A REFLECTIVE GAZE OF THE CLASSROOM SPACE: DISRUPTING CERTAINTIES AND SEEING POSSIBILITIES

by

SHARON ROSE CLARK

(Under the Direction of Martha Allexsaht-Snider)

ABSTRACT

Race, class, and gender elitism can shape the structure of the classroom, creating a lived reality of insider versus outsider that is predetermined, often in place before any class discussion begins. This research study focused on looking at a teacher's practices from a poststructural perspective, the teacher's vulnerability to dominant school discourses, and the realization that she could begin to work towards understanding her part in granting or withholding recognition of her students. A yearlong study was conducted in the teacher's own third grade classroom to better understand how she could help her students realize that they did have control over their lives and were capable of making important decisions. Applying poststructural theory, the teacher used research practices that would not determine a single truth because the diversity of the students' experiences were filled with contradictory truths and multiple subject positionings; therefore, the purpose of the analysis of the data in this yearlong study was not to unravel and find truths, but to trouble and deconstruct the discourses in our everyday lives.

The teacher set out to provide a poststructural reading of the student's worlds, showing the many layers and complexities, the difference and insights, disrupting certainties and seeing possibilities in the silences opened up by the disruptions. The findings from this study, presented through classroom conversations, student work, and the teacher's reflective and critical self, illuminates how the teacher recognized the students as competent spokespeople of their own lived realities. The students' voices were prominent in the exploration of what was going on in their worlds and the perspectives their worlds offered. The students and teacher engaged in moments in which their encounters occurred so the possibility of new thinking could occur.

INDEX WORDS: poststructural theory, classroom conversations, class, gender, race, discourse, critical self-inquiry, teacher practice

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my sons, Joey and Michael. I love you.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

It always surprised me how quickly the school years hurried by, but there I was, yet again, waving good-bye to my students on another last day of school. The students had all boarded their buses, and what had developed into a typical practice on the last day of school, all of the teachers lined up along the school's curb and waved their final goodbyes as the fleet of buses carrying a cargo of many smiling faces, made their way out of the school parking lot and headed towards summer. What was uncharacteristic of this past school year was the yearlong research study I had carried out in my classroom with my third grade students and how it helped me come to know them, and myself, differently. So before I could begin my own summer hiatus, I returned to my classroom one last time to collect my teacher journal filled with one year's worth of stories that told the story of the happenings in my classroom.

During my doctoral study, prior to my research study, I became inspired by Jones, Davies, and hooks, at first just "acquaintances" but later my constant "companions," as I embarked on a journey to create a classroom climate that was safe enough for the expression of my students' voices and their experiences. Now, as Jones, Davies, and hooks implored me to take a respite from the hubbub of the school year so I could write, I took a few moments to consider the classroom space, where, as both a teacher and researcher, I had attempted to create "a small plot of land" (Deleuze and Guatarri, 1987, p. 161), a safe place my students and I had laid claim to for ten months time. This safe place was where my students could be honest and "able to name their fears...speak out,

and fully celebrate the moments where…collective learning took place" (hooks, 2010, p. 21); a classroom space where not only the curriculum was attended to, but also the "willingness to listen and be open to others…a respect for differences...and a sense of empathy, a closeness that create[d] bonds" (Ceppi and Zini, 1998, p. 3).

I realized there were risks in creating a classroom space that was not solely obsessed with the current outcomes-driven curriculum. The school system, one of the largest and most diverse systems in the southeastern region of the United States, would most likely define my students' achievements by the students' state-mandated test scores and here I was, defining my students' achievements by whether or not they believed that I had recognized them as complete beings with complex lived experiences. As I struggled with how to bring my students both "fast enough and thoroughly enough to the new knowledges" (Gannon, 2009, p. 82) they would need to successfully meet the requirements for required state-mandated tests, I was, at that time, also delving into my doctoral studies which encouraged me to critically reflect on my teaching practices. I began to suspect that the school curriculum was determined to a large extent by state standards which provided the benchmarks by which the performance of my students was measured and I was held accountable. Although there might have been sound arguments which could be drawn upon to rationalize those standards, they appeared to limit and compromise my students' opportunities for participation and validation, and ultimately their chances of succeeding in school.

I began to comprehend how students were quite often asked to give up their own frameworks of meaning in order to learn the discourses of the school, what Davies (1990-1999, p. 108) describes as "teaching-as-usual" - using dominant school discourses in

which the competent students created the contexts that were recognizable as a classroom. The students knew "how to behave and in doing so became members of those social scenes" (Davies, p. 108) in which "competent students" made the right choices: when to work, how to learn, when to be creative, when to speak and what can be spoken, and when to be silent. I was stunned to realize that this "teaching-as-usual" (Davies, p. 108) was going on in my own third grade classroom without any particular attention being paid to it because it was obvious that "all of my students *should* know what was going on." My students who disrupted this order were the "problem students" and were labeled as such by other teachers who had either previously taught them or had "heard" about them. The problem was seen to lie with the students and was read in terms "of their differences from the others" (Davies, p. 109). Those "different" students made the authority relations of the classroom much more visible and this "visibility of the intimidating, constitutive nature of the context came about, not necessarily because they struggled against it, but more often, because of their very struggles to be part of it" (Davies, p. 109).

Prior to my research study, within my teaching practice, I had this assumption that my position and the positions of my competent students were the "normal" and reasonable ones. The harder I attempted to construct this normative, idealized space, the more some of my students, like Dyllan, struggled, resulting often in my removing him from the classroom and dismissing him for not fitting in. Dyllan was positioned as an outsider until he found the right pattern of behavior that would allow him to be positioned as an insider, having "good school behavior," which included acquiring correct behaviors, correct language, and correct personhood, while I positioned myself as the one

with authority to assert the correctness of my views. As expected, Dyllan never did find the right pattern of behavior. How could he as I attempted to maintain an idealized classroom that repeatedly positioned him as one who did not belong, locking him into repeated patterns of powerlessness (Ellwood, 2009, p. 36)?

While Jones, Davies, and hooks inspired me to pay attention to my students' voices and experiences, Dyllan haunted me, reminding me of how I had failed to steer him away from further experiences of failure that had already figured strongly into his life - his mom's drug abuse, the gang-related execution of his sixteen year old cousin, the stress of living with a blended family in which he was positioned as "always the bad one who could do nothing right," and the physical and sexual abuse he endured at the hands of another family member. No wonder he could not walk down the hallway without singing and dancing like Michael Jackson; singing and dancing were how he coped with a painful past, his comfort during his wakefulness after terrifying nightmares in the middle of the night, his day-to-day existence that was constantly permeated by worries about his tomorrows. Almost daily, Dyllan's "bad" behavior had me wishing for just a few minutes of peace and quiet and, unfortunately, belatedly, I realized that Dyllan was much more in need of an escape from *his* life and that my third grade classroom *should* have been his "soft place to fall."

More and more, little by little, doctoral class by doctoral class, I wanted my classroom to offer students a safe place to fall; I did not want my classroom to have so many "striated spaces" (Davies, 2009, p. 14), spaces that were structured and organized, restricted and controlled, and caught up in categorical differences. Yet, until I delved into my research study, I did not recognize that those striated spaces still lingered in my

classroom. I wrongly assumed I had encouraged my students to cross the classroom threshold believing they were entering unrestricted spaces where they were all rendered equal, but those spaces did not always exist within my classroom because of "striated lines of power that required obedience and consent to powerlessness" (Davies, 2008, p. 136).

Looking at my teacher practices from a poststructural perspective, recognizing my own vulnerability to those dominant discourses, I realized I could begin to work towards understanding my part in granting or withholding recognition of my students, particularly students like Dyllan whose struggle for recognition required that I understand his need and justification for recognition. Dyllan and I were not separate identities in the struggle for recognition, but we were both in different ways, striving for recognition (Butler, 2008, pp. 33-34). Poststructuralist theories provided conceptual possibilities that enabled me to "turn [my] gaze differently on the social world as it folds and unfolds around us…inviting [me] to turn [my] analytic gaze on the ongoing processes of [my] own subjectification" (Butler, p. 10).

As I began my study in my classroom with my third grade students, I attempted to craft my classroom into a space where all structured and striated spaces could be eliminated, only to find that was humanly impossible and unattainable. The standards-based curriculum measured by the students' performance on the benchmarks, the hectic daily schedules that permitted very little wiggle room, and the orchestration of the school lives of twenty incredibly wonderful and unique eight and nine year old beings, created particular constraints and restrictions I could not escape. I was beginning to recognize that the open spaces I had imagined were turning out "not to be spaces, but knots,

complications, folds, and partial connections" (Stronach and MacLure, 1997, p. 5) and it was impossible for me to tell whether they were openings or closings, since they were at different times, capable of preventing escape routes to happy endings. I realized I would have to forgive myself and surrender any and all notions I had of creating something, anything, resembling a utopian classroom.

My work as a teacher could not be that of a passive facilitation in which I allowed the students to find their own way. Being a deeply responsive and engaging practice, part of my work as a teacher was to construct my classroom as a space that oscillated between striations and smoothness, a space that both sometimes controlled, yet also burst with possibilities; where I could set up conditions in which lines of flight, small escapes from the limits of the individuals, could certainly be made possible. Allowing myself to be open to my students' differences made it easier for me to accept the conflict and chaos that occurred within our safe and orderly classroom (Camden Pratt, 2009, p. 58).

I wanted to create the "in-between" (Davies, Zabrodska, Gannon, Bansel, and Camden Pratt, 2009, p. 123) of the striated spaces, where there were just a few ground rules; and "smooth spaces" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 161), where movement was less regulated and controlled and the students could position themselves in different ways. So I attempted to create conditions in which the classroom could be a place where I could "move the students with me…in a moment of dissolving some of the existing boundaries" (Davies et al., 2009, p. 141) and lines of flight could be made possible for both the students and myself. My desire was for us to get caught up in shared acts of listening that required us to abandon ourselves to the idea that our being was just a small part of a much broader knowledge. I wanted to enter a space with my students in which,

together, we could experience a connectedness that would “link the speaker, the audience, and the words in a ‘becoming-story’ in which the identity of the self is lost” (Davies et al., 2009, p. 142) and we would be open to each other’s differences, to our different values, and to our different points of view.

I was bringing into the classroom, my voice - partial, multiple, and contradictory - as well as my identity: white, middle-class, a single-parent of two college-aged sons, a sister, a daughter, the aunt of two nieces adopted from China, teacher, doctoral student, and researcher. I was about to embark on a study that would hopefully create a classroom climate that was politically conscious and critical to allow for the examination of my students’ experiences within larger frameworks of equity and the formation of knowledge and culture. I felt that it was essential that I understand my “own cultural locations and how those locations impacted my perspectives” (Jones, 2006, p. 35); acknowledging that I brought multiple and shifting identity elements to each potential dialogue seemed a sound starting place. What I envisioned for this study with my third grade students can best be stated in Greene’s (1994) words:

> We want our classrooms to be reflective and just… to be full of sounds of articulate young people, with ongoing dialogues involving as many as possible, opening to each other, opening to the world. And we want them to care for one another, as we learn more and more about caring for them. (p. 25).

I wanted to invite my students to consider with me how we might “think of ourselves, and perform ourselves, differently, how we might let go of some part of our individualism and open up the possibility of new ways of thinking about who we are in relation to others” (Davies and Gannon, 2006, p. 5).

CHAPTER 2: MY ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT CLASS, GENDER, AND RACE

Telling stories allows us to become aware of the extent to which we are storied by our life experiences in particular contexts. By sharing our stories and by engaging with diverse life experiences (hooks, 2010, p.55), we gain a sense of how our family and cultural values shape our ideologies, simultaneously encountering various existences and ideologies that allow us to imagine other ways of constructing ourselves in relation to the world (Ellwood, 2009, pp. 36 – 37). Stories provide a sense of community, a coherent feeling of shared concerns, values, and investigations. In my teaching, through the "construction of my stories, I am becoming conscious of what is happening to me because of my students' stories and what is happening to them because of what I have come to understand about them and myself" (Hankins, 2003, p. 8). What I want to work on here begins with the moments of being that are "encompassed in each of my stories, stories that dwell on encounters that are sometimes deeply moving, and sometimes distressing…stories historically specific and yet open out into the future, emergent possibilities that go beyond the limitations of current pedagogical thought" (Davies, 2009, p. 12). Before I could dwell on the encounters in the present story, the story of this study, I needed to unpack some of the encounters that had shaped who I was as a person and who I was as a teacher/ researcher. The literature and topics drawn on in this chapter became part of the framework guiding the research.

Class Assumptions

My first memory of becoming aware of my position of privilege, the first term in the privilege/poverty binary, was when I was nine years old, living an upper-middle class life, my father an attorney and my mother a stay-at-home mom, with a large home with a backyard filled with toys and a pool, in a "nice" neighborhood, and a private school education. It was the week before Christmas, when my dad ran into the Woolworth store with his six young daughters in tow, searching for replacement light bulbs for our tree, a purchase I assumed one would "expect" people to make at a five-and-dime store. A young woman caught my eye, as she intently looked at a shelf of baby dolls, different only in the colors of their dresses. She noticed me watching her, told me she was buying one for her daughter but could not decide which her daughter might prefer, and after asking me for help and my own deliberation, we chose the one in the blue dress. I experienced for the first time this undeniable sense of sadness for both the little girl who would be the recipient of that unattractive, plastic doll and this woman unable to afford to buy her daughter a doll like mine, sold only in the fancy downtown department store. This moment was my initiation into the world of the privilege/poverty binary and I was intensely thankful to be on the left side of this binary term. Growing up during the sixties and seventies, there seemed to be this contemptuous attitude towards poor people, when poor people were held accountable for their own lack of wealth and it seemed the more you had, the more you deserved. Although I did not consciously have a contemptuous attitude towards poor people, I had this assumption that lingered with me for many years, an assumption that if you were poor, it would be difficult to ever really be happy.

There were students who taught me along the way that they could be happy even though they knew all too well the meanings of such things as homelessness, disrupted families (Ellwood, 2009, p. 41), and poor health care, all of which were brought on by poverty. Fast forwarding some thirty-something years, when I was teaching in a school surrounded by middle and upper middle class neighborhoods, there was a trailer park on the fringes of those neighborhoods, alienated almost intentionally from the school by a busy thoroughfare. This is where the “poor kids” lived and Fredy, one of my third grade students, was one of those poor kids. Fredy’s parents had five children, and I knew money was tight for them and they were just barley squeaking by to make ends meet. Sometimes at the end of a school day when I was on my way home from school, I would stop for gas at the Quick Trip down the road from the school which also happened to be frequented by Fredy’s mom, who, once a week, allowed the children to “pick out one thing,” a bottle of Coke, a bag of chips, a candy bar, bubble gum, whatever their hearts desired. On a couple of occasions, I would be pumping gas, Fredy’s mom would pull up to the front doors of the store and I would comically observe the children, even down to the two year old, climb all over each other, arms and legs all intertwined, racing to be the first one out of the car and into the store. A few minutes later, out they marched, taking a moment away from devouring their chosen “delicacies” only to smile at their mom and offer her a taste. I began to consider and believe that, for the lady buying her daughter the doll and for Fredy, as it was for the eight young girls in Jones’ study (2006), “poor was always debatable” (p. 27).

The vast majority of students I now teach come from families struggling with poverty and I keep close to me, Jones' (2006) description of a conversation she had with her students:

> "I asked the students, "Can you be poor and be happy?" A resounding "yes" came from the small crowd, "Can you be poor and love your life with your family?" Another loud "yeah!" came from the group. My purpose? To plant the seed that living on the poorer end of the social class spectrum does not equal unhappiness with oneself or one's family. I had a long journey ahead of me toward cultivating those seeds in the classroom… (p.13)

One way I achieved cultivating those seeds of understanding in my classroom was through my students' personal writing - "when they came to know themselves better while I simultaneously [learned] from details of their lives" (Jones, 2006, p. 8). One of my students' favorite stories was The Relatives Came (Rylant, 1985) and, after the students engaged in a lively conversation about their own family reunions, they wrote about those family "get-togethers." Samuel's journal excerpt expressed how his extended family seemed to have family reunions every Sunday, especially during the football season:

> Every Sunday my dad and me drag out the television set and an old couch and a lot of chairs from the garage. We put them around on the grass and the grownups watch the football games and all us kids play outside most of the night. It is the best time I ever have in my life.

As I read Samuel's writing piece, I held fast to Jones' (2006) words:

> Normal people, to me, have lived similar lives and have had similar experiences. Struggling to make ends meet while ensuring fun time with family is something I have always valued and continue to value as how most people live….My early conceptions of normal life continue to influence the way I read the world around me, but understanding these complexities also helps me to move beyond my world, to understand that there is an infinite number of normal experiences in our society, many differing from my own. (p. 4)

I was beginning to explore how Samuel could be happy even though he all too well understood what it meant to be poor; realizing how much I had learned from my students, many who existed in worlds similar to the ones Fredy and Samuel were positioned in.

Gender Assumptions

One of the features of the worlds that most children are born into is that everyone fits inside a binary gendered structure and everyone is "identifiably a male or a female person" (Davies, 1989, p. 5), a structure in which the male/female binary has a close connection with the powerful/powerless binary (Davies, 2003, p. 13). Growing up at a time when the majority of families reflected the type of family where most children learned the practices of hierarchical rule and where the relationship of powerful/powerless is first learned and accepted as natural, my parents raised me to feel powerful: girls could and should be able to do anything boys could do, girls did not have to forego their femaleness in order to be "granted a public place in the world" (Davies, 2003, p. 89), and girls should be "liberated from the tension and doubt that comes from

their embeddedness in the gender order with its impositions of one form of morality for males and another for females" (Davies, 2003, p. 76).

The further I moved away from the "private sphere of my home, and the further I moved into public spaces" (Davies, 2003, p. 89), I was correctly positioned as a female since that was what was "required of me in order to have a recognizable identity within the public spaces" (Davies, p. 14). My introduction to school as a six year-old was seeing a white painted line drawn down the middle of the parking lot, separating the boys and girls at recess because boys played too rough and girls must play more "lady-like" games, whatever that meant; so the boys dribbled basketballs and threw footballs, while the girls drew with sidewalk chalk and jumped rope, chanting the words "Cinderella dressed in yella, went downtown to meet her fella." I remember thinking the teacher must never know that although jump ropes were sometimes used for jumping at my house, they were more often used to corral my sister who was always the "horse who kept escaping from the backyard" in one of our many imaginary games my teacher most likely would have considered "boys' play." Once I moved beyond the classrooms' doors, the male students were constituted as the ones who knew everything, the ones who reasoned, and the ones who controlled. I struggled against a system that encouraged me to become more passive, a system that perceived my intellectual capacity and potential as negative qualities and my nurturing capabilities as positive qualities (Mahoney, 1983, p. 110).

As a teacher, I misguidedly assumed that in the twenty-first century, boys would perceive female power as important and that female struggles were appropriate for them to take up. So I was more than a little surprised when a conversation with my students about Eleanor Roosevelt and her contributions to women's rights turned Jack's smile to a

scowl, sent his hands up over his ears, and he refused to participate, declaring Eleanor Roosevelt to be “stupid like all women.” I responded insensitively, saying the wrong things, making comments alienating rather than uniting us, “pushing us apart rather than bringing us together in what could have been a shared act of learning (hooks, 1984, p. 64). I was positioned as the speaker, positioning my students to adopt a storyline to which my students were invited to conform, or were required to conform to, if they wanted to continue to converse with me in such a way that contributed to the storyline that I opened up. Jack did not want to conform and resisted, while I on the other-hand, ignored the individuality of his identity which included a history of neglect and abuse by both his mom and the numerous men she had invited into his life.

It is easy for me to sometimes forget that males can be oppressed by sexism. Poor and working-class males, like those in Jack’s family, socialized by sexist thought to believe that there are privileges and powers they should have only because they are males, often discover that few, if any, of these benefits are automatically bestowed on them in life (hooks, 2000, p. 130). More than any other male group in the United States, they are constantly concerned about the “contradictions between the notion of masculinity they were taught and their inability to live up to that notion” (hooks, 1984, p. 75). Out of a multitude of “conflicting and often contradictory possibilities” (Davies, 2003, p. xii), Jack struggled to exist separate from others. There were times when he was nurturing and gentle, preferring girls’ company to that of boys in classroom activities. Yet he often positioned himself within the terms made available to him within a particular male social order, his “macho positioning” (Davies, 2003, p. 117) with the girls, always telling the girls to “clean up the classroom because it was women’s work,

just like cleaning the house was women's work," and his dominance and aggression towards younger and smaller boys, as well as with girls who he "got stuck working with in groups," sulking and refusing to work with them to complete the group activity because "those girls didn't know how to do anything."

I have found as a teacher that it is important to remember that my students are not born assuming different roles in the course of a day's activities; rather, they are many different selves, multiple and contradictory subjects (Davies and Banks, 1992, p. 2) produced within contradictory communities. My students are constructed within relationships and they may perform their identities very differently, with different people, in different places, and at different times. Children learn to understand the world through "multiple positionings" (Davies, 2003, p. 41) and forms of discourse that are available to them (Davies, p. 4). They learn the forms of power and powerlessness that are embedded in and made possible by the various discursive practices through which they position themselves and are positioned by others. As children have access to a variety ways of being, depending on who they are with, the particular context they are in, and the discourses in which they are situated, "the taking up of one position or another does not mean that that is who the person is, but is merely one of the ways in which that person is capable of positioning herself or himself" (Davies, p. 117).

My students do not take up male/female positioning in the same ways and cannot limit themselves to "unitary sets of behaviors" (Davies, 2003, p. 2) that can be called "masculine" or "feminine." As they learn how to think and act in terms of "category membership" (Davies, p. 3), they encounter a "multitude of contradictory possibilities" (Walkerdine, 1981, p. 14), as evident in my students' recess play. One indoor rainy day

recess, the girls might be playing "house," and the next day I would be reminding them that they were not supposed to be "making laser guns out of the math cubes to fight battles." Likewise, during indoor recess, the boys might be assisting the girls with "making beds" from tissue boxes complete with tissue pillows and blankets for my menagerie of bean-stuffed animals, and the next day be kicking a soccer ball from one end of the field to the other, always on the move, never slowing down, ignoring the girls wanting entry into the game. I assumed the girls would be angry and upset but without more than a moment's hesitation, they were off in search of another game to play. I was left wondering if the girls were accustomed to being outsiders of "male games," if they were held captive to their definition of what it meant to be a girl and to the fact that this excluded masculine ways of being, at least in public. How children "see themselves being positioned in relation to others in terms of gender relations, depends on the context, the frame of reference, and the interpretive/discursive possibilities known to the child and others the child interacts with" (Davies, p. 122). Who one is "is always an open question with a shifting answer depending on the positions made available within one's own and others' discursive practices and within those practices, the stories through which we make sense of our own lives" (Davies, p.89).

Race Assumptions

Growing up in different but all-white suburbs of Chicago, although I had some contact with African Americans, I never spoke directly with them or had conversations with them; not until my sophomore year of high school when my family moved to Massachusetts, did I ever attend school with an African American. I remember thinking that a black student's family "must have had money" because I assumed that black people

could not afford to live in the same middle class town I did. The only places I believed black people lived were in shabby neighborhoods where the houses were old and dilapidated or in the projects - those isolated, unwelcoming buildings surrounded by chain-linked fences which seemed to divide the picturesque from the unattractive, those who had from those who did not, contentment from despair, nightmares from dreams, my life from theirs. Through my twenties and thirties, I remember thinking that as a "white northerner, I had the 'privilege' of not thinking about my race unless I chose to consider it" (McCotter, 1999, p. 103) and would later find out that I had actually never dealt with the issue of race, letting myself "believe" that racism only existed in the South. Approaching my forties, although I taught several African American students, I avoided engaging in the subjects of race and racism in any meaningful way in my classroom, indifferent to my students' memories, families, cultures, and languages that gave my students their distinctive voices.

Reaching fifty years old, I finally thought there might be some truth to the saying that the "older one gets, the wiser one becomes," because I was realizing that in my discourses with my students, I was positioning them as race-less subjects (Ahmed, 2000, p. 107), and because I was leaving that category of difference concealed, my students' race identities remained obscured and unchallenged (Gannon, 2009, p. 87). Delving back into my consciousness, I evoked from within my memory, a moment when I had been standing in front of twenty-one third graders, all eyes on me, waiting to hear about slavery and what I had to say about the punishments most often handed out to slaves in response to perceived infractions, disobedience, and reassertion of the dominance of the slave owners or overseers. It was a moment when my "teaching" about this event

consisted of reading about this piece of history in a mainstream textbook followed by a quick summary which took all of ten minutes, helping me avoid any direct confrontation on the issues of race and racism (hooks, 2010, p. 74). If I had allowed the students the opportunity to struggle with issues of race and slavery, I could have opened the door to meaningful conversations about slavery and freedom (Bolgatz, 2006). Hall (2008) states that identities are about questions of "using the resources of history…not 'who we are' or 'where we came from,' so much as what we might become, how we have been represented, and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves" (p. 4).

Another lucid memory of my avoiding the issues of race and racism, was the day of the Obama/Cain mock presidential election at our school. The bell had just rung when Ellie furiously stomped up to me waving a miniature Rosa Parks' flag which she explained to me was given to her by Precious, an African American girl, because Ellie had mentioned to her that she was not voting for Obama in the school's mock presidential election. As Ellie, tears flowing, proclaimed she was not a racist, justified by the fact that "she was one-half black," Precious came running into the classroom with a shopping bag filled with an assortment of Rosa Parks' flags trailing behind her, and responded just as passionately as Ellie. She realized Ellie was part black so "Ellie should have known that all black people, even ones with blonde hair like Ellie's, should vote for Obama." Sides were taken among my other students and I found myself smoothing things over but avoiding, yet again, an especially teachable moment on the topics of race and racism. I once again refused to engage the subject of race and racism in a meaningful way because those particular issues might cause discomfort and initiate conflict (hooks, 2010, p. 56) between the students. My students' experiences were relevant to the learning process and

even if those experiences were limited, raw, or unfruitful, it was essential to respect the way my students felt about their experiences as well as their need to speak about them in classroom settings.

As I read, inquired, and critically self-reflected, I was becoming aware of how, in education, difference is also understood in terms of racial otherness and that discourses of diversity tend to categorize people into racial identities that neglect many other differences amongst the subjects of such discourses. Often, “binaries of racial difference” (Ahmed, 2000, p. 107) can leave some categories of difference unchallenged and can “conceal the multiple identities that are patched together by subjects as they move through the domains of their lives. It is particularity rather than generality that contributes to an encounter that has the possibility of transcendence” (Gannon, 2009, p. 87) and can call forth an unstoppable responsibility for the other. I was beginning to imagine the powerful conversations I could have with my students.

Power Assumptions

As I “consulted” with Jones, Davies, and hooks, I began to recognize my enduring fear of rocking the boat, causing trouble, and only recently, have I begun to interrogate my own fear of power (Davies, et al., 2009, p. 148). So often, as a teacher, I felt that that my “actions did not match what I said I believed, my behaviors revealed different values than what I preached, and how I was actually teaching was not how I wanted to be teaching” (Hankins, 2003, p. 12). One of the most significant forms of power held by the powerless is the refusal to accept the definition that is put forward by the powerful.

Janeway (1981) explains:

> It is true that one may not have a coherent self-definition to set against the status assigned by the establishing social mythology, and that is not necessary for dissent. By disbelieving, one will be led toward doubting prescribed codes of behavior, and as one begins to act in ways that can deviate from the norm in any degree, it becomes clear that in fact there is not just one right way to handle or understand events. (p.92)

Instead of engaging in the act of choosing to speak, of using that speaking to bring about changes in the possible ways available to me, the needs of my students, many of them struggling with poverty, were ignored, doomed to receive less than they deserved, not just because of their very identities and circumstances, but because I tolerated the barriers and boundaries that fostered my students' exclusion.

It is essential for me to remember that power is not just an oppressive relation among people and only restrictive in its effects; power is also resisting, deconstructing, writing, creating, laughing, and imagining. Critical thinking requires us to use our imagination, seeing things from perspectives other than our own; so it is difficult to understand why imagination receives so little attention, especially when we live in a world where young children are encouraged "to imagine…create imaginary friends, new identities, wherever the mind takes them" (hooks, 2010, p. 60). My niece, Angela, was adopted from China as an infant, and although she knew she was "adopted," the word "adopted" meant little to her until she was about five years old, as she began to recognize that she looked different from her "white" family and struggled to understand why she no longer belonged to a Chinese family. She began constructing her own storied beginning, "placed special in China while some other babies were placed special in Africa," spending her days in a

palace surrounded by mountains, waiting for my sister, her mom who "chose her over all other babies, to bring her to our family." Angela shared this "beginning" with the waitress while she took our breakfast order one morning, and although the waitress looked confusingly at Angela, not quite knowing what to make of this conversation, I fought back tears, aware of her "story," how perplexing and precious it was, and how she attempted to make sense of her lived reality. Play and fantasy are powerful mediators of reality - what is made imaginatively possible in the 'unreal' world becomes also possible in the 'real' world" (Davies, 2003, p. 113). What we cannot imagine cannot come into being. I too can imagine things differently. I have this desire to reproduce what I have imagined in our third grade classroom, but I also recognize the impossibility of doing so; and so I will work with the messiness of experience in order to create something out of all of its messiness (Davies, et al., 2009, p. 121).

Where Do I Go From Here?

I did not desire for my students to see me as the authority of experience and I have begun to see how I can avoid this by affirming their presence and their right to speak in multiple ways on diverse topics. We all bring to the classroom experiential knowledge and this knowledge can indeed enhance our learning experiences. If experience is already invoked in the classroom as a way of knowing that coexists in a nonhierarchical way (hooks, 2010, p. 56) with other ways of knowing, it lessens the possibility that it can be used to silence (Davies et al., 2009, p. 140). In each of the forms of discourse we use and the ones we can develop, we constitute ourselves and our subjectivity in sometimes subtle or radical ways (Butler, 1997, p. 14). Each discourse we participate in constitutes us differently, empowers or constrains us, depending on the assumptions embedded in it and

about what we can or cannot do, think, feel, or be (hooks, p. 52). I quixotically assume that my third grade students, long conditioned not to challenge or question, to believe that the existing imbalance of power is just the way things are, could become fully aware of how the educational system denies them equal access to opportunities. I launched myself into a year-long study in my own classroom to better understand how I could help my students realize that they have control over their lives and are capable of making important decisions, knowing that much of the time, I am constrained by the assumption that they and I are powerless.

CHAPTER 3: PRACTICE EMBEDDED IN THEORY

My first day of collecting data for my year-long study in my third grade classroom was not atypical from any other school day. I had not audio-recorded any classroom conversations; nor had I collected any work samples from my students. Like any other day, my third grade students were doing plenty of speaking, reading, writing, and thinking. What was unusual was that this day was my first day of musings about my own teacher practices; I was systemically contemplating everything I said, everything I thought, and everything I did in the classroom with my students. What I was doing in the classroom with my students - the happenings, conversations, interpretations, and glimpses of life in my classroom - would be recorded in my teacher journal, first as jotted notes and later as discriminatingly detailed recordings.

So here I was at the end of my first day of data collection, attempting to make some initial sense of my jotted notes that I had scribbled while attending to, but certainly not engaging in, a school staff meeting. How often did I have to listen to how "wonderful it was" that several third grade students would have yet another opportunity to participate in advanced reading and math classes that would "surely bump their Criterion-Referenced Competency Test scores into the exceeding category?" I had this "here we go again" feeling, as once again my students were being denied equal access to educational opportunities, another school "strategy" that seemed oppressive to my students while giving positions of advantage to others. I was infuriated with that "strategy" but more infuriated with how my continued silence allowed my students to be positioned and

marginalized because of who they were. I returned to my classroom, sat at my desk, and waited for my emotions to come forth on paper. It was then that I noticed the copy of How to Steal a Dog (O'Connor, 2007), on the edge of my desk. The book was opened to the page where Georgina, living in a car with her mother and brother, decided to steal a dog and use the reward money for a place to live. She had begun to write in her "spiral notebook with the glittery purple cover" (2007) her steps for stealing a dog:

> Step one: Find a Dog. There are rules for finding a dog: 1. The dog must not bark too much. 2. The dog must not bite. 3. The dog must be outside by itself sometimes. 4. The dog must be loved a lot. 4. The owner of the dog must look like somebody who will pay a lot of money to get their dog back, like maybe someone who has a big house and rides in a limo or something like that. (p. 17)

I opened my own notebook designed with peace signs, and thinking about Georgina, wrote my own step one: *Do not quit rocking the boat. 1. Keep your life vest on, the one you continuously wear but rarely have a need for. 2. Paddle away from the shore where the waves roll ever so smoothly. 3. Once you are out in the deep and tumultuous water, stand up and rock the boat.*

I realized I did not stand outside of the constituted world and was subjected like anyone else in terms of existing discourses and practices, capable of still falling easily into binary thought and positioning. Just as easily as my students, I could still be positioned in a privileged/not privileged binary, powerful/powerless binary. Trinh's (1996) powerful words came to mind:

> Power has always arrogated the right to mark its others whilst going about unmarked itself. Within an economy of movement, the dominant self, the 'universal subject', represents himself as flexible, explorative, 'uncoloured' and unbounded in his moves, while those caught in the margin, of non-movement are represented as 'coloured', authentic: that is, uncomplicatedly locatable and custom-bound. Always eager to demarcate the other's limits, We only set up frontiers for ourselves when Our interest is at stake. (p. 8)

As I had been reading about poststructural theory of late, I began to see how the theory/practice binary began to interweave because what I was reading began to influence what I was doing and what I was writing. So I set aside my position as an authority in my teaching practice and by doing deliberate research, I began to imagine life in the classroom differently.

As a researcher, I wanted to take notice of the absence of my students' perspectives in classroom discourse spaces; I wanted to yield my "own subjectivites" (Walkerdine, 1981, p. 4) and change my ideas about what counted as knowledge and whose knowledge counted. Similar to how I tended to have a powerful feeling that "this was my classroom," I realized through my reflective inquiry that my students also tended to have a "strong sense of themselves as part of a coherent and recognizable place, boundary lines fade[d], and inside and outside knowledges [were] much less fixed than anticipated" (Gannon, 2009, p. 86).

Reading, Writing, Reflecting on Practice and Theory

My teacher journal became the medium for the story of my work. I wrote about the things my students were doing and saying, along with the things I was doing and saying. I

began systematizing those notes by sketching out the happenings of both my class as a whole and also individual students, adding to those stories as the school year progressed. Since a conversation with my students would be heard only one time and I did not want to always be scrambling to make sense of those happenings with a quickly jotted-down note, I audio-recorded sixteen classroom conversations. I went back to them repeatedly and brought them to further experience; on some occasions I could find words that made sense of what had seemed chaotic, without losing or misrepresenting the original happening (Davies, 2003, p.42). In the hustle and bustle of a school day, the recording of details of what I heard and observed were written fast and furiously; written on sticky notes or any other handy pieces of paper because I wanted to get the conversation down word for word, until I could meticulously write in the details and the reflexivity of what I wrote. Those peaceful moments that were usually in the late evenings or early mornings were when my teacher journal became, not just a notebook that I recorded and reflected on what I wrote, but when it became the data for my work.

From a poststructural perspective, any attempt I made to tell what it was I observed, felt, believed, or desired, was understood to produce no more than a possible reading or readings (Davies, 2003, p. 144). What could be known was shaped as much by myself as the researcher and what I thought, as by whatever the data might be. What emerged came not only out of the methodic practices, but also out of what Somerville (2008, p. 4) refers to as those "spaces-in-between." Those spaces, those "contemplative moments where something else, something surprising, could come to the surface and disrupt my thinking as usual, calling into question that which I had thought, until then, was self-evident and open to question" (Somerville, p. 4). Poststructural theorizing did not offer me

clarifications that closed off the openness of data to further examination. Rather, poststructural theorizing suggested "questioning usual questions…rethinking how to collect and analyze data, and even what count[ed] as data, and for opening out rather than closing down what might become relevant in the work of making sense" (Davies, 2003, p. 143).

As I contemplated and analyzed my data, I realized, as did Davies (2003, p. 142), in one of her interactions with one of her preschool aged participants, George, that no sooner had I found "a direction, a line of movement, than I was confronted with the fact that what I saw was not what I thought at all." Davies (2003) continues:

> On this particular morning George was wearing a flimsy nylon skirt. I asked him how it made him feel and he answered "powerful." Another boy came over and punched him. He took the skirt off, rolled it up, tucked it under his arm and punched the boy back. I said, "But George, if it makes you feel powerful why did you take it off to punch the boy? He answered, "no I didn't" and ran off. (p. 145)

George fascinated Davies because of what she saw as his "boundary crossing, his ability to keep genders fluid and to move between them" (p. 145), yet, after returning to her notes and audio-recordings, she realized she had imposed on him the very binary he was finding ways to disrupt. Research subjects' words give "partial access to one moment of embodied being that emerges through the discourses that are available within that particular situation at that point and time, within the relations of power at play at that time" (Davies, p. 145). This "slipperiness" Davies (p. 145) describes did not lead me to abandon any hope of understanding what was going on, but rather, it was incorporated into the analysis that was undertaken.

In my analysis of the happenings with my students, I attempted to "contextualize the data, and I attempted with successive readings, not to find a single truth, but to come close to the complex multiplicity of a particular moment of a lived experience" (Davies, 2003, p. 147). Applying poststructualist thought meant using research practices that would not determine a single truth because the diversity of my students' experiences were filled with contradictory truths and multiple subject positionings; therefore, the purpose of my analysis of the data in this yearlong study was not to unravel and find truths, but to trouble and deconstruct the discourses in our everyday lives. When I think of poststructural methodologies, the "data analysis is not the development of an accurate representation of the data…but a creative interaction between the conscious/unconscious researcher and the decontextualized data which is assumed to represent reality, or at least, reality as interpreted by the interviewee" (Scheurich, 1997, p.63). I placed emphasis on using the discursive possibilities that opened up in the writing of my poststructuralist research in my third grade classroom.

Innovative Methods of Data Collection – Everyday Practices

Student Journal Writing

I collected approximately three samples of my students' journal writing each month over an eight month period and I did not disrupt or construct the happenings of the school day to collect that data, to collect the lived experiences of my students. Having already taken a critical literacy approach through Jones' (2006, p. 5) urging, I began each school year with an invitation for my students to "engage their lived experiences within official literacy curricula" and one way I achieved this was through the students' journal writing which allowed me "window peeks into lives" (Jones, p.5). Not only was journal writing

one of my students' favorite daily activities, it allowed them a great deal of freedom to wonder in different forms – personal diary entries; correspondence to others such as family members, friends, and myself; teacher-student response journals; drawings; comic strips; and poetry (Freeman and Mathison, 2006, p. 136). Journaling offered them occasions to speak about an event, account, or experience; to speculate on paper, confident that their ideas, emotions, and writing would be accepted without criticism, "a writing space where any topic was allowed" (Jones, 2006, p. 132).

My students' journal writing times bounced between quiet moments of contemplation combined with soft murmurings, and boisterous chatter. As a teacher, I easily gained access to my students' conversations as I moved around the fringes of their interactions; sometimes I was invited to sit with one of my students and "talk to him or her as if he or she was the expert of his or her life or some aspect of life" (Freeman and Mathison, 2009, p. 107). Approaching my research poststructurally, the directions in which our conversations went were dictated to a large extent by what the students wanted to talk about, with me paying very close attention to what they told me, letting *them* explain the world to *me*. Those times when my students were writing in their journals, allowed me to "take up space alongside them which provided them with spaces for privacy and pause yet still permitting me to be part of the group" (Camden Pratt, p. 60).

Text

A critical perspective also offered me a way to think about what text I was reading with my students, what I did with that reading, and what that reading did to us and our worlds (Comber and Kamler, 2007, p. 35). Writing about my practice within a poststructural theoretical framework encouraged me to see both my students and myself

in all of our shifting, contradictory multiplicity and fragility. Some people believe that contradictions are somehow bad for children, that we should be presenting them with a non-contradictory world. Davies (2003, p. 31) believes that there is no such thing as a non-contradictory world since the world is not actually a unitary linear place, though we attempt to behave as it is. Some individuals equate contradictions with a loss of innocence as was the case when I revealed my excitement about discovering two books - Ruby Bridges Goes to School: My True Story (Bridges, 2003) and Freedom on the Menu: The Greensboro Sit-Ins (Weatherford & Lagarrigue, 2005). I mentioned to my colleagues how well these two books would lend themselves to our class discussions about marginalized individuals who took action and made a difference. I was rather startled by my colleagues disapproving responses that the books were inappropriate for third graders, believing my students too young to understand the subject matter of books that might possibly take away their childhood innocence. I was left wondering how to explain to my skeptical colleagues that my students were willing and capable of investing in the creation of their own knowledge, embracing new perceptions and understandings that emerged.

In my role as teacher, I had not realized that a good deal actually went on between my students that I did not know about as they went about analyzing texts. As a researcher, I began to eavesdrop on conversations that gave me access to bits and pieces of my students' experiences, experiences that I would not have taken the time to have been a part of as a teacher. On one occasion, well into the school year, I was reading a story about a young boy whose great grandmother passes away, when Taylor shared with Vanessa that her dad had died when she was in the first grade. Encouraged by Vanessa's

questioning and sincere concern, Taylor shared with Vanessa, myself just an eavesdropper, that her dad had been murdered by a group of men because he was unable to pay back a loan that “had come due.” I was finding out that my teacher world was often quite separate from my students’ worlds as sometimes I was called on only as the one who kept situations orderly and harmonious when my students’ worlds got a little unmanageable. I was amazed at how my students were able to operate in different school and classroom settings as if I sometimes did not exist, making it easier for me to observe without being intrusive.

Photographs

Several of the texts my students and I read together included photographs of historical individuals and events. Putting on my teacher hat, the students always took picture walks through the text before any reading or discussion of the text took place and those picture walks alone presented lively conversations and questioning about the content we would cover. From my researcher’s perspective, those photographs had a “double border, the ‘frame’ in the sense that the photographers use the term, to mean what is contained within the viewfinder and the ‘frame’ created by the way we talk about the photograph” (Freeman and Mathison, 2009, p.148). On one occasion, after I showed the students a photograph of Cesar Chavez at his eighth grade graduation, dressed in what appeared to be dress slacks, a white sports’ coat, and a tie, several of my children thought Chavez “looked rich” and assumed he was wealthy to be able to “buy those kinds of clothes.” Other students believed Chavez “looked unhappy” because he was “wearing fancy clothes and he probably just wanted to get out of them to go and play.” This snapshot was just one moment in Chavez’s life, a moment that did not tell his story -

attending more than thirty schools because his family moved from farm to farm looking for work; living in camps where there was often no running water or electricity. Nor does it let us know that Chavez quit school after his eighth grade graduation to become a migrant worker because his father had been in an accident and Chavez did not want his mother working in the fields. There was "too much movement, too much complexity beyond the edges of this photograph to allow it to be representative of [his] whole life history.…much too messy…too alive to be frozen into representation" (Jones, 2006, p. 73).

Drawing

The collection of my students' work over an eight month timeframe, almost always seemed to contain some type of drawing. No matter the subject or classroom activity, my students, with their varied artistic ability, loved to draw; in science they drew what they had observed in experiments, they solved math word problems by drawing pictures, important dates in the lives of historical figures were represented with illustrations, and writing, both personal and academic, always seemed to be concluded with drawn pictures. So drawing easily became a form through which my students expressed their lived experiences and I could interpret those lived experiences (McNiff, 1981, p. 29).

Several of my English language learners were non-writers so drawing pictures gave these students opportunities to participate in class activities (Freeman and Mathison, 2009, p. 92), as was the case with Finny who entered my classroom with limited English and who rarely had the words to tell about his thoughts and experiences. Finny was intrigued by the picture book Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez (Krull, 2003) ever since I had read it aloud to the class while we were learning about the life of Cesar

Chavez. Each morning, for several days in a row, he would "read" this children's text again and again, focusing intently on each illustration, and reaching the last page, would once again start from the beginning, flipping the pages, revisiting each illustration. After carefully scrutinizing this book for a week, Finny pulled out his journal, and with crayons in hand, drew two pictures. The first picture I had recognized from the book: Chavez as a young student, tears on his cheek, wearing a sign around his neck that said "I am a clown. I do not speak English," while the second picture portrayed Finny, a huge smile on his face, minus tears, wearing a sign around his neck that said "I am Finny and I am not a clown." Surely, Finny's picture spoke a thousand words.

Working Differently with My Students

Within my teaching practice, by defining the boundaries between the students and myself, I had created the powerful, safe, collective category of teacher, a category that had meaning as long as there were children who could be marked as the other to me. It was thus unsurprising that as a powerful adult and teacher, I totalized my students as a powerless group because that had been my well-practiced and taken for granted discursive strategy (Davies, 2003, p. 50). As a poststructurally situated researcher, I felt I had to release as much teacher and adult authority as was humanly possible. I wanted to be able to recognize the value of my students' points of view and interpretations and that required a suspension of my judgments, assumptions, and prejudices, calling for what Roffe (2007) defined as the strategy of attention:

> … a "being with" rather than the attempt to evaluate, name or represent….marked by an open curiosity, rather than by a sedimented history featuring old fears….the laying aside of fear and prejudice and replacing them with an openness to the

> encounter….when the teacher/researcher opens to the flows and intensities of encounter, to moment by moment opportunities for recognition and movement from the already known. There must be openness to difference and change in which we can escape our limits. These small escapes, "these lines of flight, these slides toward the not-yet-known, are moments of becoming – new ways of being in the world, new ways of thinking and feeling, new ways of being a subject." (p. 43)

I set out to provide a poststructural reading of my students' worlds, showing the many layers and complexities, the differences and insights, disrupting certainties and seeing possibilities in the silences opened up by the disruptions. I realized that the capacity to become reflexively literate, to catch myself in the act of constituting the world in particular ways, was inside my range of possibility (Davies, 1990 – 1999, p.71). As a poststructurally informed teacher/researcher, I believed I could try to work differently with my students, finding ways to "unlock the inevitability of their positioning, but seeing at the same time, the enormous constitutive power of the discursive practices through which their selves were ongoingly being constituted" (Davies, 1990 – 1999, p. 71).

While I can present the story of my writing as having worked out the different ways of knowing my students, that knowing could never become the known. Yet, Davies (1994, p. 35) states, "the possibility that we might constructively and legitimately think and speak from multiple positions within multiple discourses, not being identified with or bound by one is extraordinarily liberating and empowering." When I was better able to understand the discursive practices that held my students and myself in one place, we

were better able “to turn to another place, still within discourses but better able to see the ways we were constrained and to loosen those constraints even if only for a few moments of time” (Davies, p. 35).

CHAPTER 4: CREATING SPACES OF TRUST AND UNDERSTANDING

Something about Georgina

It was the first week of data collection and I was reading How to Steal a Dog (O'Connor, 2007), a story about Georgina, a young homeless girl who wanted to steal someone else's dog and use the reward money for apartment rent. As my students and I began to engage ourselves in conversations about the story, my students, who seemed up to that point to maintain that all people should be treated equally, did not appear to apply that same rule to all groups of people discriminated against in our society, particularly the homeless. The lack of compassion my students showed for Georgina and her troubles surprised me, especially since many of my students were from poor and working class families and had experienced economic hardships:

ANTONIO: I don't like the way, what's her name?

MARIA: Georgina?

ANTONIO: Yeah, Georgina. She's mean. She's kinda selfish, takin somebody else's dog.

TEACHER: Well, who can tell us the reasons for her taking another person's dog?

ANNIE: Well, she's homeless. She wasn't gonna keep the dog. She was just sorta borrowing it til she could get the money for a place for she and her mom, and brother could live.

BEN: Yeah, but you can't just steal somebody's dog. That is just wrong. It doesn't matter just because she's homeless. She can't be a dog stealer.

ALEX: She's rude.

BEN: Dude if I acted like her, I would be in SO much trouble.

ANNIE: But her friends were being mean to her just because she was homeless and she didn't want her teachers knowing she was living in a car.

BRITT: But you still can't just lie and steal a dog.

ALEX: And she had a place to go. Some people don't even have a car. That's better than having nothing at all.

I did not want to presume to explain this conversation and control its meaning and kept in mind that any analysis would be about the struggle to see from the point of view of my students who I sometimes positioned to be powerless in the classroom, where my authority as the adult and teacher sometimes made it difficult to privilege their perceptions. Wanting to further pursue my students' perceptions of Georgina, I gave them each a sheet of paper on which to write the words they believed accurately described her. With few exceptions, the students' word choices negatively depicted Georgina, overwhelmingly disapproving of how she chose to cope with homelessness:

AVA: Lazy because she didn't do her homework.

BEN: Disagreeable because she always argued with her mom.

ALEX: I think rude because she talked mean to people.

KIMMY: Well, probably sassy because she talked back to her mom.

JIMMY: Selfish because all she cared about was her own happiness, getting a place to live even when it hurt other people.

BROOK: Inconsiderate because she didn't think about anyone else's feelings but her own.

LEAH: Well, probably dirty because she never took baths or showers.

BRITT: I think messy because her clothes were always wrinkled like she had worn them to bed. Her hair was never combed.

ANTONIO: I think a liar because she always lied to her mom, her teacher, and the owner of the dog.

ANNIE: Probably disrespectful because she yelled at her mom and said really mean things to her.

I was certainly shocked by my students' responses, mostly because of my own assumption that I thought they would sympathize with Georgina's predicament, since several of my students' parents, openly discussed with their children and myself, the fine line their families were walking between having a roof over their heads and being homeless like Georgina – Alex's mom wondered how much longer she could continue to keep her house because she was unable to afford both the mortgage payment and the monthly utility bills; Ava's family who for several days at the end of each month, would "sit in the dark because the power was turned off;" Lissie's family who moved out of state to live with relatives after her parents' divorce, her mom unable to find a job and "running out of money;" several families thankful the school provided free and reduced meals for their children because "those were two less meals they had to worry about coming up with the money to feed the kids." I decided to take a different direction in exploring my students' assumptions of what homelessness meant and asked them to define their own perceptions of homelessness. I did wonder if and how I could change, and continue to change, the boundaries of the positions my students were situated in. I began this experience with the students sharing their assumptions about homelessness:

WILL: No one wants them around because they maybe scare some people.

JIMMY: They just hang out all day sleeping on park benches.

THOMAS: They wear dirty clothes and look kinda raggedy. They have some holes in them and they look like they got them at Goodwill or something.

ALEX: They smell bad because they don't ever take baths or showers.

JOE: They drink a lot of alcohol and get drunk.

ANTONIO: They don't work.

ARON: They eat out of garbage cans.

EDWIN: They beg for food from people.

LEAH: They only ever have dimes for money.

BEN: My dad, when we went to the airport, this homeless man came up to our car asking for money but my dad put up the windows in the car and said that those people were kinda worthless. I felt bad for the man and told my dad we should of given him money but my dad just ignored me. I thought about that man all the ride home.

BROOK: I saw these two guys outside of the church where I go with my aunties and they had these signs that said something like they were homeless and hungry, and to please give them money for food. They had a can for money but I don't think they really needed the money because they had a lot of money in the can, a lot of quarters and maybe nickels, and some dimes.

SAMUEL: My mom said, well, she is afraid of them. One time, when she was walking down the street, this man started following her, yelling at her for money.

KIMMY: Once my grandma and me were going grocery shopping and there was this lady, kind of old, and she was asking for money outside of the store. And then

> we saw her inside the store and she was asking one of the workers something, I couldn't tell what, but I think for something to eat. And then when we were done shopping, we saw her again outside. My grandma gave her some dollars, I don't know how much, and I asked my grandma if I could give her my candy bar I bought in the store and she said I could.

I was eager to get the students thinking about how they were positioning the homeless, so knowing their love of story time, and hoping children's literature about homelessness might help get the students thinking about how they were positioning the homeless, one of my professors suggested I read them children's texts, The Lady in the Box (McGovern, 1997) and A Shelter In Our Car (Gunning, 2004). Not only did I want to disrupt my students' perceptions of homelessness, I wanted to provide them with possible new ways of seeing and thinking about the homeless.

My students were intrigued by the story The Lady in the Box (McGovern, 1997), and it became one of the books that several of my students reread over and over again, carefully scrutinizing the illustrations, not wanting to return the text to the shelf because "someone else would keep it too long." Not only did I have to buy another copy of the book for myself, borrowed so often by the students that it had multiple dog-eared corners, several torn pages requiring quick-fixes with tape, and student fingerprint smudges from rereading the text innumerable times, I had to purchase several extra copies because the one copy I owned always seemed to be in someone's desk or book bag, claimed for "an overnight." This story, which deals with the issue of homelessness, tells the story of how Ben and his sister try to help a homeless lady, Dorrie, who lives in a box over the heating grate outside of a deli. Worried about Dorrie, Ben and his sister, Lizzie, take her food and

warm clothing. When the owner of the deli tries to force the woman to move because he thought his customers did not like seeing Dorrie living in a box outside of his deli, the children's mother convinces the store owner to let Dorrie stay. After reading and discussing the story, I asked the students to locate sentences in the story that would help them consider what Dorrie had to contend with as a homeless person:

- Her name was Dorrie and she was freezing cold.
- She told us about losing her job and not being able to pay the rent.
- Lizzie said the lady in the box didn't have many teeth, not enough for chewing her food.
- She set up her box in front of an empty store down the street. But no air came up from the basement there. She began to shiver. Her lips looked sort of blue.
- The lady in the box didn't have enough warm clothes.
- "We have to do something," Lizzie said, "or she'll freeze to death."
- The soup kitchen was in the basement. The line to get in was long. I felt sad that there were so many people needing free soup.

The biggest struggle for the students with this activity was choosing one sentence that they believed would perfectly convey the hardships that Dorrie faced as a homeless person. Since I only had one copy of the text at that time, and while it was being passed from one student to another, the students and I had a conversation about how homelessness actually touched some of the students' lives as they spoke of a friend, classmate, neighbor, family relation, even themselves, whose parents or guardians had

lost a job that resulted in home foreclosures or the inability to make monthly apartment rent payments, requiring the families to move in with other family members, desperate to keep a roof over their children's heads.

The next story about homelessness I read to them was A Shelter in Our Car (Gunning, 2004), which depicts a homeless family living in New York. Zettie, a recent immigrant from Jamaica, struggles with the unexpected death of her dad and the reality of living in a car after she and her mom lose their apartment. Zettie must survive, not only the hardships of being homeless, but also the adversity she is confronted with at school. My students considered why Zettie and her mom did not want to be "noticed" and, typical of our conversations, took us in a new, but important direction:

ANNIE: Zettie and her mom were living in a car and they were afraid they would get in trouble because their car is parked in a place they shouldn't have been and they were afraid the police wouldn't let them stay there.

CARA: One time when I was home with my brother, I was really little, probably five, and I accidentally called 911 and when I heard a lady's voice I hung up. But then the lady called me back but I wouldn't answer. And then the police knocked at my door and my brother told me to go upstairs and hide and I thought my mom would be really mad at me.

BRITT: Was she?

CARA: No, well, kinda. My mom had to say to the police that she was at the grocery store but she was really at work. She was afraid they were gonna call that kid place, the place you go if your parents can't keep you.

CRISTY: Foster care. I would have been put in foster care if it weren't for my relatives. I was afraid I would end up in foster care because my mom did a lot of bad things, well, things she was forced to do, and that's when she thought she'd have to put me in foster care.

JOE: What's foster care?

CRISTY: I'll tell him because I know a lot about it cause of my life. It's when parents can't take care of their kids and are forced to go live with a family they don't even know, sometimes until the parents can become more responsible. Yeah, my mom was in foster care because her mom was in jail and she didn't know where her dad was. She had no one else to take care of her so she went into foster care.

ANNIE: That's so sad. Did your mom ever get out of foster care?

CRISTY: I'm not really sure.

KIMMY: Was her family, the foster family, nice or mean?

CRISTY: I think they were nice…my mom still said she would not want to put us in foster care but she said she might have to if she couldn't get money.

I never knew where our conversations would take us and several of the conversations my students and I did have, sometimes appeared perplexing to some of my colleagues who, most likely, were feeling overwhelmed by the extensive amount of subject matter they were required to teach to their students. Classroom conversations did not seem to be on the list of academic standards that teachers felt, understandably, had to be checked off in

an orderly timeframe since “every minute counted if the students were to pass ‘that’ test,” the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test that not only seemed to assess the students, but also seemed to assess the teachers.

Some teachers wondered aloud if certain conversations my students and I had might have been inappropriate for “this age level;” they did not believe complicated conversations had a place in the third grade classroom – “too much information, too soon.” Of course, I had my rebuttal ready. I shared with the teachers how, while my students and I were learning about Frederick Douglass, who was enslaved, one of my students, Ben, began to checkout library books about slavery. In one of the books Ben was reading, there was an illustration that depicted the Ku Klux Klan lynching an African American. When Ben asked me questions about this picture, although I chose my words carefully, I was truthful with him about the meaning of the picture. I wanted to create learning experiences that moved the students away from learning just factual information. I wanted to provide the students with opportunities to truly question what they were learning. No matter what questions my students asked, I tried not to silence my students’ voices and never considered their questions as being unfounded or inappropriate. Coles (1986) appreciated the ability of even relatively young children to “pose questions about the meaning and ‘moral significance’ of life….In their reactions to the events and circumstances of everyday life…children possess a keen moral sensitivity to ideals and values, to what is right and wrong,” and to the reasons underlying what people do, feel, and think.

When approaching teaching from a standpoint that included the awareness of race, gender, and class, yes, I most likely did step outside of what would be considered the

formal third grade academic framework space and stepped right into the unknown, and, yes, this still left me, every now and then, feeling vulnerable. At those times of vulnerability, I had to remind myself again and again that teacher vulnerability was crucial in creating a classroom space that did not only seek simply to empower my students, but was also a place where I could grow, where I could also become empowered. This empowerment could only happen if I allowed myself to take risks as I encouraged my students to do the same (Camden Pratt, 2009, pp. 63 – 64).

One thing I believe helped my students to be able to talk openly about different perspectives was preparing the students to possibly hear points of view they might not have heard before. We talked about prejudice, discrimination, and stereotypes and read stories that incorporated these themes. For example, at the beginning of the school year, prior to when I began collecting data for this study, I read the story The Gold Cadillac (Taylor, 1987) to the students. This story was about a black family's encounter with prejudice as they traveled deep into the rural South where there was only anger and suspicion for the black man driving the Cadillac. The students and I talked about the stereotypes embodied in the story such as when people gave the family dirty looks because African Americans were not supposed to be rich and when a policeman pulled the father over and accused him of stealing the Cadillac.

When teachers suggested that the conversations I engaged in with my students were possibly too intense, the students too young to understand the issues related to homelessness, my thoughts returned to the powerful images of homelessness my students had created:

- A white girl with long yellow hair is standing next to a black car with four flat tires; in the car, there are three labeled items: a shirt, a pillow, and a blanket;
- A white girl is picking through a trashcan and several banana peels are strewn around the trashcan;
- A black man with a frown on his face is sitting next to a dumpster by the side of the road with a panoramic view of a big city in the background;
- An elderly woman with long gray hair and glasses is sitting in the corner of a black box, wind is swirling around her and snow is falling;
- A girl and boy, tears streaming down their cheeks, are sitting in front of a tombstone that has the word "daddy" written on it;
- A house, a rainbow of colors, blue, orange, brown, purple; the sky is colored black so it must be nighttime; the mom and her son are leaning over the park bench they are sitting on, staring at what used to be their home, all of their possessions put outside by the front door;
- A black man is sitting outside a cardboard box asking passersby if they have any work he could do; no one seems to be stopping to help him;
- As they carry a couple of boxes out of a house, a dad is telling his daughter "everything will be okay because we still have our car to live in;"
- A map of Vietnam within which there is drawn a young girl sitting next to a small green car; holding a cup in one hand and in the other hand, a sign that says, "We need food."

These images showed a growing awareness of how my students' perceptions of homelessness were shifting – images of homelessness that cut across race, gender, class,

even age – whites, African Americans, Asians, Hispanics, poor people, working class people, some middle class people, children, teenagers, moms and dads, and the elderly. Although there was somewhat of a cloud with a silver lining for Dorrie in A Lady in the Box (McGovern, 1997) and Zettie in A Shelter in Our Car (Gunning, 2004), I reminded the students that rarely are there happy endings for most of the homeless people in our society.

Looking at Difficult Positionings and Creating New Understandings

Several of our conversations, our shared stories, might have seemed outside the realm of classroom curriculum to some of my colleagues, but I "did not want my students to stop telling their stories" (Jones, 1996, p. 47). I did not want my classroom to be one in which the teacher talked to the students and the students only responded when they were called on to respond, or one where they completed worksheets that required little thought and absolutely no conversation, an uninspired classroom where no energy was being generated. My belief was similar to hooks' (2010) belief that teaching strategies must be transformed, reinvented, and reconceptualized:

> Teaching is a performative act and it is that aspect of my work that offers the space for change, invention, spontaneous shifts that serve as catalysts drawing out the unique elements in each classroom, calls everyone to become more and more engaged, to become active participants in learning. (p. 20)

It was during their spoken stories that my students shared moments of their lived experiences. I tried to make sure that there was always space for their stories, as was the case when we spoke of the important qualities and contributions of Mary McLeod Bethune:

LEAH: She fought for equal rights for black people.

EDWIN: She started a school for African American girls.

BRITT: She wanted the girls to become educated because when she was little, a white girl snatched a book from her and told her she couldn't have it because African Americans could not read the books.

CRISTY: Didn't she go to school in North Carolina?

TEACHER: She did. She was chosen to go to the Scotia Seminary because she was very smart and a woman paid for her so she could go to that school.

AVA: (flipping through the pages of her book) She was in jail?

TEACHER: No, she had started a chorus and one of the places she would go to sing at was the jail. Actually she also tried to help people who were in jail but hadn't done anything wrong. So she helped them get out of jail.

AVA: My mom was in jail once, for hitting my dad. She clobbered him when they got in a fight and she ended up getting put in jail.

BEN: Oh, gosh, really, she hit your dad?

AVA: Uh-huh, it was a long time ago, kind of. I think I was five, something like that. She went, I remember she went to the police station cause that's where I had to go with my dad to pick her up, but maybe she hadn't gone to jail, maybe just arrested.

The other students' hands sprang up, one after another, anxious to share their own stories of loved ones' arrests and jail time served. Antonio, first to share, spoke of how his uncle had attempted to cross the United States border from Mexico at least six or seven times and each time he got caught, he was arrested, and eventually deported back to Mexico

until, finally, he was able to "pay some man who slipped him into the country and he stayed for good." I wrongly assumed that these failed border crossing attempts would be terrifying for his uncle and also for Antonio to hear about, so I was surprised by his response:

TEACHER: I'm sure those were scary times for your uncle.

ANTONIO: Not really. No, he thought it was pretty cool and would laugh when he told us about them. If he got caught and they sent him back, he would just do it again until the last time when he didn't get caught. Well, I thought it was kinda cool too. I mean, I might have been scared if I knew what he was doing and getting arrested all the time. But I didn't know.

After Antonio talked about his uncle crossing the U.S. border, a few of my students asked for some clarification because they were confused about what the term "border" actually meant, thinking only of the times they had crossed the border of one state to get to another state. Brook could not understand why border crossing had to be "secret and scary because she couldn't wait to cross the Georgia/Florida border because she knew she would be that much closer to the beach." I was learning not to make any assumptions about my students' perceptions, prior knowledge, or experiences.

Patrick was next to share his lived experience and recounted how his mom thought she was "going to jail" because it was the second traffic offense she had been stopped for by a police officer:

PATRICK: The first time, she was dropping my sister off at school and on the way, she got pulled over. But the policeman just gave her a ticket. Her second time

she got pulled over, the police car came up behind her and she kept saying, "Oh, please God, don't let it be me."

SAMUEL: Was she the one they were after?

PATRICK: Yeah, the police didn't arrest her but I was really scared that they were going to arrest her. She did get another ticket and she and my dad had to go to court. I think she got pulled over because she didn't have something paid for on the car.

I found out at the parent-teacher conference later that year, that Patrick's parents could not afford the car insurance and the day his sister missed the bus, Patrick's mom drove her to school so she would not miss any of her classes, because in the dad's words, "School is important, where you get to learn, and when you learn and do your best, you will get to go to college. I only went to school until I was twelve and I want better for my children."

As a single mother and sole provider of two young sons, there were several months, several years, were it not for my parents financial help, I would not have been able to make ends meet – having enough money to buy groceries to feed my children, to put gas in my car to go to and from work, to pay the electric bill so the heat would not be shut off. I could not rob Peter to pay Paul because Paul was as broke as Peter. I knew Patrick's parents did not have other family members that they could rely on in times of financial hardships, so although I knew what it was like to not have enough money to stretch from paycheck to paycheck, I did not know what I might have done if I were in the same financial predicament as Patrick's parents. However, I could imagine – and not judge.

Playing the “Truth” Game

I respected my students’ need to speak about assumptions but those assumptions rarely went unquestioned or unchallenged. One component of our social studies curriculum materials was a series of American heroes’ texts that the students utilized to further their understanding of the life and times of specific historical figures. The photographs in these texts always stimulated conversations and today was no different as the students scanned the photographs of Thurgood Marshall and one of my students pointed out the photograph of white people and African Americans sitting on a segregated bus, the whites in the front and the African Americans in the back:

TEACHER: So, tell me your thoughts about this photograph. What do you see?

AVA: It looks like a lot of people are kinda mad, I think at the person taking their picture cause they don’t want their picture taken.

JOE: All the blacks are sitting in the back of the bus and all of the whites are sitting in the front.

TEACHER: Why do you think that is?

KIMMY: Well, most blacks are poor and they don’t get to take a lot of baths or showers so they are probably dirty and don’t want to sit by anybody else on the bus.

BROOK: (in a whisper): Oh my gosh.

BEN (smiles yet has this look of disbelief and shakes his head): Why does everyone think that only black people are poor? I’m African American but I’m not poor.

TEACHER: Are African Americans the only people that are poor?

BRITT: No. Not anymore.

AVA: My mom's friend is poor and she's not black, she's white. I'm white and don't have a lot of money cause my mom had a job but then lost it. So when I want something like an outfit or toy or something, she says that I have to wait until she can afford it cause she can't afford it right now. I was gonna get a cell phone but now my mom doesn't even have one cause it got disconnected.

CRISTY: My whole family is poor and we're white, well, except my little brother. He's black. Everyone else is white and we're all clean.

LEAH: There are poor people in Vietnam. When I went back to Vietnam, there were some people who lived on the streets and slept on the side of the roads. Even kids.

ANNIE: Some of the stories we are reading have poor white and Hispanic people, like Fly Away Home and The Lady in the Box. Well, they were homeless but they were probably poor before they became homeless.

TEACHER: Do you have to be poor to become homeless?

ANNIE: I think so because poor people already have it hard and so they are closer to being homeless because they don't have any money, well, just a little money to begin with.

ALEX: Well, I think you can have money and become homeless. My friend, he had money, but then he didn't have anymore.

JOE: How do you know he had money in the first place?

ALEX: Cause he had lots of toys, three game systems, lots of video games. He had a bedroom AND a playroom.

BRITT: But that doesn't mean he was necessarily rich.

ALEX: Yeah, but he was. Even my mom said. What was I saying? Oh, yeah, he said he had to move because his parents were getting a divorce and he and his mom didn't have nowhere to go cause his dad wasn't paying any of the money for bills and stuff.

PATRICK: Where did they go, do you know?

ALEX: I don't know. But they're not in the house anymore. Nobody lives there and the yard is full of weeds, so I don't think they had nowhere to go and they weren't rich anymore.

CARA: We were rich in our other country but we're not rich now. We didn't have money, even for food or an apartment, or for clothes, so we live with my grandma.

JOE: Can I say why the blacks were sitting in the back of the bus? Because they didn't have any rights, well equal rights.

ARON: Oh, yeah, blacks weren't allowed to sit in the front of the bus.

BEN: We studied that in second grade. Remember? We learned about how Rosa Parks got arrested because she wouldn't give her seat to a white person.

JOE: Oh, yeah. We learned about Rosa Parks too.

KIMMY: I didn't know. I don't think we learned about that.

As I listened to Kimmy's words "I didn't know. I don't think we learned about that," I wondered if there were many teachers who avoided conversations about difficult issues such as discrimination and oppression because so many of the students seemed to have such limited knowledge. I felt that our failure as teachers to confront difficult issues denied the students access to truths about history and their own lives. My students

thought they knew Helen Keller because they had read or been told that Helen Keller was blind and deaf; that her teacher, Anne Sullivan, helped her communicate using sign language; that Helen Keller helped blind and deaf people throughout her life and wrote books about her experiences. Not one student knew of Helen Keller's campaigning and tireless work for women's suffrage and workers' rights or that, as a writer, her publishing options dwindled because she wrote passionately for women's rights. I couldn't understand how students "knew" about the First Thanksgiving, yet were unaware that Squanto, prior to helping the Pilgrims learn how to hunt deer, fish, pick berries, and grow crops, was kidnapped and taken to Spain where he was to be sold as a slave. How come the students "knew" that Christopher Columbus proved the world was round and that he discovered a New World, yet, were unaware of how Columbus supported enslavement of the indigenous people for economic gain? Why did so many of my students comprehend no more about history than I did growing up? How could so many of my students believe oppression and injustices could be omitted from a mainstream text because "there wasn't enough room in the book to write about 'everything,' so the authors could only put in the main ideas and had to leave out all of the supporting ideas?" Not only was I having to revisit and "reteach" history, I also had to attempt to help my students understand that no text has one single purpose, one single meaning, or one single existence. I realized I had to help my students "critique and challenge mainstream text – those texts the students will encounter most often throughout their lives" (Jones, 2006, p. 128).

As my students and I learned about several different American heroes, we spoke about and challenged the assumptions my students had acquired – Ben's assumption that only African Americans were poor and Patrick assuming that the abolition of slavery

secured equality for all individuals. During a conversation about Thurgood Marshall, Patrick struggled to understand why African Americans were not permitted to attend the University of Maryland Law School or why Marshall had to "fight for black kids to go to the same schools as white kids because slavery had already been made against the law." Annie assumed migrant workers in California were "owned as slaves" because, while she was reading a book, she remembered seeing the sign "we serve only white people" in one of the business establishment's windows and she remembered "seeing a sign like that one in a book when we were talking about the blacks not being able to eat in the same restaurants as white people and couldn't drink out of the same water fountains." Alex believed "kids in California could not speak Spanish because they wouldn't ever learn anything in school and that's why Chavez's teacher forced him to learn English, so he could be smart."

My students and I are of different races, classes, and genders, yet, we engaged in powerful conversations that promoted our understandings and helped point us towards different meanings and different pathways, conversations that "helped us look at difficult positions from different perspectives as we turned them this way and that way, with the resolve to create a new understanding" (hooks, 2010, p. 46):

PATRICK: My mom, I know she's not a slave. See, she cleans people's houses and some of the people treat my mom like a slave. I mean, I know she's not a slave or anything like that because nobody owns her, but they are really mean to her sometimes. One lady always says mean things to her, that she isn't doing a good job cleaning her house, but my mom knows she is. One time, when I was there, this lady told my mom she hadn't cleaned the floor but my mom

had, and the lady said she had to do it again in a mean voice. When we left, she called my dad and she was kind of crying. It made my dad really mad and he didn't want her going back to that house.

TEACHER: How did that make you feel?

PATRICK: Bad. She didn't deserve to be treated like that. I think the lady thought she was better than my mom because she was rich and she knows my mom only has a little bit of money. But that shouldn't matter. One time, when I was at church, there was this group of kids who came to our church for the day. They came from this church that was a lot bigger than ours and they were rich. See, I wear these jeans and I wear them a lot because I don't have many clothes. See, these jeans have holes in them but I like them. It doesn't matter. So we asked the kids if they wanted to play something with us but they acted like they were better than us. We asked them to play soccer with us but they, well, they didn't laugh at us but they kind of made fun of us and just walked away. It's weird. It's weird that someone doesn't want to hang out with you because you don't have what they have. Or they think they can talk to your mom like she was a kid and did something bad. That's why I like my friends Samuel and Antonio. We all live in the same neighborhood, and we're pretty much the same. Samuel's mom cleans houses too.

I found myself thinking about how a group of children could not look past their judgment of the materialistic worth of another individual and how Patrick's lack of material possessions divulged to those children nothing about who he really was – the love he had for his family, his honesty, his compassion and acceptance of other students' differences,

his courage to stand up to injustices both in and out of the classroom. No matter how slight an infraction, Patrick absolutely, positively, had to tell me the truth in this particular discursive practice, even in situations in which he could have easily gotten away with whatever he had done, or had failed to do. On the rare occasions he forgot his homework or the not so rare times he would be talking when he should not have been, usually during the time the music was playing in the cafeteria, he would pace back and forth, and back and forth, just a few feet in front of me, until he had gathered the courage to let me know what he had done.

Understanding and appreciating the students' and my locations was a necessary framework for building harmony between us, as well as for creating a space of emotional trust where understanding of one another was encouraged. Yet, even though I desired for my students to speak freely, some students were uncomfortable exercising their right to speak freely because it meant giving voice to thoughts and feelings that revealed they were not materialistically privileged. Our conversations about different American heroes were one of Antonio's favorite parts of the school day but he was unusually quiet on this particular morning, disinclined to participate while the other students shared what they believed were significant events in why Cesar Chavez wanted to protect the rights of migrant workers. The students spoke about the migrant farmers' poor working conditions – little pay; long, hot days spent laboring in fields with no water breaks; using short hoes that forced workers to stay in bent-over positions, twisting their bodies to crawl along rows of lettuce or beets often resulting in painful backaches that lasted the rest of their lives. The students spoke about the living conditions – shacks, tents, even sometimes just blankets thrown over tree limbs for housing, no electricity, no running water, and only

one bathroom facility that, in some instances, almost a hundred people might have to share. Antonio's prolonged silence and lack of engagement in our conversation concerned me so I sat beside him and we talked about the uncertainties he might have been feeling:

ANTONIO: This is embarrassing.

TEACHER: What is, Antonio?

ANTONIO: Everyone is going to think Mexicans live in junky houses and that they're poor.

TEACHER: Well, some Mexicans are poor, but there are poor people all over the world, not just in Mexico. And, yes, some poor people do live in houses that are different than what we're used to but that doesn't mean they should be ashamed of how they live. Would you like to just listen to the next part of this activity and see what you think?

ANTONIO: Yeah, I guess.

TEACHER: (to the class) Okay, who would like to tell us why we are learning about Cesar Chavez?

ANNIE: I think it's because he helped a lot of people, like when the farmers didn't treat the migrant workers fairly, Chavez helped them to get equal rights.

TEACHER: That's right, Annie. So, we've talked about why Chavez wanted to help the migrant workers get equal rights. What were some of the ways he did that?

BRITT: He led a boycott of grapes which made all of the grapes rot in the field and the farm owners lost a lot of money.

JOE: Didn't he do a boycott of lettuce? Yeah, lettuce.

BROOK: He led marches and walked in the marches too and he walked so much that his shoes was practically destroyed and his feet hurt him really bad.

PATRICK: He started a strike.

JOE: What's that again?

PATRICK: When you won't work, right?

TEACHER: Yes, it is because the workers were protesting the low pay they were getting and the poor living conditions too.

PATRICK: He went on a fast because he wanted the migrants to get what they wanted but not through fighting. So he didn't eat so the people would think about nonviolence.

TEACHER: I learned something interesting the other day about Chavez. He had fasted I think for about five weeks and when he could not fast anymore, because he was getting too sick and weak, one person would carry on his fast for three days, and then another person for three days, and then another person, and another person, because they believed what Chavez was doing was so important.

Although Antonio did not want to share in our conversation, he did sit up a little taller, held his head a little higher, and listened closely as I explained how the black Aztec eagle symbolized the connection the farm workers' union had to the migrant workers of Mexican American descent. Once we finished that part of the lesson and the students were illustrating and writing about what stood out to them as the most important contribution Cesar Chavez had made, Antonio chose to draw the Aztec eagle surrounded

by the words "Viva La Huelga – Long Live the Strike!" As he hung it so proudly on the wall, Antonio turned to me and said, "I am feeling a little better now."

When students from poor and working class families share their perspectives, they disrupt the inclination to attend only to the beliefs, positionings, and understandings of those who are materially privileged, those who because of their class privilege, are made more powerful than others. I believe not only that most children are well aware of a wide range of human differences and that they realize that these differences do not all attract and enjoy the same status and authority, but they also know that some lives count more than others.

Girls' Positions: Reaching Across and Ignoring Margins

Interactions and conflicts among the girls in my class, who represented a range of socioeconomic, racial, and linguistic backgrounds, offered valuable perspectives on the dynamic nature of identity construction for children this age. Jones (2006) describes poor and working class girls as:

> in many ways, isolated, and without credibility and validation from the larger society. Because of their fears of institutions, of being judged harshly by others, young girls learn at a young age to keep family experiences a secret. Generations of keeping these lived experiences secret has led to a society that doesn't discuss realities of class-specific lives on the margins. (p. 52)

With few exceptions, the girls in my class often positioned each other to some extent, first and foremost by class. Certain girls had particularly high status ways of being which were rooted in material possessions and the girls who achieved these ways were popular, while several other girls aspired to be popular so they could be included in that group, the

single aspiration that seemed to have any meaning for them. It made sense then that Kimmy was one of the popular girls, a high status girl because she dressed in expensive and trendy clothing, often went to salons for manicures, traveled to what my students imagined to be exotic places that “cost a lot of money,” and lived in one of the school district’s most affluent subdivisions.

Brook greatly wanted, and attempted, to connect with Kimmy’s experiences - the cruises to the Bahamas, the trips to Jamaica and Aruba, the grandmother who would take her on shopping sprees to “buy her whatever clothes she wanted and it didn’t matter what the price was.” It seemed to me similar to the way that Cadence in Jones’ study (2006, p. 116) seemed to try “desperately to *connect* with Henry and his experiences… [he had] an elaborate party with games, prizes, balloons, and many friends, leaving the party with goldfish in plastic bags,” and Cadence telling others, “I had goldfish at my party too.” Brook “went on four or five cruises but “forgot the places the ship stopped at;” she described shopping trips to New York City where her “auntie bought her a lot of new clothes;” her family’s trip to Aruba “got cancelled because the “hurricane came and the airplane couldn’t get there.” Several of the girls, mostly from poor and working class families, intensely sought inclusion into Kimmy’s circle of friends, oscillating between communicating envy and admiration towards Kimmy. One of those girls was Brook who seemed to believe that she “was what she possessed” (hooks, 2000, p. 82) and showing signs of believing that lacking material success labeled her as valueless, “the object of shame that could be internalized or externalized”(p. 82). Brook’s envy of Kimmy made their friendship precarious, one day the best of friends, the next day, Kimmy in tears

because Brook, unable to handle Kimmy in yet another new outfit, called her a spoiled brat. Brook attempted to explain her remark to Kimmy in a note she left for me on my desk:

> It is not my fault! When I went over to her desk to talk to her, she ignored me on purpose cause Annie and all of the other girls were asking her where she got the dress she was wearing. When I said to Annie my mom was taking me shopping for new clothes Saturday, SHE, Kimmy, just flipped her hair at me and turned away from me. She always thinks she is better than me and everyone else in this class. But I still want to be friends with her and will say sorry.

I wondered how I could help Brook and her peers understand that who they were, their self-worth, was not relevant to their class positioning, and expand their understandings beyond the idea that happiness will only come through the attainment of materialistic possessions. Unquestionably, it does not help that "today's youth culture is centered around consumption and materialism and that becomes the basis of all transactions. For young people, the world is their marketplace and all one's worth, mass media tells them, is determined by material things" (hooks, 2000, p.81). There was one moment when my students and I were able to see Brook for a little while in a different way as we talked about public housing and Crista asked if public housing was the same as the projects:

SAMUEL: What are the projects? You mean like projects you do at school? Or something different?

BROOK: Oh, I know! Can I tell? I used to live in one. I used to live in one with my mommy and auntie. They were kinda like apartments except they were more

scary. I could never go outside to play cause it was really dangerous cause people could shoot you for no reason and there was always gun noises outside of your place.

JIMMY: Gun noises? You mean real gunshots?

BROOK: Yeah, gunshots. I couldn't never play outside unless I was with Mommy or Auntie so I wouldn't get shot. And there were bars over all our windows so nobody, like gangs, could break in and hurt or rob us.

THOMAS: Did you ever get robbed?

BROOK: I don't think we ever did. And then we had enough money to move to a nicer place where I had my own room and could play outside. I DO NOT ever want to go back to that place.

BRITT: You didn't have your own bedroom?

BROOK: No, I slept with my mommy and my auntie had her own room. But even if I had my own bedroom, I would have slept with Mommy because I was always having nightmares and wouldn't have wanted to sleep alone anyways.

Brook's words gave partial access to one moment of time that emerged through a discourse that was available within that particular situation at that point in time and I did not want to diminish her "lived experience" (hooks, 1994, p. 61), reduce her story, to something that could be easily explained. Rather than assume to explain her position and contain its meaning, I had to be responsive to the multiple possible meanings this event held for Brook, attending to everything else I already knew about Brook that might be valuable in how she and others positioned her both in and out of the classroom (Davies, 2003, p. 147).

Whereas Brook's mom struggled to provide many of the material things Brook believed she required, Ava's mom's financial situation prevented her from doing the same for Ava whose clothes came either from goodwill or were hand-me-downs from cousins. Unlike Brook, Ava was not one of the popular girls and, not by choice, often played alone even though she made several attempts to join the girls. It was six weeks into the school year, the weather still hot, and Ava strolled into the classroom with her "I am happy with the world" smile and her new shorts outfit, which seemed one size too small, and a pair of rainbow colored flip-flops, much too big for her feet. The glance that passed between two of my other girls was one of amused contempt until they realized I had observed their behavior and I was none too happy about it, yet they were unaware that Ava had also noted their amusement at her expense. Since Ava chose to ignore the girls' snickering, and as difficult as it was, I kept myself from intervening which allowed Ava to respond with one of the positions available within her own discursive practices and paying no heed.

There soon followed other occasions when Ava was excluded from and refused access to the high status group of girls. One particular morning, Ava asked a small group of girls working together if she could join them and the first time she asked, they pretended not to hear her. The second time she asked, they spread out their books so there was not enough room for her, yet, shortly afterwards, had conveniently found room for Kimmy at the table. Ava seemed content working with another group of students but became visibly upset when the group of girls who refused to allow her access to the table, shouted at her for taking a container of markers off their table. These incidents appeared to be struggles over belonging and it confirmed for me, that some of the girls not only

recognized class as a "marker of difference and were aware that it signified unequal power relations, but were also prepared to exploit this awareness" (Davies, 1990-1999, p. 201). I struggled with how to support not only Ava, but other girls who were positioned because of their class, cast out from the group because they were "different," different because they were from poor and working class families.

How could I take my girls into the space where they could confront rather than withdraw from class conflict? I desperately wanted to believe in the possibility that I could disrupt the conditions in which lines of flight, small escapes from the limits of the individual, could be possible. I wanted my girls to extend compassion to the other as that other engaged in the struggle for existence, seizing moments of power that were made available, and seeking pleasure in the possibilities of existence (Todd, 2003, p. 89). I could recollect many moments, summon up many images, of when the girls showed compassion for others – at the school book fair when Kimmy spent less money on her own books so she could buy a book for Leah. Or when all of my girls made Crista "Welcome to your new school" cards to help alleviate the fear and anxiety the girls had recognized on Crista's face that first day she had entered yet another school, her fourth in five months. Or the girls' obvious distress upon hearing hateful words another student had directed towards Britt at recess.

I believe one of the most powerful moments that showed just how compassionate my girls could be was when Jada, who had relocated to our school from another state and was recently diagnosed with autism but waiting on the documentation for placement in an autistic classroom, was welcomed with open arms by the group of girls as a whole. They realized quickly that Jada was "different" (Camden Pratt, 2009, p. 59); her reading level

significantly lower than theirs as she mostly read only picture books with very few words on a page, nowhere close in difficulty to the chapter books the other students were reading; Jada was completing activities that required "way more" coloring, cutting, and pasting. The girls understood that Jada, although doing different things than they were, was still a member of "their" group, at this moment inclusive of all the girls. They made sure she understood her work, the girls often times contentedly coloring Jada's work with her, reading books to her as they sat close together, their heads touching as they snuggled up on one of the comfy library chairs, and including her in games of tag and tether ball at recess. Fiercely protective of her, the girls chastised anyone who made negative or hurtful comments about her being different, as unfortunately, one student discovered after calling Jada a retard.

Jada reminded me of Kiet, a young girl in Camden Pratt's (2009, pp. 53 – 68) story, who having spent the first three years of her life in an orphanage, was considerably behind the other students. Kiet opened up a new line of flight that was outside what the other students understood to be correct behavior for kindergarten students and the activity they were completing. The other students engaged in what would be considered age appropriate work, while Kiet was caught up in something different. The teacher was conscious and concerned about the outcomes-based curricula in which she was working and knew that Kiet was not performing like a kindergarten student, yet, she allowed herself to be vulnerable and created a classroom community in which there was an "openness, and attention to others as a value, and respect for differences, however…expressed" (Ceppi and Zini, 1998, p. 2).

I hoped to find a way to build on my girls' compassion, a compassion that would create a spirit of tolerance for each other's class positionings, as Jones' (2006) so powerfully affirms:

> I didn't want the girls to overcome poverty, but instead I wanted to help them understand their experiences as central to their developing identities, and learn how their diversity could help them to be sensitive to other local and global injustices. Through this understanding, I hope that the girls will grow to become – not overcome – women who have insights into living under poverty's heavy hand and who work toward the lofty goals of social justice. (p. 23).

Reminded of Jones' (2006) words that "poverty must be lived to be felt, to be fully understood and to have the grounding necessary to think deeply about the implications for schools and society," (p. 27), I sought the support of other students, enlisting them to help us look at complicated matters from different perspectives as we turned them this way and that, striving to construct a new understanding.

Maria, Poverty, and Spirituality

My working class girls were rewarded if they chose to assimilate to the high status ways of being and estranged if they chose to maintain those more taboo aspects of who they were – something Maria knew all too well. One of five children, her family's financial situation affected by difficult economic times, Maria's family spent the least amount of money feasible on the clothes she wore, and Maria, like other working girls in my class, wore mostly hand-me-down clothes and made do with one pair of shoes. However, unlike some of the other girls, Maria's perception of who she was had little to

do with what she wore and more to do with who she was as a human being, as one day she defended her position on why a fixation on clothing was, to her, so inconsequential:

MARIA: So much drama about clothes. I don't know why they think what you wear is so important. I only have one jacket, a few shirts, two pairs of pants, and a pair of shoes. It's not like they are the most important thing about me. My mom always tells me that God is most important and He doesn't care what you wear. First is God, second is family, and third, friends.

In one of her journal entries about Georgina, the main character, in How to Steal a Dog (O'Connor, 2007), Maria, effectively, and with a bit of arch humor, described her concern with the qualities of the human spirit: "love and compassion…tolerance, forgiveness, a sense of responsibility…a sense of harmony – which brings happiness to both themselves and others" (hooks, 2010, p. 148):

> I felt sad that they lived in a car. I would be sad if I lived in a car cause then you will not have food. You cannot buy food and you have to eat from the garbage. They do not know what is in the bag. My mom told me if you see some persons that are digging in a bag and I had food in my hand instead of eating it I will give it to them because Jesus has a video of you and when you go to heaven He will say that you can go to heaven or you can't go to heaven. I would like to go to heaven.

Maria's family believed that any resources they had should be shared with and given to others. In a society where material possessions so often seem to be the measure of a person's value, Maria's family did not share this value and it did not seem difficult for them to sustain different values. Maria seemed to look past the material things to find the person inside because material things told her nothing about another person. Maria was

taught both at home and in church to identify with the poor and her journal entries were often about her weekends spent doing for those individuals with less. Glancing through her journal, there was a picture she drew of how she might be able to help the homeless; she had drawn a pair of brown shoes, one shoe with a hole in the toe, and beneath the shoes, she had written “don’t judge me until you have walked in my shoes.” I do believe that there were times, occasional times, when Maria desired to have “a little more wealth” so she could actually buy a book from the book fair instead of always only doing window shopping, or sometimes have the fifty cents to buy ice cream at lunch time. Maria’s mom was quite open with me about their family’s financial hardships and I asked her one day if it was alright if I might buy Maria a few books from the book fair or an ice cream every now and then from the cafeteria; I thought she would say yes because she believed in sharing resources and, the way I looked at it, her daughter got books and ice cream, while I got her beautiful, loving, smart, and dynamic daughter in my classroom for an entire year. Maria and I happily enjoyed reading the books together while eating our ice cream since Maria’s mom agreed to let me buy the ice cream and the books Maria had chosen from the book fair.

Crista’s Spoken “Normal”

Crista did not fear revealing that she was from a background that was not materially privileged and shared unreservedly the complexities of a life filled with the uncertainties of not knowing when she would be going to the next relative’s house, the next new school, the next situation. She talked openly of the frustrations that came with eight people sharing a two bedroom, one bathroom house, a house that she was often told was

not hers, and sharing a few pairs of jeans with her sister that they kept “hidden” in their book bags because of their fear someone living in the house would take their clothing.

Crista’s tumultuous life at home was her “normal” and even though her experiences outside of school were not shut down in our classroom, there were other spaces within the school where some people struggled with accepting her “difference.” My students’ approaching footsteps, their laughter, and the tail-ends of their conversations that weren’t quite finished when lunch time was over, always alerted me that they were approaching the classroom from the cafeteria, but this one day was different because the students were silent and Crista’s tears indicative that lunch did not go well. Although many voices were talking at once, the substance of what had transpired was that Crista, accustomed to “storytelling” at lunch, often surrounded by a captivated audience, chose for this day’s lunch topic, how her dad, a drug addict, hit Crista’s aunt for using his cell phone, Crista’s aunt called the police, and her dad got arrested and sent to jail. An adult in the cafeteria overhearing part of Crista’s story, deemed her story inappropriate for school and told her she needed to change the conversation because her “teacher would be upset if she found out that one of her student’s was talking about ‘those kinds of things’ at lunch.” I inwardly smiled because Crista’s voice was rarely silenced in our classroom and she shared openly “those kinds of things” on a daily basis in the classroom: her mom’s drug addiction, her knowledge of a crack house, her family’s eviction from their motel and sleeping in their car until her mom could find a relative to take them in, her close call with being placed in foster care, even being homeless.

It worried me that foster care and being homeless seemed to be on Crista’s mind of late, ever since her mom told her they might be moving once again, possibly living in a

van until they had enough money saved to rent an apartment, the current living situation "no longer working out." Crista, understandably, struggled to concentrate in class and, as I taught lessons, I would often see but ignore her doodling on her papers or writing notes to me in her journal. As the days passed and Crista became more apprehensive, she moved her desk next to mine and would often forego recess to stay inside with me for some "extra girl talk." The other girls began to wonder why I seemed to let Crista get away with so much and why she seemed to get "special favors" they were not entitled to. I took time not only to provide what Crista needed to cope those days, but I took the time to explain to the other girls why those "special things" were necessary for Crista, that it was not privileging one student over another but providing Crista with the experiences she needed.

Providing time to listen to Crista's stories was a powerful way for the girls to connect with each other, a way for them to see and comprehend the previously hidden or misinterpreted, a way for Crista to heal. The school rule was that when the students disembarked from their buses in the morning, they would go directly to the cafeteria for breakfast and after the students picked up their breakfast from the serving lines, they sat at the tables, filling each seat as they sat down, teachers' watchful eyes making sure the students "did not skip seats so they could sit by their friends." To circumvent this school practice, the girls, with my permission, would first meet upstairs in the classroom and then walk down to breakfast together so they could sit together and have some "girl time." Sometimes, the girls would bring their trays upstairs to the classroom, pull several

desk chairs up to the table near my desk and would take turns telling pieces of their "stories" where, for those moments, there was a total sense of belonging for all of the girls at the table.

Annie's Lesson of Courage for her Teacher

Each and every day, Annie's entrance into the classroom was a happy occasion for all of us; she always had a smile, a hug, and a "good morning" for me, and then would circulate around the room, attempting to create a space where she could "help everyone have a great day." Although her family was poor and working class, she did not believe she was doomed to an unhappy life of despair. She appreciated and was thankful for all of the "little things in life" – pencils her mom found with the name "Annie" on them, several chapter books she bought for a quarter each at a yard sale, a scarf her grandmother had knitted for her and it didn't matter if it was eighty degrees the first day she wore it, a sheet of glittery peace sign stickers I placed in her writing journal, knowing she and her sisters decorated their diaries with them, her new sweater and three pairs of jeans that her mom bought at a nearby consignment store that "altogether cost less than ten dollars." Annie's mom and dad always referred to her as their "flower child because of her lighthearted, care-free, 'love everybody' because the world is beautiful all of the time" spirit.

Annie easily expressed her thoughts on complicated and difficult matters of race, class, and gender, and more than any other student, openly addressed and questioned other people's values and assumptions. Annie candidly considered any discrimination, as discrimination, any inequality, as inequality, any injustice, as injustice. For instance, as Annie stepped off the school bus one morning, she heard a pair of boys direct disparaging

remarks toward a young female student wearing a headscarf. Distressed by what she saw, she decided to follow the boys to their classroom and tell their teacher what she had witnessed. Not only did she speak from unbiased perspectives with her transgressions of boundaries helping to create a trusting and open climate in the classroom, her honesty and openness made me strong enough to work through my own fears and insecurities in talking about the issues of race, class, and gender.

Unlike many individuals, myself included, Annie was rarely defensive, no matter what the topic was that the students and I were discussing; she reminded me that the "less defensive one is, the less one tries to be a character, and the more one allows oneself to be surprised by one's own weaknesses" (Davies, 2009, p. 15). During a conversation my students and I were having about Thurgood Marshall and segregation, Aron stated that he believed all white people were racist. Even when other students, offended by his remark, reminded him that other individuals in the class, myself included, were white, and that he had actually just referred to all of us as racist, Aron just shrugged his shoulders and once again stated that all whites were racist. At that moment, several of my students became self-protective and began to disparage both Aron and his remark. At that moment, having learned from Annie's eloquent and courageous modeling, I remained quiet, letting the students continue to talk with each other:

Ben: Why would you say that?

Aron: Cause they think they're better than black people.

Ava: Yeah, well, when you say that, you're calling some of your friends racist. We're buds and I'm white. So you're saying I'm racist?

Kimmy: You're calling our teacher a racist too when you say that.

Annie: Yeah, and she's nice to all of us. She doesn't care what color we are.

Aron: I didn't mean she is racist, just a lot of whites are.

Annie: Well, some are, but some aren't.

I chose to recognize the value of my students' voices and in that moment, I became more like Annie.

Different Ways of Being

I worked to situate my girls as powerful beings who seemed to have access to discourses in which freedom and individuality were central and who often situated themselves as having control of their lives, or, at least so it seemed, in the classroom. They did not attempt to stand correctly in their allocated positions, but, rather, they displayed themselves as individuals who could move in ways not anticipated by the discourses through which they were subjected, (Davies, 2003, p. 138) and to the frustration of several boys, did not include some of their ideas of what it meant to be female. As I was walking around the room, helping groups of students as they began working on their animal habitat projects, I noticed Jimmy sulking, his head resting on clenched fists. Nearby, Britt intent on upsetting Jimmy, methodically examined each of her colored pencils as she removed them from the box before choosing which one to color with. I walked over to them and Jimmy readily explained his frustrations working with Britt:

JIMMY: Well, Britt is being mean. She won't let me do my ideas, even though I said we could both come up with ideas. She's being really bossy and I don't think she should get to make all of the decisions when I have a good idea and she won't even listen to it.

BRITT: (shrugs her shoulders) – I told him we could use his ideas but we had to color the background first so that's what I'm doing. Then he just got mad and wouldn't do anything.

JIMMY: No, you just ignored me. I wish I could work with someone else. Can I work with Peter or Alex? Cause they listen to my ideas and think they are important.

Jimmy and Britt were able to continue working together with some negotiating but I had noted on several other occasions how several boys seemed threatened by Britt's displayed power and self-confidence:

ANTONIO: Can I sit somewhere else?

TEACHER: Why?

ANTONIO: Well, she kinda scares me.

TEACHER: How come?

ANTONIO: Well, it's just that, I don't know, she's kinda bossy. She tells me what to do all the time. Nobody likes to sit by her.

LEAH, BROOK, and ANNIE: (in unison) We do.

MARIA: Me too.

ANTONIO: Well, I don't. None of the boys do cause she acts like the boss of us and we have to do what she says.

Both Antonio and Jimmy had conveyed to me instances of what I myself was seeing with Britt, and although I helped the students negotiate their various positionings, I was pleased to see Britt acting in powerful ways. The feminist struggle against the powerlessness connected with being female has been taken up in diverse ways which Kristeva (1986, p. 209) has separated into three tiers – women insisting on having "access

to the social order, women refusing to accept what it means to be female, independently of patriarchal discourses that reduce femaleness to an inferior way of being" (Davies, 2003, p. 74), and women rejecting the "tensions and doubts that come from…embeddedness in the gender order with its impositions of one form of morality for males and another for females" (Davies, p 76). I worked to situate my girls as being able to do what they wanted to do, including what my boys could do, and worked to assure that my girls did not have to surrender their femaleness in order to be granted a public place in the world.

Maya much preferred to play with the boys in my class as opposed to the girls who she often seemed to find boring, and today was no different as she kept guard on the playground equipment and prohibited any other student access to the slide. If a student attempted to use the slide, Maya and Jimmy would join forces, Maya at the top of the slide and Jimmy at the bottom, and "karate chop" any student attempting to gain access to the passage to their "secret world." I knew they often carried "invisible identification cards and swords" which I would often see them "playing" with, so I thought nothing of what they were doing until a teacher sent them to see me, and I gathered from Maya, I was to give them "a timeout." I could not resist a smile because, to an observer, how I allowed my students to situate themselves might have seemed to imitate deviant behaviors that did not impose on my students some sort of normative view of gendered behavior, and allowed them access to multiple discourses inside and outside of the classroom (Davies, 2003, p. 127). It was Maya, who earlier in the week, had been

reprimanded by another teacher after falling through the window of the preschool students' playhouse pushed up against the fence and off limits to all children over the age of five years old.

One of six sisters, all of us a little more than one year apart, gave me an almost "special ordered" and exclusive group of friends. Some days my sisters and I might have decided to be the domestic nurturers, playing house, Gigi, the oldest sister, always the "mommy," the four youngest, the "children," and I, as the second oldest, the "daddy." Other days, we played with our Barbie dolls and our family room was transformed into "the world of Barbie," different hair-colored Barbies, Ken dolls, little sister Barbie dolls; Barbie cases filled with Barbie clothes for every imaginable occasion; Barbie houses, furniture, swimming pools, and automobiles. And, yet, I was always very active, always moving, running, hanging from the top of the monkey bars or jumping from one piece of furniture to another, playing "cops and robbers," constantly chased by our family terrier because my continuous movement made her nervous and her attempts to "corral" me to a chair often failed. My parents still retell me the story about how the expensive play kitchen set they bought me was used more for my dancing on and tumbling off of than it was for any kind of domestic activity. I went through times when I loved wearing dresses and other times, much more frequent times, when I wanted only to wear pants and would wonder how my sister, Gigi, could wear those dresses that required those horribly uncomfortable pantyhose that never seemed to fit correctly. At home, I was not limited to either masculine or feminine positionings; it was at school that I was limited to only feminine positionings, and unfortunately, at school, my femaleness allocated me to a position of weakness.

Although Kristeva (1986, p. 209) describes all three tiers as intertwined, the problems faced in reconstructing a sexist world must eventually be resolved within each person since “the nucleus of sexism lies in the way each person has been constituted on one side of the male/female binary” (Davies, 2003, p. 74) and does not imagine everyone being the same, but as multiple kinds of persons with many ways of being. I believe that children should be free to explore the full range of positionings currently available within their narrative and interactive structures, and free to develop new ones.

Matthew was one of my boys who did not see girls’ things and boys’ things as clearly separate and identifiable, so when he was in the hall wearing a pink and blue striped jacket, it raised eyebrows. A teacher assumed that I had not noticed him in the jacket; her eyebrows were raised still higher when she realized I knew that he was wearing a girl’s jacket explaining to the teacher that “because the classroom was cold and Samantha wasn’t going to wear her jacket, she had offered it to Matthew and he gladly accepted Samantha’s offer.” The teacher remarked that she thought the other students would make fun of him but I reassured her that not one student in my class had uttered one word about his wearing a pink and blue jacket. Matthew did not seem to be caught up in the male/female binary and was comfortable in many ways of being; one day playing a Power Ranger, ridding the world of evil space aliens; the next day, playing a daddy in the girls’ domestic fantasy play. I chose to read Matthew’s line of flight as a breaking open of the known order, a certain event in which he generated another possible order. To some individuals, in some discursive practices, his wearing of what would be considered a girl’s sweater was strange because it was situated outside the already known, whereas I

connected it with chaos, the combination of multiple possible orders, which created new intensities (Davies, 2009, p. 26).

My continuing challenge was to help my students find ways of thinking about and describing their own and others' behaviors independently of what we currently thought of as masculine and feminine. I knew that this could only take place through the development of discursive practices through which that recognition of those new positionings were recognized as meaningful and legitimate as Harré states (1979):

> The task of the reconstruction of society can be taken up by anyone at any time in any face to face encounter. But the trick is to have others recognize and accept the discourse through which the reconstruction is taking place. (p. 405)

As I continued to work on eliminating the male/female binaries seeping in at a snail's pace into my classroom, but nonetheless still seeping, I failed to situate Alex's tears as just tears, when he was escorted to the classroom by a safety patrol student, reporting him for running down the hall, but particularly for being impolite when asked to walk. Alex was sobbing inconsolably and without hesitation I blurted out that he needed to stop crying because "he was almost in fourth grade and the other kids were going to make fun of him;" but thank goodness what my mind was thinking, "you are almost a ten year old boy and boys do not cry like this," was not given voice. I worried about how other students and teachers might position Alex's tears, but hoped that Alex and others would be able to avoid being situated as unitary and fixed individuals. In any case, in this encounter, I had not carefully thought about what I said and how I said it, and too easily fell into binary thought.

My Students' Acting Powerfully

I had just finished reading No Bad News (Cole, 2001), a story about Marcus, a young African American boy on his way to get a haircut, distressed by the bad things he sees in his urban neighborhood - shabby, nearly deserted streets, litter and weeds, boarded up stores, and men drinking from brown paper bags. Seeing his long face upon entering the barber shop, the people in the barber shop tell him to keep his chin up and to look for the good news instead: a close, hardworking family, a pretty garden, and a man and his son who repair old bicycles to give away to local children. On his way home from the barber shop, he sees his community in a new light and resolves not just to observe the good news but to make some good news himself. While the photographs of Marcus on his way to the barber shop are all black-and-white, the photographs showing his journey back home are suffused in color. My students, after sharing how they could "make good news" within the school community, prepared to create the drawings of their ideas. The principal had inconspicuously walked into the classroom and it took a few student murmurings for me to realize that we had a "visitor."

Recently appointed principal to our school mid-year, all of us still acclimating to one another, I sensed my teacher vulnerability materialize once again. I wondered if my classroom resembled what she expected to find, worried she might not recognize or value the classroom space I continued to create. Her genuine interest she had shown as I abridged the text for her and described the activity they would be completing in a few moments, afforded me the space to consider my vulnerability as one of my strengths. She asked the students, if when they finished with their "good news" creations, they would allow her the pleasure of looking at their completed work, and at the same time,

conveyed to them how impressed she was with the thoughtful work they were attempting to do. After her departure from our classroom, the students eagerly used images and words to describe the good news they wanted to spread:

- plant flowers around the school to make it look prettier;
- build a big box to put outside the front of the school so people could drop off clothes for people that need them;
- collect old toys that kids don't want anymore and fix them to give to poor kids that don't have any toys, or bring in new toys;
- collect food for people that don't have enough to eat;
- help the younger kids, kindergarten and first grade kids, with reading;
- recycle; put bins outside and inside the school so parents and kids can put their newspaper, plastic, and other things that are recyclable in them;
- play with the kids with special needs at recess, help them on the playground or teach them soccer;
- write books for the kindergartners; books they can color and take home to keep, and they can practice with them, like read them to their parents or their parents can read to them.

Before delivering the good news' projects my students had completed, I grabbed a stack of letters my students had written in their attempt to persuade the principal to reevaluate cafeteria procedures, particularly the music that was played intermittently, sometimes continuously, the students permitted to only talk when the music was off. Writing these letters came about one afternoon when the students had returned from lunch, both upset and irritated, not only because a teacher in the cafeteria had left the music on for

practically my students' entire lunch time but because she had reprimanded them for "whispering" while the music played. My students nicely demanded that I take some sort of action, but instead, my suggestion was for them to write letters to the principal communicating their positions. After completing the letters, they shared pieces of what they had written:

JIMMY: I will be saying something important to my friends and then the music starts to play so then I have to be quiet and then when the music goes off and we can talk, I can't remember the important thing I was saying to my friends.

SAMUEL: We work hard all day and do lots of work. We should be able to talk at lunch because that is our social time.

ANNIE: Sometimes the teachers put the music on because their kids are being really loud but we have to be quiet even when we were not being loud.

PATRICK: I think the teachers like quiet.

BRITT: That is the time we can just relax and talk to our friends.

PETER: I do not mind the music if it is only on for a tiny bit of time. But the music is so boring and they play the same song over and over and over and over. I think they should play music kids like if they have to play music.

Sharing their letters with the principal gave my students a power that lifted them up. One week later when the principal stopped by the classroom to tell the students how much she had enjoyed reading about how they would make good news within the school community and praised them for writing such convincing letters to change lunchroom rules, my students seemed to experience this intense joy that both energized and empowered them. I struggle now to remember my principal's exact words, and for fear of

not doing her words justice, Butler's (2008, p. 3) words express her thoughts most fittingly: "democracy must be participatory, and, at the very basic level, entails a capacity to know the world, to judge the world, to deliberate upon it, and to make decisions." My principal seemed to understand that I wanted to develop in my students, a spirit of inquiry that would enhance their world and hopefully encourage them to continue to be compassionate, participating, and effective citizens.

CHAPTER 5: MY TURN TO BE POWERFUL

Shifts and Changes Inside the Classroom Space

The day after the principal's visit to our classroom, I decided it was time to take another step, a bigger step, in combating my own fear of power which, of course, still seemed to be situating me as sometimes powerless, my voice still periodically silenced, fearful of those whose positions seemed favored over others, including my own. As the next awards' ceremony was near to rearing its ugly head, once again I got that unsettling feeling that was impossible to shake, and I wondered why I felt so powerless to do more than just voice my concerns at a grade level meeting, not only about the awards' ceremonies, but also the privileging of some students and the marginalization of others. Why did I permit a small group of teachers to make decisions that compromised my students' opportunities to be successful, to be happy? How could I encourage my students to be powerful when their teacher did not practice what she preached?

Again and again, I recognized that education was not, would never be, politically neutral, but that did not mean I could not fight for what all students were entitled to receive. Prior to the beginning of my yearlong research study, the teachers at my school were asked to compile a list of concerns they had about school practices and policies. I expressed my concerns with practices and policies that privileged certain groups of students who were provided with advanced reading and mathematics classes, whereas, the academic needs of several of my students, many of them struggling with poverty, were being ignored. Since additional funding is allocated to schools with teachers

certified to teach gifted curriculum, teachers were highly encouraged to acquire their gifted-certification endorsement, which purposely situated gifted students in those "privileged" teachers' classrooms, constituting classrooms that were anything but heterogeneous. In addition to the gifted teachers' schedules determining the daily schedule for all other student programs, enrichment programs, "advanced classes," were designed and made available only to students performing above grade level in the hopes they could move from meeting skill requirements to exceeding them on state mandated tests.

I was concerned about how we discounted recognition of students who worked diligently but because they had not received all A and B grades, went unrecognized. Several of my students had improved in particular subject areas, yet, I could not hand out more than two academic improvement awards; nor could I hand out more than two awards for good citizenship. I vividly recalled the memory of a previous student award ceremony two years ago that so noticeably provided differential opportunities and rewards to individual students and groups of students. The audience applauded, parents snapped pictures, and the principal shook the children's hands as they accepted their awards in recognition of their academic achievement determined by the performance standards; and while it was a joyful celebration for many students and their parents and teachers, I struggled to keep a smile on my face. I hid my despair as the majority of my students once again failed to meet or exceed academic standards and once again went unrecognized. I remained silent about one more inequity my students were forced to confront. My students, marginalized by class, race, and/or gender, showed little feeling, passive recipients complacent in accepting the way things were, except for Mira whose

tears fell like raindrops as she struggled to understand why her name was not called to walk to the podium; and Hasen who most of the time was frustrated with the world, but at that moment was angry with me for not giving him an award, pulled on his hood, zipped his jacket over his face, and repeatedly kicked the table.

Unsurprisingly, even after being identified as a teacher concern, the awards' ceremony remained unchanged and I was still struggling to find a stronger voice. I was fortunate with the year's first awards' ceremony in October because all of my students had received at least one award. January's awards' ceremony, I was able to "slip in" a few extra awards here and there so all of my students, yet again, received awards. The third awards' ceremony in March, with restrictions on the number of students who could receive specific awards, I could not for the life of me, finagle an award for every student. Not wanting to flagrantly disregard the awards' policy and unable to "slip in" numerous extra awards, I emailed my new principal, told her of my awards' dilemma, and asked her if it might be possible for me to hand out the awards I felt my students should receive instead of the awards school policy required that they receive. She quickly emailed me back, and since she had just come on board as the new principal, she asked me to keep the awards' procedures the same but assured me that the future awards' ceremony procedures would be addressed.

So being the bearer of the bad news, I relayed my dismal news to my students. Even with the promise of our own classroom awards' celebration in which all students would be recognized, I could not eradicate their frustration and anger. Tears fell and were wiped away, after which Annie wondered if the class could write letters to the principal because

"she seemed to be taking their advice" on other matters. So my students' letter writing began as they prepared a list of reasons why the awards' ceremonies were unjust:

BROOK: I get awards but I think it's unfair that not every student gets one. We all work hard and try to do our best.

BEN: I like getting awards and I like that my parents get to come and watch me because they are proud of me. That's what I like. What I don't like is that some of my friends don't get awards and I feel bad for them. They keep waiting for their names to be called and then I start to wait too and feel bad with them because their name never gets called to go up and get an award.

KIMMY: I think when awards are given out, it SHOULD be a fun time but when my friends don't get awards and it makes me sad and it's not fun anymore.

SAMUEL: Well, I worked very hard and did my best, I did all of my homework and wasn't the first one done with my work cause you said we should take all the time we need and I didn't get an award. That's really not fair just because I didn't get all As and Bs. I still did my best. I tried in math too but math is hard for me.

AVA: You can get an award for perfect attendance.

PATRICK: But what if you're sick? You can't come to school if you're sick. So you wouldn't get that award either.

AVA: What are the other awards? Isn't there one for good citizens?

TEACHER: There is but only two kids can get it, two from each classroom. So let me ask you, what do you think about that, only two students getting the good citizen award?

AVA: That's not fair. What if there a lot of kids who are good citizens? I think if you are a good citizen you should get the award and not worry about not getting picked cause there can only be two.

I kept my own motives for wanting to change the awards' ceremony tucked away in my mind as I listened to my students' thoughts and suggestions, but later, with both their list and my list tucked away in my pocket, I marched on to the principal's office to discuss the current and future awards' ceremonies.

With the arrival of our new principal, there seemed to be fewer borders between the hierarchical positionings within the school structures; the administrators no longer seemed to be so alienated from the teachers. The school seemed to be transforming into a space where a cooperative spirit was able to emerge with all its relational possibilities, a space which according to Ceppi and Zini (1998), was stimulating and productive of new relations, a space in which life takes place:

> When we talk about relational space, we mean an integrated space in which the qualities are…closely related to "performance features" …where everybody is welcome, their diversity not existing in predetermined, hierarchical and rigid structures, but an active generation of sensory networks – each person a network spreading out into other networks. (pp. 139-140)

My principal began to encourage me to locate my power, to speak my position, and to experience the power that came with it. Through the distribution of her leadership, her refusal to allow favoritism that hindered the spread of leadership beyond a privileged few, she created opportunities for teachers to lead and encouraged us to assume

leadership responsibilities, surmounting barriers which until that time, denied the teachers opportunities to pursue a more powerful role in how they were positioned in school.

Education, however, is always political, and even though borders were shifting and dissolving, making new lines of flight possible, that one state mandated test still "lay in wait," restricting and constraining all of us - principals, teachers, and students alike - throughout the school year and then, eventually, defining us at the end of the year. In August, I had accepted my students as who they were - their differences, from where they came, their lived experiences, and where they might be going. In May, I was provided with the results of my students' Criterion-Referenced Competency Test scores and was, as every past year, "reminded" that I needed to get more of my students to *exceed* the third grade curriculum standards, rather than just *meeting* the curriculum standards, that I should "talk to other teachers who had a "higher number of students in the *exceeding* category of the curriculum standards." My students were consistently being judged by one performance measurement that did not demonstrate their challenges, achievements, and successes; a performance measurement that did not tell my students' stories. I realized, slowly but surely, that it was often my voice that embodied my students' voices and I had to keep reminding myself that it was both my right and duty to question and respond to how the knowledge and positioning of my students was being presented. I could not let the fear that others might turn away from my words keep me from arguing against one sheet of statistical data on my students' achievement that was being used to define who my students were. So I began to open the data up to the interpretation of my students' storied lives, grateful to have hooks (2010) to remind me about how much "information I was given and told was hard science or data, [but] was really a story, the

interpretation of data and facts. When the information received…in science, countered the data once held to be immutable fact, the story changed" (p. 49). I began to take more and more advantage of my principal's open door policy, occasionally joking with her that I might one day find my yearbook photo with a big red "X" posted on her door. I felt exceptionally fortunate to work with a principal who encouraged me to use my voice that was once upon a time silenced.

My interpretation of student data consisted of the sharing of my students' storied beings and I began with my interpretation of Maria's data. Maria began third grade reading one year below grade level and writing two to three *sentence* stories; by the end of third grade, she was reading on grade level and was writing four to five *paragraph* stories. The data on Maria's test scores did not reflect the two mornings each week she came to school an hour early for before-school tutoring; the recesses she gave up so she could read with Ms. Mary, our grandparent volunteer; the lunch periods she would skip eating in the cafeteria with her friends, instead, eating lunch with me in the classroom while we worked on reading and writing. By sharing my students' stories, such as I did with Maria, I was "providing the framework for contextual awareness….when we know the story, we see…the previously hidden or misinterpreted" (hooks, 2010, p. 52). Bringing Maria's story and the stories of my other students to the forefront of the conversations that I began to have with my colleagues and administrators about the relevance of the CRCT in our students' lives seemed to disrupt the usual discursive practices that judged my students by one performance measurement.

Many teachers, it seems, have been taught to become risk aversive, believing their job performance is secure only through unquestioning obedience to school policy, and

that has meant holding fast to the latest performance measures, such as the CRCT, and how, as teachers, they should best "perform" those measures. As I shared Maria's story, followed by Crista's story, followed by Brook's story, although my colleagues had not yet begun to tell their stories, I observed how some of them nodded their heads in agreement, this silent acknowledgment that yes, there are other ways we can both question and respond to how our students' knowledge and positionings are being represented. As I learned in my classroom listening to stories with my students, I hope that as I continue to share my students' stories, rethinking my students' data, other teachers will move beyond fear that the imparting of their students' experiences and a sense of their being whole people will be shut down or dismissed as irrelevant. Postructuralists believe that individuals may tell several, possibly competing, stories about themselves (identities) and the politics of our time and place influence which stories are told, when these stories are told, and by whom these stories are told. This is why some stories are heard more often and are given greater status than others and, consequently, identifying the stories that are silenced or marginalized and then sharing them is a political act (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 3). My next steps in my work as an educator informed by poststructural theory and what I have learned with my students are to consider the ways in which I can support colleagues and students in my school to continuously disrupt the taken-for-granted discourses circulating moment-to-moment in our classrooms and hallways. How can we develop practices and collective action that help us to realize the broad and deep potentials in all students (and all educators) to create more equitable and engaging learning spaces?

Shifts and Changes Outside the Classroom Space

Subjectivity, power, discourse, choice, and power are key terms for making sense of what *used to be* and how things *could be* different in the future. However, things can only be different if we are willing to take action. Teachers' engagement in particular discourses is certainly a complex matter. Choices, in terms of discourses taken up, are understood as similar to forced choices, since the subject's positioning within particular discourses makes the chosen line of action the only possible action, not because there are no other lines of action but because one has been subjectively constituted through one's placement within that discourse to *want* that line of action (Davies, 2000, p.60). Since we exist as thinking, feeling subjects and social agents, "capable of resistance and innovations produced out of contradictory subject positions and practices, we are…able to reflect upon the discursive relations that constitute us as able to choose from different options that are available to us" (Weedon, 1987, p. 125). Poststructural discourses allow us to disrupt and challenge taken-for-granted notions and practices as being "usual" and in the larger context of my school, broader discursive practices produced two significant changes in school policy – music was no longer played in the cafeteria as a means to monitor the students' lunchroom behavior and the awards' ceremonies were restructured. These changes came about with the implementation of the principal's advisory team that advises the principal on such matters as setting school priorities and goals; conferring on school culture, parent involvement, and family engagement; and allocating school resources – all of which support the position that "we do what is best for the kids."

I was selected by my principal to be a member of the principal advisory team and I have been elated by the dialogue and school policy changes that have come about as a

result of the principal's advisory team. My students' first awards' ceremony this year was met with cheers instead of tears since all of my students were recognized for both their academic achievements and improvements. Furthermore, now when my students go to lunch, although there are a few minutes that the students are required to quietly eat lunch (I continue to advocate for the students to be able to converse the entire lunch period), for twenty-five of thirty minutes, the students enjoy conversing with each other - the way it should be. As I reflect on the work the principal's advisory group takes up, I realize that there will always be "something that we can work on to do "what is best for kids," and I must remember that not everything in school "is bad, but that everything is dangerous….If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do (Foucault, 1984, p. 343)

Letting Go of Fairy Tales

Positioning Brook

As a teacher and researcher, as my voice became more powerful, I had to be careful to position myself as the one not making judgments, the one who privileged her students' knowledge rather than her own. I knew placing limits on my students was one way I could achieve myself as an adult, teacher, and researcher, so I wanted to disrupt this assumption that my students were always and inevitably powerless and that I was the one with the power to decide who would be named and in what way. Within a poststructural framework, it was impossible for me to decide who my students were because they were undecided, yet knowing this did not mean that they could not exist in my imagination. Rather, I should not make the mistake of thinking that what they became in my imagined image was who they really were or that any of their further actions were to be made

consistent with that first imagined image. Just as my students were unimaginable, so were their actions. What I did have to work with were readings of actions, and readings of our own readings and it was possible to do this because my students took up their own beings in a world made up out of so many of the same discourses as the worlds we live in (Davies, 2003, p. 147).

I realized I had for some time been situating Brook as struggling only with her class positioning, however, she was also struggling with race and gender positioning. I remembered one afternoon, somewhere near spring break, when it was revealed to me how Brook assumed other students were positioning her by race; and quite often those days, she seemed angry with just about everybody. This one afternoon was no exception. After recess was over and the students were settled into a writing activity, Brook, still upset following a confrontation with several girls at recess, wrote angrily in her diary. When she finished writing in her diary, she tossed it on my desk with much ado and stomped her feet back to her desk. I glanced at the diary page which was folded back with the words "teacher only" underlined several times with several exclamation marks that I easily glimpsed through the folded sheet of paper.

> I do not want to be friends with Kimmy anymore!!!! She is always mean to me and you were mean to me today too!!!!! When she hugged you and you hugged her back, she was just making me jealous because you did not hug me!!!!!! Then she flicked her hair back and you saw her and didn't say anything but you know I don't like when she does that! !!!! You like her better than me!!!!!!

I waited for Brook's anger to subside, but even as it subsided and she wanted to sit and talk with me, it was difficult for her to find the words that described how she felt she was

being positioned by everyone else, myself included. The incident at recess had actually followed an unpleasant incident at lunch when two boys, Aron and Ben, saved Kimmy a seat at lunch angering Brook because they had not invited her to join them. Three different times, Brook approached Kimmy and told her, not only that she was no longer her friend, but "she better watch her back."

As I encouraged Brook to confront, rather than withdraw from, the contradictions and conflict she was experiencing, she began to abandon her silence, opened up, and began to name her fears. She wanted Kimmy's hair because "it was long and blonde" and she knew everyone thought Kimmy was one of the "prettiest girls in the third grade and everybody wanted to be her friend, even the boys." She showed me a page in her diary on which she listed the names of girls who were popular, the names of girls certain boys liked; a list her name was not on because she said, "the other kids don't think I am pretty."

Brook seemed to situate Kimmy as the beautiful princess with the long blonde hair and the fair complexion, the princess who lived in the castle with her prince, and would live happily ever after, "safe from the fearful things that happen to a girl who has no place" (Davies, 2003, p. 90). I so desired for Brook to rid herself of that romantic love notion and "replace it with something equally viable and rewarding, if not necessarily safe" (Davies, p. 90). Each time we "see the space where we are not, or notice the silence of our own voice, I believe we become more able to feel when others are silenced" (Hankins, 2003, p. 186) and that helped me to recognize in Brook this fear of always being forced to live life on the margins, a fear I experienced in my first year of school at the very young age of six years old, a fear I did not reject for years to come.

Even though all of my classmates were white, I was "different" than the girl who had the long blonde hair and the blues eyes, the "good girl," that would have granted me the "privilege" to sit directly in front of the teacher, the space I desired. Instead, my desk was situated in the last row, the second to last seat, because I never "properly" behaved. The only desk behind me was saved for Jimmy whose behavior I had assumed was worse than mine. I was a "rambunctious girl who could never sit still and pay attention," a little girl who either spent most of her days on the margins of the classroom either looking out the window wishing she was at home where she was not captive to what it meant to be a girl, or watching the little blonde-haired girl behave the way she was "supposed" to behave.

Over time, "desiring to become somebody, if only briefly, to have a place to belong" (Davies, 2003, p. 90), I was a little girl who allowed the romantic love notion to become more and more powerful in how I allowed myself to be positioned. I waited for "my prince" to come along so I could be the perfect "image of the domestic woman which is intricately tied up with the romantic image of beauty and love for ever" (Davies, p. 76). I did not want Brook's power "circumscribed by her own ideas of what it meant to be female" (Davies, p. 90).

I began to encourage Brook *to move with me,* to experience with me, her intellectual competence and potential; to promote in her a healthy self-esteem by calling attention to the strengths she possessed and encouraging her to work from a foundation that could provide the necessary confidence that was key to building her self-esteem. Brook came to school early two mornings a week so I could help her with reading, and knowing how much she loved to write stories, her morning tutoring club slowly but surely evolved into "our writing time." Claiming a corner of the classroom as her office space and enjoying

the privacy that two large cabinets provided, we collected a mishmash of colorful containers, a variety of writing utensils and notebooks, and an extra teacher's chair I had in the classroom, to make her office complete.

My hope was that Brook would never fear that she would be judged intellectually inadequate by her peers. Brook's writing seemed to release a voice she did not know she had so I created a safe space where Brook could possibly find new ways to be powerful and open up to not-yet-understood ideas that she could come to express in her writing. I supported "her work," her writing, by manipulating the classroom space so Brook could have generous opportunities, not only to write, but to share what she wrote with other students, other teachers, and myself.

Revisiting and Rereading Kimmy

As researchers, "we make ourselves into powerful interpreters with superior knowledge claims and it becomes all too easy to ignore disruptive moments that interfere with or trouble the story we want to tell" (Davies, 2003, p. 153), and as the school year progressed, after considerable review of my teacher journal and reflections of what I had written, I believed I had read Kimmy through a particular discourse. On several occasions, she showed little interest and enjoyment in being the high status girl and the discourse she often found herself in, often positioned there by the other girls. Kimmy often looked for another line of flight, sitting alone or with the boys at lunch, choosing to work by herself instead of with the other girls, playing with the girls who did not care if she was recognized as a high status girl; girls that did not care about the materialistic things that positioned Kimmy as high status and, therefore, a popular girl. Kimmy often seemed uncomfortable with how the girls would stare at her each morning as she walked

into the classroom, disliking both their looks of admiration and envy and disliking even more, the attention she received from several boys in our classroom and boys in other classrooms.

It came to my attention one morning that two fifth grade boys were “blocking” Kimmy from walking down the hall and by the time she told me what had occurred with those boys, a week had passed by, Kimmy “too afraid to tell me because the boys had threatened to get her into trouble if she said anything.” In this instance, both the boys and Kimmy thought of maleness and femaleness as opposites and the problem was that what it was “to be male was constructed in opposition to the idea of femaleness and the boys in part, were positioning themselves as masculine through an oppressive act of domination and control over both the environment and non-masculine others” (Davies, 2003, p. 92). I realized that even a quite powerful girl like Kimmy could find herself hesitating in the assertion of power. I found out later that Brook, friends with both of the boys, had “put them up to being mean to Kimmy to get back at her,” which showed how Brook had effectively used the boys maleness to position them as the ones in control, the ones with power.

Kimmy, similar to Brook, loved to write (her dream job was to be an author of children’s books) and would create stories that progressed from numerous paragraphs, to several pages, and developed further into chapters. Kimmy often left her stories on my desk for me to read so I could review her work before she got it “published;” Kimmy’s grandmother typing the final copy of her story and having it bound into a book. Following a book “publishing,” Kimmy would don her non-prescription glasses (she believed the glasses completed her “look as a writer”) and read her book to a captivated

audience of her peers. Kimmy and Brook began their own writing club, their love of writing seeming to have revealed a new space that invited them to engage in a new encounter, a new way of becoming, that helped them bridge a gap that had opened up between them.

As the school year inched towards the end of April and the yearlong study I had conducted with my third grade students was coming to a close, Brook's "writing time" had developed into a "writing club" that had opened up membership to all of the girls in my class. Watching all of my girls engage together in this writing time was deeply moving to me as this writing club that had evolved, this "community" (Camden Pratt, 2009, p. 59) the girls were creating with one another, seemed almost therapeutic for them. The girls accepted each other in this new shared activity and boundaries and borders that had existed between the girls seemed to disappear, this writing time characterized by an attention to each other with a value and respect for each other's differences, no matter how they were expressed (Ceppi and Zini, 1998, p. 2).

CHAPTER 6: SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL

If teachers are to become aware of the places in which "themselves and the selves of others are intertwined, we must open to the vacancies in the landscapes against which our stories are told" (Greene, 1994, p. 21). Walking to my classroom one morning, it was impossible for me not to "eavesdrop" on two teachers conversing about a student's family they described as the "American poster family," the perfect family. The student's dad held a high level position with a notable company that afforded the student's mom the "luxury" to stay at home with the children and "dote on them." Every day, the girl came to school with her hair, "this long and absolutely beautiful, blonde, almost white hair, done up so cute and tied up in ribbons." I wondered – with that description of an upper middle class, white, two-parent family –with so many assumptions in one statement, how did such assumptions situate the poor or working class students, the minority students, the students raised in single parent homes or by relatives other than their parents? How did a characterization as an "American poster family" constrain teachers' and peers' abilities to know the family members as complicated, whole people with needs and strengths that might not fit into the narrow, "perfect" frame that had been allotted to them?

How many students' voices were dismissed and silenced because their lived experiences positioned them on the negative side of all of those binary opposites? I wondered where those white, middle-class assumptions left Maria, Patrick, Antonio, Samuel, Joe, and Alex, all Hispanic and from poor and working class families; Brook,

Britt, Aron, Ben, Jimmy, and Edwin, African Americans, most of them from poor and working class families; Leah, Asian, her family working class; and Crista and Ava white, from poor and working class families. Many teachers were "taught in classrooms where styles of teaching reflected the notion of the single norm of thought and experience, which they were encouraged to believe was universal" (hooks, 1994, p. 35), and, as teachers, they believe it is necessary to give "different" students another opportunity to get it right, to be "normal," to try to fit them into the "picture perfect family" position. The teachers, who so stubbornly cling to their perceptions of what the classroom and their students' families should look like, will continue to silence specific students or groups of students that are marginalized.

My classroom was a regulating and regulated space within which the students and I engaged in particular pedagogical performances that were constrained by curriculum, timetables, and hierarchies of authority; yet, even though the "pedagogical encounters" (Gannon, 2009, p. 70) within them were determined, they were not fully determined and could certainly tolerate encounters which involved both surprise and conflict. Much of the existing schooling is contingent on supporting the idea of the teacher as the one who knows and the students as the knowable. Yet, I was "caught in my unknowing, surprised and somewhat undone" (Ahmed, 2000, p. 6), as I connected with my students and engaged them in learning. Within the context of the current outcome-driven curriculum, it was possible for me to have agency, and to find ways to facilitate the individual and collective arts of "becoming" – a continuous process of differentiation beginning as a "moment of de-individualization and accompanied new ways of being in the world, new ways of thinking and feeling" for the students and myself (Roffe, 2007, p. 43).

I was able to untie some of the knots that I had seen in my encounters with my students, and, of course, I would inevitably find old knots tied back up within those encounters, but I sanctioned those knots because, within a poststructural approach, good action or good outcomes are never guaranteed. What it did, was open up discourses and practices to questioning and provided strategies for questioning that might run against the grain of dominant discourse and practices (Davies, 1990 - 1999, p. 169). Learning the disruptive practices of a society, we are able to position ourselves in multiple ways because the "social world is constantly being constituted through the discursive practices in which the individual engages; we are not unitary beings but complex, changing, contradictory creatures that we each experience ourselves to be" (Davies, 2003, p. xii).

Recognizing my students as competent spokespeople of their own lived realities, I wanted their voices to be prominent in the exploration of what was going on in the worlds they inhabited so I could better understand and imagine their worlds and the perspectives their worlds offered me. I chose not to be the kind of teacher who told her students to "do as I do," but rather a teacher who asked her students to "do with her," and as a result, the students and I engaged in moments in which our encounters occurred so the possibility of new thinking could occur. My hope was that, as a teacher/researcher, my students could help move me towards new ways of understanding them and I believed we got caught up in the mutual exploration of ideas where thinking and being could not be separated.

My students who journeyed with me through this yearlong study have moved on to fourth grade, and although they are no longer physically taking up space in my classroom, their spirits will always linger in our moments together, the memories that have become both oral and written accounts of our shared experiences. Those encounters

have helped me welcome another group of third grade students into a classroom space where they are not only individuals with distinct voices, but are also members of a classroom group that will work collectively with me, their teacher, who has discovered, and will continue to discover, how to work differently with her students.

For several years, I have taken pieces of my students' writing and have made classroom books out of those student writing pieces, books the students enjoyed as much, if not more than, the multitude of store-bought books that lined the shelves of both my classroom library and the school's media center. One of the student-made books called "Something Beautiful" is not only one of this year's third grade group of students' favorite classroom books, but it is also one of mine, created by the students that journeyed with me throughout this study. The following is one of the last excerpts from the teacher journal I had systematically written in and reflected on throughout my study:

My classroom was rarely a quiet place, and because today's tranquility took me by surprise, I found myself watching the students as they wrote in their journals. Kimmy, deep in thought, was continuously licking her lips, the same endearing habit that was still present in my son at the age of twenty whenever he was totally absorbed in his writing. Brook, Leah, and Britt were in "their office," the back sink counter area cleaned off of all of my messiness, replaced with everything their office needed to run smoothly – snacks, water bottles, writing journals, photographs of loved ones, pictures they had drawn and had taped up on the wall, and what seemed like hundreds of writing utensils overflowing from pencil cases. While Patrick and Samuel claimed the spot in front of the only window in the classroom, the other boys were sitting at two large rectangular tables they had pushed together. At the beginning of the school year, I had drawn a big heart on

the first page of each student's journal and inside the hearts, the students continuously wrote down any topics they deemed "close to their hearts" – family, friends, pets, favorite movies, books, and holidays, to name a few; so many topics, some children had two or three hearts overflowing with interests, aspirations, and memories. On this particular day, the students were writing about one of their topics and as I quietly strolled about the room, Crista's drawing tugged at my heart strings because I knew the story that it told. With no safe place to go, Crista and her family had stayed with an uncle whose house was adjacent to a crack house and many nights Crista's uncle would take her to this crack house, where untypical of crack houses, there was a gold-colored piano. Although a few piano keys were missing, it was still somewhat playable and Crista's uncle taught her to play what few tunes he knew. Close enough for me to hear but far enough away to be unobserved, Crista shared with a small group of students why her drawing was so beautiful:

CRISTY: But what was really cool about this house was whoever had lived there before had left this piano, this beautiful piano, well, it maybe wasn't that beautiful anymore, it was dirty and there were some keys missing, but it looked like part of it was made with gold.

ARON: Real gold?

CRISTY: I think so. Anyways, my uncle and I would sneak over there, when no one else was there, and he would teach me songs and we would sing while he played them. And he would teach me the songs and we would laugh cause sometimes he would get to a part in the song but the key would be missing and he wouldn't know what to do so he'd just make it up. I loved that piano, not just because it

was gold and beautiful but because it was my special time for me with my uncle.

So I began to think about Crista's lived experiences - the struggles, uncertainties, and losses - and I was reminded of the book Something Beautiful (Wyeth, 1998). Before a teacher wrote the word "beautiful" on the board, a young African American girl saw only the ugliness of her neighborhood: trash in the yards, a broken bottle that looks like stars, the word DIE that someone had written on her front door, a homeless lady sleeping on the sidewalk. The young girl decides to go out and look for something beautiful in her neighborhood, something that makes her heart happy. She encounters the fruit stand owner who gives her a beautiful apple, she is served a beautiful fried fish sandwich at the diner, and Mr. Sim's shows her his beautiful smooth stone. Wishing to create her own something beautiful, she cleans the trash from her yard and scrubs off the word DIE on her front door, leaving her feeling less discouraged and more powerful.

Through images, my students gave me more pieces of their lived experiences, experiences that were dearest to them, pieces of their lives that told me what made their hearts happy, pieces that told of a beautiful moment for each of them. Leah and Britt's elaborate self-portraits; Antonio skateboarding with his friends; Ben's patriotic picture of a red, white, and blue eagle with the word "freedom" written underneath it; Samuel cheering on a Mexican soccer player scoring a winning goal; Patrick walking his beloved dog; Peter hiking on a park trail collecting rocks with his brothers; Maria and her family at a church picnic; Leah and her cousin having a sleepover and making color-beaded bracelets; and Crista and her uncle playing a gold-colored piano.

It somehow seemed fitting that reading Something Beautiful (Wyeth, 1998), completed at the closing moments of my study with last year's third grade students, would be one of the first children's books I would share with this year's students. After Lola read the student-made classroom book "Something Beautiful," she and I talked about how and why it "became a book," after which she asked me if I could read the book Something Beautiful (Wyeth, 1998) to the whole class. Lola, with many heads nodding along in agreement, then asked me if they might be able to make a book that "shared special pieces of their hearts." How could I possible say "no?" I now have two student-made "Something Beautiful" books, the latest version, filled with images of my students having "fun time with the family" (Jones, 2006, p. 4) and friends:

- Shooting baskets at the neighborhood park with Dad;
- Making a solar system art project with Granny and going to get it framed;
- Helping Mom study for her United States' citizen test;
- Going swimming with aunts, uncles, and cousins;
- Riding the rollercoaster at Six Flags with Mom while she screams her head off;
- Dad helping to make a Ninja sword out of cardboard and pieces of wallpaper;
- Riding on a four-wheeler with brothers and sisters in an empty field;
- Grandpa writing really hard multiplication problems with lots of zeroes to solve;
- Going to boy scout meetings;
- Serving wedding cake to people to help mom who is an event planner;
- Going to Romania to visit relatives;
- Climbing Stone Mountain;
- Playing jokes - putting ice cubes in a brother's pillowcase;

- Riding bikes with neighborhood friends;
- Having sleepovers with friends and dancing to music;
- Playing football, making a touchdown, and everybody cheers;
- Playing soccer;
- Grandma giving tennis lessons and getting the ball across the net – finally!

As I read what last year's and this year's students wrote about what makes their hearts happy, I was immediately reminded of Jones' (2006) personal perspective on why I need to consider my students histories and identities:

> Personally, preserving the part of me who is the girl who grew up with strong, independent working-class women and engaging, sensitive working-class men is the most important work I do. It is not, however, a message that I received in school; a message that relationships and identities are important and do not have to be shed in the process of academic achievement and class mobility. Perhaps if we begin with what we learn is most important to our students, and for many that would be family relations and community, we can pave a road toward school success that does not assume getting "up and out" of communities where we feel most at home. (p. 159)

When my students enter my classroom, I desire for them to "feel at home."

CHAPTER 7: POSTSTRUCTURAL THOUGHTS AND CLASSROOM PEDAGOGY

Being a teacher/researcher is about acknowledging how theory and practice are interdependent, and in a certain understanding, one and the same. So, as I performed pedagogical practices, I poststructurally theorized them into existence, and with an awareness of that, I started to reflect upon practice theoretically and trouble my own understandings. As I thought deeply and critically about how I presented, positioned, and analyzed my pedagogical performances, I did multiple readings to understand the same situation in different ways. This helped me make situated ethical choices about how I would work differently with my students, providing them with opportunity to learn differently, opportunity for me to teach differently, and opportunity for both the students and myself to be creative makers of meaning, rather than recipients of fixed knowledges (Davies, 2009, p. 1).

Conducting a yearlong study with my third grade students and using the classroom space to consider inequitable relations of gender, race, and class, was sometimes a daunting task as I maneuvered my way through "curriculum guidelines and national standards that were not useful documents to guide me through the vulnerability I often felt" (Camden Pratt, 2009, p. 63) and as I tried to open up the classroom space to new and different discursive practices with my students. I never precisely knew where this study would take the students and myself or where we might be headed as I attempted to draw from poststructural work to produce a fuller understanding of my teacher practices and cultural practices. Within the striations of consistent routines, materials, and pedagogies,

by creating smooth spaces with my students and crafting encounters that involved the "welcoming and hospitality of the Other – an openness to the difference of the Other, to the coming of the Other…to listen to the Other from his or her own experiences and not treating the other as the same" (Dahlberg and Moss, 2006, p. 15) - both individually and collectively, I sought to help my students acquire a sense of themselves as worth listening to.

I believe I can make the claim that "good teaching practice" is not the successful imposition of a desirable order on chaos - "the chaos of multiple bodies, multiple ways of knowing, diverse trajectories, opposing wills" (Davies, 2009, p.1) that must be brought into line and contained. Rather, good teaching practice is the transformation of a place into a space where community between the students and teachers, and the students with each other, is able to emerge (Todd, 2003, p. 89) and is designed to provide a flexible, responsive support to explorations of conflict as well as commonality. The classroom can also become a space that is both stimulating and productive, a space in which life with all its messiness can take place and where individuals can make spaces for themselves. It is possible to work with students in ways that make them recognizable as legitimate learners and with the new discourses my students and I engaged in, I was finally able to understand that my students seemed to know what to do to "get it right to be a student" and I was no longer teaching them as though they did not know what to do. I, as so many teachers continue to do, had been placing numerous binaries on my students – teacher/student, adult/child, powerful/powerless –and these binaries were "marking off boundaries between myself as subject and my students as the other, or between myself as the known and the other as the unknown" (Ellwood, 2009, p. 50). What my students were

saying began to affect both what I was saying and doing in my teacher practice, along with what my students were doing and saying in the discursive classroom spaces.

I was disrupting what and how I was teaching, taking a different path than other colleagues as I navigated the curriculum in new and different ways that certainly created messiness. In my school, as in many schools in current times, educators (including myself as I began my graduate studies) assumed that the teachers had to strictly adhere to a standards-based curriculum framework and not question school curriculum policy. Asserting that I could not justifiably teach a curriculum in ways that marginalized particular students or groups of students, I noticed colleagues' looks of both displeasure with what seemed to be my noncompliance to policy, and looks of apprehension, concerned that a curriculum they were satisfied with was being questioned. Messiness continued as I voiced my discontent when particular groups of students were provided with additional opportunities to succeed while other students were being short-changed and excluded from the possibilities with which education should be providing them. I was creating messiness in my school when I wanted to move away from competitive recognition practices, which in my eyes, encouraged competition between the students - if someone is the best, then someone else must be by definition the worst (Ellwood, 2009, p. 35).

Even the physical messiness of my classroom seemed somewhat appalling to teachers as they took little peeks through the classroom door and saw only unorganized chaos - my students' desks discarded, pushed to the outskirts of the classroom so the students could collectively gather around three large rectangular tables, or stretch out in open classroom spaces where their materials were scattered about, making a clear

pathway nearly impossible, and the use of "inside classroom voices" long forgotten. At those moments, I felt as if I was putting my recognition as a "good teacher" at risk because I seemed to give my students too much freedom, too much power, too much voice; yet I wanted to argue that my students were extremely focused and attending to what we were doing. The pedagogical movements my students and I gave thought to, gave life to, did not "fetishize mastery, agency, or certainty, but rather embraced the messiness of knowing, experiencing, and doing" (Davies, Zabrodska, Gannon, Bansel, and Camden Pratt, 2009, p. 122). Unless we lose ourselves in what we are doing, what we are creating, we might not ever come to "know what there might be to find, what movements might be possible to follow… what possible moments might await us" (Davies, Zabrodska, Gannon, Bansel, and Camden Pratt, pp. 122-123).

And yet there are times I find myself enmeshed in old discursive practices, remaining silent for fear that I might be considered to again be creating "needless conflict." One example, just prior to the state standardized testing last year, was when I discovered that my ELLs (English language learners) would not be provided with a small group testing accommodation. As I questioned why this testing accommodation was no longer offered for ELLs and, although the reasons I was given were discriminatory in my eyes, I felt that my concern was considered insignificant. Consequently, my own sense of voice and agency were dismissed, and sensing my discourse being silenced, I said no more and the English language learners were not provided with the accommodations they should have been given. This year, with my new group of third graders, some whom are English language learners, I did find my voice and mustering together a new discourse, I opened

up new discursive spaces with colleagues and administrators that have led to our reinstating of testing accommodations for English language learners.

I believe that the value I placed on my students' particular stories that were about particular people and particular positionings in particular contexts, encouraged my students to see that they did have a voice, a voice working against the dominant modes of understanding differences. The world is like a "single skin over which our senses…extend like networks…ourselves spreading out into our surroundings, and our surroundings spreading themselves out into us" (Ceppi and Zini, 1998, p.2). The material contexts in which we each take up our existence in the world are thus brought to life, given power, understood as having effects (Davies, 2009, p. 131). Although I believed there would be changes, disruptions, because of my poststructural approach to working with my students, I had no preconceived idea of what those changes might be or what they would look like.

Through poststructural work, I actively built and transformed my pedagogical knowledge and that required that I take control of my own learning and meaning making about education, about pedagogy, and about myself as a teacher. That same poststructural theory offered me unique stances and lenses as a researcher. Poststructural theory offers a "radical framework for both understanding the relation between persons and their social world, and for conceptualizing social change" (Davies, 2003, p. xii). The organization of and processes of the social world are understood as having a "material force, a capacity to constrain, to shape, to coerce, as well as to potentiate individual action" (Davies, p. xii).

It was, at times, challenging to keep up with the typical day-to-day routines at school, yet at the same time, exhilarating to be consumed with possible meanings of the

"happenings," of what I was seeing and hearing as I listened to both myself and my students. In addition to making observations, I was writing in my teacher journal, reflecting on what I was writing, and reading poststructural theory. The reflexivity of this observing, writing, and reading of theory, affected not only what I was doing but also what I was writing. I began to position myself in my writing with the students and I began to write the analysis of the data, realizing I would not find any "truths" but might trouble and deconstruct the everyday operations of dominant school discourses on both my own and my students' everyday lives.

The poststructuralist theoretical stances and practices I have engaged in as a researcher are ones for other teacher/researchers to consider because, if we see society as being constantly created through discursive practices, then it is possible to see the power of those practices, not only to create and sustain the social world, but also to see how we can change the world through a refusal of certain discourses and the generation of new ones, "confronting dominant discourses by introducing other kinds of realities" (Jones, 2006, p. 150). As teacher/researchers, commitment to our students involves our capacity to be "altered, to become someone different than we were before; and, likewise, our students' commitment to social causes through the interactions with actual people equally consists in their capacity to be receptive to the Other to the point of transformation" (Todd, 2003, p. 89).

Poststructructuralist theorizing has had strong implications on my teacher practice, making the constitutive forces of discourse visible and making it possible for me to work with my students in new and different ways. By utilizing the data I collected from this study and theorizing my teacher practices, coming to see how my students' stories and

my stories could inform theory, a space was opened up where I could analyze myself, my work, and the writing of my work differently. Without the systematic reflection, theorizing, writing, and rewriting that comprised my poststructural research work in my role as a teacher/researcher, it would have been very difficult to effect the confrontations of dominant discourses and transformations I sought as a poststructural pedagogue.

Theorizing a poststructurally informed pedagogy, drawing from what I have learned this past year with my students, as well as my self-critical analysis of my own power in relation to my students, colleagues, and the school, is one of the tasks I am setting for myself as I plan my continued learning/writing related to my dissertation study. Being committed to social justice in and through pedagogy, and at the same time recognizing that there are dangers inherent in even well-meant practices, has not lead me to pessimism but to the acceptance that there is always more to do. Those of us engaged in schooling and its processes continue to make value judgments about what kinds of knowledge counts; a systematic postsructural theorizing as a foundation for pedagogy could push educators like myself to approach school-based taken for granted knowledge as problematic, therefore challenging, confronting, and disrupting misconceptions, untruths, and stereotypes that lead to structural inequality and discrimination based on gender, class, and race. Moving away from the classroom to the broader contexts of the school and district, I will continue to write, first for myself and then for others, to make more visible and open to the possibility of change, the structural and systematic inequalities for particular groups in education that continue to undermine learning for many children.

Now, as I draw the formal writing of my year of poststructural teaching and research to a close, I wonder if my students, who journeyed through this study with me, were asked what transformative spaces could they remember, where something different or transformative became possible, how would they respond? I wonder if my students kept close the memories of the spaces we created, ones in which connections between both the students and myself and among the students with each other were enabled? Did the students' fourth grade teachers attend to the students' "hundred languages" (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 65), a metaphor that refers not only to a capability for a "hundred, a thousand creative and communicative potentials, but also to the ways in which recognition, or the making intelligible of the Other brings them into being" (Ellwood, 2009, p. 34), or did they just attend to school work?

When I take my new class of third grade students outside to recess, I get to visit with my students from last year as we share some of our recess time together. Although many of my students from last year's study are currently scattered throughout six different fourth grade classrooms, I wait at recess, knowing that from many directions on the playground, they will come running and our "reunions" will, as always, be joyful and pleasurable. We had a connection, having told stories across differences in skin color, gender, culture, class and privilege, or the lack of it. We didn't erase our differences, and we didn't eliminate conflicted positioning among ourselves in relation to power; but we did create a space in which to engage with each other, sometimes to grapple with the conflicts and sometimes to reach across differences to hear and see each other in new ways. Each time we encounter each other, I remember the strong connections we had - and I can't help but smile.

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APPENDIX A

Closing Off Discourse Outside the Classroom Space

As I prepared to begin my yearlong study, my doctoral committee suggested that I apply for funding that would permit me to devote myself fulltime to the writing of my dissertation. I applied for a fellowship through the American Association of University Women (AAUW), an organization dedicated to advancing equity for women and girls through educational, economical, and political advocacy. I underwent a highly competitive selection process that evaluated the applicants on the basis of scholarly excellence, the quality and originality of the project design, and commitment to helping girls and women through service in the communities, their professions, and their research fields.

I was awarded one of fifty-eight 2011 – 2012 AAUW fellowship awards but I had to decline the fellowship. According to school policy, although my school system would "attempt" to secure a teaching position for me after a one year's leave of absence, no teaching position would be "guaranteed." As a single parent and sole financial provider for both my two children and myself, I could not jeopardize my livelihood.

My scholarly work has the potential to not only improve my school and community, but also holds the promise to improve the lives of my students and tackle the educational barriers they may face. It is crucial that critical thinkers like myself, who want to change and improve our teaching practices, have opportunities to talk to one another so that we can share ideas, share concerns about teaching practices, and collaborate in discussions

that cross boundaries and create spaces for new ways of thinking. Yet, instead of being encouraged to participate in scholarly teacher/researcher work, I was closed off to rich conversations and the exchange of writing and ideas with other teachers, scholars, and researchers.

So, as I conclude my study in my own classroom, and consider ways in which I as a teacher want to make changes and be powerful, I am going to look into ways in which teacher voices might be incorporated in the setting of district policies about leaves for professional learning. I want to see how we might be more proactive as a district in supporting teachers' initiatives to critically inquire into our curriculum, practices, and policies to examine ways in which learning of children of diverse socioeconomic, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds might be constrained. We need teachers with the energy and inspiration to pursue these kinds of inquiries that could lead to innovative and inclusive approaches to teaching and learning for all children.

APPENDIX B

Opening Up Discourse in the Classroom Space

In 2010 when I conducted my study, the Georgia Professional Standards for third grade social studies included discussing the lives of Americans who expanded the people's rights and freedoms in a democracy. Some of the historical figures my students were required to learn about were Frederick Douglass (civil rights), Susan B. Anthony (women's rights), Mary McLeod Bethune (education), Eleanor Roosevelt (human rights), Thurgood Marshall (civil rights), Lyndon B. Johnson (voting rights), and Cesar Chavez (workers' rights). The students were required to explain the social barriers, restrictions, and obstacles those historical figures had to overcome and describe how they overcame them. These particular social studies standards provided openings for me to create different discursive spaces in my classroom where my students and I could engage in powerful conversations that promoted our understandings, pointed us towards different meanings, and permitted us to look at difficult positions from different perspectives.

We were doing what (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 38) described as "reading for equity, to explicitly insert issues of power and inequity into our understandings of the world." There are different ways to "read for equity" (MacNaughton, p.38) and it was important for me to ask my students questions about what they felt, did, knew, and said. The students and I wondered how the stories of the historical figures we studied highlighted the voices of those groups of people who had been traditionally marginalized. We discussed the individuals in the text who exercised power and how their exercising of

power affected themselves and others; how those effects reinforced or challenged the unjust power dynamics. The students and I were able to open up discursive spaces that provided us "new paths of discourse that revealed to us new ways to deal with situations and make new connections with the world" (Foucault, 1988, p. 15).

I was also able to use the reading and language arts standards, such as using a variety of resources to research and share information on different topics, making and defending opinions about a text, stating a position and developing a point of view, and making connections (text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world), as my rationale for selection of excellent children's literature exploring themes of social justice to support our explorations of the lives and work of the historical figures designated in our curriculum. Following are both the lists of the texts we read and discussed, drawing on a critical literacy approach that Jones (2006) outlines in her text Girls, Social Class, and Literacy developed from her research with a group of girls starting in the first grade and following them through the fifth grade, and the social studies historical figures' texts.

Critical Literacy Text

How to Steal a Dog (O'Connor, 2007)

A Shelter in Our Car (Gunning, 2004)

No Bad News (Cole, 2001)

Something Beautiful (Wyeth, 1998)

The Lady in the Box (McGovern, 1997)

Social Studies Historical Figures' Texts

Lyndon B. Johnson (Benna, 2006)

Susan B. Anthony (Corey, 2006)

Frederick Douglass (Cunningham, 2006)

Eleanor Roosevelt (Eisenstark, 2006)

Cesar Chavez (Fitzwild, 2006)

Mary McLeod Bethune (Green, 2006)

Franklin Delano Roosevelt (Katzin, 2006)

Thurgood Marshall (Motil, 2006)