended outward thematically from fictional narration and characterization

("They're not real") toward connections with actual U.S. citizens who lived in those

decades and who experience collective traumas "("Like Kennedy got assassinated;

trying to resolve those issues"). Acknowledging the cartoon's formula of closure in

each episode, Lucas identified how producers sought to create particular messages that

might ease viewers into a sense of "a more perfect society." Lucas found balance

between media fiction and ways that actual lives were reflected in the text.

> Lucas: It's using irony because they're mocking society. In the Stone Age,
>
> people didn't have cars and electricity. So Flintstones represents society but
>
> also it doesn't. *The Flintstones* is a satire about life in America after WWII.
>
> They weren't living in the real world; they were living in an ideal world.

Transcending a passive media viewing experience, Lucas interrogated the cartoon

text and its methods of "mocking society" by noting its recontextualization of

twentieth-century inventions into "the Stone Age." Thus, Lucas recognized "the

standpoint of others while simultaneously recognizing the partial nature of all

discourses" (Freire & Giroux, 1989, p. xii). The literary term "satire" extends in

Lucas' analysis and applies to visual animation; thus, his reconciliation that the texts

"represents society but also it doesn't" provides him and those of us who listened to,

watched, and learned from his tertiary text that the "real world" and the "ideal world"

were mutually exclusive. Lucas pointed to the pervasive recontextualizations that

exist in contemporary society and interrogated the mythology of the American Dream,

thus establishing reciprocity among a hybridity of literacy experiences. Literacy for

Lucas was becoming a pathway filled with multiliterate, multimodal, and transcultural

learning that was much more than acquisition of grades or prestige: for Lucas, literacy

was a tool that deepened one's life across a wide spectrum. In our later discourse,

Lucas, would interrogate gender roles by offering that "men were overpowering" and

"women didn't take a big part" (November 28, 2007).

Rather than choosing to compare class systems, families, technologies, and social

events, as did Lucas, John analyzed his text of choice, *The Brady bunch* through

construction of gender and genderized ways of being.

John: *The Brady bunch* and how it represented society in the 1970s. What I did

was how women's rights were emerging in society at the time. Families at

the time were trying to have the perfect family, three of each: parents, a boy,

and a girl. And they were trying to lead the perfect life. *(narrates as he

shows the video clip)* They are all blonde...

Mrs. Brady: Bobby, Bobby.

John: This is the mom calling her kids. Alice is wearing an apron to show how

she helped out and all. Here's Alice. Marcia has a problem and she asks

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Alice to help her out. She's trying to keep Gregg from getting into the other room. Now she tries to sit him down with pie to stall him… trying to show that the women make food and serve men. Now I have another scene: in this scene, they have Carol and Alice making all the lunches for the family. It's kinda hectic, getting everything ready for the family. It's the women's jobs to make sure the kids were all ready. I consider them the perfect family…. Mike Brady was representing wealthy men (October 23, 2007).

To what degree had John's own life and family been reflected in *The Brady Bunch* tertiary text he created through sounds, visuals, print, and digital modalities? As a subjective observer, I can only make deductions, but his 16-year-old sister was undergoing chemotherapy at the time he constructed his tertiary text. Privately, he spoke to me about his sister's need to have her eggs removed if she ever wanted to have children. How had media art, his own life, and representations of "the perfect family" fed into John's interrogation of the classic television text? How had his empathy for women at a pivotal time in his life, in conjunction with the invitation to interrogate classic texts from a social justice perspective, not only create powerful academic discourse but, also, cycle back to his life outside of school and helped to create meaning and balance through literacy in his chaotic world?

Later, in his senior year, John asked me to write a letter of recommendation for college and to respond to his college essays, even though I was no longer his English teacher. His thank you letter included the revelation that I was "the teacher who most understood what I was going through with my sister" (personal communication, September 27, 2009). Thus, John recognized the ways that he had gained meaningful

literacy practices through connecting popular culture, rigorous expectations for learning, and his real-world literacy needs. He made meaning through dialogicality, social justice platforms, multimodal interrogation, and choice of issues and themes so as to create a new literate self that was much more than success in academic grading. John had transformed his world in a small but important way through critical literacy.

Lucas, John, and other students had begun to recognize how texts are imbued with signs through his multimodal composition. As will become apparent in the following example, meanings and messages in the form of sign-systems became a specific kind of communication (Hall, 2003a) that existed in all kinds of texts for my students. The notion of sign-systems was complex, since it required students to possess the ability to perceive metaphors in relation to actual life. In the data sample that follows, semiotics allowed sophomores to decipher how human ways of being could be informed and changed by the mediation of action through producing and consuming texts that involved body use and sensory perceptions.

The body and voice as semiotic meaning making activity

The Pulitzer Prize-winning author Toni Morrison once said, "If there's a book you really want to read but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it." Unfortunately, aversion to print, and particularly the high western canon, was pervasive in my sophomore students.   Sure, most yearned for solid GPAs so they could enter college. But, in actuality, my students wanted to compose text messages, post on each other's Facebook walls, write music lyrics, design photograph slideshows, and collaborate in social networking spaces. An overwhelming majority

of sophomores arrived in my class with feelings ranging from strong dislike to acquiescence and ambivalence about standards-based assessment, mandated curriculum, and traditional literacy practices. In this third example of data section three, however, sophomores gained insights into the ways that discourse relies on social, textual, and interpretive semiotic codes and, as a result, gained confidence as learners through meaningful literacy practices.

Metaphors supply meanings of an individual and a culture. The individual begins the message creation process by deciding what is to be signified. Then the individual chooses among a selection of signifiers. Finally, the individual decides the method for best communicating the selected signifier. Metaphors as meaning makers for multitextual, multiliterate, and transcultural learning transformations feature prominently in this example, which I selected from a data set of videotaped English class final performances of *Macbeth* (Shakespeare, 2005).

THS authorities placed high value on the study of Shakespeare as high canonical literature. Shakespearean texts also presented students with what multimodal literacy analyst Franks (2003, p. 155) calls "archaic forms of language and historically remote cultural conventions." Shakespeare was daunting for my THS sophomores who were enclosed in the lower of two tracks (Oakes, 2005; Oakes & Wells, 1998; J. Rogers & Oakes, 2005). Because I wanted to access my students' experience and knowledge of the world, of home and school, and of other texts as a way to help them connect and relate to Shakespeare, I designed a *Macbeth* (Shakespeare, 2005) unit that was multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural in nature. I intended the unit to be a wave

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that began with shimmering currents, built with tides, and rose to high surf through a performance-based pedagogy.

The sophomores did have previous school experience with Shakespeare. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Shakespeare, 1998) was mandatory in the Taylor eighth grade English language arts curriculum, and *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare, 2004) was required in the ninth grade English curriculum. The prevalence of Shakespeare in the curriculum conferred "the ways in which the value of Shakespeare is enacted and valorized through educational policy and pedagogical practices" (Franks, 2003, p. 160). However, because my sophomores could not independently decode the language and narrative structure of the text, their previous experiences with Shakespeare lacked authenticity, meaning, and relevance to their own lives. My goals within a critical literacy framework were to transcend mere regurgitation of traditional literacy narration and textual determinism: I wanted students to gain structures that would allow them to play forward the themes of power and greed to contemporary society. As this data sample indicates, a semiotic process approach to textual analysis allowed sophomores to produce and consume multimodal performances, interrogate differences among primary, secondary, and their own tertiary texts, and observe the duality inherent in artistic transactions.

Prior to these final performances, the sophomores and I uncovered layers of the text in nineteen, full-class lessons that emphasized stage and acting techniques. I wanted my students to transcend a monotone, in-the-seat, round-robin reading of an archaic text and to, instead, harness the potentials for an emboldened, invigorated, and different kind of youth reading and interpretation. The lessons incorporated direct

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instruction and simulations through shared body communicative actions such as gestures, postures, facial expressions, and movements on stage. We also practiced voice communication, including volume, clarity of enunciation, achieving subtext through inflection and emotional layering, pacing of words, and syllabic stresses.

Franks (2003) suggests that leading students through such complex activity with a Shakespearean text "requires expertise on part of the teacher" (p. 155). As their teacher, I was a robust and dramatic social actor along with my students: I shed my teacher persona, assumed a fictional personality, imagined another timeperiod and context, and felt a little silly. But my embrace of the unfamiliar and the often hilarious allowed my students and me, as co-learners, to move from the print primary text, to speech with discussion and dramatized readings, and, ultimately, to socially-directed and intentional compositional acts.

I carefully assigned students into Acting Companies in balances of gender, engagement, decoding confidence, and public speaking prowess. Relations are "excessively complicated" problems when considered within in the "political and economic structures of society," according to Foucault (1972, p. 112), which I extended in this study to describe students with various degrees of cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1977). So, in a performance-based pedagogy, then, it made sense to identify and organize students so each would have broad access to hypotheses about how Shakespeare represented power relations in society.

As with all human compositions, each Acting Company performance differed due to contextual factors that rose from boundaries of time and place and were contextually driven. Individual contextual factors that contributed to differences in

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final performances included the time each student devoted to annotating his or her promptbook, acquiring props, assembling a costume, running lines, and practicing blocking. Group contextual factors that contributed to differences in final performances included the personality dynamics of each Acting Company, the physical spaces where the different performances took place, the timing of each acting company's final performance as juxtaposed to the strength of the previous Acting Company's final performances, and --- a surprise to me --- the historocultural contributions of other students who had also read *Macbeth*. Some of these students were other sophomores in 2007 who read the text with other THS teachers and who shared different interactions with and responses to the text than did my students.

I chronicle two Acting Company performances below; each contains a scene where witches are central. Scenes including witches were intriguing to my students due to popular and media culture profitable recontextualizations and interconnections among witches, ghosts, supernatural phenomena, ghouls, cross-human beings, and humans. Acting Company #1 was comprised of four Outsider students (Rick, Val, Jack, and Julie), one of whom presented as dyslexic to me (Jack). Each was an insightful and analytical thinker. Acting Company #2 was comprised of two students who decoded print texts well, two students with language goals on their Individual Education Plans, and one student whose love of football transcended academic focus. Every student held an individually prepared script that contained all the lines for the scene as well as reminders/ prompts for performances.

Acting Company #1 chose Act one, Scene one where the witches are prominent and the lines involve choral readings. This Company utilized the auditorium stage

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where school-wide dramatic performances occurred, as it was unoccupied during their class period. The Company chose to leave the black brick wall exposed at back. A long black table was positioned center stage, and under it, a student was hidden and able to engage props and effects. The props on the table included a feathery owl, plastic claw, and cauldron. A whiteboard contained drawings of seven ghosts, and the student in charge of effects moved the whiteboard across the stage midway through the scene. A hidden student released dry ice twice during the performance.

While Rick, as Macbeth, had more lines, the other Acting Company #1 actors, Val, Julie, and Jack, worked in unison or patterns (occurrences: dressed in capes = 4 students; lifting props = 3; elevating body to higher position = 2; manipulation of full-length stage curtain = 3; stomping = 6) to reinforce the lines they were reading from their prepared scripts. Rick also infused dramatic tension by pausing, looking around, and searching the stage at one point for ten seconds.

Acting Company #2 chose Act four, scene one where the witches reappear and offer predictions, called prophesies, to Macbeth. This performance took place in my classroom, as the main auditorium stage was unavailable. On the bulletin board behind the "stage," I had posted a series of our nineteen preparatory lesson plans. Acting Company #2 hung a double poster-sized green and brown crayon drawing of Birnaum Wood. Actors found their places in symmetry around a cauldron drawn on cardboard. Other props were hidden either behind the actors or offstage. Each of the three witches on stage, Melanie, Robin, and Marie, wore a high pointed black hat and black cape. The two students who mediated a shift in scene action, Clark and Tom, wore costumes that differentiated each character as a human being. Wayne as

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Macbeth wore a flowing white cape and a golden paper crown. Clark played a rift from a CD in the background at one point.

During their performances, all Acting Company #2 members read lines on cue and threw/ dropped a prop to reinforce the orality and iambic pentameter of the scene. Wayne pointed several times off stage to cue other actors. Clapping off stage indicated an entrance of a new character. Each of the three prophesies was reinforced by Tom or Clark on or off stage holding and moving either a baby doll or a mask.

Moving from scaffolded lesson plans to students who took power in Acting Companies points to meaning and movement between a high canonical text and students' recontextualizations. Molding Shakespeare into a mélange of prior knowledge, secondary text film viewing (Casson, 1978; Polanski, 1971), wider experiences in their own literate lives, and incorporations of other texts "in cultural locations and mediated by the interventions of the teacher and other fellow students" (Franks, 2003, p. 171), students gained multimodal semiotic perspectives through dramatic performances. "Integrating one's past, present, and future into a cohesive, unified sense of self," according to equity educator Tatum (1997, p. 14) was a complex task for all these student actors, regardless of their track stigma, gender, or learning style. Each student took control of bodily communication and orchestrated and worked collaboratively to come to a collective sense of dramatic meaning.

Through a performance-based pedagogy, sophomores engaged in activities that were situated within a youth social setting and around a centrality of multimodal recontextualizations. They rose to crescendos where the role and function of the body and the voice were imperative. Students/ actors examined what counted as morally

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significant by using multimodal means to determine a character's own goals, purposes, and values and, moreover, shared particular interpretations of motivation with their youth peers (Gee, 2003). As socially organized persons, students/ actors used the human body to recontextualize high canonical literature. Students gained individual confidence, found hope in their literacy capabilities, acquired new strengths within the genre of drama, and moved into meaningful literacy practices in the public school setting.

As producers and consumers of semiotic and dramatic recontextualizations, sophomores came to recognize the role of the verbal code in the texts, the importance of message to receivers of texts, and the manner in which multimodal events on stage require both composers and receivers to decipher signs. Students came to new understandings about different media and the media's necessary semiotic processes which are never divorced from the verbal. Moreover, other partial sign systems coexisted within the sophomores' recontextualizations, and the students produced and consumed meaningful literacy practices through the whole signification system necessary to convey particular messages and meanings.

In a similar fashion to how the sophomores in this example were able to transcend their labeling as less capable due to academic track through semiotic dramatization and recontextualization, the following example traces how seniors who engaged in multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural learning events rose in rhythmic waves of meaningful literacy practices. I outline how, through a year of multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural learning embedded in social justice pedagogy, seniors

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---- as formal co-teachers in the classroom --- assumed and welcomed positions of power through interrogation of sociocultural constructs across their real life texts. In doing so, many found voices to challenge dominant definitions of gender, youth, and sexuality through recontextualization around cultural constructions of identity.

Shared power and interrogating the discourse around misogyny

In the second section of this data chapter, I described how dominant definitions of gender and genderized ways of being frequently created dissonance when situated within a critical literacy framework that promoted equity and agency for all. I argued that students resisted multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural learning events embedded in social justice pedagogy because these learning events challenged dominant definitions of gender and youth sexuality, especially as represented in popular and media culture texts. In this fourth example of data section three, I describe the results of an end-of-the-year unit which, like Shor (1996), invited "students to question business as usual, to imagine and implement alternatives, to share authority with me, to co-develop the syllabus, to disrupt our routine roles and expectations, to talk back" (p. 2). I wanted students to have opportunities to achieve voice and challenge reproduction of dominant ideologies and definitions of "normal" in ways that their own THS authority figures could or would not.

I called this unit "co-teaching," which interfered with the traditional and unilateral transfer of teacher authority. I had several goals in mind for the unit. I wanted students to become critically curious about society through political awareness and activism. To do so, youth would have to correlate personal literacy with citizenry,

reflect on received cultural values and norms, and question dominant ideologies of U.S. society. More than anything, I wanted students to transform conceptions of themselves and the world. It was especially important to garner the interest, intelligence, curiosity, and capabilities of the G period students who caused me much turmoil over the year due to pervasive resistance to much social justice pedagogy as embedded in multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural learning.

To initiate the waves of momentum toward these goals, I modeled for the seniors ways to plan and design lessons, to create activators and summarizers, to research curriculum texts from a pedagogical perspective, to infuse dialogicality and action, and to embed the texts of their lives so as to play forward and interrogate primary textual themes. Mary, a senior, chose to co-teach in conjunction with the play, *The American Dream,* one of our two Albee texts (1959). Part of me couldn't believe that Albee was invited into our curriculum, due to his interrogations of and alternative worldviews around gender, class, sexuality, and dominant cultural norms. Then again, it seemed the ideal text. Mary and I had exchanged periodic rejections, apologies, recalcitrism, rebellions, remorse, compromises, and rejuvenations. In essence, through co-teaching, co-learning, and dialogicality as embedded in critical literacy pedagogy, I had a teacher's dream: I had the potential to infuse energy into Mary, someone whose discourse discounted the value of public school literacy education.

> Mary: Everyone sit down, please. *The American Dream* (Albee, 1959) was one of the first plays in America to be part of the "Theater of the Absurd." It was very controversial, and it surprised a lot of people. So. What do you think the American Dream is?

Steph: If families aren't well off, then they're not going to be satisfied with the

American Dream.

Marty: You have to be the rock of the household (April 15, 2008).

Mary began her co-teaching lesson by asking her peers to call upon their prior

knowledge to interrogate the various meanings of the title. Typically, the American

Dream that implies courage, thrift, hard work, and determination will serve as

pathways for individuals to achieve success, fame, and wealth. Steph asserted that the

American Dream sets up barriers to families who are not "well off" and who would,

thus, find limited satisfaction with an American Dream mythology. Marty

personalized the definition of the American Dream to encompass masculine qualities

of strength and stability within family dynamics.

Mary then narrowed the academic discourse toward embedded themes within the

primary text.

Mary: What about "emasculation"?

Roger: Can you define that for us?

Mary: Excuse me? I want you to define that.

Mary's detour to discourse around "emasculation" signified that one

categorization of the "American Dream" could highlight a form of social regulation.

Fairclough acknowledges that constructions of being have "particular relations with

each other" (2003, p. 85). Roger's request for clarification was a knowledge exchange

in which he denied Mary's commitment to truth that "emasculation" exists or was

pertinent to the upcoming academic discourse. Roger hesitated to engage in what

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) describe as "categorization" (p. 163), or identification that

highlights, downplays, or hides certain properties. Mary refused to step into a teacher-as-authority role by providing a specific answer, and Roger hid his discomfort with the topic by seeking Mary's expert definition. As a peacemaker, Lana volunteered to define "emasculation:" "It's taking away masculinity."

Mary previewed her *You Tube* film clip "about masculinity" by noting "it's kind of funny." Later, in a year-in-review reflection and data check, she commented, "It showed how males are perceived in culture and how society creates the gender roles for one's quest of the 'American Dream'" (May 31, 2008). Mary's film clip used an accepted the high school comedy structure as a basis to explore teenage insecurities, hopes, and fears through the inversion of socially constructed gender behaviors.

> Elena: When he's at the conference table, we laugh, because he's acting like a woman. We see him, like, doing one hundred pushups then taking something that we guess is estrogen. We don't really think women act like that.
>
> Eden: In society, I think the media plays a lot in masculinity. It tries to portray a lot of what it means to be masculine.
>
> Roger: I guess it's a mockery of that stereotype of masculinity and femininity in which feminine is overly sensitive. Which is not true.
>
> Cameron: As soon as he starts to act feminine, his friends freak out.

Elena and Cameron, otherwise reluctant participants in full class academic discourse, joined in with Eden to describe the plot but also to analyze mainstream media images of females as childlike, emotional, and silly. Elena, moreover, critically distanced herself from the text to point out that "We don't really think women act like that," and Cameron realized that, when males perform outside the definable

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conventional metaphorical concepts of masculinity taken as structuring our everyday conceptual system (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 211), "his friends freak out." Roger rejected the plot and typicality of other students' reactions to gender bending. Mary's use of popular culture to introduce and anchor her lesson helped even reluctant students to find voice. Their coalition initiated a rally call to others to rise up on the wave of resistance to dominant constructions of gender in what was a series of meaningful literacy practices.

> Mary: The class soon related that clip to the *American Dream* text…Instead of only thinking about *The American Dream* play, the students saw the universal themes and immediately saw how they could use current real world examples in relation to the theme in their analyses (May 31, 2008).

In this section of data checking, Mary felt validated in her role as facilitator of knowledge because the class "related that clip" to the primary Albee text and "saw how they could use real world examples in relation to the theme." Mary felt empowered through multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural learning that she had instilled in her peers.

Next, Mary separated the class by gender and asked them to act out a scene in the Albee (1959, 73-75) text when Mommy affirms Daddy's masculinity by saying, "Oh, I shivered. Immediately after the student performance of the primary text, Mary asked them to dramatize again, but, in this second text, they would perform a text she titled "Role-Reversal." In the second text, males assumed socially constructed roles of females, and females assumed socially constructed roles of males.

> Mary: C'mon now. Applause. What did you note?

Lana: In the second one, femininity is associated with being decisive and strong.

　　　　In the first one, it was the masculinity.

Elena: It's not the masculine quality, so it seems really different.

Kerry: It also changes the way you live… If Eden says, 'Oh. That's so

　　　　feminine…' You just don't do that.

Arlene: That's not a characteristic you usually associate with masculinity. You

　　　　don't usually hear acting, like, "jelly" as being masculine.

 Mary: You don't really hear, "oh, I'm being girly today." (April 14, 2008).

Various members of the gender segregated group of females spoke in a series of

turns that exemplify what Freire (1998) describes as "the importance of our identity as

a produce of a tension-filled relationship between what we inherit and what we

acquire" (p. 70). The speakers in these turns identified the irony within the Albee text

where female gender identity was "decisive and strong" (Lana) and "really different"

(Arlene). Moreover, Arlene identified how Albee's reference to masculine sexual

response, or turning into "jelly," appropriated and reversed a typically associated

female construct. As female and co-teacher, Mary concurred in the discourse about

gender associations: "You don't really hear, 'oh, I'm being girly today.'"

Marty: If you ask most guys around here, I don't think that most guys would

　　　　want to be totally masculine. Most want to be part of the middle spectrum.

Roger: If you weren't masculine, girls wouldn't find you attractive.

Marty listened to the gender-segregated females and engaged in a deconstruction

process that transformed him regarding hegemonic narratives about females "and their

associative values, and is a necessary first step in questioning the status quo,"

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according to youth and gender researcher Smiler (2009, p. 362). Mary's lesson design had made the "borders of critical culture appear" to Marty and others because her discourse questioned "existing knowledge and unequal power relations" (Shor, 1996, p. 180). Mary had made "the social construction of the self concrete" (p. 142) and had reminded her peers that "gender is a social construction" (J. R. Martin, 1994, p. 229) in a way that I, as an Outsider to the world of contemporary youth, might not have been able.

> Mary: The role-reversal proved to the class how females are stereotyped to be
> masculine and the leader of the family. This provoked a very animated class
> debate (May 31, 2008).

Subsequently, Mary chose song lyrics by Ciara called "Like a Boy" for her peers to consider[44]. The melody of a hip-hop song filled the room and connected "subjectivity to history while relating personal contexts to social contexts and academic texts" (Shor, 1996, p. 180).

> Sheila: She's saying that guys think they can walk all over girls. Well, not in all
> situations.
>
> Kerry: It's a guy thing. If a girl did some things, it wouldn't be acceptable. It's
> role reversal.

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[44] **Pull up your pants, just like him/ Take out the trash, just like him/ Getting your cash like him, fast like him/ Girl you wanna act like he did/ I'm talking 'bout, security codes on everything/ On vibrate so your phone don't ever ring/ A foreign account/ And another one he don't know about/ Wish we could switch up the roles and I could be that/ Tell you I love you but when you call, I never get back/ Would you ask them questions like me, like 'Where you be at?'/ 'Cuz I'm out, four in the morning on the corner rolling doing my own thing/ [refrain] What if I had a thing on the side, made you cry/ Would the rules change up or would they still apply/ If I played you like a toy?/ Sometimes I wish I could act like a boy/ Can't be getting mad, but you mad, can't handle that?/ Can't be getting mad, but you mad, can't handle that?/ …**

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Eden: Boys can ask, 'Where are you? What are you doin'?' He can get away

    with it. But a girl can't get away with that.

George: *(yelled out)* That's just totally not true.

Roger: Ggrrr. You can't stereotype a woman. You can say, we want you to act

    that way, and you act that way.

Mary: Would it be a turn off? (*Four students raised their hands.)*

Lana: Guys are all defensive when we say that they're acting in a certain way.

    But in more recent years, when girls speak out, like, they do in more recent

    times, guys get defensive.

Through popular culture immersion and dialogicality, Mary invited her peers to think critically about their own recontextualized media texts and "deconstruct the portrayals of ever-present male sexual desire and women as gatekeepers," according to youth and gender researcher Smiler (2009, p. 364). Shared authority through co-teaching provided a new distribution of classroom power and authority which Roger and George found "surprising and discomforting" (Shor, 1996, p. 62) but which also created constructed of academic discourse as interspersed with "a language provided for us by history" (Edley, 2003b, p. 210). The song inverted socialized gender practices "so utterly familiar, so thoroughly routinized and automatic, that most men (and women) mistake history for nature" (Edley, 2003b, p. 195). Because framing narrows the range of likely interpretations of events and because Ciara broke loose from "cultural blinders" (Ross, 2003, p. 33), Mary opened herself up to critical feedback from her peers. She also consciously increased the definitions of "acceptable behavior for girls and boys" and minimized the "'naturalness' of gender" (Smiler,

2009, p. 366). She used my invitation to infuse popular culture into the public school classroom in ways that created meaningful literacy practices for her peers.

> Mary: It was interesting to find socio-cultural themes in texts… I learned how to compare and contrast different themes and use more than one text when analyzing the present themes. I found the new ideas of socio-cultural analysis so intriguing because my ideas have definitely changed (May 31, 2008).

Mary exhibited a teacher's capacity to struggle so that her peers could "create coherence between discourse and practice" (Freire, 1998, p. 15). Moreover, she had developed a critical disposition where understanding meant analyzing, posing questions, and affecting what social justice advocate Leistyna calls " the sociopolitical and economic realities that shape people's lives" (2003, p. 53). Through her role as a co-teacher, Mary pushed back against the walls of traditional literacy education so that she and her peers would think more deeply about the issues and relations of power that affected them. Mary had employed multiple representations of knowledge through youth everyday lived experiences "to motivate and assist them in connecting new knowledge to home, community, and global settings" (Irvine, 2003, p. 46).

Through relinquishing teacher-as-authority power to Mary and the other seniors, I invited youth to consider ways that the self is a social construction and that definitions of "normal" must vary according to contexts of culturally-variable perceptual codes. Mary's lesson demonstrated the human practice of simplifying codes around gender in order to communicate experiences. Through the experience of a critical literacy classroom, Mary and other seniors recontextualized literacy as representations of a

series of signs that signify rather than represent with reference to codes rather than to reality. This was an entirely new way of seeing not only literacy but the world, as seniors could take their new notions of signification into their college experiences and adult lives. They could link codes together to represent and embody certain values and could identify ideological assumptions that established particular worldviews and dominant ideological climates of the lives. These meaningful literacy practices drew upon activism that produced a particular kind of engagement. Mary shook off her waves of senior year ennui to inspire a small revolution. Together, Mary and her peers critiqued the dynamics of power and sexism, recognizing the interplay of many forces and agendas in any act.

Celebrations around discourse and dominance

Mary's co-teaching segment was not the only example of students' epiphanies of hope that resulted from critical literacy pedagogy through co-teaching and release of teacher authority. Reggie, who chose to co-teach Potok's *The Chosen* (1967), distributed cartoons that offered perspectives about the confluences of religion, history, politics, and power as tensions of Othering. In his fact-checking, he remarked that "these texts had a face meaning, what the original author intended it to be, and a second, higher level meaning, explaining society" (May 30, 2008).

Reggie: Each cartoon has a different theme in it related to the conflicts in the novel.

Erin: You're supposed to pray to one higher being. Now it seems like religion is created to perpetuate war.

Reggie: These aren't supposed to be from one particular religion. They're

supposed to apply to all religions...

Reggie introduced a dilemma that has plagued humans since the onset of

socialization: how can we live in peace and spirituality? How can we resist the

temptation to assume power, which tends to foster individual growth at the expense of

the collective good?

Reggie: Micro concepts between characters grow into macro conflicts... like

things grow into big things, like wars.

Through his investigation into dominant structures in western religions, Reggie

confirmed a direct concern of social justice education: citizenship has implications

beyond the "micro concepts" of daily life and must interrogate rights and

responsibilities, or duties and entitlements, so as to enhance awareness of the

individual as a mechanism of "big things."

Connie, whose narrative in this study was rife with conflicts over how to respond

to critical literacy pedagogy and to continue to achieve grades for college, chose

Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* as her co-teaching text. In doing so, she came to new

personal meanings about the ways that literacy can reconcile dissonance around social

constructions of gender and how language incorporates metaphors to create common

cultural definitions.

Connie: Socio-cultural analysis was a theme I loved to study. From the very

beginning of the year, I openly shared my passion for women's equality to

men… This was the first time I was taught to connect the two. I have never

related both factors before this year. Now I realize how judgmental society is

as a whole. I realize I never focused on just how much I label people, silently, without knowing I do it. From this theme, my world views have changed because everyone belongs to a culture. I always believed a culture meant a religious group, or country, but now I know there are millions of inner cultures within nations, states, and cities.

Connie funneled critical literacy pedagogy into issues of concern to her. She spoke "passion for women's equality to men" in my classroom, which "was the first time" a public school forum connected society and culture. Moreover, Connie acknowledged that her worldviews changed as a result of being asked to tie "independence," "depictions," and a "judgmental society." Connie achieved something much greater than grades: she reflected about how much she and others "label people" and simmered in the revelation that "millions of inner cultures" comprised our worlds. She gained meaningful literacy structures that better prepared her for a life of citizenship.

Successes also emerged from students whose voices had seemed uncertain but, eventually, rang strong and clear through the opportunity to link authenticity to curriculum. Debby found her voice through dialogicality and the co-teaching requirements to demonstrate original, creative, independent, and critical thinking. She drew upon her social capital as someone who had lived previously beyond the Taylor town limits to interrogate dominant social structures.

Sam: I don't think society wants to limit minorities. I think they haven't achieved it yet.

Debby: You have to take into consideration where you are. Where you grew up.

Taylor doesn't have any minorities. You don't have any exposure to it…

Think about it. Why Shakespeare chose Othello to be a Moor. And would it

make a difference if he wasn't a Moor? (April 2, 2008).

Debby pressed Sam through my model as co-teacher (Vygotsky, 1978) to

reconceptualize an archaic text through contemporary constructs of culture, race, and

the Other. She made public Sam and other student's emotional responses to her lesson

through immediate feedback about the ways that experiences around race are

inextricably linked and how drawing upon a grand and dominant narrative around race

makes years of oppression seem invisible (Rich & Cargile, 2004). Through Debby's

co-teaching, differences around perceptions of race in Shakespeare illuminated and

challenged dominant views around the current status of race in the U.S.

After co-teaching and a grand finale, seniors viewed portions of the documentary,

Growing Up Online (Dretzin & Maggio, 2008). The film invites viewers inside the

private worlds that youth are creating online, raising questions about how the Internet

has transformed childhood. Afterward, Dan noted that "the new generation is much

more different than educators could imagine because the society that we have grown

up in has shaped us differently than their generation shaped them." Kathleen advised

"educators to realize that students are using the internet more and more everyday and

that if by chance all computers were not working, they would not know how to

function." Emma reminded, "Younger generations today were born with the current

technology…That transition can be difficult for the teacher, as well as for the learning

process of the student" (June 3, 2008). Their advice continues to resonate with me as I

plan multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural learning events for students in subsequent years. If I am to continue to meet the literacy needs of the newest students who appear in my classroom, then I must be cognizant that youth position themselves through community and personal contexts achieved in greater degree *outside* the context of the classroom than by the THS culture, norms, and behaviors produced *inside* the school building.

I am a literate somebody![45]

Early in this study, sophomores seemed to define themselves via overlapping interpersonal negotiations in dancing waves of similarity, indifference, difference, compliance, acquiescence, and opposition to critical literacy pedagogy. By the end of this study, however, many of the sophomores rose to rhythmic waves of self-advocacy, self-determination, and unity beyond borders of status, gender, and academic successes. Their voices attested to a new awareness of hope as a result of their multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural learning experiences.

For example, after reading a *Yes*! magazine article about a self-made school in Tilonia, sophomores reflected on their privilege. Jack allowed, "I know for one thing, no matter how intelligent, how resourceful, and how motivated I am I just do not think I would be willing to work for only $100 a month, especially in our society today." Tom wondered, "A town where people barley (sic) make 100$ a month is protecting the earth why cannot the U.S." Ronald realized, "The freedom that the Barefooters

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[45] **With apologies to Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.**

have been shown to possess is freedom in it's (sic) purest form, the freedom of choice" (May 8, 2008).

Moreover, sophomores used blog postings to comment on issues in contemporary U.S. society. Ray considered a variety of points of view about Oppressors; his Graffiti Wall illustrated famous utterances about the nature of wielding power. Jarred composed a post that tied sarcasm, satire, and hyperbole to Photo Shopped graphics of a scantily clad female donning Uncle Sam attire into popular song lyrics around patriotism: "They are fighting more than just a war; they are fighting one another. Humans fight constantly; they find themselves being betrayed and cast out from others" (June 11, 2008).

> Chad: I tried to fix what I thought was wrong about the world by using my words. I have tried to talk about things that many do not like to talk about… how some of the different areas in war and politics were corrupt and wrong. Before I thought the war in Iraq had to be done but now I believe it is doing more harm than good (June 11, 2008).

Chad found "words" to transcend a climate of silence about U. S. militarism. Starting from a position early in the year in which he viewed the war in Iraq as necessary, through critical literacy practices he attempted to unveil issues that "many do not like to talk about." Chad had grown tremendously in awareness, courage, and curiosity about the world throughout the study. Like Chad, many sophomores came to recognize the critical literacy classroom as a source of resistance and inspiration. Students' positive self-conceptions surfaced in the social world of the classroom through the texts they produced.

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Ray: I think this English class gives you more opportunities to think freely and

      do more projects where you can do them your own way and truly learn things

      (June 11, 2008).

Emma: This English class is nothing like I have taken before. The combination

      of technology and identity analysis has made me look at the world from

      different perspectives (June 10, 2008).

Clark: I first responded to this year's theme with great skepticism. I quickly got

      used to thinking what I would be like if I would stop letting others influence

      me into being like them. I realized I would probably be a completely

      different person. My world views have changed because of this. People

      conform to societies' standards because they are afraid what everyone in the

      society would think of them (June 6, 2008).

Working from popular culture texts toward a recognition of multiple meanings and messages within all texts helped sophomores ascertain that popular culture was a powerful mechanism for shaping society and was also "a vehicle for challenging structured inequalities and social injustices" (Guy, 2007, p. 15). Students absorbed and internalized aspects of critical literacy praxis and the language of social justice as related to their authentic worlds. Sophomores and seniors alike created meaningful literacy experiences through critical literacy pedagogy.

Conclusion: New meanings about literacy practices

Each of the data samples in this third and final data section of chapter four represents a transformation about academic literacy practices and dominant ideologies

through critical literacy praxis that embraced popular and media culture texts. First, the infusion of popular and media culture texts and choice into a mandated curriculum of the high western canon did produce new meanings for many students, including acknowledgment of and resistance to hegemony, or contention over particular visions and representations of the world as having universal status.

Second, after gaining insights into the interconnections among individuals, society, and media, many sophomores were able to rise to evaluate and challenge dominant ideologies. While comparing television representations to U.S. society, students incorporated and extended digital research into mandated writing through academic discourse across multimodalities. Students appropriated classroom terminology to extend previous English class instruction around linear narrative and literary devices, thus inviting new lenses around ways that media does and does not represent actual lives of U.S. citizens. Allowing students to analyze texts of their choosing released students' voices around construction of gender and genderized ways of being. Students reconceptualized media art, their own lives, and representations of "the perfect family" into empathy for women. Interrogations of classic television texts spoke to a social justice perspective that emerged from real-life discourses and offered voice, meaning, and balance through literacy in an otherwise chaotic world.

Third, moving from the written text of a Shakespearean play, to speech with discussion and dramatized readings, to temporal socially directed acts, sophomores recontextualized a high canonical text and made meaning that, likely, was not possible through other methods of textual interrogation. A mélange of prior knowledge, secondary text viewing, wider experiences in their own literate lives, and

incorporations of other texts invited students to compose multimodal, semiotic, dramatic performances. Socialized activity and dramatic meaning recontextualized the role and function of the body as situated beyond simply an academic realm into a youth social literacy setting situated within a central place of multimodal meaning.

Fourth, seniors who were designated as formal co-teachers in the classroom assumed and welcomed positions of power through interrogation of sociocultural constructs across their real life texts and found voice to challenge dominant definitions of gender, youth, and sexuality. Through co-teaching, discourses of gender, subjugation, domination, exclusion, marginality, and "otherness" took on new meanings. Through my mandated use and modeling of popular culture in the classroom, Mary, a student with high status, rose to consider questions of power and gender through discourse. Mary comprehended identity as a social construction of self, defined what gender meant as a social construct, and translated her analysis into a collective learning experience for her peers in a way that I, as an Outsider to the world of contemporary youth, might not have been able. She recontextualized youth and literacy experiences into a semiotized view of life and reality so that the importance of sign-systems through meaning-making was the social context of its use. I had wanted to be a teacher-researcher who would open up to students new spaces for learning, thinking, knowing, and imagination of equitable worlds through their whole life literacy practices. I was partially successful.

By the end of the year, students designed, composed, and posted on a classroom blog, transcending the intensive high canonical requirements by reaching outside the cement walls of THS to their real literate lives. Many youth's abilities to

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recontextualize the high western canon into applicable meanings became central to literacy practices that they would carry into their adult lives. Through multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural learning experiences grounded in critical literacy pedagogy, youth began a journey toward establishing good in society through accommodation of a vocabulary of and structures around social justice. Absolutely, I acknowledge that the hope and positive consequences of my praxis were indirect, probably delayed, and largely invisible. Yet I perceived the sparks of resistance and rising up of youth as literate learners as a sign of educational pleasure and revelation. Could I, as a public school social justice educator, reach all students or eliminate individualism as a mechanism to wield power and oppress others? No, that would be an unrealistic goal that would, in all likelihood, have pushed me toward burn out and early retirement. Rather, I see this study as a rising wave of positive action; a path along the way but not the destination; a temporary, partial, and sometimes flawed series of achievements; and, more than anything, hope in the journey toward a paradise of an equitable world for all.

In the next chapter, I summarize a pedagogy of social justice as seen through this dissertation and its way into youths' authentic lives through multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural learning events. I also outline its potential ramifications for public school literacy practices and how other teachers, researchers, and activists can engage in hope for a better tomorrow.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS:

RECONTEXTUALIZATION AS A WAY

TO CONSTRUCT MEANINGS

A year has passed since I conducted this narrative inquiry using teacher researcher qualitative methodology. Most of my seniors went on to college, several asked me to be their "Friend" on the social networking space, *Facebook,* a number of their family members stopped by my long line on Parent Night to extend greetings, and a few returned to the THS campus to visit and thank me for the learning experiences I had provided. Those last visits especially resonate with me as I write and recall the challenges and joys of being a social justice educator.

In 2008-2009, in addition to four sections of senior honors students, I was assigned one section of twenty-eight college preparatory juniors, and ten of the former sophomores who participated in this study were again my students[46], or looped. Without a transition from one teacher to another, those looped juniors now experienced ease and comfort with my expectations for multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural studies and composition. They modeled what academic success in my class looked like for the other eighteen students. Davvie asked to be transferred into my junior class, but the school administration denied his request. Nine other former

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[46] **Emma, Nate, Chad, Peter, Tony, John, Cody, Kayla, Cassie, and Ronald.**

students[47] asked me if I would be teaching senior college preparatory classes in the 2009-2010 school year, as they would request me for a teacher if that were to be the case. These examples tell me that critical literacy pedagogy as funneled through a multimodal, multiliterate, transcultural learning environment had created meaningful literacy practices for lots of the students I chronicled in this study. Numerous literacy experiences were relevant, and many students wanted to maintain contact with me as a guide toward their authentic literacy achievements.

And --- of course --- not all the participants in this study came away afterward with good feelings about critical literacy pedagogy. Some former seniors passed by my classroom when returning to visit THS; a handful of juniors who had been my former students looked the other way in the hallway. I had a heated parent meeting in which one new senior asserted that my class required "taking a social idea and forcing it on the book" (April 1, 2009).

It is interesting to note that one of the three school authority figures present at that meeting was the new THS principal, Matthew Nadir, formerly a THS Assistant Principal. Pat, the THS principal I discussed in data section one of chapter four, resigned midway through the 2008-2009 school year to assume an assistant superintendent position in a northeast district under expansion in anticipation of a major motion picture studio's arrival. Wyatt also resigned as Taylor Superintendent of Schools when another override failed, citing his unsuccessful attempts "in securing adequate resources, (thus) making your challenging jobs more difficult" (August 27, 2008). Challenges like these confronted me as a teacher and researcher in this study

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[47] **Katie, Rachel, Barry, Crystal, Mariah, Alexa, Linda, Jack, and Larry.**

and continue to do so. The attrition of Taylor school authority officials and the subsequent drive for new school authority figures to establish their authority through recontextualizations have always complicated my students' experiences with multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural learning events. A pattern exists at THS where school authority figures focus on consumerism, middle class behaviors, a mythology of youth as reckless, and success in annual yearly progress on standardized tests. In doing so, they perpetuate visions of "normal" and "privileged" without addressing or valuing a plethora of other ways of being.

Thus, this dissertation describes an only partially successful attempt to inspire social justice in a public high school classroom. Using the tools of qualitative research through narrative inquiry as a teacher researcher, my study traces THS authority figures' reproduction of dominant ideologies, my struggles as a social justice educator to break through those definitions of "normal" with an upper middle class student population, and the hope that resulted when my students were able to embrace multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural learning experiences as conduits for humility and possible equity for all. My students faced traditional ways of being literate in-school that were mutually exclusive from what it meant to be literate outside-of-school. Moreover, when I asked students to interrogate their literacy practices against a backdrop of an education that reproduced dominant ideologies of U.S. society, youth at THS had to reconcile school authority, their own privilege, a mandated curriculum, and critical pedagogy contexts to shape the meaning and quality of their literacy learning experiences. Therefore, my study documents the fluid,

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dissonant, and sometimes epiphany-sparked processes that U.S. youth today experience in order to become fully literate.

To some readers, contradictions around literacy, learning, and citizenry may seem part of a whole that has existed as long as there has been public education. In many ways, it is easy to think about youth today within the institution of U.S. public education as one more generation fighting to establish their identities in an era of change due to innovations, inventions, and a commonly held acceptance of the American Dream. Even the students who chose to maneuver within the dialogicality and multimodality, multiliteracies, and transculturalism of my critical literacy classroom could just as easily be read as another group of students who wanted to "do well in school" to advance their own future goals as "normal" and "privileged." However, throughout this dissertation, I argue that such an interpretation is a deflection from the backdrop of public school education as it exists today and which denies the embedded messages within traditional literacy education. In order be labeled "successful," youth today must recontextualize their worlds by extracting text, signs, or meaning from the contexts of dominant U.S. ideologies and molding a way of being that is distinct and dissonant from their own literate lives. This dissertation is an attempt to see this way of educating U.S. youth as contradictory, simplistic, and ill-structured toward meeting the literacy, learning, and citizenry demands of the twenty-first century. I assert that students can reconcile their real lives with public school literacy practices and become hope-filled when they are able to read and recontextualize their worlds in meaningful ways through critical literacy pedagogy and a foundation of multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural learning experiences.

As I reflect back on the year of this study, I am aware that my positioning as a social justice educator often set me apart from my colleagues in what might be categorized as an Outsider status. My approaches to mandated literature, my praxis during a conservative political climate, my vociferous distaste for an exclusive print-based curriculum: I was so non-traditional as to be a threat to others who had made successful careers by negotiating and working within a top-down culture of upper middle class education. And, yet, in the same way that Solnit (2004) argues that an activist "seeks to democratize the world, to share power, to protect difference and complexity" (p. 18), I felt during this study and still today that to educate is to illuminate youth about possibilities for knowing their worlds in new, breathtaking, complex, and confounding ways. If I were to succumb to dominant power as typically wielded in public education, I would lose my essential joie de vivre as a teacher and guide to youth toward a world that might and should be. I continue to be committed to social justice pedagogy and its inherent goal of equity for all. I acquiesce to the struggle voluntarily, readily, and warily.

The Metaphor of Waves

Throughout this dissertation, I incorporate the metaphor of "waves" as a means to analogize the transfer of energy that occurred in my critical literacy classroom and at Taylor High School. When a wave passes into a new medium, its speed changes. Because critical literacy praxis was so different than students' previous experiences in their public education, I was a new medium that changed the speed of student reactions. Kist (2005) argues that researchers could write entire books about the

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"struggles" of teachers who attempt to infuse new literacies into their classroom.
Waves of tension occurred in learning events when I required students to engage in constructivist thinking; when I asked students to assume critical distance from the western canon; when students juxtaposed popular culture texts and the western canon; when students responded to deconstruction of their real life or favorite childhood texts; or when students interrogated their privileged places within a hegemonic society. Waves built and rose in frothy crescendos when school authority officials created public performance texts that drew on dominant discourses in U.S. society. Davies (2006) notes that social justice educators must be highly motivated for change to occur, but that the associated and "profound implications for teaching and learning… may not sit easily with current pedagogical philosophies tied to content knowledge and passing of examinations" (p. 6). I was an obstacle placed in the path of established and comfortable learning; we bent the waves of the norms of public school education through critical literacy praxis.

Waves varied in degree and intensity; they traveled through space and time. On occasions during this study, waves of school authority transferred my energy momentarily but without actually displacing my commitment or enthusiasm for critical literacy pedagogy. In section one of Chapter Four, convictions like Jim's in that Taylor had become "an elite member of the state's communities" overshadowed my social justice texts about seeking democratic alternatives, departing from dominant discourses, and recreating equity and justice as the center of the knowledge-making enterprise (Shor, 1999). In spite of the access to what seemed to be limitless information through communication technologies like laptops, cellphones, television,

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and podcasts, Pat resorted to print-centric means to clarify her vision for educational reform through top-down professional development. The privileges of school consumption became a complex interplay of school, media, and collective social discourse that duplicated the stratification of the dominant sectors of U.S. society. School authority figures recontextualized in ways that offered few pathways toward spirituality, fellowship, or reaching out to Others.[48] Like the importance of physical origin in the wave process, waves of authority traveled through other media during ths study. Waves of authority that might have been restorative and filled with visions of hope for my students and me, rather, were a constant moving disturbance in the space-time existence of this study.

In the second data section of Chapter Four, I discussed how waves of student tension created constant ripples in our classroom deconstruction and composition of texts. Arlene's challenge to me about the necessity to read and analyze Hall's (2003a) *Encoding and Decoding* rose in interconnected swells of youth discontent. I showed how youth tried to subvert my overarching sociocultural year-long theme by complaining about grades, seeking the intervention of school authority figures, and

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[48] Pat did subscribe to an online program "rooted in respectful, responsible, and caring behaviors." I use this example to demonstrate how elusive the character building process is in public education. THS student cultural rituals ignored the content of announcements in lieu of social discourse. Pat repeated the phrase, "The choice is yours" at the end of each daily message. Because repetition emphasizes jargon and terms, however, the refrain became part of the student body discourse and took on a life of its own so as to diminish or even negate the efficacy of the character education it was intended to summarize. Students ignored the narrative and, instead awaited the refrain as signal to move into class content and learning events.

duplicating dominant discourses such as those around gender and sexuality. Further, the institutionalized tracking system at THS served as periodic barriers, and crests and troughs of anxiety and comfort around tracking permeated the classroom. Students with success in lower tracked classrooms like Martin were concerned about new and uncertain approaches to literacy instruction, while students who self-advocated for a higher track felt pressure to possess knowledge that had not been previously incorporated into their literacy instruction. Previous literacy instruction in high canonical texts had situated "reading" largely within the theory of New Criticism and Reader Response. Students had little in the way of metacognitive structures about these previous approaches to literacy instruction, so deconstructing texts using sociocultural analysis seemed often far-reaching. Moreover, discontinuities between approaches to literacy curricula year-to-year baffled many students, especially those had been, historically, high achievers. These were waves of social justice tensions that I needed to absorb and reroute in order to help youth, as conscientious human beings, discover how we are conditioned by the dominant ideology (Shor, 1993).

These waves of struggle speak to the inherent tensions around which this dissertation is hinged. In the third data section of Chapter Four, I name this as a wave of harmony and motions where digitalized, personal, and socially empowering texts across a broad range of texts, formats, and genres invited students to distance themselves from their daily existence and to reflect on the world through social justice lenses. The undulating waves of common terminology, of successes of non-traditional and looped students, of projects that drew from in-school and out-of-school literacy practices, and of my abdication of teacher-as-authority and resulting youth voice and

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recontextualization made for constant underlying currents toward more social and democratic youth epistemology. Recognizing that students drew on a wide variety of texts in order to form the communicative practices of identity, I built sociocultural analysis into multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural celebrations so that waves of meaning-making would flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1997) and evolve over time in the contextual medium of my critical literacy classroom.

Recontextualization as a way to construct meaning

In each of the chapters, recontextualization was the connecting factor that washed waves across the actors. Recontextualization, I suggest, is a process that extracts text, signs, or meaning from its original context and molds it into another context. Through recontextualization, THS authority figures were able to create a discourse around correct cultural and socially appropriate ways of upper middle class being and accountability. The texts transmitted by school authority figures in our suburban, upper-middle class school conveyed common definitions of what it meant to be privileged and part of a discourse of meritocracy. Taylor public education was designed to appropriate texts so as to reproduce dominant ideologies.

School authority figures' texts reflected core values --- the power of determination, excellence, tradition, merit, excellence, and ambition. Their ideals, missions, standards, school culture, ways of knowing and doing reflected both high standards for academic achievement and, at the same time, reinforced privilege.

While important, privilege as a sociocultural construct was but one element in a series of waves that built into a crest in this study. Recontextualization allowed the

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youth in my classroom to come to individual terms with critical literacy pedagogy by drawing in their own popular and media culture into analysis and composition. Because I infused respect for multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural texts as new definitions of being literate, tensions arose due to my students' entrenched ways of knowing their worlds and the world of public schooling. I argue that we were only able to challenge the dominant discourses in upper middle class public education when students brought to class and reconceptualized their own modalities, literacies, and cultures as part of literacy learning requirements. When we did so, numerous youth were able to create their own critical youth texts and gain youth power across a variety of dimensions.

Drawing from Fiske's (1987) analysis of three layers of texts --- primary, secondary, and tertiary --- I facilitated a classroom climate of dialogicality where we merged social justice with popular and media cultures. I accepted youth as an audience of many kinds of individuals and in which texts were received variously by different youth depending on their social and cultural backgrounds. Through recontextualization, my students and I as co-learners examined the subtle layers of meaning and sociocultural content around textual representations. Recontextualization opened up pathways for me to relinquish teacher control in the classroom because youth gained cognitive structures to mine beneath surface meaning.

No longer did first impressions, pervasive mythologies, public performances, clichés, aphorisms, or celebrity opinions necessarily translate into immediate meanings (Shor, 1992). Students assumed leadership roles and critical distance; they began to seek out alternative meanings, underlying causes, sociocultural contexts, and

personal motivations within textual messages. They became more critical, more

hopeful, and more fully literate learners through critical literacy praxis.

Students negotiated the literacy tensions in their lives: they researched the high

western canon via the internet and drew upon their own repertoire of music, film,

television, satellite radio, sports, magazines, and other authentic texts to merge in-

school and out-of-school literacy. They discussed plots of media narratives and

overarching socioeconomic themes with extended family members,[49] friends[50], and

classroom peers[51]. Many wanted to be successful in their academic world but, also, to

"stop letting others influence me into being like them" (Clark, June 6, 2008). They

sought to balance generic texts, evaluative stances toward others and the world, and

discourse in structurally compatible ways (Bakhtin, 1986) with becoming critical

consumers of textual messages. Many youth began to realize that decoding the

"deliberate manipulation of symbolic material within socially organized practices"

(Dyson, 2003, p. 332) could be the core of being fully literate.

THS school authority officials, youth, and I recontextualized differently and

variously dependent on the social network from which we drew, our positioning as

composers or recipients of messages, the degree of ritualization of the textual activity,

the kind of communicative technology on which we drew, the assumptions we brought

to the discoursal acts, and the narrative structures we confronted. Throughout this

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[49] **Summer: "My dad had introduced me to the song 'Father of Mine' when I was younger…
Then… my Grandmother came up with another song, 'Leader of the Band' by Dan
Fogelberg" (May 30, 2008).**

[50] **Brandy: "I should have called on my classmates that never raised their hands, instead of
only calling on the ones that always had their hands up" (May 11, 2008).**

[51] **Caleb: "This year, we did a variety of different things to show our understanding of the
text. These included schemas, going live, fishbowls, acting, close-reading, co-teaching,
digital audio recording and just being able to discuss as a class the different texts. It
was a very fun and unique atmosphere. " (May 8, 2008)**

dissertation I showed how we at THS used recontextualization to secure worldviews ranging from "privileged" and "normal," to "equitable" and "just" for all. And I also demonstrated how we drew on reconceptualization as a means of creating sociocultural identities consistent with public sphere personas. Navigating the complexities around reconceptualization is at the core of this dissertation, as recontextualization invited translation and negotiation across different symbolic modes, expectations, and spaces.

Inviting popular culture

This dissertation was a controlled study in controlled circumstances that sought to understand how critical literacy pedagogy might transform privileged students' literacy practices. "Because youth are so often controlled, managed, confined, and subjugated in our culture" (Bogad, 2002, p. 223), youths' multimodal, multiliterate, transcultural learning experiences took on velocity and amplitude. Inherent to this quest was the incorporation of popular and media culture texts into classroom and public school institutional analysis. Youth's learning experiences traveled along a spiraling continuum of explicit instruction, orientations to new analytical and compositional processes, and situating points where certain epistemologies fit into certain thoughts and dispositions.

For example, in the third data section of Chapter Four, when Reggie used political cartoons as a means to interrogate dominant religious practices, he "took a small world example and used it as a metaphor to explain the world" (May 30, 2008). When John chose a classic television show, he decided that it recontextualized "the perfect

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family" (October 23, 2007) at a time when his own family was experiencing crisis and loss. Caleb recontextualized the high canon through his personal experiences by observing that people "can express many qualities both male and female" (November 26, 2007). Mary designed her co-teaching lesson so her peers could link "real world examples in relation to the theme in their analyses" (May 31, 2008).

In each of these examples, students moved reciprocally through in-school and out-of-school literacy practices to gain meaningful learning structures. Thus, youth need spaces both inside and outside school where they can absorb and practice twenty-first century literacy structures. As Duckworth (1996) notes, "Wonderful ideas do not spring out of nothing. They build on a foundation of other ideas" (p. 265). Even still, critical literacy classrooms with multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural cores --- while possessing great possibilities for emancipatory literacy learning --- do not appeal to all youth. As I have argued in this dissertation, THS was a complicated context for twenty-first century youth to transcend dominant ideologies and their own privilege in order to break through to transformative literacy experiences. What conclusions can be drawn from these various reactions of acceptance, resistance, or acquiescence to critical interrogation of texts?

Students of privilege relied on existing structures within their public education for success in my classroom. The reality was that privileged students who lived in a predominately white, middle-class suburban area and had had little contact with the poor, minority groups, or urban environments had little personal experience to inform their perceptions about people whom they did not consider normal. However, the students in this study who were outsiders to structures of privilege or status were

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drawn into mediation of meaning through popular and media culture texts and their own semiotic recontextualizations. Additionally, looped students, or students whom I had taught in a previous year, like Jonathan, persevered to link their existing thinking process to new frames of knowing their worlds.

Moreover, as the year progressed, more and more students attempted to draw from contemporary culture in order to comprehend the western canon. For example, reconciling myself to Taylor youths' literacy educations within a tracked high school, I recommended Rick, Emma, and Val to junior honors tracked English.[52] Each had shown deep abilities as literate learners across a broad array of learning events and texts and, so, appeared to me to be able to return to a classroom of nearly exclusive high canonical focus- and its associated prestige, which would be beneficial to each of them in other traditional and critical literacy classrooms. Thus, through the year of this study in which I offered to lower tracked students a wide array of alternative literacy practices, I feel I enabled them to transcend socioeconomic class stigma and gain valuable literacy structures.

Three distinct areas in this dissertation contribute to the literature around critical literacy pedagogy. First, U.S. educational reform efforts must include new definitions of valuable public school literacy practices in the digital era of the twenty-first century. Second, youth require repeated opportunities to recontextualize their own learning within the framework of sociocultural theory. Third, social justice pedagogy

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[52] **Interestingly, none would continue onto senior honors English. Each returned to college preparatory studies.**

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can infuse awareness of equity issues when students interrogate their worlds through original, popular, and media culture texts.

Implications for future research

Using portions of this study as a model, researchers could locate classrooms that build in multiple opportunities for intertextuality. For example, upon reflection, positioning one popular culture text in juxtaposition to *Billy Budd* may not have been sufficient exposure for all students so that they could discern various contemporary definitions of society and ideologies. The core activities in multiple opportunities for intertextuality across primary, secondary, and tertiary texts (Fiske, 1987) would extend the development of a critical vocabulary and knowledge base, unveil the corporate construction of childhood, critique a broad spectrum of visual, audio, and digital representations, and require more critical interrogation of the hidden curriculum of selected cultural artifacts.

Researchers could also advocate for deeper teacher-student relationships through looped critical literacy classrooms. When teachers and students share learning experiences for more than one year, academic and social discourses merge more readily. Additionally, when looped, students are more likely to assume positions of agency, in which learning events are sequential steps toward competence, self-respect, and collective concern for others. Researchers might investigate ways in which looping within in critical literacy framework could become a step toward restructured tracked classrooms, as teachers and students who have an existing relationship might

be able to transcend artificial barriers and labels of academic value and worth based on social and cultural capital. Critical pedagogy praxis can reconceptualize "a paradigm of sameness" (Caruthers, 2008) in public education and invite more marginalized students into all kinds of academic discourse.

Moreover, future research could turn to ways in which public schools across the U.S could create collegial spaces where public school teachers could explore together the place and possibility of popular and media culture texts as serious educational discourse. Students in this study frequently saw infusion of popular and media culture texts as novel but not academic. When teachers share discourses about intertextuality, classroom conversations can extend beyond memorization of who-what-where into why and how questions. Important work within such a collegial space would be to deconstruct the western canon as a body of significant literary texts that have embedded existential, propositional, and value assumptions.

Further, this dissertation supports the premise that the time is now to infuse more ethnographic teacher researcher analysis into accepted research around public education. Ethnographic analysis gives voice to alternative worldviews (Delpit, 1995) and can deconstruct codes of power. As Fairclough (2003) argues, social theorists produce interesting critical insights but may also need to "engage in language in a far more concrete and detailed way" (p. 204). If teachers were supported in more opportunities to conduct ethnographic research, we could share "teacher talk" about multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural textual practices across disciplines. Thus, "the experience of engaging with new textual worlds on a more sophisticated level" (Kist, 2005, p. 104) might seem less radical, more accessible, and commonplace.

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Even if only some of these recommendations were to be implemented across many K-12 public schools in the U.S., new textual representations and messages would enter these institutions. However, although new discourses may be enacted, they may never become fully inculcated. We must attend to the complexities of popular and media culture texts and the discourse around the high western canon even if such goals are uncertain. This does not make them unnecessary. Other teacher-researchers, teachers, school authority figures, and --- even --- youth can draw from critical literacy practices to impact the lives of future U.S. citizens. To do so would be to infuse more courage, selflessness, creativity, and passion into public school literacy practices. Days of promise and what Argentinean poet Jorge Luis Borges calls "moments of paradise" could become ubiquitous waves of hope.

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