READING OTHERS, WRITING OURSELVES: THE CRITICAL CONSTRUCTION OF

COLLABORATIVE MEMOIR

by

HOLLY BROOKS ISSERSTEDT

(Under the Direction of JoBeth Allen)

ABSTRACT

Paulo Freire's (1970) pedagogy focused on an anti-authoritarian, dialogical and interactive approach to learning that aimed to examine issues of relational power. In addition, the fundamental goal was to place social and political critiques of everyday life at the centre of the curriculum. Building on the work of Freire and other significant contributors to critical literacy pedagogy, this collaborative study incorporated the reading of published memoirs with a group of high school students and their teacher as a springboard for dialogue about social, political and cultural issues. In addition, the study explored how autobiographical writing served as a tool for reflexive contemplation and critique of ideological positions.

INDEX WORDS: Critical Narrative Analysis, Paulo Freire, Collaborative Research, Critical Pedagogy, Dialogue, Memoir

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DEDICATION

To Baylor and Emily, my beautiful children. It is my hope to make the world you inherit just a

little bit better.   I love you beyond words.

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My heart is weak and unreliable. When I go it will be my heart. I try to burden it as little as possible. If something is going to have an impact, I direct it elsewhere. My gut for example or my lungs…When I pass a mirror and catch a glimpse of myself—small daily humiliations—these I take, generally speaking, in my liver. Other damages I take in other places. The pancreas I reserve for being struck by all that's been lost. It's true that there's so much, and the organ is so small. But. You would be surprised how much it can take. Sometimes I imagine my own autopsy. Disappointment in myself: right kidney. Disappointment of other in me: Left kidneys…I don't mean to make it sound like I've made a science of it. It's not that well thought out. I take it where it comes. When the clocks are turned forward and the dark falls before I'm ready, this, for reasons I cannot explain, I feel in my wrists. And when I wake up and my fingers are stiff, almost certainly I was dreaming of my childhood…I have to run them under the hot water, steam clouding the mirror, outside the rustle of pigeons. Yesterday, I saw a man kicking a dog and I felt it behind my eyes. I don't know what to call this, a place before tears. The pain of forgetting: spine. The pain of remembering: spine. All the times I have suddenly realized that my parents are dead, even now, it still surprises me, to exist in the world while that which made me has ceased to exist: my knees, it takes half a tube of Ben-Gay and a big production just to bend them. To everything a season, to every time I've woken only to make the mistake of believing for a moment that someone was sleeping beside me…Loneliness: there is no organ that can take it all.

~Nicole Krauss

FORWARD

The first time I read *The History of Love*, this passage so aptly described something I understand about myself but have always had trouble articulating. The words suggest a kind of delicacy with which I navigate the emotional landscape of my life and more specifically, my teaching, and the pain it inevitably inflicts. I imagine that there are many other careers that challenge the limits of the human heart. For instance, I am sure there are moments in a surgeon's life where the best of modern medicine and the intricate work of skilled and precise hands are not enough. A life is lost. And the wake of that loss reaches far beyond the operating table after the family has been notified and the scrubs sent for cleaning. But for the most part, physicians choose their career for the love of science, the love of medicine. Not the connection with the patient, who is often just a number on a computer generated intake sheet.

Teaching is different, at least for me. To me, teaching is not showing a kid how to outsmart the inane mind of the SAT writer, it is not a percentile ranking on an AYP report. It is not even the triumph of my most troubled, "at risk" student to finally pass a test without exercising a "recovery option." But I don't talk about this at school. It is impolite to make this distinction. We want to contend all teaching is important; all teachers are equal. It is pretentious to believe otherwise. But the English teachers with whom I most identify, the kind of teacher I believe myself to be, were teachers long before they ever entered a classroom. They came to the job for the love of kids. Not the love of literature (even though we do love literature), not the summers off (which for reasons I can never understand are rarely ever "off") and not for the money (while we keep holding out hope that one day our paycheck will match the hours we work.) No, we became teachers for the opportunity, however significant or insignificant it may

be, to brush the lives of children who sit before us everyday at a time in their life where they are most violently imprinted by their experiences and those they meet.

They cut us with their words, they scald our patience, they cause us to doubt ourselves and the significance of our work; they break our heart. And yet, we sit before them each day, glancing around the room in silent recognition of the complexity of the fragile lives contained in that small space and breathe in our gratitude that we chose this path—the girl in the back row who, unsure of herself and ever conscious of the movements of the boy beside her, brushes the strand of hair away from her eyes. The seemingly impenetrable expression on the face of the student near the door that has everyone convinced of his stoicism is losing his mom to cancer, the student on the front row who joined the wrestling team last year shifts in his seat, 150 pounds lighter than he was last year because another student called him a "fat ass" during a pep rally.

I am witness to this suspended moment, a moment overflowing with human frailty and the tiny details that make up a life. A moment I feel so deeply I often do not know where to direct the hit.

INTRODUCTION

I arrived home after a three-hour meeting at Starbucks with the English department chair of the high school where I would be teaching the next year. After four years of teaching intensive writing courses to high school seniors, Scott was developing a new program to meet the increasing demands of Bush's *No Child Left Behind* policy and the pressures to improve national test scores. I was hired to take over his writing program and he was assisting me in this transition. I was excited about the prospect of not only teaching intensive writing on a block schedule, but one of the unique features of this course was its emphasis on multicultural creative non-fiction and memoir texts in the teaching of writing, one of my particular areas of interest.

That evening, I sat down to review the materials he provided me in the hopes of designing a first draft of my syllabus for the fall. I was anxious to map out my course and text selections. As I was leafing through the stack of information, I came across a list of students that would comprise my classes. Finding these rosters among the papers was unexpected and surprisingly made my new job seem suddenly more of a reality. It was the first tangible connection I had to the school because my interview for the position was at the county office; my meetings with Scott were at Starbucks, and I had not visited the campus. The names on the list suggested what I intuitively suspected from innuendos during my conversations with Scott but had not confirmed: This school was almost entirely White.

I turned on my computer and searched the Internet for the published demographic information for this high school. There on the webpage, buried among the links for baseball

scores and school lunch menus, I find it: 96.3% White, 2.1% Asian, 1.53% Hispanic/Latina, .07 % other. Then, I noticed the median income per household was also listed: $83, 600. As I stared at these numbers I remembered a phone conversation with Scott in which he described Jackson as "The Great American High School"—a classification that had no significance at the time but now made me wonder about the connotation.

As I researched my new school and the community, I learned this area of Georgia had long been plagued by racial tension and power struggles among White and Black residents. For example in 1991, there were only 17 registered black residents living in Forsyth County, a very small number even in Georgia. Furthermore, it is a county slow to accept racial diversity and haunted by publicized racial tensions. There was a highly charged incident as late as 1987 involving hate groups such as neo-Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan, which attacked civil rights marchers in Forsyth County who were celebrating the recently established Martin Luther King Jr. holiday.

I turned back to the draft of my syllabus and stared at the grade portions I had haphazardly typed: Essays (55%), Short Writing Assignments (10%), Participation (15%), Final Project (20%). I wrote the course objective at the top of the page as defined by the school: "This course is an intensive seminar of varied modes of writing and review of texts which represent the experiences of a diverse population." I was struck by the irony of teaching text reflective of "experiences of diverse populations" to a mostly White student body. I paused, a bit overwhelmed by the task before me. I was a middle class White teacher charged to use multicultural texts to teach advanced composition in a predominately White high school, in a predominately upper to middle class suburban area in the Southern Bible Belt. I thought I should

draft a teaching syllabus to weigh the inevitable challenges before me: White (30%), Affluent (40%), Christian (25%), Southern (5%). My work was cut out for me.

PART I

Back-Story[i]

A story never occurs only in the moment; it has a context

CHAPTER ONE

Beginnings

Beginnings are intimidating. They are especially difficult for me because they establish linearity that I spend most of my time rejecting. I would rather have begun this study somewhere in the middle and marveled as it twisted and turned in uncertain and unmanageable directions. That approach would have been more befitting my ambiguous, disorderly nature. But, alas, as an academic I accepted the imperative of form even though I did what I could to resist them when appropriate as I made this qualitative trek. I struggled to begin in a way that did not betray my spontaneous tendencies and somewhat rebellious intent.

I am an English teacher and literature offered some impressive beginnings to serve as a guide, but none as impressive as *Moby Dick*. This was far from an original choice to serve as my model as it is recognized as perhaps the best-known opening line in American Literature—"*Call me Ishmael*." What I love about this beginning is not perhaps what literary critics and readers alike have found so captivating. I love it not for Melville's well-chosen biblical metaphor that immediately foreshadows so much about this character. Not for the uncertainty it poses as to whether or not this is actually his name. It is not even the abruptness with which it begins that seems at once direct and yet unpretentious. It is that Melville begins simply with an introduction, *"Call me Ishmael,"* that says before anything else happens, before the epic journey begins, *"We will begin on a first name basis."* The narrator does not take up a position of authority or claim knowledge of anything. Only, *"Reader, be my companion as I tell the story as I have experienced it."* Ishmael, a newcomer to whaling, who has admittedly turned to the sea

out of a sense of alienation from society, has many adventures. But, in the end, he is the only witness left to tell the tale and all others in the novel must be represented through his voice.

So I wanted to begin as Melville did—owning my subjectivity from the opening page. Making clear to the reader that while I attempted to write in a discerning and meaningful way, I exist in a world of comparative ways of knowing and mine is not superior. In the spirit of Ishmael, I conduct research because of the belief that "some certain significance lurks in all things, else all things are little worth, and the round world itself but an empty cipher" (p. 470). But even as Ishmael experienced, there were times I, too, was filled with self-doubt and lack of certainty. Many times during this journey I questioned my capacity to adequately represent this experience to others. *So it began like this…*

<div align="center">The Road Here</div>

Call me Holly. The road here was a long one born out a simple act of resistance to conventional teaching practices. While that resistance evolved into the inquiry herein, there are some specifics about me and my particular approaches to teaching that were really at the heart of this study. First, I fight for what I feel is right for my students, which is laden with my own particular social bias favoring democratic learning. I have a reputation for being obstinate if not downright combative toward those who hinder my efforts to create a democratic learning environment. I have often retooled and restructured my curriculum within prescribed standards in order to avoid texts and lessons I believed impeded the creation of an inclusive classroom. I try never to teach against my conscience and openly question discrimination and my own oppressive ideologies in front of my students and encourage them to do the same. I seek out texts and writing assignments representative of the experiences of minority perspectives even when viewed by my colleagues as an unnecessary departure from the curriculum. It is always a

professional risk when a teacher promotes educational practices that involve students in discussions and actions that critique sources of knowledge, question institutional practices, or run counter to norms and power structures within society (Lipman & Gutstein, 2001). Therefore, I am never at ease in my job.

Those who critique teaching ideological awareness believe by doing so, they are actually inscribing their own values. I agree. Teachers always present lessons from some kind of ideological position; however, I work diligently to articulate mine of which I am aware as clearly as possible to my students—in one-on-one discussions, through sharing my personal writing, in my responses to their journals, in my admission of social and political passions and positions in classroom dialogues. Again, this is risky. In naming myself, I often worry about crossing boundaries of professionalism and becoming too personal with my students.

Finally, I am fascinated by the power of human reason but am distressed at the tendency of humans, both individuals and a collective, to ignore reason and act only on emotion and prejudice. One of my central challenges as a teacher is how to manage the different subjectivities that collide in any given moment in my classroom. For example, when one student expresses an opinion that is clearly contradictory to another, I must decide how both voices are heard without allowing racism, sexism or elitism to have credence. I am constantly in a struggle to teach my students how to negotiate their various ways of knowing that are less oppressive.

This study materialized out of this pedagogical approach, the specific classes and student demographics of Jackson as well as the critical questions with which I grappled as an English teacher. Prior to designing this study, I had been recently hired by a White principal to teach in an all White department, in a nearly all White high school in one of the most affluent communities in Georgia. This was my first experience as a teacher or a student in such an

environment. At first glance, this would seem a particularly troubling scenario for a critical educator, but I admit it also seemed to offer exciting possibilities to expand my experience in critical inquiry, even as it filled me with uncertainty. I too am White. I too am a card carrying member of the dominant social class and am perceived as such so far as I can tell. I am a subscriber to Southern Living magazine, driver of an SUV, frequent shopper at J Crew, regular patron of the Atlanta Ballet, listener of country music on XM Radio and countless other things which situate me square in the middle of every White, southern suburban stereotype I know.   I knew I could not offer my new students an account of cultural experiences much different from their own. While my education, scholarly work and previous teaching experience provided me many resources from which to draw in creating a critically centered and relevant classroom in such an environment, I have very few direct links to the diverse populations that I celebrate in my teaching of literature and composition.

In addition, I came into my new job curious about how critical literacy pedagogies can help students to think in the complex ways authentic writing instruction demands. In other words, how can writing teachers help students with their own problems and discourses that emerge from encounters with text that we initiate? Any seasoned English teacher has an arsenal of essay prompts for literature designed to assist students in this process, prompts that presume to compare, contrast, or analyze the text with the students' personal experiences. But I have always found these sterile prompts do very little to encourage a student's creative or critical thought. The writing students produce from such prompts is evidence that the rhetorical choices I give students do not necessarily encourage critical thought or inquiry.

Little of my professional development in public schools over the years had addressed this issue. I came to critical theory as many have, in my personal and professional struggle to make

sense of what I observed in my classroom everyday and in searching for new methods of inquiry. My years as a writing teacher working toward the goal of helping students develop their own writing voice suggested that students, particularly those inexperienced in negotiating social problems and understanding a critical pedagogy, need to hear themselves and their fellow students thinking out loud before the writing process begins. I longed for instructional methods that supported a broader sense of literacy. I wanted an approach that engaged students not only as writers, but as readers, speakers and listeners who are going through the messy business of thinking through a problem, an idea, an ideological concept, or a textual dilemma rather than one which assumes those things are already resolved by some compartmentalized application. My students' voices needed to have public and unscripted involvement with other students, the texts, and me before I asked them to privately grapple with the solitary process of writing about it. So I wondered what kind of study might permit me to explore these issues while allowing a space for my critical priorities emerging in my new job.

My graduate work provided the greatest resources from which to craft my design and the necessary theoretical concepts that helped to fill the gaps between what I *wanted* to do and actually *how* to do it in my study. But this was a backward journey of sorts. My first two years of graduate school were spent testing the waters and canvassing the many theoretical positions available. Early on, I was attracted to scholars who questioned how power operates in the construction of knowledge. As hooks (1994) explains, "More than ever before . . . educators are compelled to confront the biases that have shaped teaching practices in our society and to create new ways of knowing, different strategies for the sharing of knowledge" (p.12). This involves rethinking a number of aspects of educational practices, ones I saw operating every day in the classroom, including who makes the decisions about what and how to learn, who does the talking

and who is silent, and what is taught and what is not. In addition, I found the work of critical educators who incorporated critical literacy goals through social action in the classroom held exciting possibilities for me in my classroom. This included helping students acknowledge their own racism (Michalove, 1999), wrestle with the religious influences in public schools (Hankins, 1999), study their own privilege (Blackburn, 1999), examine historical "givens" (Bigelow, 1995), and critique the "standard" represented by Standard English (Christensen, 1995). There were also scholars who taught me about empowering students who have been traditionally disenfranchised by public education (e. g., MacGillivray, Rueda, Martinez, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Critical theories also helped to articulate the relationship between knowledge and power, language and experience, ethics and authority, student agency and transformative politics.

Then my interests took a sharp turn when my coursework began to delve into postmodern and poststructuralist scholarship that insisted on multiple realities, the rejection of truth and never-ending deconstruction. I spent over a year reeling in the intoxication of being able to free myself from structure. But as my dissertation neared and my questions in the classroom persisted, I had to begin thinking again about the real life of an educator and not just the dizzy possibilities of postmodern musings. I began to worry about what meaning I could take away from my work in the classroom if framed by theories that denied the existence of truth and relished "an art of negation, a perpetual negation," (Lyotard, 1985, p.16) where "nothing can legitimately claim to possess a stable, autonomous identity" (Auslander, 1997, p. 28)—where, *truth* and *meaning* can never actually arrive as they are always deferred.

My experiences as a teacher produced a narrative so powerful, so profound and so real that I wondered how a politics of optimism could survive the underpinnings of such a slippery

theoretical slope. I wanted to situate myself within a paradigm that allowed my pedagogies to be real without being absolute, hopeful without being naive and democratic without lacking scholarly rigor. With that in mind, the connection between my early explorations in critical theory and my goals as an educator was apparent.

> One of the tasks of the progressive educator, through a serious, correct political analysis is to unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be. After all, without hope there is little we can do. For hope is an ontological need...The attempt to do without hope in the struggle to improve the world, as if that struggle could be reduced to calculated acts alone, or a purely scientific approach, is a frivolous illusion. (Freire, 1998, p. 3)

The center of Freire's pedagogy revolved around an anti-authoritarian, dialogical and interactive approach that aimed to examine issues of relational power for students and workers (McLaren, 2000). In addition, the fundamental goal was to place social and political critiques of everyday life at the centre of the curriculum.

It is only fair to note that some scholars argue that indeed Freire and other critical pedagogues do encompass postmodern thinking in their writing. Peters (1999) suggested there are "postmodern tendencies" in Freire's work including "emphasis on textuality, on the text and text analogues for understanding the world; his emphasis upon subjectivity, experience and culture; and, to some extent, his understanding of oppression and the exercise of power" (p. 117). However, I believe that there are different phases in Freire's writing. The early works were most influential to the work here, even though I acknowledge his later work perhaps reflected a greater inclination to encompass postmodern thought. While not particularly utilized here,

postmodern studies helped me to better understand "multiplicity of modes of oppression" and the importance of a "postcolonial politics of ethics and compassion" (Freire, 1993, p. xii).

Once my rationale for undertaking the study was determined and the theoretical frame was established, I began to look for ways to best address my earlier questions within the classroom itself. There seemed overwhelming evidence in the research that I read in my critical coursework, that student involvement and participation was essential to a move toward a democratic classroom. Freire (1970) believed that there must be a reconciliation of the hypocrisy of the "teacher-student contradiction. To resolve the teacher-student contradiction, to exchange the role of depositor, prescriber, domesticator….to remove the banking concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits" (p. 62). According to Shor (1992), one of the ways of addressing this dilemma is critically democratic pedagogies for self and social change, "a student-centered program for democracy in school and society that defines individual growth as an active, cooperative, and social process, because the self and society create each other" (p. 15). According to Beane (1997) society must have faith in the capacity of [students] to work out intelligent solutions to issues that face them. If schools are really supposed to play a crucial role in "maintaining and extending the democratic way of life" (p. 91-92) they must have the freedom to inquire and act upon the issues that impact their lives.

A study that included student collaboration seemed like a good choice, but a study in which my students were actually *co-researchers* offered a way to seek even greater understanding of the consequences democratic practices have on our beliefs about power and how it materializes within a classroom. Co-research with students offered opportunities to individually and collectively grow as students, teachers, researchers and citizens. "The pursuit of

full humanity, however, cannot be carried out in isolation or individualism, but only in fellowship and solidarity… no one can be authentically human while he prevents others from being so" (Freire, 1970, p. 73). Thus, I began to consider the particulars challenges of co-conducting a critical study with these particular students in this particular high school.

<div align="center">The Challenge before Me</div>

It is my belief that students mirror their own society—a society in which some forms of knowledge are privileged over others. At the heart of the problem is the cultural tendency to accept the ideologies of the dominant culture without critical examination. Often without examining the privilege or the power structures that create it, we think we must live by and strive for the values the "privileged others" have produced. It is a difficult matter to counter such deeply rooted beliefs and assumptions, particularly with populations of students who are part of a dominant social group and who lack the life experience of adults. However, I believe the classroom is one location to take up this challenge of confronting assumptions that preserve the status quo.

For Freire (1970), if knowledge is to be liberating, it needs to be systematized through study and grounded in ways that make sense of people's experience and enable them to play a full and active part in its construction. I was intrigued by the possibilities of a narrative inquiry methodology for accomplishing such objectives (Denzin 2001; Joyce and Tutela, 2006; Schrader, 2004). Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research method that has emerged in educational research (McVee, 2004; Connelly, Phillion, & Fang He, 2003; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2001; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Conle, 1999; Eakin, 1999; Davies, 1998; Bochner, 1997; McEwan, 1997; Clandinin, 1989) and particularly those conducted in Language Arts classrooms. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), "narrative inquiry is a way of understanding

experience" (p.20). Curran (2002) believed, "telling and listening to narratives are how we learn to translate, represent and interpret our experiences in the world" (p. 35). Denzin (1989) claimed "telling tales assists participants in making sense of how social interactions flow and how humans understand the seemingly related and/or unrelated nature of events" (p. 208). Narrative inquiry is useful in not only making meaning of one's own experiences but also situates one's experiences within a larger cultural and social framework. Furthermore, "when using interpretive methods, [narrative inquiry] can become a form of self-understanding or self-interpretation as it seeks to relate the stories …to the stories current in society at large" (Hones, 1998, p. 2).

This study also found possibilities in examining "story", that of others and ourselves, through narrative inquiry. The genre of personal memoir, already a component of my course at Jackson, offered some interesting possibilities for this, because memoirs often focus on life experiences that disrupt cultural norms, debunk harmful stereotypes and confront social ills. The increased popularity of memoirs is perhaps their ability to motivate and inspire change while maintaining the literary strength of illuminating specific aspects of the human condition. For example, the top selling memoirs of 2007 according to *The New York Times* bestseller lists, all focused on issues of poverty, forms of social alienation or political or religious oppression. Thus, the intersection of reading personal memoirs while writing them creates an interesting space for narrative inquiry and for studying both the literary and the political simultaneously.

I believe the reading and writing of memoir to be one location for exploring what Chomsky (1986) described as confronting how to clarify and better the world socially, politically, and culturally. Chomsky called this "Orwell's Problem": How oppressive ideological systems are able to "instill beliefs that are firmly held and widely accepted although they are completely without foundation and often plainly at variance with the obvious facts about the

world around us" (pp. xxv-xxvi). I argued in this study that Orwell's Problem can also be explored in academic settings using the reading and writing of memoir as one springboard for examination. Because reading and writing are both intensely personal and social, depending on their context, memoir reading and writing as examination of the self, past experiences and present ideological positions, are possible ways of enacting conceptual change in both individuals and within the collective learning community formed in the endeavor.

According to Miller (2002), "we read the lives of others to figure out how to make sense of our own, and in the process we also admit to our wishes for a future" (p.137). Murdock (2003) emphasized the emotional link between memoir reading and writers: "Reading another person's memoir gives the reader the opportunity to reflect upon *her* life's memories, possibilities, and chances for renewal" (p.80). She emphasized the fragmented and selective nature of memory, which, even when not always factually accurate, helps the reader to better understand an emotional past that is crucial in identity development. Furthermore, Murdock explicitly encouraged her readers to write their own memoirs. She believed in using the stories of others as inspirations to write our own stories so we might be able to "to bear witness to [our] life... to find community...to understand" (pp.111–12). Murdock's own autobiographical essays demonstrated how writing our stories can also be transformative. In her own memoir she wrote about memories of her mother who had recently died from Alzheimer's disease and how writing this experience helped her understand the complexities of their relationship and gain greater compassion and forgiveness. Murdock's example holds interesting application for writing in the English classroom.

Sharpening my Focus

My primary aim in conducting this study was to demonstrate how I generated my living theory of practice that was informed by my belief that classrooms can be critical environments that promote critical reflection and inquiry, and foster democratic relationships within a high school English curriculum. By continually reflecting on my own learning as a practitioner, I strive to create a pedagogy that is grounded in my ontological values of social justice and equality. I subscribe to a view that recognizes the value and dignity accorded to the human condition by acknowledging concepts of diversity and pluralism (Berlin, 1997).

From the time I accepted my position at Jackson, sitting opposite the English department chair at Starbucks making reference to Forsyth's " Leave It to Beaver" (1957) community, I knew that a story was forming—one that could only be told out of the hegemony such as this. It was important for me to immediately acknowledge that Jackson could potentially provide a racial comfort zone that might lessen my awareness for the importance of teaching a multicultural curriculum. I also knew there would be fewer opportunities to feel the outrage sparked by the injustices I have observed in more racially and ethnically mixed schools that sustained my critical focus in the past. I intuitively knew that teaching in a school where my student's lives so closely resembled my own cultural and social experiences would increase my need to be ever vigilant of the social dangers that such an environment—a more or less a closed society—could pose. Because the world, at least outside of Forsyth County, is becoming increasingly more diverse, I did not want to lose sight of a pedagogy that reflected the multicultural realities beyond my classroom at Jackson. Being in an environment that did not challenge my own ways of knowing was also compelling, and I was optimistic that teaching from a position of counter hegemony, while not without obstacles and frustrations along the way,

would enrich my existing critical values and empower my social justice convictions. I was encouraged that Freire (1970) seemed to think that it was possible for educators to have one foot in the system and one foot outside it; demonstrated by his position as Education Secretary in Sao Paulo while also aligned with those outside the system through social movements.

Because "theory emerges out of the intersection of the past and present; they respond to and are shaped by the conditions at hand" (Giroux, 2003, pg. 42). My conditions were finding how critical theory could be regionalized to explain any disparate experiential relations that existed between the oppressors and the oppressed who's racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, or economic situation differ from ideological orientation of those in power (Tyson, 1999). In order to examine this more closely, this study used the reading and writing of personal memoir as a location to begin a critical dialogue with my 12th grade students at Jackson, a predominately White suburban high school in Georgia, to investigate the following questions:

1. How did the students in a high school writing class use published memoirs as a springboard for dialogue about social, political and cultural issues?
2. How did students use the writing of cultural autobiographies for reflexive contemplation and critique of ideological positions?

In addition, my research account represented a self-study of my educational practice that was not a separate inquiry from that undertaken with my students who served as co-researchers, but rather integrated within the study such that the two were embedded.

Defining and Validating Memoir

Early in the design phase, it was useful to clarify some of the terminology of the study and the relevance of published memoirs to our critical work. There are many genres of writing that were part of both my English course, but our study focused only on those that were autobiographical in nature—the ones where the writer writes about his or her own life. Some recognized examples by major book sellers are *autobiography, confessional, credo, diary, journal, letter, log, memoir,* and *personal essay*. This study concerned itself in particular with the genre of *memoir*, a slippery term at best, as marketed by major publishing companies.   So what is memoir? This is indeed a loaded question.   Memoir is one of those forms that each time you attempt to define it, it overflows those boundaries because practitioners keep it alive by renewing it.

According to Beth Burch (1999), a memoir does the following:

1. Explores an event or series of related events that remain lodged in

   memory

2. Describes the events and then shows, either directly or indirectly, why

   they are significant to the present

Burch believes memoirs are effective because they center on a problem or focus on a conflict and explore reasons why and how the problem or conflict is significant and very often, have far reaching implications. Calkins (1994) in *The Art of Teaching Writing* contended that memoir is writing which selects "moments that reveal our own experiences of our lives" (p. 407) while Virginia Woolf defined memoir not as what happens, but to whom things happen. Contemporary memoirs tend to be more emotional and concerned with capturing particular scenes, or a series of events, rather than documenting every facet of a person's life (Zuwiyya, 2000). For the purposes

here, we used a cross section of definitions of memoir, rather than focusing on one, which served to extend the margins of what a genre can both endure and accomplish. Both trade and class-written memoirs in this study primarily focused on particular meaningful themes or events in one's past, often including a contemplation of those themes or events.

As memoirs gain popularity among readers and are sought after by publishers, there is growing debate over the ethics of truth and boundary of embellishment and exaggeration in autobiographical works. This was an issue we investigated early in the study. According to J. A. Cuddon (1991), "An autobiography may be largely fictional. Few can recall clear details of their early life and are therefore dependent on other people's impressions, of necessity equally unreliable. Moreover, [we] tend to remember what [we] want to remember. Disagreeable facts are sometimes glossed over or repressed ...." Many memoir authors agree that memory is difficult to validate. In his groundbreaking memoir, *This Boy's Life*, author Tobias Wolff (2000) noted that he and his mother disagreed over the attractiveness of a dog in the book. He allowed some disputed details to stand because he believed his book to be one of memory, and memory has its own story to tell. The question then becomes, if a piece of writing claims to be true, or at least an attempt at truth, is it held to a different standard of scrutiny than fiction? Is there greater ethical responsibility when you claim truth? Mary Karr claimed it is more about representing the "big picture"— "for me, the greatest pressure is to tell the truth to the best of my ability, knowing that it will be corrupt, and I'll forget things, and I'm self-serving" (Dotinga, 2006).

The theoretical perspectives of study accepted this dilemma and focused the attention instead on interpretation. This study was concerned more with context—how contexts affected our judgments and our interpretations upon which those judgments were based. Because our judgments were based largely on values and beliefs that are culturally determined, socially

constructed, and not explicitly articulated, the act of creating a narrative permitted us some creative latitude and afforded an opportunity to make the basis of our work open to inspection. The reading and writing of this study assumed the memoirist is guided by truthfulness -- not a claim to The Truth.

The decision to use memoirs as an anchor of the study was for their usefulness exploring narratives that arose from a dialogue *with* the self and *about* the self relative to others and within a particular cultural landscape. The texts were part of our dialogic process of speaking, reading, and writing, creating opportunities to address the self, others, texts, signs, and elements of the writer's culture. The published memoirs created a bridge to the writing of our own memoirs as "a process of self-alteration" (Fowlie, 1986, p. 275) in which the students experienced textuality as an exercise of critical consciousness. Constructing writing about the self allowed us to better understand our own subjectivity and situates us as individuals in society. We were able to "write" ourselves into the world and reflect critically on that position. Therefore, memoir writing was a way of synthesizing the reading of others and the writing of self providing a way to examine ourselves in relation to others and how others affect the development of the emerging self. As Green (1988) suggested, literacy is a synthesis of the "operational, cultural, and critical" (p.27).

It is important to point out that it is not the factual truth of our memories that were crafted into our collaborative memoir, but the emotional truth of our experience that revealed the influences on our lives. We began with the concept that memory is a particular angle of perception that shapes our sense of identity and helps us to examine how our memories establish our own subjectivies and reveal a sense of self.

Limitations of the Study

Bell (1997) reminded us that social justice education is both a process and a goal and is not without limitation. Some of the more minor limitations were that my study relied heavily on successful models of collaborative research: student participation and contributions in the classroom, general feedback during reading/writing activities and student responses to open-ended discussion prompts administered during the course. This meant that the quality of the data set depended on how often and how deeply my co-researchers participated and engaged. During the study it was a challenge and a responsibility to create situations and activities in which students were able to acquire skills, resources, attitudes and dispositions in order to participate fully as socially conscious catalysts for change by challenging unjust knowledge systems. Unfortunately, their response to such situations could not be predicted. Therefore, there was occasional unequal participation by the students; at times, some student researchers monopolized others. Finally, it was impossible to include all of the data collected, but the portions of data included and excluded were, in as many ways as possible, negotiated and selected by the identified researchers of this study.

I also feel there were theoretical limitations to our work that must be acknowledged. Although critical pedagogy is meant to advocate for social justice and transformation within education, there are also a number of critics (Gordon, 1995; Lather, 1991; Lynn 1990/2004; Murillo, 1999). While it was not possible to offer an exhaustive discussion of these critiques here, several of them helped to explicate a key concern I wrestled with here. Many critics of critical pedagogies believe that there is a disproportionate focus on systems of class that do not fully consider race, ethnicity, culture, language and immigrant status (Gordon, 1995; Ladson Billings & Tate, 1995; McCarthy, 1988; Solorzano & Solorzano, 1995; Valencia & Solorzano,

1997). They contend that critical pedagogues do not possess adequate language to talk about race and racial inequities in ways that are useful and ultimately libratory. (Gordon, 1995; Ladson Billings & Tate, 1995). Because of the demographics of this community and the school, this was a particularly troubling critique.

While I attempted to address this by including input and feedback from critical race scholars who contributed to our study (specifically our cultural consultants discussed in Chapter Two) and utilize literature that offered counter perspectives, the fact remains that I am still a White teacher talking about race. And the world is full of White researchers, academics and educators offering their interpretations of the 'race' issue, with only a handful that do it from the perspective of Whiteness. I did not put race in the curriculum at Jackson, it was already there. For example, Ellison's *Invisible Man* was a key text in my AP courses. I just attempted to analyze critically how the politics of privilege played out in my classroom. But the truth of the matter was that I could decide at any time during a critical dialogue with my students to abandon the discussion, never mention race again and it was likely that not a single one of my students would have noticed. Even if I said or did things during the study that angered my students, I was reasonably sure my race would have no bearing on why they were offended (McIntosh, 1988).

Conclusion

Tracing the steps that led to this study enabled me to provide my reasons for undertaking this examination in my own classroom. It provided the rationale for using the reading and writing of memoirs to initiate reflexive contemplation of dominant ideologies, grounded in the principles of critical theory. Transforming the core values of social justice and equality that underpinned my research into a living pedagogical practice, helped me to establish a standard by which I desire my research to be assessed. The aims and purposes of the research, which are

connected to my own theoretical values, contributed to the knowledge I gained during the research process. In addition, the knowledge constructed herein could not have authenticity without taking my own historicity into account and how it played a significant role in how this study was conceived, designed and executed.

Part II

Method and Design

Crafting the specific of a particular work

CHAPTER TWO

Overview

This critical study was designed as a collaborative, co-researched study by my students and me. We utilized narrative inquiry in order to meet our critical objectives. Our primary means of data collection were audio taped dialogues of our readings of published memoirs, writing samples from our cultural autobiographies and my research/field journal (photography, while not a data source, was used to expand the data collected.) These data sets were coded and analyzed using the processes of narratology, a specific form of narrative analysis that also looks at action described in the narrative. Finally, our data was represented in the form of a collaborative memoir written as an integration of our work in the study. See specific timeline of events in Appendix A.

All Things Considered

All things considered, student collaboration is a dynamic approach to educational research. However, this study was based more on general accounts of teacher/student collaboration as there were very few specific studies about high school students as co-researchers to reference at the time this study was conducted. Some of the models used were that of Freirean pedagogy and other collaborative research studies where the traditional relationship between educator and student is radically transformed. Buber (1992) and Arnett (1986) also encouraged teacher/student collaborations as a counter approach to the authoritative classroom.

> The teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in

turn, while being taught, also teach. In this process, arguments based on "authority" are

no longer valid. (Freire, 1970, p. 67)

My role of teacher and researcher demanded I move between the roles, sometimes explaining

theory and didactics, other times engaging as a member of our research collaboration. One

caveat, however, was that I had knowledge of what it meant to be a high school student, while

the students had no knowledge of what it was to be a high school teacher. Therefore, I had a

greater responsibility than my students to openly acknowledge power differences when they

appeared in the study, from data collection to the writing of the final manuscript.

At every step of collaborative inquiry, researchers draw from their own experiences to

inform the process and findings. As co-researchers, each of us brought with us our own history

of experiences, beliefs, and feelings that were represented to other members of our group in

specific ways; we brought our own contextualized, contradictory grounded truths. Even though

students were just beginning qualitative researchers while I had several more years of education

and research experience, this study used existing knowledge and experiences of both students

and teacher as an integral part of our design and implementation. Our role as researchers was not

only to acknowledge the differences of research experience and varying degrees of knowledge,

but to "legitimize such experiences in order to give those who live and move within them a sense

of affirmation and to provide the conditions [for us] to display an active voice and presence"

(Giroux, 1985, pp. xxi-xxii).

Critical Framework

The critical theoretical frame of our study is a tradition of research that focuses on "the

alleviation of suffering through the critique of sources of oppression" (Bentz and Shapiro, 1998,

p. 39). This critique is suspicious of the constructed meanings within our culture that serve

hegemonic interests.   For example, even though power is constructed in different ways, hegemonic environments without a significant other, serves to reinforce norms rather than challenge them. Critical theories focus largely on explanation of social relations and power. These theories help explain the ways in which culture is produced and reproduced through the use of various institutions, how systems of power are able to operate through these processes, and the ways we are able to make sense of the world. Critical work concerns itself in particular with power structures, forms of oppression and restrictions of freedom, manipulation and other modes of injustice. As critical inquirers, we had "the responsibilities of helping others, including those in the immediate setting, attend to and act upon a perspective" (Schram, 2003, p. 34).

This was a collaborative action study guided by Freire's (1972) claim that "authentic reflection considers neither abstract man nor the world without men, but men in their reflections of the world" (p. 54). Thus, the world in which we live is not only subjected to natural and historical evolution, but shaped and changed by us. Our task as critical researchers was to better understand our responsibility of being *with* the world rather than simply *in* it (Freire, 1970, p. 51). As such, we took the moment in which we were currently immersed, came out of it, reflected on it and intervened in it with the understanding that our situation is not inalterable, rather limiting and challenging (p. 57). For example, in our study, each conversation or written response demanded we assess the context of how, when and under what conditions the dialogue took place and then explicate the limitations, biases and influences of the outcome. In particular, our study focused on the critical possibilities within reading, writing and classroom dialogue to explore the multiplicity of perspectives and the indivisibility between humans and their world.

To assist us in doing so, we used Freire (1997) three pillars of the critical literacy campaign that he led in Brazil and later in Chile and in Africa. He saw the oppression of the

peasants, their passivity and fatalism, as a political means of control used by the elite. He used these pillars of literacy education to raise the consciousness and political awareness of the peasants to help them change their world through a firm knowledge of the community, the particular students, and the educator himself—each working from an understanding of the particular to the general, from the individuals to the community. In this study this meant taking into account the curriculum demands of the district, the academic priorities of the school, the interests, abilities and individuality of each student and my personal and professional objectives as a teacher. Each pillar created particular nuances, advantages and limitations that had to be taken into account at every phase of the study, particularly because we were charged with acknowledging our hegemonic position. The co-researchers and I designed the study with Freire's sequence in mind bringing in as much of the outside world into "our world" as possible. For example, we began by identifying ourselves and some of our contexts as described in Chapter Three. Then, we determined issues within the critical framework that concerned us as individuals, then as individuals of our research community and finally, those issues within our larger community.

We wanted to be ever cognizant of our social positions and positions of power. If hegemony is the way in which the dominant culture imposes its ways of knowing so that those who are oppressed by it begin to accept it as common knowledge (Giroux, 1997), then our attempts at a counter-hegemonic approach offered a vision of what "could be" if less oppressive ways of knowing and learning were in place. In the face of this hegemonic ethic, it was necessary that we recognized the existence and the real influence that it exerted on us all, socially and culturally.

We attempted to put Freire's pillars into consistent practice in our study and in our lives, translating it into real actions with meaningful outcomes. As an educator, I also tried to apply it in the teaching process – the learning value that I brought about in my classroom. But also in the social and political context of this study—whatever the setting or however hegemonic it was—since at no time were we in isolation of the outside world, exempt as members of the human race from participating in the larger culturally and socially diverse world.

<div align="center">Participatory Action Research</div>

To place the issue of social justice at the center of teaching is a challenging task, more so when students are white and socio-economically privileged. Facing this challenge called for strategies which avoided confrontation and moved towards shared understanding. Therefore, we used a methodology that allowed us to begin with the student's experiential knowledge, while helping them to accommodate the views espoused by others, specifically the authors of the memoirs, as a way of producing and consuming new knowledge. Participatory action research was a useful framework for designing a methodology for conducting our critical qualitative investigation because it provided an informal, subjective, interpretive, reflective and experiential model of inquiry in which all of us involved in the study were knowing and contributing participants (Hopkins, 1993). In addition, researchers negotiated meaning from the data and contributed to the selection of interventionary strategies. (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1990b, p. 122)

When designing our study we investigated the varying differences of opinion about what actually constitutes action research and thus participatory action research. In exploring the literature on practice as inquiry, there exists a range of possibilities of this methodology. Stephen North (1987), for example, believed that practice becomes inquiry only when practitioners identify a problem, search for possible causes and solutions, test those solutions in practice,

validate their observations and then disseminate their findings. In his understanding of action research, the making of new knowledge requires some distanced systematic investigation, done primarily as an end in and of itself. Therefore, the researcher/practitioner is essentially detached from teaching. In North's opinion, inquiry is not research unless it follows the rules of traditional quantitative methodologies.

While North's work was taken into account, what proved most useful to our study in the literature on action research were writings by Schon (1983, 1987) who saw practice as inquiry as a way to inform and change the on-going practice of teaching; this allowed me to play a double role as teacher and co-researcher. For Schon, inquiry occurs when the practitioner reflects both while engaged in action and subsequently on the action itself.

> Surprise leads to reflection within an action-present. Reflection is at least in some measure conscious, although it need not occur in the medium of words. We consider both the unexpected event and the knowing-in-action that led up to it, asking ourselves, as it were, "What is this?" and, at the same time, "How have I been thinking about it?" Our thought turns back on the surprising phenomenon and, at the same time, back on itself (p. 28).

This reflective practice offered several interesting techniques for conducting research because it assumes that there are no given, predetermined "answers" waiting to be uncovered through inquiry. All research findings, according to Schon, are someone's construction of reality. And yet the researcher must strive to test his or her constructions of the situation by critically examining, juxtaposing, and discriminating among alternate accounts of that reality, even while immersed in the study itself. This model of reflexive practice was compatible with our cooperative inquiry objectives and was chosen for the following reasons:

1. It increased the relevance of research to the concerns of the entire learning community.

2. It invited full participation by honoring the input of all stakeholders.

3. It improved the balance of the power between researcher and the participants.

4. It fostered a sense of ownership and broadened the commitment to the study.

Finally, our study was informed by literature on critical participatory action research, but it was used to develop a different methodology which my students and I termed *critical collaborative research*. Our work here was more or less a hybrid of what we found useful from similar methodological approaches outlined in this chapter combined with our own priorities for this project. We determined that we were, in as many ways as our experience allowed, *co-researchers* and *co-authors* committed to full collaboration. I attempted to note specific nuances of our methodology and design wherever possible which appeared outside the scope of the literature discussed.

We defined our collaboration as a means of identifying and resolving social problems, creating a more democratic perspective which involved all stakeholders in actively examining together current action in order to change and improve it. Our collaborative model was rooted in the work of social psychology, built on the action research and Group Dynamics models developed by psychologist Kurt Lewin in the early-to-mid 1900s. Working very much within a psychological paradigm for social change, Lewin created a space for "the development of reflective thought, discussion, decision and action by ordinary people participating in collective research on "private troubles" (Mills, 1959, p. 43) which they have in common. Lewin challenged borders of traditional paradigms by insisting on "no action without research; no research without action" (Adelman, 1981, 13). Freire (1970) called this critical relationship

between action and reflection "praxis," the bringing of implicit knowledge into consciousness and making it explicit.

At the center of Lewin's philosophy was the refusal to separate thought from action by insisting on the integration of science and practice and the recognition that social processes can be understood only when they are changed (Cherry & Borshuk, 1998). Our collaboration revolved around the relationships between individuals within our community and our research group, relationships between/among those our research group and the community, and relationships between us and our environment. This allowed theory and practice to intersect.

Our model was rooted in the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire (1970) as a response to the traditional formal models of education where the teacher is an authority figure "imparting" knowledge to the students who are passive recipients. Therefore, our collaboration revolutionized traditional approaches to knowledge - its ownership and use - and redistributing its power. This was particularly important in our study because I could not have been both teacher and co-researcher with my students under a traditional educational model. Freire (1970) contended the silenced are not just incidental to the curiosity of the researcher but are the masters of inquiry into the underlying causes of the events in their world. In this context, the students were moved into a position of authority, out of silence, and were part of collaboration built on mutual respect. According to Comstock and Fox (1993), there is in inextricable relationship between truth and power.

Power includes the ability to define what is factual and true, and the more powerful are able to impose a conception of the world that supports their power..... . Participatory research is a method of destroying the ideological bases

of current structures of power by giving a voice to those who dwell in what Freire

... calls the 'culture of silence'. (p. 209)

Our collaboration was an attempt at a radical approach to education and to power, what Freire

(1970) calls "liberating education," with the intent of not only challenging structures of power

but actually changing them.

In addition, our cooperative was a "model for empowerment" (Jean and Hildegard Goss-

Mayr, 1990) which assisted us with community building and preparation for cooperative action.

Our collaboration offered a dual process of awakening and formulating understanding. It

allowed us to become aware of the nature and dynamics of the socio-cultural issues under

scrutiny, and of the possibilities for transforming them. In Freire's (1970) words, "liberating

education consists in acts of cognition, not transferals of information" (p.66). These acts of

cognition are brought about through a process of "critical and liberating dialogue' and 'praxis'."

Therefore, education has to begin with "the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by

reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students"

(p. 46). This, ultimately, was our goal in every aspect of our study.

<div align="center">Students as Co-Researchers</div>

In a study conducted by *Guardian* entitled "How I'd like Schools to be," the top five

responses included "being listened to." While student needs have changed over the years, as

have their identities as communicators, citizens and consumers, school structures remain largely

unchanged (Burke & Grosvener, 2003). In order to promote educational change and create new

knowledge of schooling, research and inquiry must involve partnerships and participation among

all stakeholders (McLaughlin, 2004), including students. As Freire (1970) argued, "people who

would normally be considered objects of … investigation should act as *co-investigators*. The

more active an attitude [people] take in regard to the exploration of their thematics, the more they deepen their critical awareness of reality and, in spelling out those thematics, take possession of that reality" (p. 87).

There is a growing body of research suggesting the benefits of student contributions in school evaluation and school improvement (Fielding & Bragg, 2003; Rudduck & Fludder, 2004; Oldfather &Thomas, 2000; Johnson, 2000;). Students as Researchers (SaRs) is a progressive approach to qualitative studies wherein researchers actively listen to student views and support student-led and student-collaborated research (Naylor & Worrall, 2004; Fielding & Bragg, 2003; Raymond, 2001). Such research indicates that changing school structures, priorities, or curricula is unlikely to lead to sustained improvements in student engagement, motivation and attainment until the students are perceived as partners in this change.

Students as researchers is consistent with the aims of critical and emancipatory work because it seeks to explore and generate new power relations. SaRs also demonstrates a commitment to collaboration, inclusion and democracy and builds momentum establishing a shared purpose. Furthermore, practice-based learning theories focused on the construction of identities (Arnot et al, 2004) suggest that citizenship cannot be learned in isolation but is enacted as a community of practice. Freire (1970) said that learners should be encouraged "to name the world and change it…once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new naming. Men are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action—reflection" (p. 76).

Freire's (1970) writing about education as a dialogical process was unequivocally about the need for "the objective transformation of reality." He insisted, "To dismiss the role of subjectivity in the struggle to change structures," you need not "combat subjectivist immobility."

In his words, he was promoting "neither objectivism nor subjectivism, nor yet psychologism ....., but rather subjectivity and objectivity in constant dialectical relationship" (p. 27). For example, there is a reciprocal relationship between subjectivity and objectivity, you cannot have one without the other. Furthermore, he believed research should give voice to those it seeks to benefit.

> Research tends to be owned and controlled by researchers, or by those who, in turn, remain powerless to influence the processes of information gathering…and the dissemination of finds are usually the subjects of the research, those very people the research may purport to serve. (Brechin, 1993, p. 73)

Our collaboration met both ends. Researchers served a dual role as participants.

Student researchers challenged models of education where the educator holds a dominant position of power and is the "sole arbiter of what counts as knowledge" (Mumby, 1993, p. 20). We assumed that as researchers and participants we constituted a particular community interested in questions that emerged from a given context in which we played various roles. Once those questions were established, we guided each other in problematizing them—that is, situating them into a wider theoretical context (Thiollent, 1994). Because students were both researchers and participants, they were involved in all of the various stages of the research process-establishing secondary research questions, collecting data, implementing interventions, analyzing data, validating and interpreting outcomes, and disseminating results.

<div align="center">Published Trade Memoirs</div>

Once our methodology was established, we began to look at components of design. Because the study took place during a regularly scheduled class, it incorporated portions of the curriculum already in place. The memoirs utilized in the course were useful in the study because

they focused on personal perspectives about chaos and community, experience, and identity engaging in analyzing social and media constructions of self and groups—appropriate tools for a critical exploration. Nancy Miller claimed, "It takes two to perform an autobiographical act—in reading as in writing . . . the writing autobiographical subject—female or male—almost always requires a partner in crime—and often that partner is the reader" (p. 2). Readers have a heightened sense of self identification when reading memoirs because they serve as "…an aid to memory… In this sense what memoirs do is support in the act of remembering. Memoirs then, should be understood not as a proliferation of self-serving representations of individualistic memory but as "an aid or a spur to keep cultural memory alive" (pp. 13-14).

We read six published trade memoirs selected out of a list of possible reading for the course for their usefulness in understanding and telling diverse life stories (Propp, 1968; Stacks, 1974). We selected these texts for their ability to depict a cross section of people and experiences that "construct particular kinds of representations with their own conventions" (Atkinson and Coffey, 1997, p. 47). The selection and reading of these texts not only provided a foundation for memoir writing, but also initiated dialogue about critical issues that were the focus of this study. Finally, these memoirs provided a basis for establishing some writing guidelines/criteria developed by the research group.

We read the memoirs in the order listed in the following section, with periodic audio taping of class dialogues. However, once the reading of a particular book was completed, the text continued to be a reference for writing activities and the working criteria for writing meaningful and effective memoirs. Audiotapes of the instructional and investigative stages of this research project were used to verify that the process was being implemented successfully and provided a method of self-evaluation of instructional activities. In other words, many times

during the study, I would review the tapes to ensure that all performance standards were being met and there were not sustained departures from my prescribed curriculum requirements. If I discovered that the goals of the study seemed incongruent with my course objectives, I would make adjustments the next day. For example, one particular day I noticed that we had recorded twenty minutes about various categories of college scholarships—a tangential debate that arose out of an on-task discussion about socioeconomic status and the "fairness" of HOPE scholarship. The next day, I was more aware of redirecting any such diversions. The audiotapes were transcribed completely with the objective of noting the participants' use of reading materials to satisfy an inquiry of ideological positions and attitudes as well as a means of establishing criteria for writing our own memoirs.

In addition, we utilized specific techniques for reading each memoir which in turn, was an instructional strategy of critical inquiry. We consistently practiced three methods of approach to our reading of memoirs.

Multiple Reads: There were many times during the study that we conducted multiple and close readings of a text. A self-constituting individual is able to select and evaluate ideas, values, forms of behavior, cultural forms, institutions, and social practices in a critical and discriminatory mode, to make them her or his own, and to engage in a process of self-discovery and self-development. This is a complex process that does not always occur with the first pass at the text. At many times during the study, my co-researchers and I would read aloud, sometimes several times, a particular passage or section of the text. This helped us to focus on nuances that we might have otherwise overlooked during skimming or a first read.

Annotation of Text: On first readings, we annotated our own text and upon group or subsequent readings, we added annotations beside our initial ones to show concretely how our thinking was validated or changed when that part of the text was revisited. While the objectives for how we were reading (as much through a critical lens as possible) was clearly defined, the style of annotation was left to the individual. Some students wrote copious notes in the margins, while others used highlighter pens and page markers.

Questioning: The formulation of questions is the cornerstone of critical work. We focused on questioning that disrupted the assumption that answers are much more important than the questions by using inquiry to delve deeper into the understanding of the human experience. During each reading, we kept a log of questions either in our book or in a separate notebook and then sought to evaluate the critical merit of those questions to our study in our group discussions. It was the questions from our reading that actually directed each chapter of our co-constructive critical narrative.

Text Selection and Rationale

We selected trade memoirs which reflected events of a single life, but experiences that could be placed within a larger social context. We exhausted annotated bibliographies of popular memoirs offered by book sellers that also met course requirements, to locate texts that met this objective so that we could "hear" stories different from our own, stories that challenged our ways of knowing. Once we reviewed our lists, we ranked the social themes that we felt were most in need of "action" and change within our immediate and extended community. We selected the following titles informally by group discussion which focused on which "themes" were of concern and where we felt change was most needed. Once we finalized our selections,

we compiled our comments to establish a rationale for our choices. These trade memoirs served as a forum for integration of dialogue and inquiry-based writing activities.

1. *Night* (Weisel, 2006): Very few books which center on religious oppression are approved for reading in public schools in the South—particularly those by Jewish authors. *Night* is a rare glimpse of the life of a Jew during The Holocaust and offers examination of genocide, human atrocity and the effects of such widespread prejudice and intolerance.

2. *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood* (Ray, 2000): The research group was particularly interested in the relationship among consumptive cultures/environmental destruction/poverty. We decided as a group to see the documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* (Guggenheim, 2006), a decision that consequently landed me in the middle of an ugly media controversy in the school district (some members of the community publicly calling for my resignation), thus, suggesting this was an appropriate choice for our study.

3. *Autobiography of a Face* (Grealy, 1994): One of our concerns was addressing the assumption that oppression is limited to race, class, gender, socioeconomic status and sexual orientation. This book focused on the body as a category of oppression which had immediate significance to them. This book offered rich possibilities to discuss perception, cultural definitions of beauty, subjectivity, and how and by whom stories of oppressive experiences are told.

4. *Me Talk Pretty One Day* (Sedaris, 2001)*:* What drew us to this memoir was the quote by the author, "this is ultimately about the inability of humans to communicate"—one of the underpinnings for our theoretical framework. We were particularly interested in how emancipation is possible when it seems so few people will listen to those whose opinions

they oppose. We were also drawn to the gay themes of the text and the forthrightness with which the author writes about his lover.

5. *Memoir of a Race Traitor* (Segrest, 1999): One of our early discussions when designing this study included the way in which oppression is justified, explained, even rewarded. We also discussed hierarchy of oppression—are some "isms" worse than others? Are racism, sexism, and homophobia all different facets of the same bigotry? Is there such a thing as 'acceptable' discrimination?

6. *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (Nafisi, 2003)*:* Despite the cultural structures imposed by the regime in Iran, the women contested its patriarchal premises through a book club of Western canonical literature. The students and I were drawn to the potential for this book for our study primarily because Nafisi wrote, "Yet, while these measures are meant to render women invisible and powerless, they are paradoxically making women tremendously visible and powerful. … Every private act or gesture in defiance of official rules is now a strong political statement." This was precisely at the heart of our study—finding and claiming power when it would seem you are in a position of powerlessness.

Each memoir was read in the above sequence which the students arranged in increasing order of our perceived difficulty of the text, both in length and subject complexity.

Narrative Inquiry

In this critical study there were dialogic interactions with the text, each other and with ourselves. As discussed earlier, one way that we ordered our study and created meaningful units of our experiences was through story, or narrative. All the researchers in this project agreed that narrative is a way in which we structure our life experiences. Some researchers have focused on the narrative approach as a method of inquiry (Carter, 1993; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990;

Gudmundsdottir, 1997, 2001), a research genre situated within the qualitative or interpretive research family. Others have claimed that the narrative approach is not a method but, rather, a frame of reference in a research process, wherein narratives are seen as producers and transmitters of reality (Heikkinen, 2002). In this study, we subscribed to the former.

Narrative inquiry (Bal, 1985; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) was used in our collaborative CPAR study to explore personal histories and ideologies of co-researchers in an effort to understand who we were at the time of the study— what we believed influenced our values and actions. The 'evidence' consisted of narrative accounts of significant moments of both our past and present which helped us understand our ideologies and provided insight into how we perceive, evaluate, judge and understand particular individuals and situations as well as re-imagine those positions. It is through narrative inquiry that we were able to disrupt existing ideological positions and explore new ones by literally "writing through" this process.

Narrative inquiry was used as a strategy for situating the lives and stories of the research group. Central to this approach was a focus on voice, silence, reflection, and action (Belenky, 1986; Blake, 1997; Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Rogers, 1993); notions that are more completely captured and expressed through narrative. Rather, the analysis of how deeply and profoundly race, ethnicity, class, and gender shape perceptions, assumptions, and expectations, a central tenet of critical theory, was used to guide the narrative inquiry, and help apply the insights gained from the inquiry itself. Thus, from this perspective, my co-researchers and I explored and described the particular contexts in which the narrative and story were used not only to create pictures of one's self, but also to construct knowledge and understanding (i.e. personal theories) about literacy and language learning.

There are several forms of "stories" told in this study. The first are the stories that participants and I told during classroom conversations—in particular those personal analogies and metaphors expanded our understanding of textual themes and the "stories" of other researchers as well as articulating our ideological perspectives. The second are the stories constructed in our writing in which we narrated particular events of our lives in acts of recalling and retelling. We also told our stories by our interactions with others in the research community; our body language, our voice intonations, our word choices. Many of these stories were "read" only by perception and without tangible record while others were "read" through audio taped discussions, text on paper, or photographic images. All of the stories, however, told us more about ourselves and situated us in relationships to others.

Research Site

This study was conducted in Cumming, Georgia in Forsyth County which lies on the western banks of Lake Lanier, about 35 miles from the city limits of Atlanta, an area heavily populated with sprawling new home developments and golf course communities. It still is an area with some of the largest privately owned land tracts in Georgia and until recently, its biggest employer was a poultry-processing plant. The public school system is now the county's largest employer (4,000 employees) and is an integral part of the community.

Forsyth has a long history of racial tension and violence dating back to 1912 when an 18 year old White woman was beaten and raped and, before she died, named three Blacks residents as her attackers. All three were convicted. One was lynched; the other two were tried and hanged before a jeering crowd. There were so many threats waged against the remaining thousand or so Blacks in the county that they all moved out and there was not a single Black resident living in Forsyth until 1989. On January 17, 1987, a racially mixed group of about 75-

90 individuals staged a small brotherhood march in honor of the birthday of civil rights leader, Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., in the county seat. That march was broken up by a rock and bottle throwing group of about 400 counter-demonstrators, lead by Ku Klux Klans-people. The breakup of that march prompted another, one of the biggest civil rights marches the South had seen since the 1960s, which took place the following Saturday. There were 15 to 20 thousand civil rights marchers, a thousand counter-demonstrators and two thousand National Guard and law enforcement personnel.

Forsyth was, for many years, considered a "sundown" (Lowen, 2005) community that systematically excluded Black and minority residents from living there or passing through after the sun went down. The implication was that Blacks were permitted in these communities to provide unskilled labor to the whites during daylight hours, but were not permitted to reside there because of institutional racist practices. Among these practices were local banks refusing housing loans to minorities, restrictive covenants agreed to by real estate agents, White vigilantes and organized White Supremacist groups who literally ran Blacks out of the community, and fraudulent land repossession in a determined area from minority landowners by means of illegal foreclosure. Demographic changes did not really occur in Forsyth County until the early nineties. Despite its rapid population growth in recent years, it is a county still overshadowed by a pervasive racist reputation.

In the 1990's, Forsyth was the second-fastest growing county in the nation. Today, that growth has more than doubled and it still ranks in the top 10 fastest growing counties in the Southeastern US. In the 2005 census, the county was still 94 percent white and its growth is mostly explained by the droves of white people moving in. For every black person and every 10 Hispanics new to Forsyth in the 2000s, there were approximately 100 new white residents, most

relocating from other areas of Atlanta. This trend could suggest that perhaps White residents were seeking "Whiter" housing as Atlanta and the surrounding suburbs are becoming more racially diverse. Forsyth County is an interesting location for a critical study because it remains one of the most affluent, named as the 13th "richest" county by Forbes Magazine (Woolesy, 2008) in 2008, and racially homogenous counties in the state of Georgia.

The high school where the study was conducted was built in 1989 and nearly tripled its capacity over the years by adding over 50 portable classrooms. Because of this, some students and faculty went an entire day without ever being in the main building creating a kind of fragmentation. In my first few weeks at Jackson, I noticed this feeling of fragmentation was pervasive throughout the school. Some of my observations distinguished this school from others where I have taught: Teachers did not gather to socialize during lunch or attend an off campus happy hour on Friday afternoons, the stands at athletic events had very few students and I rarely saw non-athletes wearing clothing promoting the school logo or mascot, cultural and club events—with the exception of Fellowship of Christian Athletes and DECA (both of which held the record for highest membership in the state)—had sparse participation and attendance, the campus was vacant minutes after the bell rang in the afternoons as no students milled around once the school day ended, the school lacked the kind of unity and investment in the collective school culture I have witnessed in other schools.

Another thing overwhelmingly apparent was this school district's affluence. Take for example the bus system. Riding the bus was an unmentionable at Jackson, social embarrassment akin to bumping into your parents on a date—something to be avoided at all costs. Students went to great lengths to find other ways of getting to and from school. By far the most passionate school topic and in fact the biggest point of contention with parents was what was

unaffectionately referred to as "the parking issue." I saw this phrase on the website; heard it echoed in the halls and over the PA system, and read page long blogs about it in the school newspaper. The "parking issue," simply stated, was that there were only a quarter as many parking spots (assigned by lottery) on campus as there were students with cars—most of them newer and nicer than those in the teacher's parking lot. In 2005, they erected a new Methodist Church next door to the school that capitalized on this and sold 250 of their parking spots to Jackson students for $100 a year. They sold out in a matter of hours, an easy $2500.00.

The affluence manifested itself in other ways. There were drug dogs on campus in the first two weeks of school and the confidential material circulating throughout the school about the number of students in possession of and using Class A drugs was staggering. Students who sat before me in class wore expensive clothes, shoes and jewelry and talked up luxury summer vacations that sound more like celebrity destinations than those of suburban families in Georgia. In faculty meetings, the administration mentioned that one of their highest priorities was keeping cell phones, IPods and laptops out of view during the school day—I did not, in my entire time at Jackson, encounter a student who did not own all three. At Jackson, it was fairly safe to assume all students could buy their lunch, a new book, an athletic uniform, a field trip or activity fee or a gown for graduation. If there was assistance or consideration made for students in lower income brackets, I never heard it mentioned or saw reference to it in an email.

There was an obvious elitist attitude about academics at Jackson. It offered both AP and IB curriculums, heavily promoted and funded by the district. The school offered Honors, College Prep and Technical diploma designations. Less than 10% of the student body was enrolled in the technical degree program and I doubt it was coincidence that technical classes were underscored in course offering publications and housed in the back of the building not

visible from the parking lot or the street. ISS (In school suspension) was also in the "vocational" building. It was not unusual for juniors and seniors to take the maximum amount of AP and Honors courses and academic competition was fierce. In my first year at Jackson, the margin among students competing for a spot in the top 10 rank came down, literally, to seconds before the ceremony and well after the program had been printed. The student who had steadily held her position as Valedictorian for most of the year, if only by a fractional margin, sobbed through the entire graduation ceremony after the school announced she had ranked 3rd in her graduating class. In protest, she refused to rise with the other graduates to receive her diploma. The news came only hours after she had written her commencement address.

Jackson prided itself on being the most advanced technological school in the state funding whiteboards in every class, new laptops for every teacher, hundreds of digital cameras and expensive video equipment, plasma televisions in every common area and in several classrooms, and paperless communication including grading and reporting. Parents were expected to check email and students were required to use home computers on a regular basis for assignments.

In addition, the study was conducted in a portable classroom over 100 yards from the permanent high school. I mention this because I felt the environment had both beneficial and detrimental influences on our work. Conducting our research in an isolated environment separate from the main structure housing nearly 2000 students each day allowed for fewer disruptions and only a negligible amount of noise. This was particularly conducive to audio recording and on days we required quiet to think and write. Detrimental because on many days my students were trekking through rain, wind, high humidity and even sleet to get to our classroom. Once in the classroom they were subjected to the unpredictable temperatures of our

faulty window unit; the room was sometimes biting cold, other days sweltering hot. This often made the students irritable and I believe less willing to give full participation than if they had been physically comfortable.

We collected most of the data in my portable classroom. The data primarily focused on what occurred within the learning community during class. For the purposes of this study, community is defined as a "geographically delineated unit within a larger society…which is small enough to permit considerable cultural homogeneity, diffuse interactions and relationships between members, and to produce a social identification by its members" (Berg, 2001, p. 233). The motivation to choose my own classroom as a research site stemmed from the understanding that schools are often contexts which fail to illustrate "full and equal participation of all groups in a society" (Bell, 1997, p.1). As such, I recognized my school for reasons previously detailed as a possible location where examining sociocultural perspectives of this community might be an opportunity to confront critical issues and advance social justice.

My class met every day for 90 minutes from 9:05 to 10:35 beginning the first week in August and ending the third week in December. Data was collected almost every day during this time. There was not a set schedule of time data was collected. Some days we were able to devote the entire 90 minutes to the study and other days that time was disrupted by testing, modified bell scheduled, assemblies, etc. Because the study was an imbedded part of my daily lessons, in other words, I designed all of the work we did around the performance standards for my class, the only significant difference between this and my other classes was audio taping and the continual coding of data. The memoirs, writing assignments, class discussions and feedback/assessment given could have been part of any semester class. To an outsider visiting my class, it might have been difficult to detect a difference from this and my other classes. I do

not believe it was apparent to anyone a study was even in progress.

Co-Researchers

The co-researchers in this study were between the ages of 17-18 and were in the first semester of their senior year. Because this was a collaborative research project, I invited the students in my 12th grade English class to participate as co-researcher for my dissertation. All students who were part of my class were invited to participate by way of consent form the first week that classes met in August. All students in my class were required to take this course for graduation. Therefore, this study was conducted within the context of an existing setting already established and operating outside the design of this study. There was no exclusion criterion for participation.

All students received parental consent and were clearly advised that non-participation would in no way affect their grade or workload by way of consent form. Only those students who returned both signed consent forms by the deadline of September 3, 2006 were included in the study. I offered participation in all three of the sections of the courses I taught that semester with prior notification to students that the section with the highest number of signed consent forms (with a possible total of 22 per class) would be chosen for the study simply for reason of providing the most data. I also informed students that should all classes return all consent forms, the class would be chosen by a random drawing. They were also informed that should the class with the most consent forms returned not include ALL students in the class, I would arrange class discussion groups into smaller groups where students who were participating would be the only ones audiotaped.

I received 92 signed consent forms by the deadline (100% return) and therefore selected the research group by random drawing. The research group chosen had 18 students enrolled at the time the study began and met in the middle of the school day.

Each co-researcher made a year long commitment to designing our study, collecting and analyzing data and writing the results of our work. They met two days a week after school during the months of writing up data from 3:30-4:15 in my room. Furthermore, they commited to one meeting after graduation to review the final manuscript. When the study began, I anticipated that we would co-publish any articles derived from this manuscript, but the students were unanimously against this. All of students wished to have pseduonyms and some were particularly concerned with "name anonymity" because they had already received acceptance letters to attend UGA and feared their comments might somehow make them known to UGA faculty in the future. Therefore, students selected psudonyms for themselves to ensure as much confidentiality as possible.

The demographics of my co-reserachers is a relevant, perhaps even central aspect of our critical work. I conducted a survey before our research began. I completed this survey as well and shared my answers with my co-researchers. It was important to all of us to situate ourselves within our critcal framework and reveal any subjectivies which might influence our work. All eighteen students of my class identified White. None identified multiracial. There were eight males and ten females. Sixteen of my students lived with both biological parents. Two live with one biological parent and/or one step-parent. All eighteen students claimed their parents (either biological and/or step that they considered guardians) held a bachelor's degree or higher. Fifteen lived in a dual income home. All of my students identifed able bodied. Sixteen of my students nameed themselves "Christian/Prostestant", one "Catholic" and one "Non-Practicing". Seventeen of my students identifed heterosexual, and one identified homosexual. Finally, all of my students ranked academically in the top 20% of their class and all had plans to attend a four year college upon graduation.

Data Collection

No one data collection method is ideal for every situation. Therefore, it is preferable to use multiple methods whenever possible. Using multiple methods to assess the same outcomes provided me a richer, more detailed picture with which to explore the research questions. Data was collected for the research from the following: (a) critical dialogues, audio-taped sessions that recorded discussions of our reading experiences with trade memoir (b) collection of my co-researchers' writing assigned intermittently with the reading of trade memoirs (b) my daily research journal in which I recorded my own observations during the study and implementation of activities. The following details more about each of the data.

Critical Dialogues

A dialogue is a forum that draws participants from as many parts of the community as possible to exchange information face-to-face, share personal stories and experiences, honestly express perspectives, clarify viewpoints, and develop solutions to community concerns. Unlike debate, dialogue emphasizes listening to deepen understanding. Dialogue invites discovery. It develops common values and allows participants to express their own interests. It expects that participants will grow in understanding and may decide to act together with common goals. In dialogue, participants can question and reevaluate their assumptions. Through this process, people learn to work in collaboration. We defined effective dialogues do the following:

1. *Move towards solutions rather than continue to express or analyze the problem.* An emphasis on personal responsibility moves the discussion away from finger-pointing or naming enemies and towards constructive common action.

2. *Reach beyond the usual boundaries.* When fully developed, dialogues can involve the entire community, offering opportunities for new, unexpected partnerships. New partnerships can

develop when participants listen carefully and respectfully to each other. A search for solutions focuses on the common good as participants are encouraged to broaden their horizons and build relationships outside their comfort zones. (Much of this was aided by critical consultants discussed in Chapter III)

3. Share local history and its consequences for different people in today's society. The experience of "walking through history" together can lead to greater understanding.

4. Make attempts to connect with the authors of our memoirs. Understanding can lead to greater empathy and new perspectives.

5. Aim for a change of heart, not just a change of mind. Dialogues go beyond sharing and understanding to transforming participants. While the process begins with the individual, it eventually involves groups and institutions. Ultimately, dialogues can affect how policies are made.

Twenty-one, 30-minute dialogues were conducted during the reading of each published memoir. We read approximately one memoir every three weeks. There were three sessions per memoir as we divided the reading into thirds. The sessions were audio-taped and transcribed immediately after the dialogue took place. The coding of data followed the review of transcripts and preceded the next reading/dialogue. This data set offered our only account of our interactions with each other and the texts we read during the study. Conversely, the writing was individual.

Co-Researcher Writing

Important to the development of writing skills is the longitudinal development of critical writing as we progressed throughout the course. In addition, writing was a useful artifact in identifying sociocultural attitude and perception changes. Co-researchers collected their writing during the entire study. As with the reading assignments, the writing assignments of this study were designed to encourage researchers to challenge existing knowledge systems by carefully

examining particular ways knowledge is constructed, who benefited from that knowledge and whose values and beliefs are reflected as a result. To this end, we are challenged through writing to look at our own underlying assumptions, preconceptions and ideologies. We use writing to see how knowledge is produced over time---becoming static, thus, providing psychological defenses that blind us even in our own communities. And, finally, we are charged to consider that we are capable of opposing some knowledge that is upheld by even very powerful majorities. I designed the writing in this study as a tool to increase awareness of social justice issues, encourage written self-reflection as a form of unpacking long held beliefs and assumptions, and promote self-efficacy as a way of identifying social problems and seeking solutions to those problems.

One of the pivotal writing assignments in this study is a *cultural memoir,* similar to those used in conjunction with photography by Allen and Labbo (2001) as a means of learning more about ourselves as cultural beings in order to become more culturally responsive within our immediate and larger community. Through this activity, which is a working and progressive draft, the co-researchers and I were able to delve more deeply into our own ideologies by tracing significant life experiences that have influenced our thinking. This particular writing exercise also encouraged us to be critics of our own values and assumptions, as a means of helping us understand our own capacity for challenging inequity. In addition, the assignment was juxtaposed and informed by what we were reading, discussing, and thinking. In this way, writing became a kind of on-going interplay of dialogue within a social discourse in which we observed, and in fact analyzed, the intricate interrelationships between writer, text, and world in which we were actively producing such texts themselves.

One focus in how we wrote this study employed Freire's belief that in order for students to reflect on themselves in order to discover their ability to act, they "have to become literate about their histories, experiences, and the culture of their immediate environment." (Freire & Macedo, 2003). Freire was mostly concerned with the actions of the oppressed, but the theory was still applicable.   Our work advocated for social and personal transformation in order to resolve the oppressor-oppressed contradiction.

Students were given the following writing guidelines with each of the memoirs we read and discussed in class. The writing assignments were collected in a three ring writing notebook (the exterior of all notebooks were identical) and were tabbed according to each assignment. Each piece of writing was typed and neither the notebook nor the writing identified the student by name. I gave students as much choice as the performance standards allowed. At the end of each week, the students and I reviewed these notebooks and each piece was ranked in order of critical merit and thematic relevance to each reading. Each notebook was initially read three times by four readers before the selections for analysis were made. There was a guide sheet in the front of each section of the notebooks for rankings, five sheets for the five memoirs. The students devised a system to initially code data with colored labels that marked the ranking in each of the aforementioned categories as Red=Very High, Blue=High, Yellow=Medium, Green=Low, Orange=Unusable or Irrelevant. All pieces that received Red and Blue were submitted into the data set. All that received Yellow labels were added into the data set for possible consideration. All that received Green or Orange were not submitted at all. It is important to note here that many selections of writing represented in final manuscript are excerpts of larger papers. A critical analysis approach to each paper was required and the following guidelines were given:

All writing assignments should be approached through a critical lens. Approach each assignment with an awareness of the inequalities and imbalances of power relations that exist either in the reading, your own thoughts, your language, etc.—racism, sexism, heterosexism, linguicism, classism, and so on. Focus also on reflexive (or self-reflexive) writing which concerns your feelings and personal experience. Attempt whenever possible to place yourself 'outside' of their subject matter and blend objective and reflexive approaches. This will better enable you to express a critical awareness of how you write about your subject (Ashmore, 1989).

Students were required to write selections after the completion of each published memoir. They could also journal at any time during the reading of each memoir. They were asked to separate entries not part of the cultural memoir assignment as either summary or journal entry. The students were given the following guidelines:

Summary: A summary is a brief description of the main idea and key supporting points of something students read, heard in our discussion or experienced around the reading/discussion.

Journal: A journal is a written account or record of occurrences or events during the study, in the reading or during class dialogue. This record includes personal analyses of the reading or events before/during/after the reading. This section is not used in our data set, but is a way to assist in critical thinking and synthesis of spontaneous ideas with cultural memiors.

Students were required to choose two of the following writing assignments during the reading of each memoir and were permitted to select their own prompts taken either from their annotations, our transcripts, or class discussions. Students were encouraged to write multi-genre papers as

much as possible, combining writing styles. The students wrote three additional assignments during the semester, *The Things I Carry* (discussed in Chapter Three) and *The Cultural Memoir*—much of it constructed from the writing above—the final collection of writing that was a comprehensive collection of writing pieces from the entire semester—and *Final Reflections*, discussed further in Chapter Eleven.

Journal Writing as Field Text

My interest in my own teaching, as well as my awareness of my subjectivities, led me to include a research journal in the design of this study. Acknowledging that my research methodologies were grounded in the context of education, I pursued self-study in addition to the other qualitative modes of inquiry. Self-study is the purposeful reflection upon one's own experiences and is an important movement in qualitative studies in teacher education (Zeichner, 1999). Using myself as a research instrument, I was able to construct a reflexive account of my own experiences during the study while working to understand my own narratives (both written and oral) and those of the co-researchers. This approach allowed my personal and research interests to converge, one informing the other. In addition, self-study demanded greater accountability of me as the researcher. I intended such self exposure to enrich the research report with the "juxtaposition of self and subject matter" (Gergen & Gergen, 2001, p. 1028).

I conducted this self-study by keeping a comprehensive journal of my reflections on my own thoughts and experiences both during and after data collection in my classroom as the study progressed (Cresswell, 1994). I believe that writing during the entire research process allowed me to look closely at my data from many angles. As with many qualitative researchers, I sought triangulations to broaden the implications of the project as a way to further validate our collaborative findings. This was a systematic reflexive journal providing further documentation

of my experiences, thoughts and observations during the research study. The journal demonstrated the many ways in which I incorporated my own voice into the research study where I, like my co-researchers, was both a participant and a participant observer.

Photography

As collaborative researchers, photography provided a creative way to enhance our data collection that was both dense and fixed. We incorporated photography because of the emergence of photography in the empirical literature "as an integral part of the study of signs and symbols that constitutes research data and advances our understanding of events, behaviors, and scenes in context." (Moran and Tegano, 2005) These photographic images became the resources that we utilized to visually anchor each segment of our collective memoir having some visual connection to our work therein. "The value of projective responses to photography is the powerful persuasion of realism. Often, we think of psychological explosions in terms of symbolism; realism can be even more provocative. Not just photographic realism, but any real evidence can have the most explosive effect upon the witness." (Collier, Jr. and Collier, 1986, pg. 129) Essentially, "photographic details provide a space that is continuous with the lived world, allowing viewers to establish a link with the everyday world that surrounds them" (Cox, 1992). While there are limitations to data collected with no contextual data beyond the recorded moment (Battorff, 1994), photographs provided an additional way of exploring emerging theories.

We kept a digital camera in the classroom for casual use during the study by me and the other participants. The photographs helped us derive meaning from the context in which they were taken in order to learn more about the social environment in which our study was taking place. We used the images to give greater depth to our narratives and as illustrative ways to

describe what was occurring in a given moment. By freezing specific contents of the scene in which they are taken, photographs were used as an instrumental extension of our senses as researchers. The critical theories that informed this study insisted that there is not one objective reality. While the images themselves were not able to explain, they invited deduction, speculation, interpretation, and analysis as companions to our data (Sontag, 1977). The photographs selected by the research group were used as connective illustrations to separate the chapters of our collaborative memoir in Chapters Four through Ten.

Procedures

During the first two weeks of the study, consent forms were distributed and collected. Then, we collaboratively developed the specifics of the timeline using the list of trade memoirs to be read and the primary research questions as a starting point. First, each of my co-researchers was given the general topics that each memoir addressed in order to tentatively decide our schedule of readings. Once our schedule of readings was established, we began the writing entries that eventually comprised our cultural memoirs, the capstone writing project for the course which both my co-researchers and I wrote (mine taking the form of my research journal). Our memoirs were a way of writing through many of our experiences (past and present) and relating thoughts to events occurring during the study relative to our research questions. In my own memoir, I attempted to respond to the same questions posed to the research group as well as capture my reflections of the nuances of the study. Shorter, more spontaneous writing assignments were completed as forms of reader response and ways of writing through some of the topics that emerge in class from both the readings and discussions.

An example of the process was as follows: We read *Night* and conducted three audio taped discussions of the reading which took place as segments of the book were completed.

Audiotapes were transcribed by me and my co-researchers following each discussion on a volunteer basis. During the first month, we established our secondary set of questions we wanted to explore during the study that were generated from questions we posed in our annotations or in class discussions which served as preliminary categories for coding data which began immediately after any data was collected. Also at this time, we began taking photographs.

During the second, third and fourth months of the study, we continued reading our trade memoirs, conducting audio taped discussions and writing short responses to our reading. We also established the writing topics which comprise the individual writing installments of the cultural memoir. Transcription of audio taped discussions as well as the photography continued. During this time, I journaled and wrote in concert with my co-researchers. In addition, photographs and transcriptions were available to students electronically during the entire course of the study on our research website accessible only to our research group. Students also negotiated the preliminary thematic themes for data analysis.

In the final month of data collection, the co-researchers and I completed our cultural memoir and a course reflection paper that "talked to" the writing from the previous months as a way of evaluating some of the data. This is what we used to collaboratively write the Reflections paper for the final chapter of our manuscript (See Appendix H). At the close of data collection, students provided input as to what they considered the most significant categories of data collected during the study considering class discussions, their own writing, the reading assignments and the photographs. The writing was selected by consensus using our earlier coding of colored labels. The transcripts were selected by open forum in our process of selecting sections that most complimented our writing selections or vice versa. I compiled the

photographs into a slideshow and we informally chose the ones that were best for the study, which often was influenced by the aesthetic quality of the photograph.

Following data collection, the group examined the first set of coded data. At this time, the group was asked again for their input before the final inclusions/omissions of data were made to inform the analysis. Once this process was complete, I analyzed the data and began data write-up giving it in segments to my co-researchers for review, comments, suggestions and editing. While I conducted the majority of the analysis, the participants provided the necessary input to guide the analysis and, prior to analysis, participated in selecting and coding the data.

The data representation of this study utilized some of the narrative conventions of the published memoirs we read and also included some of the excerpts of narrative developed in our class/journal writings. The final manuscript is a collective memoir constructed as a composite of the fragmented pieces of narrative that the students and I decided were best representative of our problem, our process, our critical moments and our opportunities—if not plan—for change. Once the final assemblage of data was completed, co-researchers were given a copy of the manuscript for review and revision; this took about 17 hours and occurred during the summer meeting mentioned earlier in study requirement details. Once revisions were made, the manuscript was submitted to the committee for review.

Data Analysis

A structural theory of narrative, defined as *narratology* is understood as "narrative texts, images, spectacles, events; cultural artifacts that 'tell a story'" (Bal, 1999, p. 3). By analyzing narratives on the level of structure, narratology has the propensity to disclose the ideological underpinnings of a narrative's construction and demonstrate through a narrative compilation of experiences of the participants. Narratology theory is understood here as a readerly device, a

heuristic tool, that provides focus to the expectations with which readers process narrative—fabula, story, text and associated action. (Bal, 1999, p.xv). It is by way of the text—published memoirs— that the reader had access to the story, of which the fabula is, so to speak, a memorial trace that remains with the reader after completion of the reading and/or as they began their own writing. Narratology in a broader scope is suitable for analyzing both written and visual texts; it thus allowed us to conduct narrative analysis within a critical frame to analyze all the data sets of this study –transcripts, memoir writing, photographs, and journal writings. We look for patterns in the data which indicated the impact of reading on both the literary and sociopolitical investigations.

By combining the tenants of both narratology and critical theory, an approach LeCompte & Schensul (1999) defined as paradigmatic synthesis, we create a methodology we call *critical narratology*. The connection of these two paradigms allowed us to code, analyze and interpret the data using a structural approach that emphasized the social construction of individual and shared meanings. In other words, the textual data in this study was not analyzed for simply what is, but rather what could be. We performed analysis of the three data sources collected to determine whether the use of memoir as a genre encouraged us to focus on using reading and writing to process meaningful information. Critical narratology complemented and counteracted the "culture of fragmentation" (Atkinson, 1992), which characterizes data analyses based on coding and categorizing. Unlike fragmentation, which does not preserve the form of qualitative data, narrative analysis is sensitive to narrative forms and genres. Critical narratology opens up possibilities for a variety of analytic strategies and provides a critical way of examining key actors, events, cultural conventions and social norms. Critical narratology encourages the oppressed to contest the stories fabricated for them by 'outsiders' and to construct counterstories

that give shape and direction to the practice of hope and the struggle for an emancipating politics of every day life. It is able to destabilize the pretensions of a monolithic identity that dominate narratives exhibit. It is meant to disrupt assumptions of racism, sexism and classism. We used critical narratology to examine the schema of our own life stories and the stories of others (McLauren, 1995).

Because our approach was counter hegemonic, we use critical narratology to pose questions as to how our own written and verbal stories were subjectively and politically assumed. In addition, we "interrogat[ed] the ways which they are bound by certain conventions and learned from and built on these very norms and models (West, 1990, p. 107). For us, critical narratology was a means of examining how culture is constructed and the social and political impact of discursive practices. Finally, our attraction to critical narratology was that "it is itself open to criticism and revision" (Ball, 1998, 230).

An analysis of the our writing samples, triangulated with an investigation of the audiotape transcriptions and my own research journal were used to validate whether the use of reading and writing memoirs in a writing intensive multicultural high school English class served as a useful tool for examining and/or changing ideological positions and attitudes. We also sought counter-examples in our work to look for patterns that further validated our study. See Appendix A for a sample of analysis that details this process that occurred within the developed critical collaborative model of this study.

Validity of Data

Writing is a political act and may have both intended and unintended consequences (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Therefore, it was important to establish some criteria for the trustworthiness of data and its representation. McNiff (1994) claimed that validity in action

research is not so much about methodology but is concerned with the acknowledgement of personal and interpersonal relationships within the field. With this in mind, Clarke (2000) suggested that action researchers provide an analysis of decisions made while conducting the study to facilitate judgment of validity. Waterman (1998) described this aspect of reflexive validity whereby articulation of the researcher's influence on a study enables the reader to evaluate the appropriateness of their influence.

This study followed Guba's (1981) criteria for validity based on the contention that the trustworthiness of qualitative inquiry can be established by addressing the following characteristics of a study: *credibility, transferability, dependability,* and *confirmability*. The credibility of the study refers to the researchers' ability to take into account all of the complexities that present themselves in a study and to deal with patterns that are not easily explained.

Transferability refers to qualitative researchers' beliefs that everything in the study is contextually bound and that the goal of their work is not to develop "truth" statements that can be generalized to larger groups of people. A critical narratology approach to data analysis is established to place the emphasis on asking good questions of the data "rather than searching for answers" (Bal, 1999, p. 13). With each piece of data we selected, we performed a close reading to highlight (literally in colored ink) any claim to truth not contextually supported. In addition, at every turn in the study, we discussed what kinds of assumptions were being made and how those assumptions influenced the wording of our questions/responses.

According to Guba (1981), dependability refers to the stability of the data. Research is dependable when it maintains a clear philosophical base which is documented in the manuscript. All forms of data collection used in this research study were chosen for their ability to allow us

to gain a sense of the whole as well as the details. In addition, I included the use of "multiple I's", the multiple levels at which the research proceeded (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.9) to balance my view of the study with the other levels and issues that emerged as the research progressed.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued the confirmability of the data, or the neutrality or objectivity of the data that has been collected can be addressed by following two steps: (a) practicing triangulation whereby a variety of data sources and different methods are compared with one another to cross-check data and (b) practice reflexivity, that is, to intentionally reveal underlying assumptions or biases that cause the researcher to formulate a set of questions in a particular way and to present findings in a particular way. The first satisfied by multiple forms of data and the latter by the including my own research journal in data collection to ensure that this is done.

Results within collaborative research often are considered valid when their application is beneficial to the specified community and/or brings about an actual improvement of the individual behaviors within the community which can be sustained over time. In other words, "valid" is often defined by the perspective of the co-researchers and other stakeholders. The results of the research had to first be meaningful for them.

By beginning with local knowledge and designing the study to empower people to define what constitutes problems, opportunities and solutions for them, our collaborative study challenged the conventional tendencies to rely on *scientific* knowledge and external authorities. Yet, validating findings was still of concern and was dealt with through methods of triangulation (Chambers, 1991).

This use of triangulation helped to describe and analyze problems or situations through an overlapping variety of techniques, perspectives and social interests. Therefore, multidisciplinary collaboration, capability to combine local understanding with scientific explanation, and readiness to shift from theoretical reasoning to concrete decision-making were key elements for the successful application of collaborative findings outside the study in which they were derived. There is greater validity when all researchers are actively engaged in analysis and interpretation because it is then possible to draw from multiple rather than a single perspective. Finally, member checks and group debriefing among researchers add further credibility to research findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Data, analytical categories, interpretations, conclusions and implications for action were therefore negotiated and revised by all researchers.

In our study we recognized that community members would experience things differently and assign unique meanings to them. We agreed on the need to describe and account for our various perspectives in the final report. We further agreed that during data collection and analysis would allow for informal debriefing sessions as a check and balance of our progress to discuss some of the meaning we assigned individually, for example, how did we define participation in dialogue? Our collaboration model prioritized open communication, a commitment to flexibility and the iterative process of evaluation design and implementation, and a shared focus on determining the information that was most useful to the project.

<div align="center">Data Representation</div>

An increasing number of scholars working in the area of narrative inquiry have begun to argue in support of academic writing that reaches audiences beyond a particular academic peer group. Tierney (1997) has even pushed for dissertation committees to consider experimental

forms of narrative data representation as a viable form of doctoral research. Polkinghorne (1997), another proponent of experimentation with narrative formats, believed that "by changing their voice to storyteller, researchers will also change the way in which the voices of their 'subjects' or participants can be heard" (p. 3).

One of my primary goals for the completion of this study was to represent the data in a form accessible to my co-researchers since it was their work. In keeping with the focus of this study, data representation was constructed as a memoir co-authored by all researchers and consistent with new trends in qualitative studies which incorporated creative writing strategies to reflect the experiences of participants (Denzin, 1997). Furthermore, in some forms of collaborative research, the representation itself can be catalytic, liberating and transformative (Piercy & Thomas, 1998). If at times, the language, seemingly abbreviated chapter segments and analysis seem overly simplistic, it was in keeping with a fully collaborative effort and a commitment to write within my co-researchers academic experiences.

One of the challenges of writing from an interpretive perspective is that meaning is not dependent on an external reality, but on a reality that is socially constructed through intersubjective experiences (Kvale, 1996). Thus, the aforementioned attention to standards of validation assisted in evaluating interpretive data in terms of pragmatic and moral concerns. Interpretive researchers must always ask whether the work adheres to a "moral compass" (Kvale, (1996), and resonates with the intended audience; is it compelling, powerful, and convincing (Osborne, 1990; Smith, 1984; van Manen, 1990). As such, the manuscript has verisimilitude and avoids generalized truths. Finally, it attempted to answer the "so what" question: Is the study worth doing to begin with? According to Angen (2000), we have a moral obligation to research topics of practical value and represent them accordingly. Because the study is framed in

a reflexive way, where at every phase we stopped to consider the impact of our questions, our work, our challenges and our progress on our individual lives and our community, the purpose for the study was immediate, persistent and accessible to others.

Explanation of Our Narrative Collaboration

Co-research is, at best, intended to be collaboration between/among researchers to analyze a jointly collected data set. As such, what results is a co-production of knowledge. I have always assumed that co-research, distinctly different from participatory research because there is an identified principal researcher, is an assemblage of researchers with comparable experience. Obviously, that was not the case here. At the time of the study, my students had only about twelve years of formal education, while I had nearly twenty. Most of my students were novice writers while I had been a composition teacher over ten years. I had been conducting qualitative research for five of my last six years in graduate school; my students were first-time researchers. When I first began devising my mental sketch for the design of this study, this part troubled me greatly, not just in terms of maintaining equity, but also in terms of producing a study that was focused and meaningful. Without someone designated to *direct*— maybe I secretly meant *control*—would the study fall into chaos?

Then I stumbled across a text written by a narrative therapist in which he described his practice as co-research because he focused on the disorder and the relationships people have with them rather than on the people themselves (Epston, 2001). It is important to note that narrative therapies share similar postmodern assumptions about our sense of reality, the social constructionist nature of truth, and the primacy of the client's involvement in identifying problems and their possible solutions (de Shazer, 1988, 1993; Miller, Hubble, Duncan, 1996).

Narrative therapy pays close attention to the injustices and marginalizing qualities of social and political contexts (see Gaddis, 2004; Redstone, 2004) as we did in our work.

He noted that he arrived at the term co-research to describe his practice that began in 1988 when he was working with family members with a rare skin disorder. He listened to their stories, asked meaningful questions and asked preference questions of the patient's narrative accounts of their experiences. In doing so, there was a co-production of certain knowledge about the disorder, about possible treatments, about the patient and about the therapist that were of pragmatic value to all stakeholders. Because the clients had open access to all notes and writings of the therapist, the process was more or less collaborative except for the difference of field experience which Epston felt was balanced by his lack of experience with the particular disorder. In addition, this approach served to level the power hierarchy between therapist and client.

I used this model to think about the noted dilemmas in creating a co-researched, co-authored dissertation. The way in which Epston negotiated the power imbalance between Therapist and Client was similar to my own considerations of the power differential between Teacher and Student. It helped me to see that each researcher has a unique contribution and even if there are differences of experience, those differences can be managed if there is a commitment to openness and collaboration. Further, it helped me to better understand the importance of focusing on the study rather than the individuals conducting the study. When a common goal was clearly established and accessible to all, this lessened the importance of the former concerns with power.

Construction of Working Manuscript

From the beginning of our project, the co-researchers and I agreed that we would organize our writing into three categories: pieces of text taken verbatim where we established a

particular connection, excerpts from our discussion transcripts, and notes of research journal. My co-researchers liked the idea of a "scrapbooking" technique wherein the final work is a collage of writing from the project. We struggled at first with the possibilities of fragmentation, but decided that the ordering and the analysis "glue" would ensure our format was unified.

For the first category of writing, we simply highlighted the text during our class discussions if we found it significant to our immediate or larger work. For the other four forms of writing, we created plastic "bins", with appropriate labels, where each was stored (a copy of each was kept electronically on our website.) At any time during the study, researchers could read from any of the writing in the bins, including my journal. The advantage of this method of our working draft was that it fostered openness among our group. The disadvantage was that each of us was responsible for making sure any computer generated work had a corresponding hard copy in the bins. In addition, each of us had the responsibility of keeping all research material inside the classroom with the exception of transcripts which were also contained on a limited access website.

As we neared the completion of the study, most of the work in the bins had been coded and much of it earmarked for final manuscript with sticky tabs. However, even at the end of our study, we were still going back to bins when we discovered gaps in the research, discrepancies that needed explaining, or simply needed additional support for our findings. For example, at one point we realized we had chosen two pieces of writing with almost identical topics. Even though both pieces were pertinent and reflected good critical writing, including them both seemed redundant. We chose the one by a student whose writing did not appear in the previous chapter and then went through our data to find another example for that void that focused on a different topic.

Construction of Final Manuscript

One of the greatest challenges of this project was developing a writing style that was unified, yet compatible, with the collaborative nature of the study. From the beginning, I struggled with the ethics of collaboration and the awesome responsibility I had as the "author," or ghost writer, for multiple voices. One way I metaphorically thought about this endeavor was an artistic collaboration. For example, I have seen many beautiful murals in my life in which one artist directed the creation, but many artists contributed. Or a composer writes a piece of music in which multiple instruments are played at once. In both instances the finished piece is unified yet represents the individual contributions, each equally important to the others. While these were not exact analogies for what I tried to accomplish here, they offered guidance for the task. I began knowing that in the end, even with the best of intentions, what I produced would still be inadequate and incomplete. My decisions were inevitably affected by my subjectivities and my authority in my classroom ultimately influenced my students' contributions. The best that I could hope for was to practice integrity in process and in product, acknowledge my power as teacher and researcher, recognize my subjectivities of which I was aware, look for ways to validate my work, and admit my limitations.

We dipped our research brush into the data and created a piece I feel attempted to capture our experiences in a specific moment. We examined it multiple times from multiple angles, held it up to the light, added layers upon the original strokes, and viewed it always as a work in progress. The final written product, however flawed, is an attempt to get at what transpired and what we found of value in our work. What cannot be represented in the final manuscript was what we took with us from the experience and what becomes of it once we let it go.

The Format of the Final Manuscript

Ultimately, this is a co-constucted critical narrative created from multiple stories shared between the researchers and me. These stories connected us with others and with our own histories, through time, place and the experience of others (Dyson & Genishi, 1994). The final manuscript reflects how narrative inquiry uses stories to describe how we constructed meaning in our lives (Bruner, 1986, Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) Connelly and Clandinin (1990) argued, "people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience" (p. 2-3). We hope that the individual story and that of our research "selves" are both represented here.

The first three chapters of this manuscript are in the format of a traditional dissertation. While my co-researchers certainly contributed much of the content, I am the sole writer for these chapters. In addition, I also wrote the final chapter even though I included their reflections of our work. The remainder of the document was a fully collaborative effort among all of the researchers. In the beginning of the project, it seemed obvious to me that the students became easily overwhelmed and needed a periodic sense of completion. In order to make the writing process manageable for the first time researchers, I divided the chapters into small segments organized by the readings. This made it possible for us to work on a few pages at a time, similar to chapters in a novel. Each of the segments has its own kind of closure. The final draft is written so that if the co-written section was removed from the larger manuscript, it could be read as its own complete, co-authored memoir.

The final manuscript was written similarly to the way a quilt is constructed. Our study ended with approximately sixty "pieces" of finished writing, which included edited write-ups of our data analysis. My job in the months following the completion of the study was to "sew" all the pieces of the quilt together. While I am responsible for the production of our manuscript in

its final form, I did not add additional writing to any section of the manuscript after our study

ended.

PART III

Voice

Evidence that the writer is credible and has a strong authoritative presence

CHAPTER THREE

Who We Were

To begin our study, we wanted to introduce ourselves to give our readers a general sense

of the dynamic of our research group and the individuals that comprised this study. The students

did not want to write their own introductions, so I asked them to choose three words they felt

most defined them at the beginning of our study and then I wrote a short description of my

observations of them as their teacher at the end of the semester. In return, I requested that they

write one for me so that those who read our work would have a better sense of our collective

dynamic. The students read their descriptions at the end of the semester and none made changes

except for Bailey, who changed her three descriptor words claiming she was a different person at

the end of the study and felt the original words no longer defined her.

Mrs. Isserstedt: *Passionate, Outspoken, Energetic*. Mrs. Isserstedt is a risk taker. She

is always at odd with those teachers who think what she does for her students is a waste

of time. She is unconventional and that sometimes makes her unpopular, but only by

those teachers who are too lazy to do anything amazing with their students. She can be a

scatterbrain. She sometimes has too many thoughts in her head at one time and cannot

sort them all out when she is talking. She is the most caring and passionate teacher you

will ever meet and loves her students more than any other teacher. She will always fight

for them or stand up for them even if it means losing her job. She always says, "It's

better to ask forgiveness than permission" which means she is not scared to go out on a

limb. She is very emotional. We have actually seen her cry when someone writes

something good or makes a good comment in class. She is a good listener and will take the time to hear your point or side of the story. She is stubborn and will not give up which means she is hard on us and expects a lot. Maybe too much. She works hard and nobody loves literature as much as her.

Trevor: *Patient, Contemplative, Open-Minded.* Trevor is a keen observer in class. You can watch his facial expressions and measure the tempo of the intensity of his silent engagement. Ironically, he rarely speaks in class but his writing is much more emotional and intimate than my other students. He is openly gay but it is underscored in social situations. He is originally from the mid-west and often finds the Southern culture oppressive even though he moved here from a predominantly white town and attended a predominately white high school. He is cautious and measures outcomes carefully before making decisions. He can surprise you with his dry sense of humor and is a discrete practical joker. He is troubled by injustice, perhaps from his own experiences and perhaps not, but he once said, "The pain I see inflicted on others always seems to damage me too."

Bailey: *Liberal, Caring, Loyal.*   Bailey is the girl sitting in the front desk of every class. She is never trying to fly under the radar screen or blend into the crowd. There is nothing about her appearance that indicates subversion, but she is always the defender of the underdog and the first to stand up to her friends if she thinks they are wrong. She is deeply troubled by injustice and suspicious of contested meanings. At her former high school, she was told that the varsity football team did not allow girls to try out. So she

showed up for four consecutive days in full pads, did the drills with her male peers and then wore a prom dress to the try outs landing her on the opening spread of the yearbook and on the front page of the school newspaper. She has a talent for inciting outrage but never seems to make enemies. She also has a knack for getting her way by making you think it was your idea. She and her sisters are being raised by a single mother who is a pediatrician. Bailey works tirelessly with the Special Olympics program at the school.

Lauren: *Realist, Independent, Social.* Lauren is an entrepreneur who is always on the brink of her next great money-making idea. She claims her parents are both self-made millionaires who enthusiastically support her business ventures. She carries with her an arsenal of bottle water, candy bars and potato chips in her backpack and will stalk you at the vending machine before you make the deposit. If a teacher is giving a test and students are asked to supply testing booklets, she will buy them in bulk and supplying them to anyone in need, undercutting the school store's price by fifteen cents. You cannot get her to do anything unless you supply a well-thought out reason for your request. Her friends know better than to ask her for help building the set for the school play unless they have a litany of reasons why no one is better at painting 3D objects as well as she. She is never without a small spiral notepad that hangs out of her pocket like a talisman, flapping as she walks. It is where she jots down her "big ideas" and solicits suggestions from her peers about others areas of material need in the school. After a successful transaction, she will pocket the money and exclaim with a smile, "Another satisfied customer."

Taylor: *Outgoing, Friendly, Good Listener.* Taylor is a little firefly. Always flitting around school as effervescent as a glass of expensive champagne. She is always dressed for a runway show and takes fashion very seriously. She can spot a Chanel imposter from five miles away and can tell you if someone on campus is sporting last year's Hermes scarf attempting to pass if off as a new purchase. It is not unusual for her to be wearing a leather mini skirt with Jimmy Choo stilettos in the dead of winter if that is what is featured on the cover of Vogue that month. She has a large discretionary spending account funded by her parents' business that manages 5-Star hotels across the county. She spends Winter Break skiing at their chalet in Telluride, Colorado, and Spring Break in their home on the Amalfi coast. There is a momentum to Taylor. She is always moving forward and often when you are around her you feel like you should be walking faster or talking faster just to keep up. But she will stop dead in her tracks, change directions, hang up her cell phone, or stop her car if she sees someone in need. For example, I once saw her stop her car at the red light with traffic backed up nearly half a mile down the busy street in front of the school to chase down a woman in a wheelchair to return the backpack that had slipped off the back of her wheelchai 100 yards back. When Taylor got back to her car, angry motorists were honking and yelling out the window. She just waved and calmly closed the door to her car and drove on.

Jeff: *Quiet, Introverted, Philosophical.* Jeff is a walking quotation book, his memory a potpourri of philosophical tidbits to help explain your every life dilemma. His advisors are the usual suspects: Gandhi, Mother Theresa, Martin Luther King, Jr., John F. Kennedy. But also, Heidegger, Habermas and Nietzsche. One day I heard him talking to

one of his friends who was complaining about his recent girlfriend debacle. Jeff replied, "Ah, women. They make the highs higher and the lows more frequent." End of conversation. He seems to be universally adored by his peers and is something of a young god around campus. He always wears a sport coat to class and has an impressive collection of vintage swatch watches. He has long hair that he wears in a ponytail most of the time. His father owns one of the largest construction companies in Georgia, which Jeff refers to as "bourgeois time suck." His family's wealth has afforded him extensive travel in his 18 years and he speaks both French and German.

Sarah: *Outgoing, Enthusiastic, Social.* The barometer for Sarah's mood in class is the amount of tips she received the night before at her waitressing job at a local sports tavern. In her mind, people fit into only two categories: Good tippers and bad. Waitressing is the central metaphor for her life. For example, if a friend asks her if she did her Biology homework, she will reply, "Yep, pulled a double to finish." Or if you ask her if she made a good grade on her Trig test, she will often tell you the teacher "stiffed her." She believes there is an art to the job that begins with physical fitness. I once heard her say, "Strong arms makes the job easier and the tips larger." So, she spends hours a week at the gym to give her the stamina for the "weekend slam" which she describes as "like an ER except no one is hurt or dying, just hungry and in need of a drink." She can be very introspective and will sometimes pause several minutes while she considers something you say which others sometimes find unnerving—Did you hear what I said?! Nod. She is the class triage nurse and school supply store: She is never without Band-Aids, Neosporin, cough drops, Kleenex, paper clips, a stapler or a sharpened pencil.

Jordan: *Dedicated, Thoughtful, Hopeful.* Jordan is a chronic insomniac who has been treated for a sleeping disorder since she was 12. She often falls asleep, sometimes mid-sentence, in my class. Her insomnia is a unique adolescent burden because her exhaustion takes an obvious toll on her ability to think clearly and articulate her thoughts. I know this because on the rare days when she is rested, she exhibits reasoning and communication skills much more advanced than her chronological age. She always carried her IPod. I have never seen her without it. One day after one of our late editing sessions, she left it on the table in my room. Not knowing it was hers; I glanced through the screens to see if there was some identifying information. She had over 100 photographs downloaded, but only one song: Mozart's Requiem in G. She always has an unused packet of Kleenex on her desk but I have never once seen her use one. At no time that can I remember, has she had a cold this semester either. I like to believe that they are there in case she is moved to tears unexpectedly. The way she sits in her desk often makes her look smaller than she is—childlike, breakable.

Steven: *Conservative, Christian, Dedicated.* Steven is actively involved in the Baptist Church and a leader in the youth program there. He continually laments that we do not have an ROTC program and is an aspiring Marine. He is very outspoken and is often confrontational, sometimes combative, if it is an issue about which he is passionate. He believes that conspiracy theories abound and that "the liberals will be the demise of the planet." He is very vocal about his opposition to gay marriage, welfare programs, and anyone in society he feels is "lazy." Steven is a champion for the special education program at our school and has been a Big Brother as long as I have known him. He is

selfless with his time and will help you without hesitation if you need a tire changed, furniture moved, or help with your Chemistry. His parents were high school sweethearts who have been married twenty-one years. He has a little sister of whom he is fiercely protective.

Brittany: *Shy, Caring, Good Friend.* Brittany is quiet and unassuming. When she speaks it is barely above a whisper and she can command silence in a room because her nearly inaudible voice somehow invites rapt attention. I have often noticed that her classmates sometimes lean forward when she speaks as if in anticipation of some divine truth. She wears dresses that she designs and sews herself and deeply loves Jane Austin and everything about Nineteenth Century England. She is a vegetarian and during the week she pays regular visits to the pet tortoise in the Science Lab and the rabbits that roam around the special education wing of the school. She has a bumper sticker on her car that reads: "May all that have life be delivered from suffering."

Allison: *Athletic, Passionate, Procrastinator.* Allison has been involved in some kind of athletics since she could walk. She is a self-proclaimed tomboy and can hold her own in almost any physical situation. While only 5'1 and 109 lbs, she has an intimidating physical presence about her that make even the linebacker in our class think twice when she challenged him to arm wrestle. She has an endearing naïveté about her. For example, the Friday before Labor Day she asked in total seriousness, "Mrs. Isserstedt, do you know who the pregnant woman was who started Labor Day?" However, this quality often impedes her critical thinking and makes her vulnerable to rumor and propaganda.

She got detention for vandalizing the bathroom stall (which when it happened, I was sure was a case of mistaken identity.) When I asked her about it the next day, she said, "Yea. I did it. It was a stupid thing to do. I wrote on the bathroom stall with a paint pen." "What did you write?" I asked. She replied, "I wrote, 'tell you mother you love her every day.'"

Ashley: *Kind, Honest, Trustworthy.* Ashley is an outspoken defender of those she believes cannot defend themselves. She covers her ears if she feels what you are saying offends her philanthropic sensibilities. She cries unabashedly and without apology if she is moved by an act of kindness or cruelty. The first week of school a small snake found its way into the student parking lot and during class changes, a crowd had gathered around it, several students poking it with pencils. Ashley pushed her way through the crowd and picked up the snake by the tail. She walked the snake the entire length of the parking lot and released it in the woods behind the practice field. She served two days of ISS for leaving campus and her tardiness to class. Her capacity for expression is an asset to her as a writer and she has the ability to articulate the emotion of a moment with absolute clarity. She speaks with a sugary Southern drawl that she often exaggerates to keep your attention. She plays on the varsity soccer team and is forever selling something (candy bars, popcorn, honey baked hams) for the many charity organizations to which she belongs.   She is the oldest in a family of three girls and has an autistic sister whom she adores and who is often the topic of conversation.

Kevin: *Laid back, Friendly, Adventurous.* Kevin is self-directed and accomplished (already the recipient of some prestigious awards and scholarships) but paradoxically lacks particular conviction and unlike my other students, does not claim to have specific personal or career goals ("Kevin, are you going to college next year?" "I don't know, I suppose.") He changes his mind (and his opinions) often and admits to being an "evolving work in progress." Kevin's parents both died of cancer only a few months apart, a fact I have never heard him mention to anyone and I suspect few people know. He is a native of Forsyth County and his family owns a large portion of land here and has significant influence in local government. He is deeply interested in local gossip and politics and is well connected here—I doubt there is a person in this town he does not know or know of. He works 30 hours a week as an assistant undertaker at the local funeral home and he is a wealth of knowledge about the "dearly departed", the circumstances of their death and the details of the funeral. He often wears a coat and tie to school—"they are dropping like flies so we'll be packin' em in tonight." He plays the organ at his church every Sunday and has never traveled more than 100 miles from home. When I say "Goodbye, see ya'll tomorrow" as my students flood the open doorway, he replies, "God Willing." Every day.

Katie: *Friendly, Loyal, Curious.* Katie carries her video camera everywhere she goes. She will, without warning, hit the "record" switch and attempt to engage an unsuspecting passerby in an impromptu interview: How do you feel about the decision to replace the grass on the football field with turf? Do you think the school should offer AP Calculus? She is an aspiring journalist who is an avid reader of the *New Yorker* and closely follows

current political affairs. She has a cat named "Scoop" and can actually handwrite italics. She is a fierce debater but is often seen congratulating her opponent in the student parking lot after a competition. When I once asked her how she would describe herself to others, she said, "A human interest story."

Patrick: *Logical, Accepting, Adventurous* Patrick is the kid I imagine growing up and becoming an extreme athlete, one of those guys you see on the news who has just survived record low temperatures on Mount Everest or is dangling from some cliff halfway around the world existing for weeks on granola bars and water. He once broke his arm in two places snowboarding during spring break and then had some kind of waterproof sling fashioned out of neoprene so he could get right back on the thing the next day, cast and all. He always dresses such if he got an unexpected invitation to go rapelling after school, he would not have to go home to change. And while he is not afraid of heights that would unnerve a career pilot, he is deathly afraid of bugs. Because our study was conducted in a portable classroom, all nature of insects and spiders find their way under the cracks in the doors when the weather is hot. One day a small roach was running up the wall of the trailer. It is one of the few times I saw Patrick react to anything, verbally or otherwise. Not only did he scream, but he also ran out the door of the trailer. When I went out to check on him, he was hyperventilating and gripping his carabineer on the side of his jeans so tightly his knuckles turned white.

April: *Happy, Caring, Thoughtful.* April is the quintessential romantic. She believes she has total mastery over her life, and the blueprint is quite detailed. She has an

unprecedented ability to see the best in everyone. I have never heard her say an unkind word. She is an unwavering believer in the happy ending. She uses the word "perfect" on a regular basis in everyday conversation. She is a straight A student and has been writing college essays to Yale, MIT and Duke three years before she was eligible to apply. She is dating another senior who is regularly in trouble with the law and I have serious doubt about whether or not he will graduate — but she seems to love him despite their differences, or maybe because of them. She is perceived by most students as strikingly beautiful and to me, is totally unaware of the power this affords her.

Becca: *Accepting, Dreamer, Dedicated.* There is no more apt description of Becca from my perspective than *dreamer*. She carries a black Moleskin journal everywhere she goes and can fill up 100 pages in less than two weeks. She is the most vigilant writer I have ever known personally. She never goes to lunch. She sits in the Senior Courtyard, absent-mindedly nibbling an apple, and writes. She is also a devoted daydreamer who openly spins life fantasies for her friends and classmates in which every venture has a happy ending.   In these explicitly detailed stories, she is living in a home with every material luxury, is married to a man whom she loves deeply, never fights and with whom there is never even the slightest touch of sadness. She has a deeply satisfying job which offers her unending flexibility and autonomy at which she earns a multi-million dollar salary. In her tales of the future, there is never old age, or loneliness or even inconvenient challenges. She is always beautiful, always young, and always exceedingly happy. She reminds me a little bit of *Harold and the Purple Crayon*, forever coloring the world she wants rather than the one she has. I cannot tell if this is a symptom of denial or

naïveté. Either way, she is always ready to make the lemonade if our day if full of lemons.

<div align="center">What We Carried</div>

At the beginning of all my English classes, I use Tim O'Brien's (1990) *The Things They Carried* as an example to help my students establish what I believe is the first step in critical work: identifying what we carry. This means what we carry into the classroom, what we carry into research and what we carry into the world at large. I explain to my students that while O'Brien's novel is about what his characters literally and metaphorically carry in the Vietnam War, it is a useful way of thinking about establishing our personal context for critical work. I provide a condensed excerpt from the novel to illustrate the way the author moves back and forth between the tangible and intangible "baggage" of the soldiers and the implied effect this has on who they are, how they view each other and the implications for the larger scope of grappling with a controversial war that killed millions of Americans and Vietnamese, soldiers and civilians. At the start of our study, the co-researchers and I modeled this format to create our own version of what we carry that we thought might have some bearing on our study. In addition, it gave each of us a better sense of the others, particularly since our method for articulating it was a standardized writing prompt (See Appendix X).

This was admittedly an intimidating task so early in the semester because it required a certain amount of trust that had not yet been established, so we therefore began simply and then progressed toward more intimate narratives. Some examples of early drafts from the students reflected basic factual biographical information:

I carry eighteen years as a Christian in the First Baptist Church of XYZ.

I carry the responsibilities of caring for two younger brothers.

I carry the pride of athletic and academic successes.

I carry seven years as a Black Belt in Karate.

Then we completed second drafts where we focused on what we carry that we felt was especially

relevant to the critical aspects of our study. Because my students got my list first where I

intentionally take some obvious personal risks (See Appendix C), they were quick to follow:

I carry the sadness of losing my mother to cancer when I was fifteen.

I carry the burden of my attractions to men in a world that shuns me.

I carry the Marine's Rifleman's Creed[ii]

These narratives were an important part of our study because they not only served as a way to

disclose some of our values, biases and personal experiences informing our cultural attitudes,

they were a first step in building trust that was essential to our critical collaboration.

This writing exercise left me riddled with doubt about moving forward in collaboration

with my students when there were so many conflicting ideologies. In fact, several nights before

the study began I dreamed that one of my students called another a "war monger" and a bloody

fight erupted. However, I did not want to shy away from this study simply because of my

uncertainty and inevitable anxiety. Fecho (2004) says that "the critical inquiry classroom thrives

on uncertainty, because in that subtle, unsteadying of our confidence, the quest for learning

occurs" (p. 154). According to Freire (1970), liberation lies within our commitment to

uncertainty.

The radical committed to human liberation, does not become the prisoner of a

"circle of certainty" within which reality is also imprisoned. On the contrary, the

more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it

better, he or she can better transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen,

to see the world unveiled...(p. 39)

Perhaps in uncertainty our impulses are born and our greatest work created.

Reading about Theory

Once my students and I had a working definition of critical theory it was time to look across the critical theories that we would need for our study. We spent the first two weeks of the study familiarizing ourselves with literature that established a working understanding of the critical perspectives that might assist us during the study. This was meant to give my students a crash course in some of the knowledge I had acquired in three years of doctorial courses. Because our memoirs were chosen during the design phase, we established the following categories of literature we would need to read each one through a critical lens: Reader Response (as I felt we needed a foundation to understand multiple ways of knowing and the various interpretations of the texts that would inevitably arise during our study), Freiran Critical Theory, Critical Dialogue, Critical Pedagogy, Critical Race Theory, Theories of Whiteness, Queer Theory. In addition, we explored some of the ways reading and writing are critical acts as a way of further validating our methods. My students also wanted to use passages from a memoirist in order to keep a connection to that aspect of the study. I had no role in choosing these, but thought the idea interesting and wanted to encourage, as much as possible, a co-ownership of the study.

Bailey: I like how some of these articles and books have cool quotes at the beginning of the chapters or after a heading. Let's do that in our literature review.

Stephen: Where are we going to get them?

Bailey: We can look for some on the Internet or take one from one of the author's

of some of the articles we read.

Allison: Don't ya'll think we should try to keep some kind of connection to

memoirs? That is why we are reading all this literature anyway, to be able

to read them, you know, critically. And that is kind of our theme.

Trevor: I think we should get them from memoirs.

Bailey: Yea! Let's get the quotes from memoirs. But not the ones we are reading.

Patrick: But we could do that on the chapters where we are reading the memoir.

Bailey: Yea! That would be awesome!

Trevor: Oh, that would be totally cool. Mrs. Isserstedt, can we do that?

Holly: Sounds good to me.

Reader Response Theory

One of the course objectives for my class was a research project which is intended to familiarize my students with sourcing, writing with the words of others and citation styles—all things they would need for college and our study. Another course objective was the synthesizing of sources within a piece of writing. I had my students research the critical paradigm of reader response theory (because critical literary perspectives are an integral part of the high school English curriculum) and use the information from their sources in a mini research paper. Doing so satisfied a duel purpose: meeting the course objectives and giving my students research experiences needed for our study.   In addition, it would provide them with a foundation for understanding how we would be responding to our texts during the semester, including the

memoirs of our study. This was just one of many ways that I utilized overlap that occurred in our course and in our study.

I took my students to the media center and conducted an introduction of Galileo and electronic databases. I required them to find three pieces of information from three different sources: a single author book, an article from a scholarly journal and an edited volume. In order to facilitate early examples of collaboration, I asked my students to write a collaborative research paper on the paradigm of reader response once each student had completed their own sourcing. This required that they review the literature they collected, make choices about which information they used and then represent it in a unified paper. In order to be part of their process as co-researcher, I worked with the students to locate some of their sources and made suggestions for revision once their first draft was complete. The following is the final draft of that paper:

Although notions of reader response can be detected in works by French structuralists, who often stressed the role of perceiver as a maker of reality, it gained momentum in the 1970's when it was recognized as a distinct critical movement and found a particularly accommodating climate in the increasing anti-authoritarianism within the academy. Many theorists, such as Stanley Fish (1972) and William Slatoff (1970), called for a reexamination of formalist principles, questioning the absence of the reader in the reading process. When Rosenblatt published *The Reader, the Text, the Poem* in 1978, literary critics were beginning to think on ideas she had introduced forty years before countering the formalist view that reading occurs in a cultural and historical vacuum. Rosenblatt envisions critical response as a transaction, rather than interaction, between reader and text allowing for a matrix of interpretation.

Each reader brings to the transaction not only a specific past life and literary

history, not only a repertory of internalized 'codes', but also a very active present,

with all its preoccupations, anxieties, questions, and aspirations. (p.144)

Additionally, Rosenblatt (1938) distinguishes between two unique "modes" of reading:

(1) *efferent*; the desire to take something away from the reading; and (2) *aesthetic*; what

the reader is "living through during his relationship with that particular text" (p. 25).

Sumara (1996) calls these two processes a "form of cultural rewriting—a purposeful

construction and reconstruction of ideas that emerge from the transaction between reader

and text" (p. 27).

The early reader response critics championed subjectivity and a radically new approach

to literature that "knowledge is made by people and not found" (Bliech, 1978, p. 18). Slatoff

(1970) and a growing number of scholars deemed literary response a much more difficult and

complex event than examining the text alone. But beyond a general move toward more

subjectivity, reader response critics are tremendously diverse.

Perhaps one of the most interesting, if not influential reader response theorists is

Stanley Fish, whose work seems to be in constant evolution. His early work, largely text

centered, argued that within each text is constructed dilemmas. Meaning comes from the

reader's experience of working through those dilemmas, and the strategy for doing so is

revealed in the text (Fish, 1972).

Jane Thompkins (1980) later reshaped Fish's positions on interpretive communities by

calling for a shift toward what she terms "the politics of interpretation", stressing the importance

of social context in acts of reading. This aspect of reader response criticism focuses on the

notion that texts have assumptions and attitudes that are intrinsically ideological. Thompkins

(1985) wants an approach that yields "more fruitful results than some more narrowly 'literary' critical modes" (xiii). Her vision is to help readers demystify the once hidden social and political agendas of canonical literature.

> …[my approach] involves, in its most ambitious form, a redefinition of literature and literary study, for it sees literary texts not as works of art embodying enduring themes in complex forms, but as attempts to redefine the social order. (xi)

Thompkins pays particular attention to the location of power structures and is one of several literary theoriest who believe literature is a catalyst for social influence, if not change.

Bleich's (1978) model, "subjective criticism", focuses not on the social and cultural influences of interpretation, but individual motivation and perceptions—which he acknowledges is in constant flux. Like Fish, Bleich recognized "interpretive communities" that are socially and culturally situated. This position is informed by one of his mentors, Normand Holland (1968), who is concerned with the psychological response and how a reader's inner and outer reality contributes to the construction of meaning. Bleich, however, was primarily concerned with the emotional response of the reader and skeptical of notions of transactional relationships between reader and text favored by Holland. He believed that "each person's most urgent motivations are to understand himself" and reading serves that end (p. 297). His model allows for as many responses to literature as there are readers.

The literature review of reader response theories allowed my students to better understand how they read a text from their own unique perspective without the imposition of another interpretation. It also illustrated how this paradigm emphasizes the importance of

avoiding one correct explanation of our reading. A reader response approach was one way within

our critical framework that we accepted multilayered meanings of not only our texts, but our

transcripts and our photographs during the study.

Freirian Critical Theory

*It just seems clear to me that as long as we are all here, it's pretty clear that the struggle is to
share the planet, rather than divide it.*
~Alice Walker

Before we began our study, I situated my particular use of critical theory in order to

articulate my perspective to my students. Critical theory, as I understand it and introduced it to

my students, is a tool for designing a compassionate, living, and transformative practice. The

emphasis on compassion—compassion for both the oppressed and the oppressor—counters

existing notions that critical work is a quest for enlightenment. For our purposes here, the only

enlightenment we acknowledged is the existence of any oppressive system adversely affecting

the whole. A world where any member might be alienated or disenfranchised threatens the

democratic liberties of us all and deteriorates the authenticity of the human experience.

Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* anchored our study. Initially, I gave the students

possible critical texts from which to choose as a guiding text for the study: Critical and Cultural

Theory Reader (Easthope and McGowan, 1992), Critical Social Theory (Calhoun, 1995), Key

Issues in Critical and Cultural Theory (McGowan, 2007), Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire,

1970). After a week-long review of the critical texts I presented, which included book talks,

various readings from each of the texts, class discussion and guest speakers from three of my

colleagues at UGA, students were asked to select a text and write a short justification for their

selection to present to the group. All but four of the students chose *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Several chose this title because they felt it was most closely connected to actual classroom

inquiry and appeared to have a comfortable level of theoretical accessibility. The students

particularly wanted a text written by an educator to lessen confusion in the application of

knowledge in our study.

Kevin: I think he really seems to care about the Brazilians. He does not just seem like

some researchers trying to get ahead in his career. That seems a lot more real to

me. I like that he is a teacher and well kind of an activist.

Ashley: Me, too. And some of those other books were a little too perfect. Perfectly

divided by different kinds of discrimination. I think Freire's chapters could be

about any kind of discrimination.

Jordan: Also, a lot of the other books are just using theories that a bunch of other people

wrote. Doesn't Freire write his own theory? That makes him cool.

Brittany: I did notice that those other books have a lot of Freire stuff in it. Why would you

want all that second hand stuff? I don't really understand that. That just means

they are doing what we are doing.

Holly: What do you mean, Brittany?

Brittany: The other people are just like us. They are doing a study and then finding books

to help them out. How is that different than what we are doing? Shouldn't those

researchers be able to do their own theory? *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is the

only book that does not do that. He does not have a bunch of research in his. I

don't see very many citations.

Holly: True. In your selection of this book, you are using original theory. And most

researchers are not necessarily theorists. But you understand, at times, that might

make the work seem more difficult. You don't have the benefit of multiple

researchers applying Freire's theory for you.

Patrick: I think that makes it better. And it makes us seem smarter.

Holly: That is does! <laughing>

Bailey, chose Freire because of the title. I thought this was an interesting observation

and seemed particularly important by the end of our study.

Bailey: I like this one because it was not named Pedagogy *for* the Oppressed. I think this

says something about Freire.

Holly: What do you think it says about him?

Bailey: That he does not see himself as someone above those who are oppressed. That he

does not think he is some kind of god out there to do something for them, like he

has all the answers that can make their lives all better. That is how I think we

should see ourselves.

Holly: I think that is a very astute observation and a lofty goal for us. Do all of you

know what Bailey is talking about here?

Ashley: I have an example. You know that I sometimes do that tutoring program for

BETA at [another local high school]? Mrs. Jones is always saying we have to

help save all the "at risk" kids. These kids are my age. I am *of* them. Not *for*

them. They help me, too. This one kids is always telling me how to fix my

computer. Do ya'll know what I mean?

Bailey: Totally!

Interestingly, Bailey's observation of the semantic difference denoted an important

philosophical distinction: *of* indicating cause, motive, occasion; *for* intending to belong. Failure

to recognize this distinction might have debilitated our efforts to see our critical framework as a means to help us better understand ourselves and extricate us from oppressive conditions of our social life. Furthermore, our interpretation of Freire's work did not reject the objectivity of social forces but rather critiqued social practices and ideologies that served to devalue the human dimension in order to replicate the social order.

I suggested to my co-researchers that critical work is positive and optimistic. This because it allows that change is always possible and that change can be transformative. At the onset of this study, my students and I agreed that such a framework supports the notion that social justice can begin with the individual. If even one of us during this research group rejected the deficit model of social formation and enforced ideologies of the dominant culture, we have changed the world. This, I believe, is why Freire's work persists.

The students and I began the study by reading this text in its entirety. I purchased each student a copy of the text through a used book seller on the Internet. I could not incorporate this as an "in class" reading, so students decided to read the texts outside of class during the two weeks of designing the study. I asked each one to annotate their books as they read, and use their annotations to mark important concepts that might be useful once data collection began.

Critical Pedagogy

It was important that my students had an understanding of critical pedagogy at the start of our work so they could see that the way I teach is theoretically informed. I provided students a collection of articles which detailed actual lessons and/or classroom practices from a critical perspective in order to assist them in the application of knowledge. Before we reviewed the work of critical pedagogues, Kevin commented, "Other people teach like you? I thought this

was your own brand of teaching." The co-researchers and I highlighted information in these articles that gave us the most comprehensive yet concise definition of critical pedagogy.

McLauen (1998) defined critical pedagogy as "the new sociology of education" or "critical theory of education" (p. 163) which comprises a wide body of literature from scholars who analyze the impact of such oppression positions as race, gender, sexual orientation and socioeconomic relations on students from historically disenfranchised groups. Common to critical pedagogues is an interest in exploring the connections between the tenets of critical theories and democratic schooling (Darder, Baltadano, & Torress, 2003). While scholars vary in their ideas, critical pedagogues share the goal of "empower[ing] the powerless and transform[ing] the existing social inequalities and injustice" (McLauren, 1998, p. 163-164).

We found that the fundamental commitment of critical educators is to empower the powerless and transform those conditions that perpetuate human injustice and inequity (McLaren, 1988). This purpose is inextricably linked to the fulfillment of what Paulo Freire (1970) defined as our "vocation"—to be truly humanized social agents in the world. Therefore, a major function of critical pedagogy is to critique, expose, and challenge the manner in which schools impact upon the political and cultural life of students.

Unlike traditional perspectives of education that claim to be neutral and apolitical, critical pedagogy views all education theory as intimately linked to ideologies shaped by power, politics, history and culture. Given this view, schooling functions as a terrain of ongoing struggle over what will be accepted as legitimate knowledge and culture. In accordance with this notion, a critical pedagogy must seriously address the concept of cultural politics both legitimizing and challenging cultural experiences that comprise the

histories and social realities that in turn comprise the forms and boundaries that give

meaning to student lives. (Darder 1991, p. 77)

Critical pedagogy is a way to "illuminate the relationship among knowledge, authority, and

power" (Giroux, 1994, p. 30) in the classroom and beyond are all subject to examination critique.

Dialogue Freire and Bakhtin Style

This is obscene. How dare we be standing around talking about nothing, not running in one huge mass of people, running at something, something huge, knocking it over? Why do we all bother coming out, gathering here in numbers like this, without starting fires, tearing things down?
~Dave Eggers

One of the most important concepts that my students and I discussed in the infant stages

of our study was critical talk—or dialogue. As with anyone new to critical work, my students

had little understanding of dialogue as it is defined by critical theorists. Just as they became

critical readers of text, they became critical agents during our classroom conversations as well.

They began to see the differences between engaged and disengaged responses. Because much of

this body of literature needed unpacking in order for my students to be able to apply it to our

work, I gave them a broad scope of dialogue as it is used by both Freire (1970) and Bakhtin

(1981). My explanation was comprised of literature I reviewed during the prospectus phase of

my dissertation that is incorporated below to show its use in our study. It took only a few days

for the students to begin connecting with the concepts presented here.

I began by explaining that dialogue is the authentic exchange between student and

teacher (or for the purpose of our study between researcher and co-researcher, between teacher

and student, between memoir author and reader) and is the foundation of our collaboration

because, as Freire (1972) suggests, dialogue and other horizontal relationships allow ordinary

people (in this case, the ones not in graduate school and those researchers less familiar with

critical theory) to shape their world. Dialogue requires mutual respect and cooperation to not

only develop understanding, but also to change the world. According to Freire, authentic dialogue must be mediated by the broader context of the world. Through dialogue, people are to create new understandings which are "explicitly critical and aimed at action wherein those who were formally illiterate now begin to reject their role as mere objects in nature and social history and undertake to become subject to shape their own destiny (Goulet, 1974, viii). Freire and Macedo (1995) argued that democratic dialogue is a dialogue of equals and through this social process, knowledge and learning are generated. Through dialogue, we learn to participate democratically, something that can translate beyond the education setting, for the purpose of transforming society (Aldana Mendoza & Nunez, 2002).

Andrea: How does dialogue work when no matter what, the teacher is always the person in charge?

Holly: That is kind of what Freire (1970) is talking about. What I mean is that he uses dialogue to lessen some of those power differentials.

Taylor: What do you mean?

Holly: Well, instead of my just dispensing information to all of you, actually Freire (1970) called it "depositing" information like in banking, our discussions will be based around the idea of mutual respect rather than established authority. Meaning, I will often be in position of student and you will be in position of teacher. Does that make sense?

Andrea: Yea. It means you will try to give up some power to be on our level?

Holly: Sort of. But mostly it means we try to meet in the middle as equals in a shared exchange. Not so much like I am coming down to your level because critical theory tries to deemphasize those power distinctions.

Andrea: Oh, I get it.

I also explained that democratic dialogue is a more challenging proposition when working with students who belong to the dominant social group. The critique of democratic dialogue "requires and assumes a classroom of students unified on the side of subordinated against the subordinators, sharing and trusting in an 'us-ness' against 'them-ness" (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 315). When participates in democratic dialogue come from the dominant group, there is a risk of Marcus's repressive tolerance: "An all-embracing tolerance of diverse views always ends up legitimizing an unfair status quo" (as discussed by Brookfield, 2002, p. 274). Therefore, in our study we depended on creating a dialogue with each other, our cultural consultants, our texts and those outside of our study to model what Freire (1970) termed cultural synthesis.   It is in opposition to cultural invasion; when outsiders come in to teach their world view and values to the population. In cultural synthesis, outsiders come to learn from the population and the population learns from them.   Only we also employed the reverse of what Freire intended as my students and I positioned ourselves as the outsiders to many of the minority positions we took up in our class. This meant that from the beginning, it was useful to define what is meant by the practice of dialogics.

In Bakhtin's dialogic concept, engagement is not an option but an epistemological requirement and there is an insistence that difference must always exist for meaning to have any authenticity. Fecho (2007) who incorporated Bakhtin's writing on dialogic beliefs contended that the classroom is a location for sustaining literacy through dialogue. "By authoring a response to our wonderment, we hope to connect to responses that have gone before and to provoke fresh responses, ones that expand, curtail, or critique" our existing work (p. 550). For our purposes, dialogic was a means of shared inquiry.

According to Bakhtin (1986), "If answer does not give rise to a new question from itself, it falls out of the dialogue" (p. 114). Using this statement as our guide, the co-researchers and I understood our use of dialogics as not a reference to the talk or discussion in our study, but as a distinctive way of understanding meaning and the creation of meaning. Bakhtin's focus was on human beings in interaction with culture in its broad sense of the word, and in this connection, the concept of *dialogue* is central (Bakhtin 1981, 1986). Bakhtin's concepts of dialogue can be discussed with various levels of understanding. In its broadest sense, Bakhtin saw existence itself as basically dialogic. The self always exists in relation to others, and in interaction with different social and cultural contexts.

Bakhtin's theories on how meaning and understanding are created were of particular importance to our study. Meaning was not located in the text itself, or in the class discussion or in the writing we created. It was constructed among the relationships of all of these in an interpreted context. The dialogue concept can be better understood through the terms *polyphony* and *heteroglossia*. Polyphony does not only mean the coexistence of many voices, but a dialogic interaction between them. When my co-reserachers and I have a class discussion, there is a polyphony of voices. Each of us brought our sociocultural background with us along with particular points of view, values and meanings. The differences and complexity of these voices created a location for change. Conceptual change depends on what Bakhtin (1986) called juxtaposition of voices, the struggle between contradicting positions and the interrelations that are created through the dialogue between them.

In the classroom, there are dialogues between spoken and written utterances and texts at different times. This is the core of *intertextuality*. Writing and reading are no less dialogic than oral, face-to-face conversation, even though they may look like individual behavior.

> We never write or speak in a vacuum, our utterances are always to a certain degree related to texts and utterances that have come before us and to texts and utterances that will come after us (Bakhtin, 1986 p. 1).

In the traditional classroom experience, student writing and discussion reflects the prescribed norms of their learning environment. The aim in our research was for our voices to develop in dialogues with other persons (me, co-researchers and authors) and the various personal experienced worlds which each brings with them.

In particular, we placed trade memoirs at the center of our reading and the writing for this research.   We began by asking a series of general questions. How does the writer define or understand the experience about which he/she is writing? What meaning does he/she attach to that experience and why? What is settled and what is contested? How is this shaped and determined by social structures, and why? These questions are derived from the concepts of "history in person" (Holland and Lave, 2001, p.5) where identities are "historical and contested in practice." By beginning with struggle and approaching social practice as endlessly unfinished, we practiced Holland and Lave's (2001) use of 'dialogism' where we were "always in a state of active existence," always being "addressed" and always in the process of "answering" (p. 9-10).

Critical Race Theory

> *"At fifteen life had taught me undeniably that surrender, in its place, was as honorable as*
> *resistance, especially if one had no choice."*
> *- Maya Angelou*

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is an intellectual movement of progressive law scholars, primarily of color, who view the law as complicitous in sustaining white supremacy, and, by extension, upholding similar hierarchies within gender, class, and sexual orientation. Many believe that the advances of the civil rights movement of the 1960s have reached a plateau or are

even retreating. Therefore, legal scholars of color seek to embrace a different race-consciousness, one that challenges the ways in which race is constructed and represented both in our society and in the legal system that helps to define it.

Our study predominately focused on the work of Paulo Freire. However, in our reading of *Memoirs of a Race Traitor*, I knew that the literature in critical race theory would be useful. While we depended heavily on our critical advisors to suggest other bodies of scholarship the research group should advise, particularly with regard to our discussion and writings focused on Latina (o) and African American populations/issues, we needed to acknowledge the existence of critical race theory as a distinct and specific division of critical theory. I provided my students with a brief overview of how the movement began and consolidated some of the information from key scholars for use before and during the study.

Critical Race Theory emerged in the 1970s in response to a perceived lack of critical analysis in existing civil rights scholarship and the relatively slow progress of racial reform in the post-Civil rights area. Without attempting to overly simplify the central theme of the movement, we work from the assumption that critical race theory was an attempt to address the overwhelmingly white voice reflected in academic scholarship in the United States. To counteract this imbalance, critical race scholars examine a wide array of racial issues through the methodology of the personal narrative, believing that to appreciate the perspective of persons of color, their voices must be heard (Neal, 2006).

CRT scholars acknowledge a variety of premises on which CRT is predicated. While the list is evolving as the movement progresses there are a few key principles: Racial ideology is an invisibly normal rather than aberrant feature of American society; racist assumptions are encoded in our everyday landscape as well as in our legal system, our media, our school curriculum, etc.

Another principle is that of narrative theory; working from the social constructionist notion that culture has enormous bearing on reality, CRT sets forth to construct a different social reality by way of situated knowledge and discourse. Narratives, storytelling, and family histories are some of the methods used to question, critique and challenge racist presuppositions in our culture. A critique of liberalism also helps to dismantle the interstitial race, class, and gender framework because too often civil rights laws protect those in power more than those in need. For example, a theory called "interest-convergence" holds that in many cases, advances for minorities occur only when they also promote the interest of the dominant culture (Delgato, 1995, xiv-xv). Often this means that minorities are "rewarded" for speaking, behaving and subscribing to the ideologies of a hegemonic society.

Bailey: Is that like how people say that the Blacks at our school are Whites with dark skin?

Holly: What do you mean?

Bailey: Well, you know. They act White, dress White, like Abercrombie clothes and stuff, and talk White.

Holly: Yes. Critical Race Theories help us understand why what you just said is very problematic. As we get into our study and you read more of this literature, you will understand why.

Throughout data collection, I provided the co-researchers literature that helped them to critique such positions that occurred various times during the course of the study beginning with but not limited to theories of whiteness.

Theories of Whiteness

I love being famous. It's almost as good as being white. People are nice to you, they give you the benefit of the doubt...
~Chris Rock

Because this study did not focus exclusively on issues of race, we incorporated theories of whiteness mostly in order to introduce the notion that whiteness affects various relations and situations and have an enormous organizing affect on other forms of privilege. Theories that focused on issues of whiteness were used to help my students understand the ways in which race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation interlock to create, maintain and support white privilege. Early in our study, we talked about social construction and how whiteness is an example of a social construct. For example, the students and I discussed how whites and non-whites alike participate in maintaining the codes of whiteness in various ways. Theories of whiteness were also a way we discussed how white privilege extends also to light-skin privilege, English-language privilege, class-privilege and beyond.

Although whiteness studies encompass a diverse range of contexts including politics (Deluca, 1999, Roediger, 1997), culture (Giroux, 1992, Nakayama & Martin, 1999, Supriya, 19999), and history (Roediger, 1991, Sexton 1990), the predominately asserted rhetoric of whiteness is how whiteness is a system of privilege that is maintained discursively, institutionally and materially and are often normalized; it is taken for granted and is therefore invisible. According to Johnson (1999) the purpose of this discipline is not necessarily to invoke individual changes in communication or behavior, but to address the significance of our "recognition" of racial identity and the positionality of whiteness. The assumption that whiteness is socially constructed involves the function of white ideology in relation to systems of hegemonic discourse.

Because our work was guided by the scholarship of Freire (1970), it was important to acknowledge that he suggested that oppression is best apprehended from the experiences or perspective of the oppressed. However, our study focused on White experience as the unit of analysis in its relationship to the oppressed other in order to better understand the dynamics of structural power. Our critical analysis placed particular emphasis on how "Whiteness" functions in everyday life with the help of scholars who have examined cultural codes of White culture, the worldview of the white imaginary, and assumptions of the invisible "other" to define itself (Frankenberg, 1993, 1997; Hurtado, 1996; Kidder, 1997; Rothenberg, 2002). For example, we used McIntosh's (1988) example to better understand the taken for granted in "our invisible knapsack", daily aspects of White privilege: from buying a flesh colored BandAid, to finding one's racial identity affirmed in history, literature, and civilization in general. It was important that the students understood how the study of white privilege has pushed critical pedagogy into directions that account for the experiences of the 'oppressor' identity (Hurtado, 1999).

Trevor: That really puts it in terms you can understand. Man, I never thought about some of that stuff. I mean a BandAid? Wow.

Kevin: It really does show how much we overlook about being white.

Bailey: And privileged.

Brittany: Also how easy it is to forget there is a minority class out there because we really are not confronted like that in our everyday life.

Holly: What do you mean when you say, "Confronted?"

Brittany: We don't really see the difference that exists in the world because so much of the world just confirms us. We mostly are confronted with sameness. And I guess, I

admit, there is a lot of comfort in that. I don't feel uncomfortable all that much in my every day life.

The significance of a socially constructed reality can be attributed to the power of neutralization and transparency. While McIntosh (1997) provided one example, it was useful with my students to show how privileges and power locations intertwine and the elasticity of identity where boundaries often overlap and even contradict. For example, I suggested to my student that, theoretically, McIntosh's article could easily be rewritten as a contemporary perspective on class or sexual orientation.

Queer Theory

And sex with a woman? Turns out it was a no-brainer...because I am one (very familiar with the equipment already). It was like having the answers before the test. Like walking around in the house you grew up in. You can turn off all the lights and still know where everything is.
~Carol Leifer

As with critical race theory, we took only a brush at queer theory in our work. Not just because there are understood boundaries about discussing sexual orientation in a public school setting, but also because this study focused on queer theory only insofar as it is one trajectory of critical theory. Even though we just scratched the surface, I felt it should be included in our review of the literature. We defined queer theory as a range of critical practices that study the relations between sex, gender, and sexual desire (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1980; Halberstam, 2005; Sedgwick,1990; Warner, 2000). Queer theory is meant to challenges the notion of fixed identities and is interested in the interrogation and dismantling of the homo/heterosexual binary (Sedgwick, 1990). We did not attempt to get at defining "queer," as that could be its own dissertation, but included the use of this term in our study to disturb the "norm" of gender and sexuality; specifically to remind us to avoid fixed positions.

We elected for the purpose of queer theory in our study to be another means of critical transformation; to "break[s] apart the usual ideologies that have accrued as 'the effect of fixity'" (Wallace, 2002, p. 53). A queer pedagogy as a concept and a critical strategy shifts in relation to subject matter and discipline, to whoever is attempting to use a queer pedagogy, and according to the context within which the classroom is situated (DiGrazia & Boucher, 2005). Even though queer pedagogy resists definition, there are specific elements that make applying a queer pedagogy useful and that expanded our existing use of critical theories. For example, we agreed that an encounter with a queer text enabled us to risk thinking about identity in less unitary ways.

Reading as a Critical Act

> *It had been startling and disappointing to me to find out that story books had been written by people, that books were not natural wonders, coming of themselves like grass.*
> *~Eudora Welty*

According to McLaughlin (2004), "Critical literacy is defined as not only as a teaching method but a way of thinking and a way of being that challenges texts and life as we know it" (p.4). Critical literacy was an important component of our study because of its implicit charge to question as well as its promotion of reflection, transformation and action (Freire, 1993). Because critical literacy involves examining and challenging power relations, it was consistent with our aim to be active readers who are permitted to question, dispute and "(re-)construct" ourselves and others in the reading process (Haas-Dyson, 2001). The students and I specifically explored critical reading by Freire and other literature I found by critical literacy scholars who interpreted or applied his work.

Freire (1996) argued that a critical reading of the world involves denouncing the existing oppression and injustices in the world. At the same time, it involves announcing the possibility of a more equal and just world. Therefore, to read the world is both a pedagogical-political and a

political-pedagogical process. Denouncing the world is an act that involves criticizing, protesting and struggling against domination and domestication. On the other hand, the act of announcing a new world entails hope, possibility and envisioning a new democratic society. In our study, we incorporated memoirs as one way of reading the world and initiating a more comprehensive dialogue of the particular social dilemmas that exist and challenged their construction thereby engaging in Freire's denunciation of inequity.

For Freire (1982), literacy emerges first in spoken language, itself an effort to grasp and act on the environment. "Learning to read and write means creating and assembling written expression for what can be said orally" (p. 10). But there is a maturity built into the process of reading, a maturity which leads beyond the reflection of the world and toward a contemplation of and recreation of the world with a greater sense of understanding.

> This movement from the world to the word and from the word to the world is always present, even the spoken word flows from our reading of the world. However, we can go further and say that reading the word is not merely preceded by reading the world, but by a certain form of writing it, or re-writing it, that is, of transforming it by means of conscious practical work. For me, this dynamic is central to the literacy process. (p. 10.)

It is our critical reflection of the word that propels us toward a greater understanding of how to critically read the written word, thus the world. While it may appear overly simplistic, Freire (1997) suggested that in order to find meaning in a text a reader must have prior knowledge of their social environment in order to put these new ideas into perspective. Therefore, readers related their acquired textual knowledge back to their own perception of reality. During this process, readers broadened their understanding of the world. Critical literacy is when the word and the world are interconnected and the text is not exempt from critique by the reader…Why

was this written? Who does it include? Exclude?   In a high school classroom, this means using

the text in the same way we conducted this study— to purposely and frequently find moments of

dissonance, where discriminatory or oppressive ideologies meet critical strategies, and casual

conversation about that text is halted and reflexive dialogue begins.

Freire (1998) argued that the reader's responsibility to the text is as important as the

author's responsibility to the reader. Freire stated, "When we read, we do not have the right to

expect, let alone demand, that the writers will perform their task, that of writing, and also ours,

that of comprehending the text" (p. 22). Such an approach to literacy is "contextual" (Chacoff,

1989, p. 49) because in it, reading critically comes from contemplation of themes and

identification of biases of importance to the readers, drawn from the reader's own experiences.

The thematic content of literacy education in Freirean programs is drawn from the culture of the

participants. This culture "includes how people labor, creates, and makes life choices"

(Wallerstein, 1983, p. 5). Culture is not a static set of religious beliefs, social attitudes, and

customs; rather, it is a dynamic process of transformation and change with conflicts to resolve

and choices to be made both individually and as a community. Jurmo (1987) identified Freire as

a proponent of "literacy for social change" because Freire believed that unjust social conditions

must be changed and the objective of critical reading is to enable readers to participate actively

in liberating themselves and others from the conditions that oppress them.

This study used Freire (1971, 1972) theories of literacy as one rationale for use and other

educators to use memoir in the classroom. He saw education for liberation as the essential calling

of the educator. Thus includes a specific worldview and some central concepts. The worldview

understood society as dual, as actually two societies. He referred to these societies as the

oppressor and the oppressed society, but he also used terms such as director/dependent,

author/silent, subject/object, and invader/invaded. Concepts of central interest to educators studying memoir are "possessive consciousness" and "cultural invasion". Part of critical theory as applied to how we read memoirs included such critique as: Who is the narrator and what language and tone does the narrator choose to convey the sensibility, attitude, and character of the writer? How does the writer select and order the events of her life to create his/her story and what meaning does she make of these events?

Writing as a Critical Act

> *Our sufferings and weaknesses, in so far as they are personal, are of no literary interest whatsoever. They are only interesting in so far as we can see them as typical of the human condition.*
> *~W.H. Auden*

I believe that writing as a method of thinking is under-utilized in schools. From my experience, writers often have difficulty transferring their thoughts directly from their minds to the paper. However, in the very act of writing, writers form and develop existing and new ideas, make sense of their experiences, alter their ideological positions, and discover new ways to articulate their understanding. Recent critical studies of writing and language indicate that students' knowledge is reflective of the communities in which they participate (Shacklock and Smyth, 1998). The differences in writers' ways of using language are directly related to the differentiation of their place in the social world. They are both positioned by their use of language, as well as using their language in response. A writer's ability to move across multiple social discourses allows for greater knowledge of the self and others. Writing the self, in particular, is an exploration of self-making and world-making which emerges from "an interactive process in which the autobiographer's voice comes into its own through hearing itself in conversation with others and against the material reality of a landscape" (Dickerson, 1989, p. 18).

By teaching writing as a critical act, I encouraged my students to explore how their identities are formed, allowing them to negotiate the spaces between social spheres and the self. Theorists of liberating resistance pedagogies like Freire (1982) and, more recently critical pedagogues of composition, such as Hardin (2001) who examined not only the usefulness but also the appropriateness of teaching critical pedagogy and resistance in the field of Composition Studies, advocated a negotiation of ideological positions that provide tools for ideological interrogation in writing. Students who learn to recognize their own ideologies and positions of power learn they can choose to conform to those standards or to resist them. Once students have learned how to situate themselves within, transgress, and transform the boundaries of various genres, they have developed critical perspectives that they can apply in their social world.

This involves a very difference kind of teaching than mainstream writing instruction, which emphasizes form. Teachers must create writing strategies that counter hegemonic narratives or ones markedly different than the experience of the students in the classroom by providing opportunities to write honest reflections on positions of privilege and/or the experience of subordination. When students are "writing their world" they develop also a new way of ordering the world. For example, Patrick once claimed, "I did not ask to be born with money" which appeared to be a preeminent circumstance in the social world that does not depend on his acknowledgment of its existence. Critical writing demands examination of such a legitimizing myth and reflection of this claim in an attempt to reorder the implications of this claim. Teaching writing as a critical act positions writing as "not only a means of communication—the acquisition of certain communicative skills—but also a means of socialization into disciplinary values, assumptions, relations, and practices" (Bawarshi , 2003, p. 154). The incorporation of critical theory in the teaching of writing prepared students to place themselves within a larger

sociocultural context.   Bereiter and Scardamalia (1983) define critical writing as a process of reflexive inquiry involving "reflection on the information one already has or that is available from ordinary experience" (p. 5).

As a concept, "critical literacy needs to be continually redefined in practice" (Comber, 2001) and the co-researchers and I intended our manuscript to be no exception; it invites critique and opposition from our readers. The students and I read excepts from Ira Shor's *When Students Have Power* (1996) which documents his experiences teaching writing using critical pedagogy at a Staten Island campus of New York's open enrollment City University. Shor restructured the traditional writing classroom as a collaborative environment with minimal "gatekeeping" (i.e., traditional hierarchical authority) in order to create a more equitable system of "power sharing," (a method I tried to employ in our collaborative writing in this study.) Shor argued teachers need to democratically reorganize all aspects of authoritative modes of writing if critical work is to occur.

As co-researchers, my students and I used our personal experiences, in and out of class discussions, our texts, private reflections and so on to construct theories about our study, but we made that tangible in writing. In our study, critical reading and critical writing were close companions because with critical literacy the power of author and of reader is equal. Thus, when the co-researchers and I were writing and when we were reading we did not permit greater power in either situation. Both the texts and our writing were subjected to critical discussion and evaluation.

Critical Incidents

Our critical lens also allowed for the inclusion of critical incidents (Newman, 1987, 1991) that occurred during collaboration—moments which allowed the researchers to stand back

and examine their own beliefs critically. These stories were used as tools for conducting self research simultaneously. Critical incidents can be triggered in the midst of research, but they can occur in a variety of other ways. They can arise through reading, or interacting with others, suddenly seeing something/someone differently. Tripp (1993) explained:

> People often ask what a critical incident is and how to recognize one. The answer is, of course, that critical incidents are not 'things' which exist independently of an observer and are awaiting discovery like gold nuggets or desert islands, but like all data, critical incidents are created. Incidents happen but critical incidents are produced by the way we look at a situation: a critical incident is an interpretation of the significance of an event. To take something as a critical incident is a value judgment we make, and the basis of the judgment is the significance we attach to the meaning of the incident (p.8).

He believed that by focusing the attention toward such incidents in a structured and analytical way, researchers can better theorize about particular aspects of their experience rather than trying to apply academic theory to their experience.

This approach, however, relies heavily on individual perspective and could become very insular. Tripp suggested that one way to avoid this problem is to use it as a strategy for collaboration by co-researchers in the study. Then it becomes an even more powerful technique, particularly if reinforced by the processes of collaborative research, to develop increased understanding and control over judgments made during research.

Flanagan (1954), the founder of critical incident analysis as a training method described critical incidents as "an observable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit interferences and predictions to be made about a person" (p. 332). Therefore, for our purposes

here, the use of critical incident and analysis was twofold—the actual incident, "a snapshot, vignette, brief episode, a situation or encounter which is of interest" (Minghella & Benson, 1995, p. 207) and a reflective examination of the incident. The reflective component involved engaging with and exploring the incident with the goal of reaching a new and transformative understanding of the experience (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985). We incorporated this as part of our study because critical incident analysis involves "less structured and more spontaneous learning that is active, ongoing and therefore not bounded by time and expectation" (Collins & Pieterse, 2007, p. 18).   We used the naturalistic setting of our classroom to analyze encounters in our study that were raw and unscripted.

During the data collection phase, we kept a collective log of "critical incidents" (which we affectionately referred to as our "critical incident report") that spontaneously occurred during our study. This log was a spiral bound notebook where any one of us could add an informal entry when we felt it occurred. Sometimes, they were obvious moments and were noted by several members of the group, other times the occurrences were more subtle. During the data analysis phase, we used the guidelines below devised from our sources to determine which "incidents" would be included in our study.

Does the incident help us learn something through reflection? We identify reflection here as an opportunity for "growth of the individual – morally,   personally, psychologically, and emotionally, as well as cognitively"(Branch & Paranjape, 2002, p. 1187). Does the incident help us to:

- o better understand our **strengths and weaknesses**
- o identify and question our underlying **values and beliefs**

- o acknowledge and challenge possible **assumptions** on which we base ideas, feelings and actions

- o recognize areas of potential **bias** or **discrimination**

- o acknowledge our **fears**

- o identify possible inadequacies or **areas for improvement**.

Critical Consultants

In our process of learning more about critical research, we knew that we needed to take some caution in our work to avoid a focus on any particular critical category to the exclusion of others. We explored ways that we could include, even if only in small ways, the inclusion of some minority perspectives since few were represented in our research group. Though critics questioned Freire's early focus on social class (and, for example, not on race or gender) made us aware of using his work more generally, useful in a wider application, as described by hooks (1993).

> Paulo was one thinker whose words gave me a language. He made me think deeply
> about the construction of identity and resistance. There was this one sentence of Freire's
> that became a revolutionary mantra for me, "We cannot enter the struggle as objects in
> order to later become subjects…" there is no need to apologize for the sexism. Freire's
> own model of cultural pedagogy invites a critical interrogation of this flaw in his work.
> But critical interrogation is not the same as dismissal. (p. 148)

While, as Freire demonstrated, we placed our focus on issues most relevant to our own experiences. There was a gradual packing and unpacking of new theoretical themes when we were presented with new reading and new perspectives. Therefore, we enlisted advisors to help

draw attention to what we neglected and provide a more complex analysis of that which we should include.

As was suggested by my committee in the prospectus phase of my dissertation, the research group solicited volunteers to comprise our cohort of what we coined "critical consultants." We decided that we needed cultural advisors to help ensure the reliability of our data and assist us in maintaining an ethical inquiry and representation of our work in the final manuscript. My co-researchers suggested we have two high school students not only because we wanted to acknowledge Freire's (1996) belief that no knowledge is privileged no matter how much experience or education, but also as a way of ensuring we did not in any way compromise the integrity of our high school community.

The two high school students came to us informally through friendships with several co-researchers. One student identified as a bi-racial gay male, one identified as a white heterosexual female. They were asked to read particular pieces of our data analysis and write-ups during the process when the co-researchers and I felt we needed more objective input and give constructive comments. For example, there were many times we questioned including so much of the historical data of the community, and both of the students felt that it was needed to foreground our study and did not necessarily correlate to the current climate of the county or school—one critical consultant even stated, "past performance is not indication of future results."

In addition, an African American female professor at a large southeastern university, a friend whom I met as an undergraduate who teaches in African American Studies and has done most of her work in critical race theory and slave narratives, volunteered to serve as one of our consultants. We also enlisted the help of a Hispanic male whom I met at an academic conference a few years back who has been teaching in Georgia public schools for fifteen years. I

specifically requested his assistance with this dissertation because he was instrumental in advising me on Hispanic perspectives, literature and significant scholarship when I was developing my Women's Studies courses at UGA. We corresponded with both of these consultants via email and provided them with both our working manuscript and our final manuscript for review and editing.

Finally, one of my female colleagues in Women's Studies at UGA (who at the time of this study was completing her dissertation about the experience of African American women in academia) also provided some invaluable assistance in the way of references of other scholars who could answer specific questions/offer advice we had doing the study. She also assisted us by directing us to literature on race relations Southern United States and assisting us in sourcing local and state demographic data.

Becoming Researchers

When I was only a couple of years into my graduate work, I took a Poststructuralist Theory course under the direction of Dr. Bettie St. Pierre. My enjoyment of Dr. St. Pierre's teaching style and the course readings notwithstanding, the most valuable thing I learned in this course had nothing to do with Poststructuralist theory. Dr. St. Pierre spent part of her career in Library Science prior to coming to UGA and had, for many years, been developing a most impressive "dictionary" of theoretical terms and concepts. For her course, I was required to complete a much shorter version of her dictionary as I encountered terms in my own research and reading that I wanted to reference and cross reference later in my work as a scholar.

I in no way could ever fully articulate the amazing body of work that is Dr. St.Pierre's research dictionary, but was inspired to keep my own abbreviated version going for the last five years. Not only has it been an invaluable tool for expanding my theoretical knowledge and

qualitative vocabulary, it offers me a great deal of confidence as a researcher because each one of the entries is something new that I have learned, that I have read, that I have used in my own research studies.

The co-researchers and I created our own theoretical glossary modeled after the one Dr. St. Pierre assigned in her course. We kept an alphabetized list of definitions, references, explanations and quotations that we found in our theoretical literature that was useful to us individually as our study progressed. I assisted in this process by beginning with a skeleton list of both critical and qualitative terms for the co-researchers to consider as they began. By the end of our study, this document greatly assisted us in data analysis because by the time we reached this point, the co-researchers were familiar with much of what they needed to know to complete this phase. Below is an excerpt from Sarah's glossary which served as an example of how many students constructed their own. I did not require a specific format and some students chose to do theirs differently. However, hers illustrated the general objective of the task. This exercise gave us continual practice during the semester with sourcing, formatting citations and drawing connections among contributors to the field of critical theory and qualitative inquiry.

Collaborative Research

A participative worldview draws our attention to the qualities of the participative-relational practices in our work. Issues of interdependence, politics, power and empowerment must be addressed at both micro- and macro-levels, that is, in inquiring relationships in face to face and small group interaction, about how the research is situated in its wider political context. (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. 448)

Reason, P. & Bradbury, H. (Eds) (2001) *Handbook of action research: participative inquiry and practice* (London, Sage).

Vygotsky (1978) believes students are capable of performing at higher intellectual levels when asked to work in collaborative situations than when asked to work individually.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Bruner (1985) says that cooperative learning methods improve problem- solving strategies because the students are confronted with different interpretations of the given situation. The peer support system makes it possible for the learner to internalize both external knowledge and critical thinking skills and to convert them into tools for intellectual functioning.

Bruner, J. (1985). Vygotsky: An historical and conceptual perspective. Culture, communication, and cognition: Vygotskian perspectives, 21-34. London: Cambridge University Press.

Table 1

Excerpt of Sarah's Glossary

Fontes and Piercy (2000) believed that there is practical value in designing activities for students to "practice" being researchers before embarking on an extended research journey. Such activities help students grapple with pragmatic, philosophical, and ethical questions like those facing researchers in the field. These activities help define data collection, cultural sensitivity, ethnomethodology, data analysis, and ethics and make the concepts accessible to the

co-researchers. The goal of such exercises should be to immerse the new researchers in the roles and processes of qualitative methodology (McWey, Henderson, Piercy, 2006).

In order to understand our role as researchers and to begin the process of understanding data collection and analysis using of critical lens, I suggested we begin with a small group assignment that preceded our memoir reading and writing. The assignment was not only a way to practice media research—using Galileo, textual sourcing, APA documentation that we used during our literature review—it was a way to begin to see how political, economic, and societal structures relate to communities, groups and organizations within a contemporary society. My co-researchers were at first unfamiliar with the qualitative process, and this gave us a springboard for our study. One of the fundamental reasons for choosing this as the prelude to our work was to help my students begin thinking about the role of the critical researcher.

Researchers divided into groups of four and identified as venerable or oppressed group. Once their population or group was selected, researchers were asked to identify major processes and contemporary manifestations of oppression, discrimination, prejudice, power and privilege that impacted their selected group. Finally, groups were asked to write a brief contextual history of their chosen group using the work of at least three critical theorists. The objective was to better understand barriers to full social access, identify sources of intra-group and inter-group conflict stemming from voluntary or involuntary membership, and to determine the role of risk and protective social factors in relation to social problems and social and economic justice. We spent three days looking at different aspects of critical theory. I used an overview slideshow created by Dr. Kathy Raulston at UGA that she often includes in her qualitative courses that was available on her website. I also provided all of the work—articles, excerpts of dissertations and books— I read in my Introduction to Critical Theory course at UGA. The selection included

such authors as bell hooks, Linda Christenson, Lisa Delpit, Patricia Williams, Bill Bigelow, and several works by Paulo Freire. The researchers were asked to complete this information on a grid. The completed grids were shared among the groups. The grids served as a visual example throughout the study of the research process and an illustration of how our critical lens was used in the design. Below is the completed assignment from Group I.

Oppressed Group/Group I	Women with Tattoos
Brief Contextual History (Context)	Tattoos are a very old form of body art and have been practiced from a very long time in civilized human history. The history of tattoos is very ancient and seems to be of thousands of years old and even before the birth of Christ. The recorded indication of tattoos comes from the ancient Egypt where wall paintings as old as 2000 BC have been suggesting the use of tattoos in the ancient Egyptian society. The etymology of word tattoo provides few very different and interesting answers to the current day practicing of making permanent colored marks on human body or tattooing. The word "tattoo" canages have the same meaning and similar pronunciation. Different civilizations have been recorded to use the word tattoo or at least practicing of coloring their body parts for different reasons have been recorded.
One Theory Used to Understanding Barriers to Social Access (Theoretical Framework)	Bhaktin (1984) said that theatrical body modifications are viewed as "vulgar" or "grotesque" in comparisons to established images of the beautiful woman.
Sources of Intra-group and inter-group conflict (Supported Theory)	Women oppress other women who do not adhere to physical gender expectations. Davis (1997) claims that women contest established cultural codes by having plastic surgery and by doing this, embrace images and practices of "the marginalized woman".
Barriers to Social Access	People with tattoos are routinely perceived by mainstream culture as deviant. Often are passed up for jobs when tattoos are visible.
Sources	1. Bhaktin, M. (1984). *Rabelais and his world*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 2. Davis, K. (197). My body is my art: Cosmetic surgery as feminist utopia?" *The European Journal of Women's Studies, 4*, 23-27,

Table 2

Example of Oppression Grid

Using each group's completed assignment, we discussed how each grid could evolve into a research project. For example, we discussed hypothetical research questions, study designs and possible ways to collect and analyze data.

Holly: How did you come to identify this group for the assignment?

Bailey: There is a girl I work with who has several tattoos. I think she is so pretty, but people treat her very differently than me [at the restaurant where we work]. It seems they are turned off by her because she does not look girly enough.

Holly: And how did you determine that "not being girly enough" could be examined through a critical lens.

Lauren: Well, from the chart you gave us we knew that feminism was one focus of critical theorists. And having tattoos if you are woman is one way of being a feminist.

Taylor: For one thing, tattoos are kind of a masculine thing to do. And if you do manly things that is a form of feminism.

Bailey: And women with tattoos don't really look like the stereotype.

Holly: How so?

Bailey: Well, you never see the perfect Hollywood women with tattoos. I mean Angelina Jolie did not really gain public respect until she had hers removed.

Without even realizing it, this group was touching on some very complex social concepts and used the work of high theorists (Bhaktin!) to help them explain something seemingly simple to the rest of us. Even though my co-researchers did not yet have the research experience to understand fully the connections they made or the vocabulary with which to articulate it, they identified an oppressed group, used research to explain tattooing as an act of resistance of gender stereotypes, and posed a possible way in which women negotiate established cultural ideas about

femininity. In addition, they identified how deeply embedded are such ideas about women in our social practices.

This early introduction to the work of research was preparation for what we eventually did as co-researchers. It was the students' first example of how qualitative research stretches the limits of how we see the world by approaching knowledge from different perspectives and from different ways of knowing. It also helped to illuminate the difference between preconceived cultural narratives and critical narratives.

PART IV

Facing the Dragon

The need to write toward the tension of the subject, not away from it

CHAPTER FOUR

A Matter of Perspective

I've seen too much abuse, let alone abuse of dogs. Anyway, it's the local emperors who have
their say, and we ordinary folks are not much different from dogs in their eyes
~ Kui Kui Xiang Ri
(quoted by French, 2006)

On August 10, 2006, *The New York Times* (French, 2006) published this photograph with an

article detailing the mass slaughter of domesticated dogs in China's southwestern Yunnan Province

after three confirmed human rabies deaths in the area. Most disturbing were reports by Chinese new

media that described how people out walking their dogs had their animals seized and clubbed to

death on the spot. Others were forced to take their pets to a public square where officials were

hanging the dogs from trees. Because there are some half million dogs in the city of Jining, which

encompasses the 16 villages, the official New China News Agency report the Chinese government

plans to continue their extermination indefinitely. Because no animal protection laws exist in China, the only recourse of pet owners and animal activists is protest, speaking out and circulating petitions. The *Times* reported the outpouring of grief by province residents is tremendous.

The article struck me as an interesting piece to share with the research group in one of our early class meetings because it held some possibility for generating a discussion of the ways in which power is exercised and maintained in different political regimes and social structures, an important component of the critical theory framing our study. In addition, the article provided provocative material for experimenting with dialogic and written critical inquiry. I presented the article to the group as a precursor to our memoirs—a short piece of writing with content not likely to be familiar in order to help us understand more about how our collaborative data collection process operated.

When I passed the article around our class, the students had a myriad of responses. Outraged, Taylor asked, "How can a government be allowed to confiscate and kill someone's pet? Katie responded, "I can't even imagine living in a place where without consent, authorities can force you to surrender something you love without proposing any alternative?" April said vehemently, "There is no way I would give up my dog. They would just have to arrest me or something. I could never watch someone kill her." Jordan said simply, "I can't even think about something like that. I would never get over it."

When I asked the students to think more critically about why they had such difficulty with this article, they immediately began posing questions that offered an alternative to the problem. Some of the questions posed were: Why kill all these animals rather than mandate rabies vaccinations? Why not have open forums to problem solve this issue with those pet owners opposed to the killings? Why would such an extreme and brutal measure be needed when less than one

percent of the total population is infected. Doesn't this just create a bigger problem? Others wondered if ordinary Chinese citizens mobilized in an effort to stop the killings would be powerful enough to counter the authority of the Chinese government.

At best, our questions and comments generated from this article suggested on some level that we recognize that democracy requires overcoming "authoritarian systems and create[ing] conditions for decision making of a dialogic nature" (Freire, 1997, p. 61). Most of us agreed that in civilized society it seemed more than a little barbaric that any government might lure unsuspecting dogs out of their homes and doghouses using whistles and noisemakers only to beat them to death with giant sticks in quiet residential neighborhoods, unceremoniously toss the bodies in a dump truck and drive on to their next victims. Yet, why was this distressing to us? After all, Chinese authorities were responding to the threat of a *human* epidemic. The solution at first glance seemed relatively simple; kill all the dogs that might possibly transmit the disease. Problem solved, right? Maybe. But then what is it about this solution that so affronted our sense of reason?

As a group, this was our first opportunity to talk about the tenants of critical theory by discussing a specific instance of a seemingly heartless portrayal of human behavior where we believed personal liberties were compromised and power abused. Our discussion of this article offered a location and connection for the work we conducted that semester—an exemplar for how we moved from the global to the local and the local to the global. How did our responses to a particular event provide a model for thinking about and questioning other events? How did our experiences apply in other contexts? Freire (1997) argued that there must be room to synthesize our experiences into a collective history for us to work collectively together. He believed that a dedication to dialogism demands that we connect our personal experience to a broader political, economic and social context and that we see the larger contextual scope within our immediate

experience (pp. 39-40). Thus, this article offered an entree to discuss how we draw on our own experiences and ideologies into our reading and interpretation of the event and how the event expands our thinking of those experiences. Apparent in our first discussion were our differences in ideologies.

Holly: Why do you believe this article produced such outrage in our discussion today?

Sarah: How can you not be outraged? I mean what person who has ever owned a dog could look at this and not be angry?

Lauren: Nothing like that could ever happen here. I have no idea why the people who live in China would not revolt. I mean there are more of them, they could just band together somehow. No way would Americans put up with that.

Jordan: That's not true. We put up with stuff like that all the time. I mean, like…not our dogs getting killed but …when was the last time you went to the airport? It is kind of the same thing. You know where they make you take off all your clothes and search your bag.

Steven: They don't make you take off all your clothes. And that is not the same thing. That is to protect you. I mean do you really want to get on a plane with someone who has a bomb?

Jordan: Well, maybe the government in China thinks they are, umm, protecting, too. Protecting you from getting rabies.

We used this first illustration of how we take a global event and place it within the context of our immediate experiences to help us understand the larger context of the focus of our study. Just in this first exchange, we were already doing work within our critical framework.

Holly: How do you think your different points can help us to think about the challenges of a critical study?

Jeff: Well, both Jordan and Steven think they are right and they both think they have good reasons for saying what they said.

Taylor: Yeah, neither one of them is going to see the other's point of view.

Bailey: They are both saying the same thing, really. Um, but only Jordan sees the China thing and the homeland security as being the same thing.

Lauren: It's just that Jordan thinks the US government is justified and China is not.

Holly: So, how is justification significant to what we are talking about? Is there any connection we can make to our study?

Steven: Well, I mean people who have power, I mean, also think what they do is justified. You know what I mean?

Holly: Explain what you mean by, "what they do"

Steven: Well it's like when someone has power, they, um, can just do things to people who have less power. Just like what we've been talking about. You know, like kill their dogs, or like in the South how blacks had to drink from different water fountains. They can just decide that's how it's going to be and people have to do it.

Steven: That's what I meant earlier. Like, that kind of thing is justified. I mean at the time, the whites thought they were justified.

Jordan: That's what I was trying to say. Some things ARE justifiable, and other things aren't. Some injustice is just because people are ignorant.

Bailey: Yeah, but who gets to decide, um [pause] what is justifiable and what is not?

At minimum, the analysis of our discussion of the article suggested we had at least a working understanding that there are multiple realities. We expressed an overwhelming collective indignation toward this event and empathy toward the people adversely affected. But we reached a point of departure once we expanded the discussion to our own experiences. From the transcript, our responses indicated that, "Experience is moral…because it is the medium of engagement in everyday life in which things are at stake and in which ordinary people are deeply engaged as stakeholders who have important things to lose, to gain, and to preserve" (Kleinman, 2000, p. 362). The transcript further indicated how subjective those morals.

One tool of Bal's (1997) narratological analysis that can also be brought to bear on Sebald's (1998) concept of intermedial narrative is the idea of stressing the practice and process of narrative rather than conceptualzing narrative as a finished product. It is also the point where the narrative structure and the process of making sense of it – its reception – overlap most. As we looked at our transcript, we noticed that our narratives were evolving with each new interaction. As our narratives were developing, we were also trying to make sense of what we thought and how we attempted to articulate those thoughts. Our stories were a constant progression.

Following our discussion, we responded to the article again by writing in our cultural autobiographies. In class, we wrote a narrative in which we "defined" the themes of our discussion by way of personal antidote. I asked the students to use their assignment sheets and select one of the writing methods to help them better explicate what they perceive the theme of this article/our discussion. How did they make sense of their reading through one of their own life experiences that paralleled their thinking? We focused our attention on capturing the description of our connections that is privileged in narratology as having "great impact on the ideology and aesthetic effect of the text" (Bal, 1997, p. 36). Through these descriptions of

specific episodes of our life, our aim was to relate our thoughts about the article and subsequent discussion of it to a specific and personal context. Our writing also gave us an opportunity to "talk back" to the article/class discussion with more developed thought—as opposed to the more spontaneous ones generated in a verbal exchange. In writing, we processed the event without insertion of other voices and with more time to carefully consider our connections.

As we read each other's stories, we noticed events that established our frame of reference and provided some insight into how we interpret other narratives. In our analysis of our stories, we used our conventions of narrative theory to search for similarity in cultural discourse, identify metaphors, recognize time and place of events, and assess how we situate ourselves within and connect to particular critical themes. In our writing exchange, we began to recognize elements within the stories that revealed our subjectivities and how those subjectivities are constructed and reconstructed over time and through experience. While I included my own writings for my co-researchers to read, mine was marked with a red (X) at the top so it would not be selected. The researchers understood that while I was part of the writing community, my writing journal was the portion of my own writing reflected in the manuscript. The other writing pieces included must be those of the other co-researchers.

Collectively we selected for inclusion in this chapter the stories that most seemed to reflect the different ways we narrated our critical consciousness and represented our collective capacity to engage with the text and our writing in meaningful ways. We divided into groups of eight and each group took an equal number of writings to read and review. Within the group, each member earmarked three pieces from this chapter that best illustrated the range of ways in which we wrote about our discussion within the context of our own experiences. Once each person made their selection, we isolated these writings, eliminating those not selected. The

remaining writings were collected for analysis and out of those, three were eventually included in this chapter. This process was repeated for each chapter in the study.

THREE YEARS SHORTLY after the death of my grandmother, my parents finally acquiesced and let me get a dog after years of pleading. We went to the animal shelter right after school let out. It was raining on and off and my father, more defensive than offensive behind the wheel, was swearing at drivers he thought were going too fast. My mother was next to him in the front seat lecturing me on the enormous responsibility of owning a dog and repeatedly declaring that she would not be left to care for this dog. I really think that she was more worried about dog hair getting on the sofa than my actual neglect of the dog. When we reached the shelter, I could hear the barking and whining before I stepped out of the car. I was horrified by what I saw. The shelter was filled with dogs and cats; I saw only one empty crate. Many of the animals were pawing through the metal cages, scratching desperately to get out and howling at the top of their lungs. Others were silent; they looked hollow and desperate like they were resolved to live out their days in this prison.   The girl working at the front desk told us that the ones with the green stickers on their cages were scheduled to be euthanized that week. These, she said, were "death row dogs". Nothing about that experience was anything I imagined. When I finally chose my dog, a painful and difficult decision to pick the one dog to spare, I cried. Not because I was so happy to finally have my own dog, but because of all the ones I had to leave behind to die. We kill just as many animals here as they are killing in China. It just doesn't make the news. It was a Wednesday when I rescued my dog—just one day before the shelter would have "put her down". She would not have been dragged into the street and beaten to death in front of

onlookers, but she was living in a 4' x 4' cage, sleeping in her own waste. And on Thursday, she would have been dead just the same as if she were in China.

LIVING IN ROCHESTER Hills, Michigan, I did not often notice the homeless except for the occasional man pushing a shopping cart full of aluminum cans or the woman in tattered clothing reading outside the public library. When I was thirteen, I took a job working as a bagger at the local grocery store. I was always required to do the dirty work like separating the cans and bottles in recycling and emptying garbage bags. On my second day in the recycling center, I met a homeless man named Chris. He was running cans and bottles he had collected through the recycling machine for coins. He looked to be in his late thirties but the deep creases in his face made it hard to be sure. He told me that he had once worked for the Ford Motor Company. Every Tuesday when I was on break, Chris would appear at the recycling machine. I looked forward to his stories—he always made me laugh. It was a nice break from the monotony of the job. Then suddenly, he never showed up again. Two weeks after he stopped coming to the store, the closing story on the 10 o'clock news reported that a man had been found dead in the dumpster behind the grocery store where I worked. I feared it might be Chris. The footage on the news was unbelievable. The man had been struck in the head before being tossed into the dumpster. The next day when I returned to work, it was obvious that people had seen the news but no one seemed to be particularly outraged. I know if the same had happened to an employee of the store, the response would have been different. It made me wonder why one life is more valuable than another.

MY FIRST YEAR playing junior varsity basketball, two black players joined what, up until that point, had been an all-white team. Our coach who had a reputation for six-day- a-week practices—sometimes two-a-day—announced he was canceling practice on Monday for the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday. After sprints that day, Clay, my best friend at the time, and I walked off the court. Clay turned to me and said, "Maybe if we had killed 100 more of them, we wouldn't have practice for the rest of the season." Laughing, he pushed open the door of the locker room, the new black players still well within earshot.

Our narratives were a way for us to make sense of our experiences and relate those experiences to others. We used stories to create a structured narrative related in a particular way "in order to illustrate general truths which [story-tellers] expect their recipients to infer; story-tellers prefer to imply rather than baldly state the general truth they are illustrating" (Nair, 2003, p. 259). Our memories allowed for storage and retrieval of our experiences, but our stories provided a way of transmitting those experiences to others. According to Bruner (1990), the narrative itself is an act of meaning.

From our stories we established a foundation, albeit not perfectly formed, for our research purpose; injustice persists and there is still reason to believe in the fight against oppression. We also agreed that we think about social justice in a more comprehensive way through the telling of our stories and reading the stories of others. We used story as a tool for developing a critical conscience in order to integrate reflection and action (Freire, 1973, p. 105). What we gained from our own stories told in dialogue and in writing might not be the transformative event that was the cornerstone of Freire's work and hope, but our analysis indicated that changing ideologies and patterns of discrimination are made more difficult in a

culture where nicety is privileged and denial effectively masks the oppression that acts of brutality more readily reveal. After all, this is America, land of the free. We are a more evolved society; we know better than to kill poor animals and people in broad daylight. We are more dignified than that. We reserve violence and neglect for those we have clearly established as inferior members of society, capable of such atrocities as drawing a welfare check, threatening the sanctity of marriage or worse, not speaking *our* language. And even when we must resort to extreme measures, we make sure to wear matching hoods and robes; we drive the violator first to a remote location somewhere east of Laramie; we assess the economic cost before we leave the stranded to drown on their roof. We persisted in our study knowing that there exists a large gulf between recognizing oppression and actively resisting it.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Weight of Memory

I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation…Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we must interfere.
~Elise Wiesel

On Thursday the second week of September, the thermostat registered 88º in our trailer, the third day the needle had been hovering around that temperature. Our discomfort was compounded by the knowledge that the county was not scheduled to replace the compressor until Tuesday. The air was thick and stale. We sat in our discussion group shifting in our seats,

fanning ourselves with folders or scraps of paper, wiping the sweat from our brow as we endured the hottest part of the day.

Katie: We are like prisoners in here. How can they expect us to do school work when we can't even breathe?

Nick: (Laughing) I should have gone to private school, and then I would have had air conditioning.

It was ironic that on such a warm September day, we made our pilgrimage through East Germany with Elise Wiesel in his memoir *Night* during the coldest month of winter, the glacial winds howling in the early hours of dawn. We stood inside Block 53 (or was it Block 55?) among the emaciated Jews, none weighing more than 35 kilos. Stripped of their possessions—their jewelry, their photographs, their clothing, their spectacles, their prayer shawls, their dignity. Freezing. Sleeping three to a bed, as the smell of burning corpses rises from Krematorium Number Two.

Then it was mid-morning and we traveled the long, frozen miles to nowhere. We plodded through the subzero terrain of Gleiwitz…No…Czechoslovakia. No…Gros-Rosen… An endless journey, strange and dreamlike we marched without faltering, the icy wind blowing violently. Anyone not sustaining the pace was shot on the spot like an injured dog:

The road was endless. To allow oneself to be carried by the mob, to be swept away by blind fate. When the SS were tired, they were replaced. But no one replaced us. Chilled to the bone, our throats parched, famished, out of breath, we pressed on. We were the masters of nature, the masters of the world. We had transcended everything—death, fatigue, our natural needs. We were strong than cold and hunger, stronger than the guns and the desire to die, doomed and rootless, nothing but numbers, we were the only men

on earth. At last, the morning star appeared in the gray sky. A hesitant light began to hover on the horizon. We were exhausted; we had lost all strength, all illusion. (Wiesel, 2006, p. 87)

By the end of the class we have walked the nearly twenty miles with Elise. We feel a bit fatigued ourselves. The room, which has now reached 90 degrees, feels a little chilly. Most of us, lost in the pages of Wiesel's misery are moved by his vivid passages and brutal narration. Many of us expressed empathy and in our tone, compassion.

Brittany: I don't get how anyone could have survived all that.

Allison: I can't even imagine what that must have been like.

Ashley: I honestly don't know how anyone could ever be normal after something like that. Would you not just beg to die?

But some in the group, straightening in their seats poised for confrontation, are suspect of Wiesel and question not only his story, but his motivation for writing the story. Freire (1985) reminded us that to negate the centrality of subjectivity in human understanding is "naïve and simplistic" (p. 3) and only denies the importance of people in the making of their own history. This was very often the most exciting and often the most frustrating aspect of our study.

Kevin: Mrs. Isserstedt, don't you think he probably exaggerated some of that to make you feel sorry for him?

Holly: Why do you think that?

Kevin: I don't know. To sell more books. And to make the Holocaust seem worse than it really was.

Lauren: How could it *seem* worse than it *was*?

Kevin: All I'm saying is that if it were really that bad, no one would have survived. How could you walk that far in the snow without any food? Think about it. Everyone would have died the first day.

Holly: Very few did survive.

Several in the group express such denial, as we discovered in even greater depth in our writing. Some of my co-researchers felt that the Holocaust was still a subject worthy of debate and that Wiesel was describing "alleged" events. This discussion presented an opportunity to more accurately understand what is meant by narrative inquiry. As one co-researcher wrote the next day in their notebook as a reader response entry:

> Any logical person would conclude that the events as they are described by Wiesel could never have happened this way. Humans do not have the capacity (physically or mentally) to endure or survive that kind of suffering. Indeed, the Jews are oppressed in many ways. But to write these kinds of books or exaggerate the Holocaust is really a cheap shot. It allows Jews to be victims forever instead of moving beyond some of the events of WWII.

Deborah Lipstadt, a distinguished scholar on genocide, called the denial "the final stage of genocide" because it "strives to reshape history in order to demonize the victims and rehabilitate the perpetrators (Rosen, 2003)." Wiesel described such denial as a "double killing" because it also murders the memory of the crime. "To remain silent or indifferent," Wiesel believed it is "the greatest sin." But the oppressor relies on that silence in order to perpetuate domination. The co-researchers and I considered this in our discussion.

Katie: What I don't understand is how anyone could ever do such a thing? How could any human do that to another?

Patrick: That's what war is about, Katie.

Brittany: What do you mean—that is what war is about? That's not what war is about!

Patrick: Yes, it is. When you are at war and you have a job to do, you don't question it. You don't question, you just act. The Nazis were just following orders. They were told what to do and they did it.

April: But what if what they were told was wrong? What crazy person would think killing all those people for no good reason was what they should do?

Steven: They thought they had a reason. They weren't permitted to question orders. That's war.   That is the reality of war. Innocent people are tortured and killed during war. That is just how it is.

In our written responses to our discussion about the atrocities of war, many expressed strong opinions that genocide should be discussed within the context of war; the torture and killing of others are a "necessary evil" in times of war. My students and I directed our writing away from the counter production of defending our views and more toward considering the larger scope of violence in society. How do we think about the events of the Holocaust and the experiences described by Wiesel as just one illustration of human violence and suffering? Freire (1998) placed an emphasis upon developing a questioning attitude towards the violence of the status quo and creating a new pedagogy that relies upon a dialogue to seek alternatives to violence.

MY BROTHER IS a Marine. I know that he is trained to kill. I know that he has killed. There are moments when I think about the two of us growing up together and I cannot imagine that he is the one in those pictures in our living room wearing fatigues holding an assault weapon. Sometimes while reading this book, I actually thought, "Murderer". My brother is a murderer.

He can knowingly, intentionally take another life. The same kid who thought it was cruel that I kept crickets in a jar. The same kid who used to pick wildflowers for our mother when she was sad. Other times, I think that this is his job. That he does what he has to do. He has no choice. He does it so I can be free. After all, freedom is not free.

WHEN I WAS IN middle school, I remember watching the events of 9/11 on TV in my classroom. At the time, I had no idea what all of it meant, I just knew that it had been done by "terrorists". When I was reading this book, all I could think about was the people who crashed those planes into the World Trade Center. I wondered what belief must have been so strong that they would spend all those years training to kill all those people and themselves. What did they think they accomplished? What did all those deaths really prove? It must have been the same for all the Nazis in Auschwitz. They must have believed in the deepest part of themselves that they were doing the right thing. Otherwise, how could they not have put themselves in the Krematorium? In a way, it must have been better for the 9/11 terrorists. At least they did not have to live with what they did.

In our discussion and our writing there was a sharp divide between questioning oppression and questioning authority. Rules, policies and practices of discrimination—even those of the magnitude Wiesel detailed in *Night*—were regarded by many of the researchers as "simply doing business". In this conversation, the Holocaust was simply the business of war. Such institutionally sanctioned human denigration is a powerful determinant for the lives of those oppressed. What emerged from our conversation was that even in a society of increased

interest in human rights, progress is not a forgone conclusion. Human rights get stuck in the conflict of competing values systems and political beliefs.

Freire would not accept institutionalized oppression as reason not to question human atrocity. Through focused questioning and analysis, the "rigorous, logical, coherent structure" (Freire & Faundez, 1992, p. 39) necessary to warrant knowledge, which initiates action, can be achieved. Which is, of course, subject in turn to further questioning. The practice of critical consciousness is mindful awareness of the relationships among *consciousness, action,* and *world,* and attempts to get at the *why* of the world in the constructive nature of knowing. Freire (1994) argued that knowledge was not a state of mind or an ambitious idea, but rather it was a *way of being* that reflected the deepest human capacities for producing culture and history. Critical knowledge enfolds the knower and the known in a dialectical unity embodied through the creative powers of existence.

In Wiesel's passages, there is such lack of knowledge and understanding as to who the oppressor is, his purpose and objectives. Wiesel and the other Jews moved from day to day, week to week in a kind of mental fog that comes from forced disassociation from reality. "To surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity (Freire, 1998, p.29)". Many of us had difficulty accepting that the Jews would not question, not resist, not revolt. We disbelieved that the Jews would go so willingly.

Jordan: Why didn't they just run? Why did they just go with the Nazis knowing they had done nothing wrong?

Trevor: I know. It seems like they did not fight at all. They just got on the trains without even putting up a fight.

Taylor: I would have fought. I would have at least put up a fight. Tried to organize. Tried to free myself even if it got me killed. I would have done something.

Brittany: The Jews did not know what was happening. They did not know they were in danger.

Katie: She's right. They did not know to be afraid. They did not know they *should* fight.

Wiesel's account of the Holocaust, indicates how the Nazi's withheld information and perpetuated mystery and confusion to "dissuade the people from critical intervention in reality. The oppressor knows full well that this intervention would not be to his interest. What is to his interest is for the people to continue in a state of submersion, impotent in the face of oppressive reality" (Freire, 1998, p.). The Nazis gave out no information and therefore kept the Jews in a constant state of fear.

> "Get up, sir, get up! You must ready yourself for the journey. Tomorrow you will be expelled, you and your family, you and all the other Jews. Where to? Please don't ask me, sir, don't ask questions. God alone could answer you. For heaven's sake, get up…"
>
> "What are you saying? Get ready for the journey? What journey? Why? What is happening? Have you gone mad?" (Wiesel, 2006, p. 15)

Toward the end of our reading, questions about the Jews' inability to act against the Nazi regime overwhelmingly dominated our conversations and writing submissions.   This is what Freire (1998) called the culture of silence. It is a powerful tool the oppressor uses to keep the oppressed in line and to prevent them from questioning their situation or the reality of their

circumstances. While the Jews are able to respond, they cannot do so critically because they are stuck in the restrictions of the power structure. They are incapable of acquiring accurate knowledge of their plight and the oppressor defines who they are. Thus, many Jews appeared passive and powerless. We grappled with this powerlessness in our attempts to relate this concept to situations in our own lives.

I WAS NOT a popular kid growing up. No matter what I did, I hardly ever made friends. Kids made fun of the way I looked and they made fun of the fact that my dad was a nurse. I was never invited to parties, except when the whole class got an invitation. When I was ten years old a kid at school who was much older than me told me one morning before school that there was going to be an explosion in the cafeteria. He said that everyone was going to the gym locker room for safety. His father was a coach at the school so I believed him and went straight to the locker room. Once inside, the kid locked the door from the outside. I was left alone in the locker room for two hours before someone finally heard me yelling. I never really lived this down at the school. Everyone thought what this kid had done was so funny. But more than that, they just thought I was stupid for believing him.

FOR SPRING BREAK last year my parents and I went to the Bahamas for vacation. My Dad got one of those last minute deals where you get the plane tickets and the hotel for one price. It was that website where you make a bid and can get the trip really cheap if you don't care what day you leave. The day we were leaving, we got to the airport in plenty of time for our flight (which was earlier than usual because it was considered international). It took us almost an hour to get through security. When we finally made it to the front of the line, it was only fifteen

minutes until our flight. My Dad told the security guy that we were going to miss our flight. It seemed like this just pissed off the security officer because he pulled my Dad aside and made this woman search his bag. My Dad was irate. The security guy told my Dad it was because we had bought out tickets only two days before, but I think it was because he did not like the fact my Dad was asking him to hurry. There is no way of knowing the *real* reason. By the time we got to the gate, the door was shut and the plane was pulling out. I have never felt so helpless in my life as when I was watching that plane back out of the gate without us. The next flight did not take off for another seven hours. We spent the whole day in the airport, had to pay 150 extra dollars to get a new tickets just so some guy who had more power than us could pull every single thing out of my Dad's athletic bag as we watched helplessly, the minutes ticking away. That was really a time I knew what it was like be powerless, even though we did everything we were supposed to do.

It is unlikely that our experiences with *Night* necessarily changed some of our deeply held social, religious or political beliefs. But through this memoir we dialogued, listened and wrote through concepts that extended beyond the scope of our collective reason. Our themes here only touched on an epistemological pursuit that can never be resolved. The Holocaust remains one of the most tragic and lasting impressions of inhumanity and horror; human behavior at its most extreme. Perhaps then, our task was simply to question and work "to change some conditions that appear…obviously against the beauty of being human" (Horton and Freire, 1990, p. 131). Our reading of *Night* reminded us of the importance of this infinite quest.

That day as I left school, I was thinking about the value of an individual life. How is it that in our society one life can be deemed more or less valuable than another? My thoughts about *Night* and this day lingered. On my drive home I passed a field where two cows were huddled together under a small patch of shade offered by a large oak near the fencing. The flies collected near their faces and they shook their heads to shoo them away. The cow closer to my car had both front hooves tucked underneath her body with an arresting innocence that deeply moved me. She blinked in the harsh sunlight, her glassy brown eyes and disarming pose so beautiful.

Even though the cows were only about twenty five yards from my car, they were contained by electric fencing that extended the length of the county road. Both of them had a yellow tag attached to their left ear, a mark of ownership or perhaps means of tracking their days until slaughter. What struck me was their complete compliance, their gaze of quiet submission. They were not charging the fence to freedom or pacing the perimeter in panic. This is because they did not know their fate. They did not know the horror that lie ahead. They were separated from their mothers, boarded on a trailer with the others, unknowingly trusting whoever brought them to this pasture to graze.

Minutes later I walked into the grocery store to pick up a few items for dinner. I had planned to make spaghetti with French bread. I picked up pasta, fresh bread, an onion, tomatoes, mushrooms and a bulb of garlic. I walked to the meat department for my last item; a package of ground beef. Standing over the meat cases, the blood collecting in the corner of one of the Styrofoam packages, all I could think about were those cows. Suddenly I felt like the captor, the oppressor, the executioner. I was justified because I am a meat eater. There was no moral

dilemma for me; I am human and they are just cows. I never gave their life a second thought as I bit down on my hamburger or cut into my ribeye.

I felt sick. I walked toward the counter to pay for the items in my cart. That night, the sauce was vegetarian.

CHAPTER SIX

Unmasked

*Halloween fell on a day when I felt fine…We walked around the neighborhood with our
pillowcase sacks, running into other kids and comparing notes: the house three doors down gave
out whole candy bars, while the house next to that gave out only cheap mints. I felt wonderful.
It was only as the night wore on and the moon came out did I begin to realize why I felt so good.
No one could see me clearly. No one could see my face.*
~Lucy Grealy

Summer has finally relented and given way to fall. As if overnight, the trees ahead of me

in the distance on my drive to work have been transformed into a palette of deep crimson, fiery

oranges and harvest yellows. I was energized by the time change and the softness of the light

that morning. It was Halloween and the traffic was heavier than usual, a surprisingly welcome

opportunity to soak in the view. The child who sat in the passenger's seat in the car ahead of me

was wearing some kind of animal ears that bobbed back and forth as she talked to the driver. I

caught occasional glimpses of painted faces and strange wigs in the cars zooming by in the left lane while I was stopped by the school traffic.

Lost in thought, I remembered a conversation I had with a group of the researchers the day before in which we were discussing our Halloween memories and rituals. I was still struck by some of their comments.

Jordan: Halloween is a big deal in this county. It is a time to watch everyone try to outdo each other.

Bailey: No kidding. My mom bought my little sisters matching Coach handbags for their trick-or-treat bag because she heard that one of their friends would be carrying a Chanel. That just cracks me up!

Lauren: That's nothing. In my neighborhood they all trick-or-treat in golf carts. Which is not that unusual, except now they try to decorate their cart better than someone else's cart. It is crazy.

Taylor: My mom went to the store last night and spent like $200.00 on trick-or-treat candy.

Steven: God, what did she buy?

Taylor: King-Sized candy bars. She does it every year.

Steven: Damn. I'm coming to your house! <laughter>

Jeff: Me, too!

Taylor: Everyone comes to our house. Last year, we ran out [of candy] and my Mom had to go back to the store and buy more.

Lauren: Mrs. Isserstedt, you should see the costumes, too. They cost a ton! People go all out. Even their houses take them weeks to decorate.

This description of Halloween was totally foreign to me. From the details which they described so matter-of-factly, so casually and unremarkably, I gathered this is the only version of Halloween most of them have ever known.

This conversation was at the heart of our work this semester because it was yet another example of how privilege manifests itself in the most seemingly common of events. It also reminded me that my co-researchers and I existed within particular environments. Even though context was an acknowledged aspect of our critical work, there was evidence that we often failed to recognize the significance of our physical environment in shaping our worldview. Bowers (1974) coined the term "taken-for-granted reality" (p. 4), which addresses the paradoxical power and dismissal of place. Bowers' calls for educators to help students recognize the significance of their environment, in all its manifestations, over thinking and decision-making:

> Educators have a responsibility to assist students to understand their culture without being blind to its underlying assumptions and myths.... No aspect of the culture is to be taken-for-granted, but instead is to be brought to the level of conscious awareness and examined. (Bowers, 1974, p.5)

Taken-for-grantedness is a symptom of the inability to critically know and understand our individual situation in location in a given moment. This conversation was one example of how this study offered us opportunities to critically experience our environment in parallel to those environments described by others and by the memoirists. By promoting and linking actions of perception, awareness and response, we can deepen our understanding of how the self, in and with an environment, share mutual internal and external influences. According to Freire (1973), "Integration with one's context…is a distinctively human activity." (p.4). Humans have the

ability to understand on a cognitive level the interconnection between the self and the environment.

I intentionally scheduled our reading of Lucy Grealy's *Autobiography of a Face* to coincide with Halloween. The English teacher in me could not resist the metaphorical possibilities within Grealy's memoir to our critical themes. It offered provocative passages to consider how our interaction with others influences the formation of identity and our place in the world. Early in the novel, several themes emerged as we theorized our own experiences and those of Lucy including the concept of wearing masks as disguise, notions of invisibility, and how masks allow for the crossing from one social location to another.

> My pleasure at the sight of the children didn't last long, however. I knew what was coming. As soon as they got over the thrill of being near the ponies, they'd notice me. Half my jaw was missing, which gave my face a strange triangular shape, accentuated by the fact that I was unable to keep my mouth completely closed.   When I first started doing pony parties, my hair was still short and wispy, still growing in from the chemo. But as it grew I made things worse by continuously bowing my head and hiding behind the curtain of hair, furtively peering out at the world like some nervous actor. Unlike the actor, though, I didn't secretly relish my audience, and if it were possible I would have stood behind that curtain forever, my head bent in an eternal act of deference. I was, however, dependent upon my audience. Their approval or disapproval defined everything for me, and I believed with every cell in my body that approval wasn't written into my particular script. I was fourteen years old. (Grealy, 2003, p. 4-5)

Bailey: This passage makes me think of that quote from the movie *V for Vendetta*, "You wear a mask for so long, you forget who you were beneath it."

Holly: That is such a cool connection. I have not seen that movie, but that quote is really appropriate.

Bailey: I think that line really relates to Lucy. She tends to use her face as the reason for all the things she cannot do. I don't think she even realizes that after a while. She does it for so long, I think she forgets being visible is even a possibility. I don't believe others view her as terribly as she views herself.

Holly: Explain what you mean by "use her face."

Bailey: Well…she says she can't have a boyfriend because of her face. She says she does not have friends because of her face. She says that is unlovable because of her face.

Becca: Most of that is really more about how she feels about herself than how other people feel. Don't you think?

Sarah: I think a lot of people do what Lucy does. Not just the ones who have physical issues. Self loathing will make you that way.

What the students described is the repeated way Lucy attributes the cause of her social alienation, in a sense a form of self-protective rationalization, to her disfigured face. However, in doing so, she distanced herself from society because of her belief that she was not worthy of acceptance. Lucy felt she had no "voice" and therefore relegated herself to a socially silent existence. Having "voice" however, presumes that people want to, or indeed can, speak. There is also the assumption that people will actually listen, the first step to engaging with the ideas of others in reasoned dialogue (Jones, 1998).

Freire's theory of conscientization (1992), evolving from an educational program for oppressed peasants, used reflection and dialogue as a tool for acquiring voice. It thereby reduced

their perceived social constraints, enabling these oppressed peasants to transform their "object" status to that of "subject." Sarah pointed out that often when individuals feel valueless (whether culturally or self imposed), the result is social isolation and a sense of invisibility.

Bailey's comment that Lucy's view of herself was much worse than how others viewed her indicated Bailey's lack of empathy and unfounded assertion people would overlook Lucy's startling appearance. Empathy is vitally necessary to get the person to assume the viewpoint or perspective of the oppressed. Sidanius (1993) documented several *legitimizing myths* defined as "attitudes, values, beliefs, or ideologies that provide moral and intellectual support to and justification for the group-based hierarchical social structure and the unequal distribution of value in social systems," (p. 207) employed by the powerful to subdue or invalidate the suffering of the oppressed. Bailey used two forms of hegemonic inculcation: personal blame and natural causes. Personal blame messages convey to the oppressed the idea that they are to blame for their misfortune by some act, behavior or attitude toward their circumstances, whereas natural causes explain away their suffering as inevitable and the result of higher power, beyond anyone's control (Prilleltendky, 1994).

In our writing, we explored times in which we hid behind a veil of anonymity—we revealed how we use (both literal and figurative) to disguise our own inadequacies and also veil our resentment of others. Our experiences existed within the framework of critical pedagogical processes; processes that allowed us to address broader social issues by way of critiquing and challenging our own behavior.

FOR ABOUT THREE months I have been chatting with this girl on the Internet. I set up a Facebook account with pictures of my cousin who lives in LA and a pseudonym with a made-up

identity. I have liked this girl since I was in the 10th grade, but she has never given me the time

of day—until now. She was in my Biology class last year and that was when it first started. I

loved that class just because she was in it.   But every time I tried to talk to her, she would walk

away, act disinterested or ignore me completely. Once I got up the nerve to ask her if she

wanted to go get coffee, but she said "no". Now we have these long conversations at night and

she shares with me all these private things about herself. If she really knew who I was, she

would die. Yesterday, she asked again if we could meet. I guess soon I'll run out of excuses

why we can't and have to delete my page.

THERE IS A guy on the football team who lives in my neighborhood. We have hated each other

since the 9th grade. He and I are both starters.   During school we never speak. We avoid each

other on campus and whenever we walk into the same room, one of us will usually leave. There

is even hostility between us at practice. But when we have on our helmets and we are in a game,

you would never know this about us. We are the two people who most work the game strategies

and keep morale up on the field. We even rile up the people in the stands by doing crazy things

when we come onto the field at the beginning of a game. But when the game is over and we are

back in the locker room, we go back to being silent enemies. That helmet masks a lot of rage

between us.

I HAVE ALWAYS been a straight A student. I always try my best on my work. I always turn

in my homework and I'm always the kid that people call when they need help studying for a test.

I wear the mask of "Smart Kid".   I hate this about myself. I am a coward. I have dreams

(actually they are more like detailed fantasies) that one day I just intentionally fail a test. The

night before I hang out with my friends and never even bother to study. I walk into the room, and when I get the test, I just "Christmas Tree" the whole thing. I can't imagine how good it would feel to do that. Just to stop trying to be what my parents want me to be for just one day. Just to know what it would feel like to think about something besides grades. To be something besides a "good student". But I know I will never do that. My parents would disown me.

The narrative excerpts above suggested that cultural identity is not something we find, inherit or receive. One the contrary, it is the result of both a negotiation and a construction that is on-going.   According to Kenneth Gergen (1991), a unified self may no longer be tenable or adaptive in an increasingly pluralistic and connected culture. Immersed in a technological and ever competitive world, the self has become socially saturated, infused with and shaped by the influences of others and we find that identity is not solely constructed by the individual. However, we often fail to critically question the self and our identity in relation to our social position. What is it that motivates us to wear our many disguises and assumed identities? And for whom? Like Lucy, the many faces we wear contribute to our own internal oppression. What is implied in the above narratives and in the novel, but unstated, is the fear of rejection. We wear our "masks" as a way of perhaps preparing ourselves to reject our oppressor before they can reject us.

Friere does not speak of conscientization as a means to an end but rather how it is joined with meaningful praxis, "that means, and let us emphasize it, that human beings do not get beyond the concrete situation in which they find themselves, only by their consciousness or intentions" (Friere, 1993, p. 147). Change of thought must be followed by change of action. The "concrete" to which Freire seems to suggest, to Lucy and to us, are the feelings associated with

social alienation; the immediate consequence of marginalization. Our reflexive practice of writing about our own social disguises offered an opportunity to find new insight into how we live our lives. Perhaps it helped us develop empathy for the others who adorn their masks and those like Lucy for whom there was no mask to protect her from the public humiliation, stares, pity and emotional suffering that is a byproduct of such oppressive treatment, and to apply our belief that through critical reflection demonstrate our "belief in the worth and utility for making things better" (Clift, Houstion and Pugach, 1990).

That morning on my commute to school, I was reminded of my own childhood Halloween celebrations, a time that I recall with much sweetness and nostalgia. One particular October, my mom and I were living in a rented house at the end of a quiet street. My mother, recently divorced from my father, supported the two of us on a modest salary that afforded few luxuries, a fact that was not apparent to me at the time. That year I had a new Wonder Woman costume from K-Mart complete with a plastic mask and tie-on cape. I can still smell the vinyl, like a newly unfurled beach raft, and remember the deep checkerboard creases from its tightly squared packaging. I was so proud of my costume that I wore it days before Halloween arrived. On our porch was a small, squatty pumpkin from a local farmers market and in our kitchen a glass bowl full of miniature candy bars waiting for the trick-or-treaters.

In my music class, in an elementary school that was more than 60% free lunch[1], I sat next to a girl with whom I was always partnered because her last name appeared after mine on the roll. She and I shared a music book and because we were about the same height, we always stood together on the top riser during choral concerts. One morning while we were talking when

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[1] Children whose families have income of 130% or less of the Federal poverty guideline as well as those who receive food stamps or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) are eligible for free lunch. Those whose families have incomes from 131% to 185% of the poverty guideline are eligible for reduced-price meals.

we should have been singing, I asked her what she was planning to "be" for Halloween. She told me that her mother had fashioned a scarecrow costume from an old pair of overalls and one of her brother's flannel shirts. I did not mention it, but I wondered why her mother did not get her a new costume from K-Mart. I was about to say something about what a good idea I thought the Scarecrow was when she said, "I love Halloween! My mom always drives me and my brother to the "rich" neighborhoods to trick-or-treat." I must have looked surprised, because she lowered her head and explained, "She takes me to the neighborhoods where the parents can afford candy." Sensing her embarrassment, I quickly changed the subject.

I never asked where these houses were exactly. At the time, I did not think I knew any "rich" people and had not a clue where a "rich" neighborhood might be. That morning on my drive to work, it occurred to me that perhaps all those years ago, her mother might have driven her, dressed in her handmade Scarecrow costume, to trick-or-treat on my street

CHAPTER SEVEN

Forest for the Trees

If you clear a forest, you'd better pray continuously. While you're pushing a road through and rigging the cables and moving between trees on the dozer, you better be talking to God. While you're cruising timber and marking trees with a blue slash, be praying; and pray while you're peddling the chips and logs and writing Friday's checks and paying the diesel bill—even if it's under your breath, a rustling at the lips. If you are manning the saw head or the scissors, snipping the trees off at the ground, going from one to another, approaching them brusquely and laying them down, I'd say, pray extra hard; and pray hard when you're hauling them away.
~Janisse Ray

"It's coming on Christmas; they're cutting down trees…" Joni Mitchell played on the

radio on my way to school. It is amazing the amount of change that can occur in a week, a day, a

moment. My drive to and from work each day took me down a long stretch of two-lane highway

that offered a comforting glimpse of what is still largely undeveloped pieces of rural Georgia.

There are no tall buildings, no billboards, no on or off ramps. Here, there were working farms, horses grazing in fields and small houses built decades ago when the road was still unpaved. Over the years this seemingly idyllic county, once the home to most of the state's poultry farms, was slowly being enveloped by contemporary America, the new inevitably overtaking the old. With each passing year more industry was coming. Now among the stretches of open farm land was a smattering of Starbucks, Super Targets and fast food chains.

In November, unceremoniously, the county began preparation to four-lane this highway. On Monday the bulldozers and industrial mulching machines arrived. By Friday, 200 yards on both sides of this nine-mile stretch of highway were clear cut. The visual was so dramatic that for a split second I thought I had taken a wrong turn. Giant oaks and maples, hundreds of years old, looked as if they had been savagely mutilated on the side of the road. Old homes once hidden from view by a thick border of trees were now exposed; front yards were giant patches of upturned earth, broken branches, and uneven stumps. It looked very much like footage I had seen on the news of towns ravaged by tornados.

Waiting to turn left into the school parking lot, I watched two plump squirrels scampering on the ground around what was left of a large tree. As I watched them chase each other along the length of a broken tree trunk, I noticed a large nest, still intact among the fractured branches. Where would these animals go now that their homes are in peril? It was only a matter of hours before the mulching machine shredded what remained of this tree making way for a busier highway and easier access to drive-thru windows.

It was ironic that the clear cutting began the week of our final discussion of *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood*. This excerpt from my journal seemed an appropriate entrée for this chapter. It was rare that the themes of our memoir were unfolding before us in our own backyard. What we had done up to this point suddenly changed direction and was overwritten. Freire (1998) remarked that animals live in an environment which they cannot transcend; but humans, who can not only communicate among themselves, have the ability to reflect and act, act and reflect (p. 106). Thus, they stand a far greater chance than the squirrels I encountered that morning of altering, if not transforming their world.

Holly: What connections can you make to the changes occurring in [our] county and the events Ray describes in the novel?

Ashley: I guess in some ways, what is happening [here] was happening when she was growing up.

Holly: Be specific.

Katie: Well even in the book she talks about going to the "strip mall". What was that store where they had a dollar to spend?

Steven: The TG&Y <laughter>

Allison: It wasn't to the same extent, but growth is just a reality. There is really no other way for a city to grow unless they cut down the trees so that houses and stuff can be built.

Kevin: Yeah. It's not like you can build the road *around* the trees. The land is collateral damage. That's just life. And I mean, do you really want to keep sitting in traffic everyday for three hours?

The use of the term "collateral damage" gave me pause. By the nods of the other researchers, I realized that they shared this sentiment even though some lamented the natural cost of "progress". What Ray described in her book *was* similar, but with one very distinct difference. The Crackers used the land as a means of survival, not convenience.

> Passing through my homeland it was easy to see that the Crackers, although fiercely rooted in the land and willing to defend it to the death, hadn't had the means, the education, or the ease to care particularly about its natural communities. Our relationship with the land was not one of give and return. The land itself has been the victim of social dilemmas—racial injustice, lack of education, and dire poverty. It was over tilled; eroded; cut; littered; polluted; treated as a commodity, sometimes the only one, and not as a living thing. Most people worried about getting by, and when getting by meant using the land, we used it. When getting by meant ignoring the land, we ignored it. (Ray, 1999, p. 165)

Our critical perspective asked us to take a few steps backward and consider the particulars of comparing Ray's world to ours. In our discussion, it was evident to most of us that clear cutting was a minor sacrifice in comparison to the considerable benefits of suburban expansion.

Holly: What difference is there between the use, if not abuse, of land for the purposes in our county and those [purposes] described by Ray?

Brittany: One difference is that we are not using the land because we are poor. This is just a growing area and in order for all that growth to happen, the land gets used. It would be impossible to build all these new subdivisions without cutting down any trees.

Steven: You really have to look at it as a good thing. I mean that trailer park that has been there for years got demolished yesterday and all those run-down houses will finally be gone now that the road is being widened.

Allison: That's true. The growth has made this a nicer place to live. All the nice subdivisions and restaurants and stuff have made this a place other people would want to move.

Patrick: We are finally not that hick town that people used to gossip about. We aren't just a bunch of chicken farms anymore. This area is as nice as [another affluent suburb in Georgia].

Kevin: For a while we were just one of those towns that had a few nice houses and a couple of restaurants surrounded by farms and rundown shacks. Most of those shacks are gone now. Cutting down a few trees is a small thing when you consider how it helps the property values in Forsyth.

Holly: Kevin, what do you think becomes of those people who were here before all this growth? The ones who live in those "trailer parks" and "shacks"?

Kevin: Well, I guess they find new homes. I'm sure the county has to pay them to move.

Suddenly, I thought about the squirrels. And the trees. And rural working class residents who also found themselves displaced by a powerful majority in a town they no longer recognize as their home. While we were not the ones who made the decision to bulldoze the motor home park, or build more strip malls or four-lane the highway, my students saw this as positive change. And while there may have been zoning referendums on the ballot, late night meetings of the planning commission, and commitments from industry for more jobs, these changes necessarily altered the demographic of the county favoring and promoting affluence. With this growth came

increased new housing development, more golf courses, more retail establishments, more schools and more roads—growth made possible by many low wage workers.

In Bauman's (1998) analysis of culture, he claimed that we moved from a producer society to a consumer society (p. 24). Consumer societies differ from producer societies in that the latter primarily engage in production while the former primarily engage in consumption. Bauman contends that these are not mutually exclusive alternatives; it is possible to engage in both activities, but that the emphasis has shifted. The dominant class leads this shift. This shift was evident in Forsyth County. In a few years, most of the farms would be gone and turned into subdivided lots. It is unlikely that the new homeowners would give much thought to the crops once grown on the fertile soil beneath their manicured lawn. Crops that, not long ago, stocked the local farmer's market before the supermarket opened across the street.

Holly: Ray and her family are an example of working class poor often found in rural areas of Georgia. If her father's junkyard had been in our county, what might have become of them?

Taylor: There are some run-down pockets still in the county. If Ray had lived here, it would be obvious after a while that a junkyard just would not "go" with what was being built around it. Wouldn't it be embarrassing to be one of those people down the street living in THE ONLY trailer park surrounded by expensive homes?

Holly: But where would these residents get the resources to move or change their standard of living?

Taylor: Well, like Brandon said earlier, I'm sure they get paid if they have to move. And besides, there are lots of places to work around here now. They could get real

jobs. I'm sure Ray's father didn't choose to be a junk dealer. If he had more choices, he could have gotten a job and been able to afford a better living.

Holly: So do you believe that no one would choose junk dealing if there were other choices of jobs around?

Steven: Well, some might choose it, but it wouldn't be a very smart choice. It's not like junk dealing has any health care insurance or retirement plans. <Laughter> The working class can only benefit from money coming into the county.

Holly: How so?

Steven: Well besides the jobs you mean?

Holly: Yes

Steven: If there is money, there are better schools, more conveniences, less crime and more opportunities. Who would choose to live in a poor county when you can live in a rich county? I would think it would make you want to better yourself so you could have a better life.

We discussed what Freire (1972) termed "cultural invasion." The privileged majority worked to convince the lower class to subscribe to their way of living because they believed their model to be better, more desirable. It is the imposition of one worldview upon another. In our discussion, we were able to rationalize this "invasion" because we gave those displaced "the illusion of deciding" when in fact the decision-making power lies with the invader (Freire, 1972, p. 159). We believed it is possible to automate behavior and standardize desire. After all, who would not want a choice of seven franchised restaurants instead of two? Who would not want a well-stocked supermarket at every intersection?

As a group with critical aims, it was disheartening how pervasive the attitudes and values of dominate groups and even as we investigated stories of subordinated experience we had difficulty resisting our own tendencies to exert our power over the powerless (Darder, 1991; Freire, 1985; Giroux, 1988; hooks, 1994). As we learned more about our critical lens we became aware of how social and political systems operated and how we can became conscious agents capable of identifying and critiquing oppressive behaviors and ideologies.

In the early chapters of Ray's memoir, we waded through our assumptions about social class and spent several days discussing how it was understood both through our reading of the text and by our own perception. By situating ourselves and identifying our own subjectivities we were able to deconstruct knowledge and identify who constructed it.

Holly: What do you think are some of the social advantages we have as middle to upper income members of society?

Steven: We can afford to live in a part of Georgia where the public schools are still good for one thing.

Taylor: Most of us have our own car and do not have to rely on people to drive us places.

Becca: None of us really work because we *have* to. If we work, it is just to earn extra money.

Throughout this chapter, we tried to focus particularly on recognizing attitudes associated with affluence.   We decided to focus our analysis on portions of transcriptions and selections of writing that suggested a privileged discourse, a repetitive occurrence in our conversation and our writing for *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood*, a memoir that implies the existence of such a discourse and validates the social dangers therein. Furthermore, we looked for language in our discussions/writings which favored increasing hegemony by colonizing culture and promoting

the notion that free enterprise was reserved for those who can compete, an assumption that threatens the democracy our critical frame supported. Throughout the reading of Ray's memoir, this approach was not uniformly accepted by the group. Many were resistant when data coding required them to illuminate and isolate indicators of privilege.

Steven: It is not like I can help that I was born with money. Everyone has their place in society and this just happens to be mine. It could have just have easily been something else.

Holly: But our goal is to recognize the social and cultural advantages that come with affluence in our society.

Patrick: It just seems like I am supposed to feel *guilty* for not being poor.

Holly: No. It is only awareness of how your social class allows you greater access in the world.

Allison: We do recognize it, but it just seems like it is overanalyzed. Maybe some people just have money and others don't. There is a reason for everything.

Lauren: Society would not work if everyone had money anyway.

Patrick: And it's not like we don't live in a free society. Everyone has the opportunity to make more money. It's not like poor people can't work to get ahead. There is no one saying, "No! You have to stay poor for the rest of your life!"

These comments suggested that a commitment to consciousness was not without challenge. We were so comfortably situated in our own lives, shaped by our personal histories, that we resisted the process of making connections between individual experiences and the larger social context in which they were embedded.   This discussion was yet another illustration of the legitimizing myth. Chomsky (1992) pointed out that the privileged use a kind of cultural elitism

demonstrated by my students to protect their interests and ensure that the actual extent of democracy does not infring on their power.

> Rationality belongs to the cool observer. But because of the stupidity of the average man, he follows not reason, but faith. And this naïve faith requires necessary illusion, and emotionally potent oversimplifications, which are provided by the myth-maker to keep the ordinary person on course. It's not the case, as the naïve might think, that indoctrination is inconsistent with democracy. Rather, as this whole line of thinkers observer, it is the essence of democracy. (p.24)

We continued knowing that part of developing a critical consciousness means exploring multiple perspectives, even those perspectives demand critique.

Following our conversation, I asked the group, "How can we begin to place ourselves *within*, rather than *outside* the topics we are discussing?" It was apparent from our comments that our tendency was to detach ourselves from any role we might play in the social and economic changes occurring around us. Allison suggested that in our writing, we respond to Ray's closing comments, the Afterward entitled *Promised Land,* because it asked us to contemplate our changing social and geographic environment.

> In the midst of new uncertainties in the world, including global economies and a frenzy of technology, we look around and see that the landscape that defined us no longer exists or that its form is altered so dramatically we don't recognize it as our own…Where do we turn? To what then do we look for meaning and consolation and hope?

In narratological analysis, there is emphasis placed on syntax, semantic and cultural context of language. In addition, there is also the consideration of what is not said, what is omitted. One of the generative themes (Shor, 1992) of privileged discourse that we identified was "ownership"—

language, or lack thereof, that claimed ownership of community, ownership of school, ownership of culture, etc and "entitlement". Such attitudes reinforce an increasingly privatized society that promotes divisiveness initiated by the dominant group and rejects social cohesion.

THERE ARE MORE Hispanics living in Forsyth County than ever before. When I first started here [at the high school], there was only one Hispanic kid in the whole school. That's the downside of all this—Hispanics move in to build all the houses and do the landscaping. It's a Catch 22. The poor sections get cleaned up as the city improves but more Hispanics are moving in. Everywhere I go now, there they are. I can relate to what Ray is saying about not recognizing a place you live anymore.

WHAT RAY DESCRIBES is true. It is hard to believe that a place can look so different so fast. One day you are surrounded by horse farms and the next you have pretty much everything you would have in the city. But I'm not sure this is a good thing. It used to be that people who lived here had always been here. Now people move here for the jobs or because of the good standard of living. Sometimes I look around and see all these Mexicans that weren't here five years ago. It is not that they don't have the right to live here, it's just not the same as it used to be. The other day when I was at the gas station by my house, all these guys were standing around talking Spanish. A while back that would have been totally strange.

BECAUSE OF ALL the new jobs in North Georgia, a lot of people from out of state move to Forsyth. It used to be a small Southern town that was slow to change. Now, everywhere you turn something is different. There are all these new ethnic restaurants. Also, it used to be only

native Georgians who lived here, but now there are a lot of people from the North who have come here. There are also more Hispanic people. Sometimes, I wish it were still like it was when my mom was growing up.

The writings above helped us to discuss what Freire (1972) called "possessive consciousness" whereby the elite socioeconomic class adopts a mindset in which the lower class becomes a collection of virtual possessions that perform lower-level tasks of society maintenance. In addition, the "oppressed" must believe in "the possibility of ascent" as individuals with no vision of collective action (p. 144). Through domination, the oppressor transforms "all into an aspect of their purchasing power"—nature and the labor of others necessarily become objects; they "in-animate everything" for their own purposes (Freire, 1972, pp. 42-45).

I knew that in our discussion, our writing, and in our minds we wanted to deny that in every sense of the word, we are the oppressor. We did not want to believe ourselves responsible or capable of the mindless destruction of an ecosystem, a people, a town without conscious. But with these actions come consequences. Freire (1972) urges us to resist compartmentalizing those consequences and see them as our own; understand that the burden rests with us. My students' sense of entitlement strongly accompanied their belief about ownership and control of property and people. This dangerous entitlement justified oppressing others to maintain their social positions. My students' complete lack of understanding that these are oppressive beliefs demonstrated how these ideas are so institutionalized as to be rendered invisible.

On my drive home that evening, I was amazed that in just a few hours, many of the slain trees were now fresh, moist piles of mulch. It was drizzling that afternoon. At 5 o'clock, several dozen men were still hard at work sawing logs by hand and feeding them into the machines that popped and sputtered as the blades did their work. Most of the workers were wearing only a short pair of gloves and none were wearing eye protection. This kind of labor must be tiring and the hours long. As I made the turn toward home, I glanced around. Most of them were only a few years older than my students; most of them Hispanic.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Laughing Through Tears
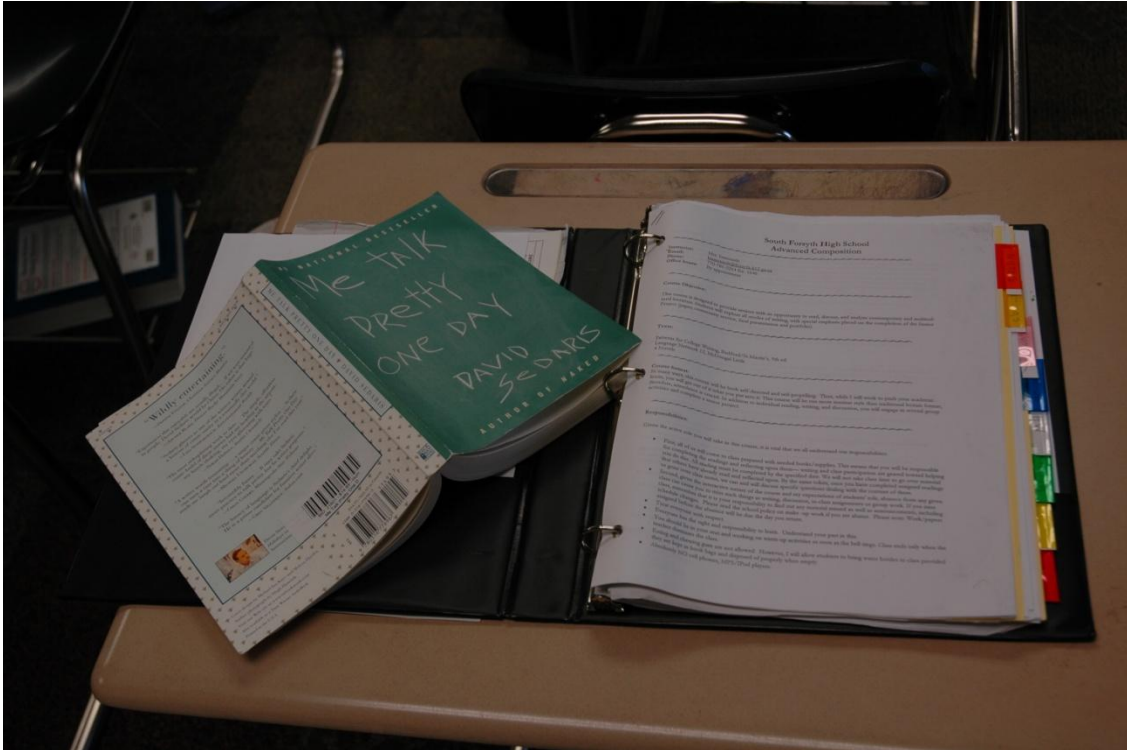
When asked 'What do we need to learn this for?' any high school teacher can confidently answer that, regardless of the subject, the knowledge will come in handy once the student hits middle age and starts working crossword puzzles in order to stave off the terrible loneliness.
~David Sedaris

During the final months of our study, it was becoming clear to me that I would not be

able to have my own biological children. For a long period of time, I thought I was being

punished for some karmic crime I had committed earlier in my life which I simply could not

remember. I was increasingly aware that "something was wrong with me." Everywhere I went,

I was reminded of the maternal imperative for women my age: For no apparent reason, I began

receiving coupons in the mail for baby formula and diapers. During a routine physical, my

doctor casually mentioned that research increasingly indicates that childbirth reduces the risk of many reproductive cancers. In the span of three weeks, both of my next door neighbors had blue balloons tied around their mailboxes which felt like personal taunting as I pulled into my driveway. I had attended seven baby showers of close friends in the span of six months. And rarely did I ever have a conversation with someone, whether a stranger or a friend, who did not eventually ask, "Do you have children?" or worse still, "When are you planning on having children?" Laden with cultural and gender assumptions that permeated every square inch of contemporary society, the world could sometimes be a cruel place for barren or childless women. When we began reading, *Me Talk Pretty One Day*, I was raw with my own feelings of inadequacy and alienation and was uncharacteristically receptive to the author's self-deprecating narratives:

> "Hold on to your hat," my father said, "because here is the guitar you've always wanted. Surely he had me confused with someone else. Although I had regularly petitioned for a brand-name vacuum cleaner, I'd never said anything about wanting a guitar. Nothing about it appealed to me, not even on an aesthetic level. I had my room arranged just so, and the instrument did not fit in with my nautical theme. An anchor, yes. A guitar, no. (Sedaris, 2000, p. 20).

Kevin: I think this guy [Sedaris] is hilarious! I have never laughed so hard in my life!

Becca: Gay people always seem to make their lives seem like an SNL[2] skit. I'd rather be around a gay person than a straight person any day.

Taylor: I know, my uncle is gay, and he is trip.

Bailey: But that is your perspective. Maybe humor is how they cope. Maybe there is more to being funny than what we can see. Maybe it is a defense mechanism.[iii]

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[2] Saturday Night Live

Kate Clinton (1997) believes that humor is one of the shared languages of minorities. Humor can be, as Bailey commented, a way to "cope" with the pain of oppression.

> The humor of both the African-American culture and the Jewish culture was originally the humor of survival. Our [queer] humor parallels the history of other minority humor-- a shared pool of buoyant inside jokes, always in danger of co-optation by mainstream media. While I wish that future humor will be the humor of change and challenge of the status quo, I fear that the conservatizing influence of the voracious maw of media and entertainment could prevail. (p. 49)

While she disapproves of the "co-optation" of minority humor, she suggests that as a strategy, can be a way of creating community within marginalized groups. In addition, humor disarms the would-be oppressor and offers a kind of "fastest gun in the west routine" for marginalized persons to find some equal footing in mainstream society. Sedaris is able to command a large public presence to deliver his subversive narratives. What is the subtle power of Sedaris' irony of the guitar and his mention of its aesthetics? What gendered assumptions does his father impose?

Kevin: I think he uses humor to have a secondary dialogue with the reader, like maybe, he did not know it at the time, but his lack of interest in guitars and his "themed" bedroom might have been an early indication that he was not the kind of man his father thought he was.

Becca: But his irony brings attention to both things: his father's stereotype (that men his age should think playing the guitar is cool and aspire to be Jimi Hendrix) and his [Sedaris's] own regret that he does not fit the bill.

Bailey: That's true. Because you remember what he does? He takes the guitar lessons.

He does not say to his father what he says to his reader. Maybe the humor is in

place to diffuse the fact that he can't be honest about who he is. What is that

called? A distracter?

 One of the rhetorical questions that surfaced in a few of our writing responses was whether or

not the humor must come from the oppressed minority to be an effective critical criticism. What

would happen if privileged authors were the ones directing the humor?

ONE THING I thought about when I was reading this book was how much he can get away with

because he *is* gay. This makes critical reading harder for me because as a straight man, I could

never write about gay people with that kind of biting humor and ever expected to get published.

I would not be seen as a comic, I'd be seen as a bigot.

SEDARIS JUXTAPOSES MANY different kinds of "other" in his book. At first he talks about

himself. Then he talks about the midget. Then he talks about the French. In all these cases he is

able to more or less insult them, but without really seeming to because, it's like, he is always

getting the bricks thrown at him, so he is entitled to throw a few bricks himself.

     Diner (2002) believed that it can be a useful political tool to question the discursive

formation of identity by minorities since they can play on both positions: the dominant and the

subordinate. In other words, through humor, the subordinate position refuses to play the "other"

position exclusively.   "Rather, there is a promising mockery out of both positions even as and

especially as they refuse to fully give up their own." (2001, p. 7)

My understanding was that, no matter how hard we tried, the French would never like us, and that's confusing to an American raised to believe that citizens of Europe should be grateful for all the wonderful things we've done…Everyday we are told we live in the greatest county on earth. And that's always stated as an undeniable fact…Having grown up with this in our ears, it's startling to realize that other countries have nationalist slogans of their own, none of which are 'We're number two!' (Sedaris, 2000p. 156-157)

Bailey: Again, I think he is being ironic. In every story he tells, I hear his own story beneath the one he is telling.

Becca: What do you mean?

Bailey: Well, like: Straight people are better than gay people and they are surprised to find out that maybe gay people think they are just as superior and have no intention to bowing down to straight people.

Holly: Did anyone else think his irony is important to our critique?

Steven: At first, I did not really know what Bailey was talking about, but he does seem to do that a lot. He crams a lot of "them" and "us" in this novel, Mrs. Isserstedt. [laughter]

Holly: Yes, yes he does.

Donna Haraway (1991) believed, "Irony is about contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes, even dialectically about the tensions of hording incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true. Irony is about humor and serious play" (p. 149). Steven's reference to the concept of "them" and "us" became a running joke during the study because during one of our discussions when this term was used in our critical literature, Taylor thought it a good idea to refer to ourselves (the white, privileged majority) as "them" rather than "us" to

intentionally name ourselves as "other." It had surprising power to disrupt our thinking in many instances during our work in that we became painfully aware in a short period of time how often "we" are the "us" in society.

Another thing mentioned during this memoir was the way Sedaris uses his narratives as an inquiry of how ineffective or lack of communication is one of the greatest detriments to being able to literally and figuratively hear what others are saying. And in that single obstacle, critical work is stalled if not impossible. A critical-narrative discourse assumes multiple possible meanings are constructed from multiple possible perspectives (Coles, 1989; Bruner, 1986; Greene, 1988, 1993; Miller, 1997), and the need for constructing one's own meaning from this web of social languages (Bakhtin, 1981) assumes we are open to hearing all of those languages. The author does this in a number of ways, but in the opening of the book, he describes his own struggles to be "heard". He was in speech therapy to "strengthen his lazy tongue" (p.12).

> Thanks to the tape recorder, I, along with the others, now had a clear sense of what I actually sounded like. There was the lisp, of course, but more troubling was my voice itself, with its excitable tone and high, girlish pitch…How could anyone stand to listen to me? Whereas those around me might grow up to be lawyers or movie stars, my only option was to take a vow of silence and become a monk. My former classmates would call the abbey, wondering how I was doing, and the priest would answer the phone, "You can't talk to him!" he'd say. "Why, Brother David hasn't spoken to anyone in thirty-five years!" (Sedaris, 2000, p. 12)

Sedaris uses his narrative antics to illustrate the impact of miscommunication and lack of communication across multiple contexts. Overwhelmingly, when he feels he is not being heard, becomes silent. Not because there is a desire to stop communicating, but because he is self

conscious of how his "voice" is judged. Many of us considered this an appropriate metaphor for what happens so often to people whom society deems less worthy of being heard. It is evident that Sedaris' self-imposed silence is an act of compliance.

Holly: Why do you think that Sedaris feels silence is a better option than vocalizing his objections to the way he is being treated by the speech therapist?

Bailey: I think it is related to the use of humor. It is the path of least resistance in some case. It is too frustrating to fight back because he feels powerless. So he opts for making everything a joke or being quiet.

Becca: When you feel like no one will hear you anyway, it's kind of like, what's the point?

Steven: You see him respond this way again later in the book, too.

Holly: When?

Steven: When his is taking the French classes.

My fear and discomfort crept beyond the borders of the classroom and accompanied me out onto the wide boulevards. Stopping for coffee, asking directions, depositing money in my bank account: these things were out of the question, as they involved having to speak. Before beginning school, there'd been no shutting me up, but now I was convinced that everything I said was wrong. When the phone rang, I ignored it. If someone asked me a question, I pretended to be deaf. (Sedaris, 2000, 171-172).

Kevin: This is one of the critical points I can relate to the most. I know that when a teacher makes me feel stupid, or even one of my friends, I just clam up. I know

that is really not what we are talking about here, but it makes it easier for me to

understand how someone who feels silenced all the time feels.

Holly: No, Kevin. That is exactly what we are talking about.

This imposed silence does not signify an absence of response, but rather a response which lacks

a critical quality. Oppressed people internalize negative images of themselves (images created

and imposed by the oppressor) and feel a lack of power or control over their own lives. Dialogue

is impossible under such conditions.

Ashley: But I don't think being silent and making a joke can be considered the same

reaction. I think that from a critical critique, the humor is actually the opposite of

the silence. The humor can be seen as the action. Don't you think?

Holly: I think you are on to something.

Fanon (1968) contended that when a person feels unconscious alienation the response is often

passivity, submissiveness, and anxiety. Self-conscious alienation, however, can lead to critical

reflection and thus action. This alienation can be overcome by action by adaptation or

compromise, or by neutralizing the opposition through superior power or force. The researchers

and I considered the ways humor acts as a neutralizer. Self-consciously alienated people can

learn to fight back and to resist their oppression thorough action.

In our writing, we wanted to examine the times in our own lives when silence was our

form of inaction and humor our form of action.

BECAUSE I AM gay, I totally relate to using humor as a social weapon to find a place in the

mainstream. I know that we have read some of the theory about how that is a way of

contributing to oppression, but for me, that is just crap. I don't want to live in the margins. I

want to be part of the mainstream. I enjoy being able to have a life that is not just about being with other gay people. I really see humor as power. All the haters out there end up liking me despite their deep seeded homophobia. Forget all the research. That is progress.

A FEW YEARS ago I started hanging out with a group of so call friends that were the "popular crowd". It was not long before I started doing things I never thought I would do. I knew that these friends were bad news, but I just kept my mouth shut and went along with them. There were times I really should have spoken up, times I knew we were going to get in trouble, but I was afraid they would reject me. I was afraid they would think I was a loser. Until we all got arrested one night. That was when I realized that my silence, my refusal to stand up for what I knew to be right, had not made me powerful, it made me powerless…and with a juvenile record.

I HAVE A really good friends who is black and I think her humor has made a big difference with some racist people in our school. She is always making comments like, "Well, you know us black girls look all ashy if we don't have our lotion" or she will say things like, "Come on Scarlet, this black girl don't mean no harm." She has a way of saying things out loud that she knows people are thinking about her, but in a way that is not confrontational or defensive. I think it just makes people more aware of how obviously stupid their racism is. I know this is action because there is a particular girl who calls her a "best friend" that told me when she started school here that they would NEVER be friends with her.

Nearing the end of our reading, I found it interesting—considering that this particular selection was read with such trepidation because of its queer content—that sexual orientation

rarely surfaced as an issue in our discussion, at least not explicitly. There were few acknowledgments that Sedaris was gay, but no dialogue that seemed to address their initial hesitation in reading a "gay memoir." We spent some time earlier in the semester touching on some of the tenants of queer theory and I felt I should at least question the other researchers about its omission in this chapter.

Holly: In our discussions, few of you have mentioned your response to reading a book written by an openly gay author which was an issue for a couple of you when we selected the book. Was this important in your reading and critique of this text?

Becca: Well, we have mentioned it. I mean maybe not directly, but you knew what we were talking about. We have talked about his being gay.

Holly: But why not directly if it was a detail important to our critique?

Jordan: Most of the time I didn't really notice. Most of his stories (other than his strange family) were things I could relate to.

Andrea: Because I have never read a book by an openly gay author, or at least not one that I knew was gay, it was more interesting than anything else. Not weird really.

Becca: I think he is a good writer and it seems irrelevant to me that he is gay. He's seems pretty normal to me.

There are multiple perspectives by queer theorists on the notion of "seeming normal".[iv] For example, some literature argues that queers should focus on disseminating information, removing prejudices and stress the "ordinariness" of homosexuality as a means of lessening societal homophobia (Thompson, 1985, p. 10). However, more contemporary literature in the field takes issue with the assumption that "tolerance can be achieved by making difference

invisible, or at least secondary, in and through an essentialising, normalizing emphasis on sameness" (Sullivan, 2003, p. 23).

Bailey: Even thought I understand what Sullivan is saying, I also think there is a lot to be gained from having a larger audience.

Holly: Explain.

Bailey: I think by "being normal", more people will be willing to hear your experiences and maybe a few of those won't be so likely to discriminate against gays even if they see one gay person who does not seem so different from them.

Kevin: I agree. I'm one of them. Because he made me laugh and he puts it out there without apologizing, I respect him. In other words, even if I want to hate him because he is gay, he disarmed me and made me appreciate all the things I liked about his writing. I guess, at the end of the day that means he wins. Call it whatever you want, resistance or whatever, it worked for me.

In March of 2007, I adopted my son whose biological mother was Filipino. When I saw him for the first time, he was only a few hours old and lay sleeping in the hospital nursery, dark lashes fluttering over his closed lids, tightly clinched fists, a furrowed brow and an expression of such intensity I feared he might disappear because already, I loved him so much I could hardly breathe.

The first time I ventured out with my son, he was three days old. The weather was warm in Florida where he was born, and the salty air coated his new stroller in a chalky opaque film. As my mother and I strolled the sidewalks of an outdoor mall, Baylor blinked in the sunlight

seeping through the crevices of the shade with a softness of sealed contentment. Deep in thoughts about my beautiful baby, I was startled when a woman with unnaturally orange hair pointed to my son and said, "Oh my God! He is so tiny! What is he?" As an adoptive mother, they don't warn you about these things; about the countless, unsolicited comments that strangers will make about biracial children of Caucasian mothers. In my mind, all I could think was, *What is he? Are you serious? Did she just ask me, what he is?* But at the time, and after several other encounters of a similar nature, I would just smile, speechless, fumbling for a quick get away.

Following one of these "episodes", I dreamed that I was standing in the center of a Piazza and people were walking up to me to interrogate me about my son. He upturned his small head, looked directly at me and without words, and pleaded for my defense. I woke up crying and vowed never again to ignore the sheering pain of having to "explain" my child. The next time, I'd be ready. I'd have an arsenal of responses that would reduce the voyeurs to a collective puddle of ignorance.

Shortly thereafter, Baylor and I were waiting for our appointment in the waiting room of the pediatrician. Baylor was sitting in my lap and I was reading one of the books I found on the side table. A woman sitting opposite me, whose top lip appears to be permanently and irrevocably snarled, said, "Where did you get him from? China?" I took a deep breath and smiled, "No." I said resolutely, "Ebay."

CHAPTER NINE

In Black and White

I had begun to feel pretty irregularly white. Klan folks had a word for it: race traitor. Driving in and out of counties with heavy Klan activity, I kept my eye on the rear-view mirror, and any time a truck with a Confederate flag license place passed me, the hair on the back of my neck would rise.
~Mab Segrest

Spring in Georgia is unrivaled by anywhere I have ever been. The streets are punctuated with bright splashes of color from the budding tulips and daffodils. Azalea bushes are an explosion of snowy whites and pallets of pink and red. The air is filled with the sweetness of cherry blossoms and lemony Magnolias. On Saturday, my son and I packed the car to enjoy a

day in Grant Park and a walk through the Atlanta zoo.   We were nearing the end of our study, and there was a feeling of lightness in the air.

Upon entering the zoo, the attendant handed me a pamphlet that mapped out the locations of the animals: Pachyderms, Big Cats, Primates, Reptiles, Birds…Each with its own "habitat" color coded on the map. As I strolled along the crowded sidewalks, navigating the strollers and teenage couples holding hands, I worked my way along the east side of the park.   The enclosures were properly simulated with what would seem the animals' "natural" environment; as if this were what I might see if I were observing them in the wild. Each exhibit included a bronze bio of each animal complete with diet and life expectancy. There were signs posted periodically encouraging "zoo patrons" to become members of Zoo Atlanta who upon membership would enjoy many "special privileges". I wondered if I should join.

The Forsyth County Defense League, a white supremacist group that originated in 1987 in Cumming, Georgia was established to counter efforts by Atlanta City Council member Hosea Williams, to integrate all-white Forsyth County. The group and its successor, Nationalist Movement, had won some prominent court battles on behalf of members' rights to support discrimination against non-whites, to march and to meet in public buildings. This prompted Oprah in the late 80's to load up the camera crews and travel to Forsyth County to air a show about racism in the South, bringing national media attention to a place where not one black person had a registered address in nearly 75 years.

Before we began our discussions and our writing focused specifically on race, we reviewed the transcripts from Oprah's show.   It was an appropriate starting point for our reading

of *Memoir of a Race Traitor*, since I had not encountered a single person since I began teaching in Forsyth County who did not know about this infamous Oprah episode. All of my students were born between 1987 and 1989. When the show aired, many were infants, some of them not yet born. At the time, I was an undergraduate at The University of Alabama and had not seen or had any direct knowledge of the existence of an active white supremacist group since I was in elementary school in Mississippi. However, the transcripts were not what we expected; not the rantings from Klu Klux Klan members, but rather unsettlingly familiar racism that the group agreed we heard, or worse—said, on a regular basis. Our study once again found its critical center where the "us" and "them" intersect.[v]

Town resident #5: I'm afraid of them coming to Forsyth County. I lived down in Atlanta, I was born in Atlanta, and in 1963, the first blacks were bussed to West Fulton High School. And I go down there now, and I see my neighborhood and my community, which was a nice community and a nice neighborhood, and now it's nothing but a rat-infested slum area, because they don't care, they don't care.

Oprah: Do you mean 'they,' us, the entire black race? The entire black race?

Town resident #5: You have blacks, and you have niggers. Blacks stayed at home during the march, the niggers are the ones that marched in Forsyth County. Forsyth County is a nice place to live.

Oprah: For white people. Let me ask you this: Can you please explain the difference between a black person—you say that we have black people and we have niggers—so what's the difference between a black person and a nigger?

<u>Town resident #5:</u> I've talked to black people. Black people, they don't want to come up here—they don't want to cause trouble. That's a black person. A nigger is the one, just like Hosea Williams—he wants to come up here and cause trouble all the time. That's the difference.[vi]

Sarah: I have heard people make that comment all my life. I admit that I sort of feel that way, too sometimes. There is a big difference between someone like Denzil Washington and the guy who is robbing the convenience store at gunpoint.

Bailey: Sarah! That's like saying that there is no white equivalent for what you are saying. The situation you are describing has nothing to do with race. It is about character. Don't you think there is also a big difference between Brad Pitt and Charles Manson?

Sarah: Yes. But, it is just what I have been conditioned to believe. That White trash was one thing, but Blacks were that way because they just want revenge on whites for slavery and all that.

Holly: What way is that?

Sarah: Well, dangerous, I guess. You know, the ones who hate White people.

Becca: I hate to admit it, but most of us who grew up here probably think that. It is strange how when you hear something enough, you start to think it is your own idea. I have heard there is a difference between Blacks and, well, since I was little. And I mean, I don't really think of myself as a racist.

As part of our critical framework, we needed to work also with some guidance from our critical race theory collected during our literature review to address some of our issues of social

justice in areas of race. For our discussions, we established that the word "nigger" is more than an insult, more than a term of white supremacist discourse. It is a "paradigmatic slur…the epithet that generates other epithets." (Kennedy, 2003, p. 12) and there is perhaps no more controversial, analyzed or interpreted word in the American Vernacular. Also, a working definition of white supremacy provided by one of our critical consultants was useful in our concentrated use of critical race theory.[vii]

> A political, economic and cultural system in which Whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of White superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of White dominance and non-White subordination are daily re-enacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings. (Ansley, cited in Mills, 2003, p. 179).

Our critical consultant used the term "racism by degree" to address this categorizing of Black vs. Nigger contending that many whites do not understand that racism is about the denial and rejection of difference. The greater the difference from the dominant culture, the more justified the oppressor feels. Our critical race theory was useful here in its commitment to racial and social justice. Such theories do not only address issues of race, racism, and power but imply an activist, emancipatory, and transformative dimension. "It not only tries to understand our social situation, but to change it; it sets out not only to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies, but to transform it for the better" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p.3). Change in our initial discussions came from examining these hierarchies ("degrees").

> This emphasis on quantification and categorization occurs in conjunction with the belief that either/or categories must be ranked. The search for certainty of this sort required that

one side of a dichotomy be privileged while its other is denigrated. Privilege becomes

defined in relation to its other (Hill, 1990, p.224).

We acknowledge the absence of a non-White participant in our discussion and try to remain

aware of how this influences our responses.[viii]

Holly: Based on your comments about categories of Blacks, how do you believe critical

race theory responds?

Bailey: I think it addresses the "categorizing" more than the race. Whites feel more

comfortable if blacks are more like them. They are less likely to see color if most

other things are the same.

Holly: Explain.

Bailey: If they look white, if they act white then we are more willing to accept them.

Taylor: I think that is what critical race theory is really about. Trying to instruct white

people to see how wanting black to be more like us defeats the whole point of

racial equality. Equality should be that neither group has to be like the other.

Bailey: Yes. That we can peacefully coexist without having to…what is that "A" word?

Holly: Assimilate?

Bailey: Yea…that's it. Assimilate.

Steven: But how realistic is that? Birds of a feather flock together.

Holly: But that notion violates the humanist vision of our critical framework.

Steven: I know, but people naturally want to be with their own kind. There is plenty of

evidence that people who are too different do not live peacefully together.

Bailey: And there is just as much evidence that they do. Haven't you ever heard that

opposites attract?

The co-researchers and I read an excerpt from Tatum's (1999) *Why are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria* in which she suggested that this "flocking" might be more a response to the self imposed question "Who *can* I be" rather than "Who *am* I". Steven was operating off the assumption that segregation is a matter of choice. And even though it might be, what larger social force is informing that choice? In a critical longitudinal study of Chicana/o college students, Villalpando (2003) found that associations with "like" peer groups is as much about drawing from their cultural resources to mitigate racialized barriers imposed by the dominant culture or institution rather than simply a desire for membership in a homogenized social group.

I THINK THAT segregation is driven by fear. If as a society we actually do let down our guard and give up our "boxes" and our labels and come together then we will have no one to blame for our unhappiness except ourselves. By staying in our boxes, we can always guarantee that whatever is wrong in our life or in the world is someone else's fault.

I THINK THAT institutions are the reason we are so comfortable with our own kind. Look at schools and political parties and hospitals and churches and the list goes on. Our entire lives from birth are about being in some category. It is all we know how to do. I don't think it is necessarily a bad thing. Maybe it is just a habit. And such engrained habits are hard to break.

THERE IS SOME comfort in segregation. In a world that fully accepts very few people, it is nice to know that there is somewhere you can go where you can be yourself. It is nice to have community.[ix]

Following our written responses to our conversation about self selected segregation, we read an article in the *Boston Globe* ("Officials Seek", 2006) where officials at the University of Massachusetts Amherst are phasing out self-segregated dorms in an effort to rid the campus of separate programs for minorities. At first the residence halls designated for particular races and ethnicities were a means of "providing comfort and comradeship on an overwhelmingly white campus". Many students interviewed in response to this initiative responded in much the same way as the researchers of this study. But a few found greater value in leaving the comfort and familiarity of a homogenized environment for the experiences they might find in a multicultural one.

We chose Segrest's memoir in part because of shared subjectivities but also for her historical account of race relations in the south during desegregation and the interconnection of various struggles of social justice. Her themes were especially relevant to our critical themes. Racism, sexism, and homophobia were all a defining part of her family's history. Her memoir described how racism and all other forms of discrimination are motivated and perpetuated by the struggle for power. Segrest appeared to have transformative intentions in that she believed all forms of oppression harm self and community and must be abolished.

Steven: This book seemed more about her being a lesbian than it did about being a civil rights activist. I think the book is wrongly titled.

Patrick: Part of why we chose this book was because it was not just about race.

Holly: One of the intriguing things about this memoir, Steven is her descriptions of the intersections of oppression. This includes race, class, gender and sexual orientation.

Steven: I just don't really get what one has to do with the other. How can being lesbian

have anything to do with being Black?

Patrick: Did you read the book?

At this point in the study, we used the work of Patricia Hill Collins (1990) that we collected for

our literature review but did not apply until now, to show how critical scholars simultaneously

confront multiple social issues by "embracing a paradigm of…interlocking systems of

oppression" (p. 221).[x]

She quotes Barbara Smith in her discussion of a comprehensive social approach to offering new

knowledge of subordinate groups. "I feel it is radical to be dealing with race and sex and class

and sexual identity all at one time. I think *that* is really radical because it has been done before"

(p. 222). Steven has trouble seeing the connective threads of varying kinds of oppression because

he is more focused on the particulars of the categories rather than the power forces driving them.

Segrest contended, "As a lesbian, I had more in common, in an eerie way, with Black people

than with my own family, entrenched Republicans, as most of them were" (p. 89). She felt a

similar isolation as that described by many of her Black friends.

Taylor: Even as a lesbian, she was, at least to most Blacks, better off because she was

white.

Holly: Yes. And she acknowledges that. But she makes the point that you are not

necessarily exempted from oppressive situations because you are white. If

oppression is about systems of power, then one system must be related to another.

As a victim of homophobia, she connects those feelings to racism. Oppressive

forces are interconnected.

Katie: She talks about it (racism) as consciousness. I think that is how the forms of oppression relate. They are about realizing that someone else is suffering without having to experience what they are experiencing.

Kevin: But then she says how that can hurt you. Maybe that is why more people don't stand up for what they believe in their heart. They get alienated by both groups. The oppressed group for trying to be some kind of hero and their own social group for being a "traitor"

Taylor: Yea, sometimes it is a lose-lose situation. She is really honest about that in the book. She says:

As I took on racism, I also found its effects could be turned on me…I began to feel more uneasy and more at ease around people of color. I knew my role was working with other white people, and self-hatred was a bad place from which to start. Could I find ways to share and appreciate other cultures without mimicking or appropriating them, without denying my continuing white privilege? Sooner or late, would the contradictions loosen? Maybe whiteness was more about consciousness than color? That scared me, too, the possibility of being caught between the world of race, white people kicking me out, people of color not letting me in (Segrest, 1994, p.80)

In our writing we explored where we have observed or experienced intersections of oppression as an impediment to development and justice.

Three breaches in identity underlie the preoccupations of my life: race (my own and others), my gayness and my mother's sickness. I search each one for clues to make

meaning of the others. They constantly bleed into one another, like water colors on wet paper (Segrest, 1994, p. 3).

I GREW UP in metro Atlanta and still have several black friends from my old school. I think it is fair to say that I have been influenced by their culture as perhaps they have been by mine. I came to Forsyth County when I was in the 9th grade and did not know much about how things are here. The first week we moved here, a kid in my neighborhood told me that "I better stop acting so black" if I wanted to fit in here. I am as white as the kid who said this to me.

THERE IS A girl in my Spanish class who is Cuban and she does not speak much English. There are several times when I bad mouthed her to my friends because I did not think it was fair for a native speaker to be in a class with non-native speakers. I knew that she had an A in that class and I was struggling to get a C. I always thought it ridiculous that she could barely speak English, was living in America but could get an A in a class that was killing my GPA. A few weeks ago, I saw her talking to this guy near the parking lot when I was walking to my car and it appeared they were having some kind of major argument. The guy she was arguing with pushed her pretty hard, yelled something in Spanish and walked off. Something in me just snapped. I saw my Dad push my Mom once and ever since then, I get very angry when I see men getting physical with women. When I walked up to her, she was crying and shaking a little. I asked her if she needed help and she shook her head. I went into this tirade telling her she should tell an administer or let her parents know; call the police or something. She just stared at me. Then I realized she could not understand what I was saying. I did not know what else to do, so I gave her a hug.

I HAVE ALWAYS struggled with my weight. I have been dieting since the third grade and have tried every magic weight loss pill ever on the market. I have been the punch line of every fat joke you can imagine. When I was 12 years old, I weighed 175. I started shopping in plus sized stored by the time I reached high school. I am the best friend, never the girlfriend. I am "sweet" not "beautiful" and I am the girl you call when you need a Friday night babysitter because you can be reasonably sure I won't be on a date. In this study, I realized that I have many places of privilege. I am white. I am American. I am educated and upper-middle class. I know that this means my life should be easier and maybe in some ways it is. But most days, I would change the color of my skin or trade in my citizenship if for one day, just one day I could be thin

Our writing suggested we all bear multiple identities, but the response from the external world to these identities shifted and changed depending on the situation in which we found ourselves. Identity is a political concept; it is formed by minority or marginalized groups seeking to define themselves as well as by majority groups seeking domination. While on the one hand it has been described as 'an ongoing struggle for recognition waged by various groups around the world against each other as well as against the hegemonic "other"' (Isin & Wood 1999, 15), identities can also be imposed by a dominant majority seeking to legitimate the status quo.

My last stop at the zoo was the Giraffes. How majestic they looked among the backdrop of dense green leaves newly sprouted on the tree branches in the distance. They ambled gracefully along the well worn path along the back wall; their legs seemed too fragile to bear the weight of their body. There was an unidentifiable emptiness to their space. It was a void that I

could not seem to name. Then it came to me.   I had recently seen some beautiful footage of a

friends' trip to Green Crater Lake in Africa.   I recalled a dramatic close up of a lone Rothschild

giraffe walking under an acacia tree. Just a few yards behind her as the frame widened to a

panoramic view of the game park were zebra, antelope, flamingos and a pair of rooting warthogs.

Nothing about this "giraffe habitat" resembled that Kenyon landscape. Maybe these zoo

giraffes, if given the choice, would have chosen this exact configuration, separated and

segregated life among their own kind. Or maybe not. Maybe they would have chosen life as it is

in the wild rife with danger and uncertainty. Maybe they would have chosen to move freely

among the different animals— all of whom depend on the same resources, drink from the same

pools, find shade under the same trees and live and die under the same vast openness of pale blue

sky.

CHAPTER TEN

Life in a Cage

In Pride and Prejudice, Nafisi points out, "there are spaces for oppositions that do not need to eliminate each other in order to exist," and it is this many-voiced disharmony--dialogue on all sides--that underlies Austen's "democratic imperative."

The school year was reaching a close and spring was folding into summer. The air

smelled like freshly cut grass and the sun was already heating up the dashboard of my car at 7:10

am. That morning I was listening to public radio and caught a heated debate about a Georgia

inmate on death row, Troy Davis, a Black man who was convicted in 1989 for killing a White

police officer. It seemed Amnesty International had taken up the cause of soliciting groups and individuals to campaign for a new trial because all but one of the seven witnesses against Davis at the time of his arrest had recanted and the one witness against him was a potential suspect himself. My initial thought, without knowing any of the details of the case, was that this alone must logically create some doubt of Mr. Davis' guilt. In view of the incredible number of exonerations that have taken place in the nation over the past few years, even in cases where the authorities expressed absolute certainty of the guilt of the condemned, it seemed that whenever doubt existed, to any degree, no execution should take place until that doubt could be eliminated.

Once at school, I was still thinking about this man sitting behind bars in a maximum security prison just a 30 minute drive south from where I sat. In my search on the Georgia Department of Corrections website, I learned that 120 people have been wrongfully convicted in capital cases since 1976, six of whom were in Georgia and over half were exonerated because original witness testimony proved unreliable or inaccurate. In addition, there have been 43 men executed in Georgia since the U.S. Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty in 1973. If executed, Davis would be the 21st inmate put to death by lethal injection. There were presently 106 men and one female on death row in Georgia. There was no physical evidence that had ever been admitted in the Davis case and his life rested in the truthful testimony of witnesses who claimed to have been present the night of the murder.

Because we were reading our final memoir, *Reading Lolita in Tehran* without having actually read *Lolita,* I collected excerpts from the novel and various selections of academic commentary and analysis of the novel to give my students some context for why Nefisi chose

this text. Of the twenty-five or so different writings I offered on Nabokov and *Lolita*, all I felt

were provocative in their own way, I was surprised that it was the afterword in *Lolita* that my

students most wanted to discuss. Nabokov wrote that "the initial shiver of inspiration" for Lolita

"was somehow prompted by a newspaper story about an ape in the Jardin des Plantes who, after

months of coaxing by a scientist, produced the first drawing ever charcoaled by an animal: this

sketch showed the bars of the poor creature's cage." Because one of my students discovered that

neither the article nor the drawing has been recovered, the class was greatly troubled by the

"truth" of this claim and if false, how trusted could he be as a narrator or someone whom

Nefisi's students should admire.   Because truth in writing one was of our early discussions, this

seemed an especially important recurrence.

Holly: Is it important that Nabokov's claim be substantiated?

Bailey: Before this class I would have said yes. I would have felt deceived if he
                     (Nabokov) included this in the book knowing it was a lie.

Holly: And now?

Bailey: And now I'm not sure it is as important.

Holly: Why?

Bailey: Because the story is a good one. And there is a way to get meaning out it even if
                     it is not true.

Holly: So is the truth then irrelevant?

Bailey: Well, not totally. But it is, I think, a good metaphor for all of this critical theory
                     stuff without having to be true.

Holly: How so?

Bailey: Isn't the cage like the ultimate image of control? I mean think about prison. That's a cage. And doesn't the cage take away someone's freedom? Maybe he wants you to think about what happens to someone, or something, when they are stuck in a cage?

[xi]The students and I began reading about the how and why Nafisi and her co-conspirators—seven young women—gathered secretly on Thursday mornings in Nafisi's living room, over tea and cream puffs. We quickly discovered that the cream puffs and comfortable chairs were misleading: this was a room of insubordination; the young women, arrived shrouded in their long robes and head scarves were their own kind of insurgents. The novels Nafisi chose, *Lolita, The Great Gatsby, Daisy Miller, Pride and Prejudice.* And also *A Thousand and One Nights,* were banned in Iran and available only on the black market. The fact that all of Nafisi's students were women was not insignificant. In the Islamic Republic, all citizens, male and female, were subject to the caprices of tyranny; but women, even as victims were less than equal. With the ascension of Khomeini and the introduction of *sharia,* Islamic law, the age of marriage for females was reduced from eighteen to nine. Stoning became the punishment for prostitution and adultery. Women were obligated to cover themselves from head to toe; to sit in the back of the bus; to avoid bright colors in coats and scarves and shoelaces. A hint of lipstick or a wayward strand of hair was likely to draw the savage solicitude of the roving moral police. Running was forbidden; licking an ice cream cone in public was forbidden; walking with a man not one's near relation was forbidden.

Bailey: Why would they risk so much when they know that there is no way out for them?

Holly: Trevor, what do you think? You seem like you are sitting on a comment.

Trevor: Well, let me think about how to say it. Bailey's right, there is a price, I mean a risk. Insubordination is not without emotional and sometimes physical weight. But without it, I don't think there can ever be a revolution, or a regime change, or progress of any kind.

Taylor: I know what you mean. It's like that bumper sticker. What does it say? Oh, um, "Well behaved women rarely make history." These women in the book were not necessarily getting together expecting the world to change.

Trevor: Yeah. Maybe they were just expecting *they* would change. Just the act of what they were doing was revolutionary to me. I want to believe, *need* to believe, there are people willing to risk it all for what they believe, even if it will never change.

We decided to explore how Bailey's idea had been used by other writers, philosophers, historians, musicians, etc. We spent the first few days before *Reading Lolita in Tehran* creating context for "the cage," a seemingly appropriate metaphor to begin our final memoir. (See Appendix G for a selection of pieces submitted.)

Holly: So how do the varied uses for "cage" that you found help us better understand this as a metaphor for our memoir and the kind of oppression the women of Tehran experience?

Allison: Most of these are about power, abuse of power and how someone who has power can take away the safety or freedom of someone less powerful.

Trevor: But it is also about how sometimes, those who don't have power still fight. They still try to do something even though there is very little they can do.

Kevin: Well, in some cases. But, I mean, there is clearly no way a pig could revolt against a human. That is not really oppression because the pig is just being a pig. Doing what pigs were put here to do—feed us. And the human is just being a human. Providing food for your family and mine.

Bailey: Kevin, it is a lot more complicated than that. It *is* oppression. You just can't see that because you are human and NOT a pig. If you were, you might be more sympathetic. I bet you would want to spend your life in a pasture, not a cage.

An important commonality existed among the different illustrations presented by the students to try and explain oppression using the metaphor of the cage: They all involved either conquest, manipulation, abuse, or cultural invasion to divide and rule, rather than the use of cooperation, community, organization and cultural synthesis to unify. The powerless were positioned as outsiders of their own world. Randall Freisinger (1994) claims "the disempowered are not somewhere 'out there,' at the edge, far removed. They are, rather, at the center of power's corrosive processes" (202).

Trevor noted that the "fight", the willingness to resist, is one of the ways the oppressed retain some of the power that is taken by their oppressor. Freire (1970) believed that hope is one of the sustaining forces against injustice.

Hopelessness is a form of silence, of denying the world and fleeing from it. The dehumanization resulting from an unjust order is not a cause for despair but for hope, leading to the incessant pursuit of the humanity denied by injustice. Hope, however, does not consist in crossing one's arms and waiting (Freire 1970).

As Freire (1970) observed in his work with Brazilian peasants, most examples provided by the students reflect some denial of personal agency in an authoritarian culture—whether it be humans or pigs. Literally or metaphorically their voice is taken or silenced.

Bailey attempted to counter Kevin's argument about the necessity of power hierarchies by explaining that as a member of the group in power, he could not possibly understand the position of the powerless. Furthermore, pigs are subjected to abuse simply because they are pigs which makes the abuse justifiable and ultimately absolves the abusers of responsibility. The oppressor "proclaim[s] the superiority of the oppressor's identity" (Deutsch, 1973, p. 102-103).The oppressors use "history," "the law of nature," "the will of God," "science," "the criteria of art," and "language" as well as the social institutions of society to legitimize their superiority and to ignore or minimize the identity of the oppressed.

Frye (1983) noted that individuals experience oppression simply because they are members of a group. The inhabitant "of the cage", as Frye states, is not an individual but a member of a social group. Therefore, to recognize a person as oppressed is to acknowledge that the suffering is sometimes experienced solely because the individual is a member of an oppressed group. For example, Cornel West (1994) recounted how while waiting for a taxi well groomed and dressed in an expensive suit and tie, he was still passed over by the driver who picked up the white customer (p. 23).

Katie: What must it have been like for those women to know that a better life existed for other women and they could never have that? How could they endure the control of being objectified like that every day by men who claimed to love them?

Kevin: That is just what they knew. They were playing a role that was culturally dictated.

Kate: But it wasn't like they did not know what they did not have.

Patrick: True. But they were trapped. There was no way out for them. What could they do?

Bailey: I like how Nefisi draws the parallel between Lolita and her students:

When I think of Lolita, I think of a half-alive butterfly pinned to the wall. The butterfly is not an obvious symbol, but it does suggest that Humbert fixes Lolita in the same manner that the butterfly is fixed: he wants her, a living breathing human being, to become stationary, to give up her life for the still life he offers her in return. Lolita's image is forever associated in the minds of her readers with that of her jailer. Lolita on her own has no meaning; she can only come to life through her prison bars. This is how I read Lolita. Again and again as we discussed Lolita in that class, our discussions were colored by my students' hidden personal sorrows and joys. Like tearstains on a letter, these forays into the hidden and the personal shaded all our discussion of Nabokov. And more and more I thought of that butterfly; what linked us so closely was this perverse intimacy of victim and jailer (Nafasi, 2003, p. 37).

Jordan: That is really what makes it so bad.

Katie: What do you mean?

Jordan: The part about victim and jailer. Just like Lolita, they were totally dependent on their persecutors. That is a whole nightmare in and of itself—when your survival depends on the jailer.

Brittany: That is so true. It is no different from the abused child and the parent. Or a woman being sexually harassed by her boss. These people can continue to oppress because the victim depends on the persecutor for something they cannot

live without. At one point, Azin says that "Only if I take my own life can I act without my husband's permission. (p. 286).

Brittany's connection illustrates a pervasive part of our discussion this semester. One of the greatest hindrances to freedom and liberation of the oppressed is their unyielding belief that there is no way out. The students recognized that this co-dependent relationship between oppressor and oppressed, victim and jailer, abused and abuser is the most powerful force in maintaining the regime in Tehran.

> The oppressed, who have adapted to the structure of domination in which they are immersed, and have become resigned to it, are inhibited from waging the struggle for freedom so long as they feel incapable of running the risks it requires. Moreover, their struggle for freedom threatens not only the oppressor, but also their own oppressed comrades who are fearful of still greater repression. (Freire, 1970, p. 6)

One belief of an oppressor is that, once free, the oppressed cannot survive without him. The oppressed, in the mind of the oppressor, is not capable enough to command his own life. Thus, it is his duty as the oppressor to care for the oppressed. According to the oppressor, the oppressed does not know the difficulty that awaits him, so the oppressor uses fear and often force to prevent the freedom of the oppressed. In other words, the oppressor believes he is the sole custodian of the fate of the oppressed. Nafisi's students have become so conditioned to life under the Iranian regime, most are resigned to it. Even the mere suggestion that another life is possible, ignites fear in Nafisi's other students, which seems even more powerful than the abuse they endure:

> "If I were you, I'd get out of this country while I can" was her advice to Sanaz. "Don't stay here and don't marry anyone who'll have to stay here. You'll only rot."

Mahshid looked at her reproachfully. "This is your country," she said, pursing

her lips. "There is a lot you can do."

"There is nothing you can do—*nothing*." Said Manna with firm finality.

"You can write and teach," said Mashid, throwing a glance at me. "We need

good critics. We need good teachers."

"Yes," said Manna, "like Professor Nafisi. Work your head off for so many years,

and then what?"

"If everyone leaves," said Mashit, her eyes glued to the floor, "who will help

make something of this country? How can we be so irresponsible?" (Nafisi, 2003

p. 287).

Trevor: I think that Freire's theories about oppression have a good application to the

oppression in Tehran. But there is something I think he does not cover that makes

Nafisi's students' lives even more difficult. They are always confused about who

their oppressors are. Even Nafisi mentions this in the first chapter, "What

Nabokov captured was the texture of life in a totalitarian society, where you are

completely alone in an illusory world full of false promises, where you can no

longer differentiate between your savior and your executioner (p. 23)."

Bailey: I know what you mean. It is just like Azin's [Nafisi's student] situation. And

really it is like so many other oppressed people. "…she barged in all bruised,

claimed that he [her husband] had beaten her again and taken their girl to his

mother's house. Then at night he had knelt by her bedside, weeping and pleading

with her not to leave him (p. 286)."

According to Freire (1970), this "fear of freedom" is a common affliction of the oppressed and makes their connection to the oppressor seem inextricable.

> One of the basic elements of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed is *prescription*. Every prescription represents the imposition of one individual's choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness. Thus, the behavior of the oppressed is a prescribed behavior, following as it does the guidelines of the oppressor (p. 6).

Nafisi's students often felt sorry for their oppressor and in doing so, prescribed to the behaviors that conformed to those their oppressor had come to expect, even demand.

In our final discussions on *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, the students were particularly interested in the notion of the "blind censor." This was also the topic that generated the most dialogue from this memoir and seemed to resonate with many of the students on a very emotional level.

> The chief film censor in Iran, up until 1994, was blind. Well, nearly blind. Before that, he was the censor for theater. One of my playwright friends once described how he would sit in the theater wearing thick glasses that seemed to hide more than they revealed. An assistant who sat by him would explain the action onstage, and he would dictate the parts that needed to be cut.

> Our world under the mullahs' rule was shaped by the colorless lenses of the blind censor. Not just our reality but also our fiction had taken on this curious coloration in a world where the censor was the poet's rival in rearranging and reshaping reality, where we simultaneously invented ourselves and were figments of someone else's imagination (Nafisi, 2003, p. 25).

Confusion dominated society in Iran. It was a confusion born of a politic of rules and fear. What was intended to free its citizens, more often than not, enslaved them.

Patrick: The idea of the blind censor is a great metaphor for all the stuff we have been talking about in our study.

Holly: How so, Patrick?

Patrick: Well, it is universal in every situation. Even Nafisi says it. "We are all capable of becoming the blind censor, of imposing our visions and desires on others." We do that everyday in one way or another.

Katie: That is the whole reason why oppression and abuse and stereotyping exist. We think others should be just like us. And when they aren't, if we have the power to force it on them, we do and rob them of their own freedom, their own autonomy.

Bailey: Yes, I guess even Nafisi is guilty.

Holly: You are right. Do you know how? All of you have come far enough in the study by now to see how, as Bailey says, *even Nafisi* is imposing her own values on her students and her readers. Even she is a blind censor.

Patrick: Does it have to do with the novels she is teaching?

Holly: I think that is part of it. Elaborate on your thinking.

Patrick: I guess it is what we have been trying to be aware of ourselves during this study—privileging what we think society should be. There is plenty there to look at critically. Like the fact that she speaks English. And has had access to a prestigious education.

Holly: Yes. Exactly. Nafisi, even though she experienced traumatic events during the Iranian revolution, comes from a background of privilege. She has social status,

wealth, and an international education that maybe is not something her students can relate to.

Jeff: And she is reading classic Western novels. I mean I can't really see them [her students] really relating to the love affair between Elizabeth Bennett and Mr. Darcy.

Bailey: Oh my gosh. That is true, Jeff!

Jeff: And she does focus on many negative aspects of Iran that may be from a particular privileged perspective, too.

Holly: You make an excellent point, Jeff. It might also futher Western stereotypes about Iran. Don't forget she wrote this book for an English-speaking audience.

Becca: I think she must have been including herself in her comment about us all being a blind censor.

I thought these conversations in particular guided our writing during this part of the study. A topic that surfaced again and again was the various kinds of physical, mental or social confinements and how they were subjectively defined. The writing as well as our discussion repeatedly returned to restrictions of freedom but also how we imposed our own judgment in situations that challenged or disrupted our constructed realities. Any one of us could have been the prisoner or the jailer.

I REMEMBER ONCE as a little girl being in a liquor store and seeing my mother, in a blue silk dress, delicate red lipstick, and sunglasses, reach for a bottle of George Dickel sour-mash whiskey. I was ten years old. The liquor store was owned by a man who had played golf with my grandfather and who carried spearmint gum in his pocket and smelled like pipe smoke. When I was thirteen my Mom went to the grocery store and did not come back for three days.

When she came home she was not wearing shoes and she was missing a button on her blouse. Dad seemed not to notice and began talking about throwing some burgers on the grill. Last year, my mom voluntarily checked herself into alcohol rehab. She wrote me letters and occasionally doodled pictures in the margins of daisies or sunflowers. My dad took me to visit her once and I was shocked. I don't know what I expected, but in my mind, rehab was a cross between a luxury hotel and a day spa. Instead, it was…. There were a few plants in the window sills that no one seemed to water, a blaring TV and a bunch of furniture from the seventies that did not go together and was weird patterns of brown and orange. My mom sat with us outside on a picnic bench. She looked tired and defeated. And she smoked, one cigarette after another, the whole time we were there. That was the first time I had ever seen my mother smoke. She always had an aversion to it—in fact she hated all oral fixations including chewing gum that she forbid in our house. A few minutes before we were leaving, I started to cry. I wanted to rescue her. I wanted whatever was hurting her to be fixed. "How can you stay here, Mom? This place is a prison." She turned her head and blew a long trail of smoke. When she turned her head back to face me she said, "Baby, this is not prison. This is clemency."

MY LITTLE SISTER lives in her own prison from which there is no escape. She will never get a weekend furlough. Never get parole. When she was very little, she seemed like a normal child to me except for two things: She never wanted to be held or touched and she had an unnatural tolerance for pain. She never seemed to cry and she never seemed to feel the sharp corners she bumped into or the hot water in which she once submerged her entire hand. And she rocked— rhythmically—but all the time. When she was about three, she developed an obsession with tearing paper. It almost drove my mother to madness. For hours a day, she would sit ripping

pieces of paper into piles of colored scraps. When she was six, she began asking the same question over and over. Every few weeks, a new one will develop. What time will we eat dinner? How old is Hershey (our dog)?   Why are there no purple apples? In the mall yesterday, a group of women was staring at my sister as she rocked back and forth in the food court sipping pink lemonade. I hope that she does not notice all of those people who look at her with pity, people who live lives free of the confining walls of autism. As we got ready to leave the mall, a new weekly question replaced the one from the previous week: How long have I been lost?

MY GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE was one of my favorite places growing up. There was always something cooking in the kitchen, an abundance of flowers in the yard and a cheerful wreath on the door that changed with the seasons. My grandfather put in an in-ground pool when I was three and almost every memory of summer during my childhood has their home in the background. One November, I helped my grandmother plant over 200 daffodil bulbs around the pool that bloomed the next April into a profusion of bright yellow. When my grandmother died four years ago, there was a two-year court battle between my mother and her sisters as to who should inherit her house. Sisters, who, before she died, had hardly been able to go a day without talking to each other on the phone, went months at a time without speaking. By the time it was over, they were speaking only through attorneys. In the end, my mother's younger sister was awarded the house by the probate judge after many bitter hours of unsuccessful mediation. My mother's older sister is so imprisoned by her envy and rage, she has cut herself off from the rest of the family. A few weeks ago, I went to see my aunt, who is now living in my grandmother's house. The yard was overgrown with weeds, the kitchen smelled mostly like

burned coffee and the pool, which my grandfather tiled himself before he was diagnosed with cancer, had been filled in and was covered with cement. My sadness was overwhelming. It was like losing my grandmother a second time. And then. Out of the corner of my eye, as we were walking to the car, I saw something remarkable. Through a crack in the cement that used to be the side of the pool where I practiced my diving, stood a single, blooming daffodil.

Inside the prison, Troy Davis was known as number 657378, since the day he was confined to cell 79 on the top floor of the G-house in the Georgia Diagnostic and Classification Prison in Jackson, Ga in 1991. That morning, Davis was relocated to a 35-foot-tall isolation cell with a steel toilet, a steel cart and 24-hour camera monitoring. He was given a Bible, some sheets of paper and a pen, envelopes and an old TV/radio. He was required to dress in clothing two sizes too big; in the event he attempted to fight the guards, his pants would fall off and he would likely surrender while stumbling over his clothing. That morning a police officer took all of his measurements from shoe size to shoulder width so that someone his size could conduct the execution scenario. Later that day, he went through the motions of filling out paperwork to designate who would receive his personal property and his body. A press release issued by the Georgia Department of corrections reported that Davis refused his request for a last meal and he would be served the prison meal of macaroni and cheese, pinto beans, green beans, lettuce and tomato salad, corn bread, fruit cobbler and tea. Prison officials said that he was offered Ativan, a mild sedative. But Davis refused to take the drug.

The last meal is the one I just don't get. In most states, within reason—whatever that is— condemned inmates will be granted even the most outrageous meal requests (save for tobacco, alcohol and chewing gum.) It is not unusual for prison guards to be hauling in tubs of

Haagen Daz ice cream, steamed lobster, buckets of fried chicken and filet mignon (that the inmate must saw through with a plastic knife) on the night of the scheduled execution. But what is this about? What difference could this possibly make in the larger scheme of things? I mean, what if we allowed a condemned man to consume 15 large cheese pizzas, a cherry pie and root beer float and then administer a lethal injection, or we simply served him a tuna sandwich and sent him to the gas chamber, the end result is the same. The difference might be less about comforting the condemned man and more about the way his executioners and society participates the killing of capital convicts and justifies his death.

Jessie Darrell William
Executed: December 11, 2002
Last Meal Request: Nothing

His execution was delayed over 30 minutes because a vein could not be found due to dehydration.

James Powell #999001
Executed October 1, 2002
Last Meal Request: A pot of coffee

Powell told a prison guard he wanted to stay awake for his killing. He asserted his innocence in a letter he wrote to the media from death row. "I was not the one who committed this crime," he wrote. "It's not only the 'poor, abused, black man' that gets screwed; sometimes it's us 'poor, old, white folks' who get shafted too."

Robert Madden #822
Executed: May, 28, 1998
Last Meal Request: An extensive itemized list that he requested be given to a homeless person.

Madden's request was denied and he fasted until his death.

Victor Ferguer #668
Executed: March 15, 1963
Last Meal Request: A single pitted olive

Ferguer told prison officials on the night of his execution that he hoped an olive tree—a sign of peace—would sprout from his body after it was buried. He is buried in an unmarked grave in a public cemetery in Ohio because the body was never claimed by his family. It bears no olive tree.

Odell Barnes, Jr. #998
Executed: March 3, 2000
Last Meal Request: "Peace, Justice and Equality"

Odell said that what he really wanted was not on the menu

In my reflection on Troy Davis—and for whatever reason, I could not seem to shake the thoughts from my mind—I wanted to believe that refusing his last meal was his final act of defiance against his executioners. I wanted to believe that he would not, even with this seemingly innocent denial of a "special meal," give them the satisfaction, ease their conscious, even a fraction, after serving seventeen years on death row for a murder he may not have committed. I wanted to believe that in his final moments before he was strapped down to the gurney and covered with a white sheet while onlookers witnessed his final breath, he would find solace in having refused the double cheeseburger in exchange for one last exercise of freedom. And maybe, just maybe, if the last supper was not served, if he refused to participate in these rituals of finality, a stay of execution would be grated before the needle was administered. [xii]

PART V

Showing and Telling

Reflections That Reveal Your Point of View

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Reflections

The emperor Marcus Aurelius wrote *Meditations* in the midst of watching his empire steadily erode. He turned inward toward the self not as escapism but as a means of understanding the self via experience, history, and community in which friends and foes were equally instructive. Similarly, self reflection was a continually component of our critical process. As co-researchers, we implemented reflection at every phase of our study. Bloud, Keog, and Walker (1985) explained, "reflection in the context of learning is a generic term for those intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciations" (p. 19). However, to refine the general aspects of our work, we continually sought *reflective practice*, "much like an underdeveloped land, its potential for growth [was] determined by the diligence, rigor and wisdom" (Clift et al, 1990, p.xi).

As a Teacher Researcher

Thomas and Oldfather (1995) conducted a study in which they investigated literacy processes with middle school students through shared inquiry via interactive journals. The authors make clear that collaborative research is not without problems or frustrations, "patience and trust were important and not always easy" (p. 200). I second that. There were times when I could not have felt more connected to my students in our efforts and other times when I felt we were mutually incomprehensible strangers. While the advantages of co-research far outweighed the disadvantages, the duality of the role was often challenging.

My students were among the brightest, most financially advantaged and parentally supported that I have ever taught. They had resources, opportunities and choices many their age were not afforded. While I thought this had in many ways cast a promising future for many of my students, it also seemed, in comparison to more diverse populations of students in my teaching career, to lead to a collective sense of apathy. Maybe apathy is not the best word choice. Apathy has a negative connotation that suggests laziness or lack of motivation. That is not it exactly accurate. But it seemed in the absence of real struggle, significant social disadvantage, and depravation, my students often appeared dispassionate. I think their most profound display of conviction that I observed during our study, the kind of conviction that incites a real social fight akin to activism, involved a school rule banning IPods as if this were the end of civilization as we know it. In the midst of our study, the war was escalating in Iraq, the death toll was mounting in Sudan, thousands were still displaced by Katrina, and gas prices were steadily rising. But my global concerns were no match for their local ones. Many times it seemed "the world" barely extended beyond their insular lives. And while I genuinely felt they were full and willing participants and devoted researchers in this study, I am not sure they found much value in the culmination of our work. Having said that, on these pages are months of hard work and commitment to the study.   I believe they had moments where they could glimpse a larger context for applying our critical work and those moments are reflected in our manuscript. However, I have no way of knowing the sustained effects.

What I hold fast to was the expression on their faces as they left campus each afternoon quickly fumbling toward adulthood where so much of what occurred in this study will remerge in the inevitable experiences of their lives.   An expression I have seen only on those individuals who have experienced so little as to still believe themselves separate from the rest of the world—

but at times, I secretly envied them. I know the emotional and intellectual rollercoaster they will experience when that world splits open. Their youth and that precious moment in their lives where everything is possible and they believe their future is perfectly ordered before them, is fleeting. So whatever we accomplished here, no matter how slight, it is enough. The students were where they should have been in their young adult lives. I know this, because I was there once too. Thomas and Oldfather (1995) concluded their study convinced that, "the time we spent was more often exhilarating than a burden" (p. 200). I could not agree more.

As an Educator

Ladson-Billings (1994) is known for her culturally relevant pedagogy. She applied her critical approach when discussing the differences between African American students and their White teachers who often know too little about the cultures of their students. She believed culturally relevant teaching as using "students' culture in order to maintain it and to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture" (1994, p. 17). This created some interesting internal issues for me when thinking about my critical pedagogy because I knew an extensive amount about my students' culture—because in many ways, it reflected my own. However, I learned a few interesting things about conducting a critical study with all-white, middle-upper class students. Lewis-Charp (2003) described how white students in a racially diverse classroom are often hesitant to speak about race related themes for fear non-white students will judge them a racist. I would say that this is true of classrooms that are economically diverse as well. There are advantages a white teacher teaching white students about white privilege has in a mostly racially and socio-economic homogenous environment. There is often a feeling of safer expression that I believe can lead to greater self-awareness. Such awareness can challenge

positions of denial ("I am not a racist") and help students better understand the complexities of power and privilege and the interplay of identities in a culturally diverse society.

For example, during the study, one co-researcher who was concurrently taking Family and Consumer Science, was completing community service hours at a local daycare. One day in class, she mentioned to the group that she thought Hispanic women who were on fixed incomes were just having more children to keep getting welfare checks. I doubt this discussion would have occurred had there been Hispanic students in our class. It was an opportunity for me and several of the other students, to go back to our literature in order to dialogue about discursive theories of whiteness and possible ways of reframing this discriminatory thinking. Many who read this study will question whether I was even qualified to confront such a deeply unjust perception since I had no way of knowing how a Hispanic mother would respond. However, I offered my students my own participation in prejudice and systemic racism and the importance of its on-going examination. In doing so, I invited a discourse of honesty and humility.

In their humility was also great courage. They took emotional risks beyond my expectations and while they did so in a protected environment without counter ideological confrontation, I believe it was authentic. Freire (1970) claimed that through prepared discussion (and using the language and concerns of the students), those individuals are alerted to the lack of social justice in today's cultures. I believe that in many ways, my students may have gained a greater awareness because when they felt uninhibited and unguarded, they were arguably more present, more mindful and more open to new perspectives.

As a Reader

It comes as no surprise that I am a life-long reader. I have been in love with books even before I could read, partly out of my insatiable desire to know and partly out of voyeuristic

curiosity of worlds and experiences beyond my own. Critical reading, however, is a relatively new way of reading for me—a practice I have been improving over the last ten years or so. For me, critical reading has the greatest potential when first introduced within a critical pedagogy. This provides a larger context for the critical lens. One of the key differences for me between reading inside and outside a critical frame is that critical reading is a transformative act, one that is active rather than passive, variable rather than fixed. It reinforces the ways we are socially conditioned readers and thinkers. It is a way to explore counter narratives and challenge dominant ones. It is a way of opening up critical dialogue and confirming the power of language. It is a way to confront oppressive voices and a way for historically silenced voices to be heard. In this study, I observed how critical pedagogy helped student to be aware of the text and question its innocence: Are there gaps, leaps, or inconsistencies? Is the method of analysis problematic? Could the author's position be interpreted differently? What are the unargued assumptions? Are they problematic? What might an opposing viewpoint be? And once this process began, students discovered how fundamental language is to one's world view and the cultural assumptions that go with it.

The memoirs we read as a component of this study opened up a number of critical avenues for me that might not have otherwise been available. For example, when we read *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, my students often had great empathy for Nafasi's students that led me to more closely examine the power relationship between teacher and student. When we read *Memoir of a Race Traitor*, my students discussed at length the ways in which their grandparents had contributed (directly and indirectly) to the climate of racial prejudice in the town in which they lived. However, they also spoke about having compassion for those who inherited a socially constructed view of race relations in the South. It reminded me that a component of

social justice is compassion for the oppressor while critiquing their specific ideologies, behaviors and acts of discrimination. Critical reading expanded how they "read" the other aspects of their lives and connected those to the text.

> We hear and apprehend only what we already half know. If there is something which does not concern me, which is out of my line, which by experience or by genius my attention is not drawn to, however novel and remarkable it may be, if it is spoken, we hear it not, if it is written, we read it not, or if we read it, it does not detain us. Every man thus tracks himself through life, in all his hearing and reading and observation and traveling. His observations make a chain. (Thoreau, 2007, p. 420)

Reading critically with my students provided ways to better understand how people articulate their oppression and how the text serves as an important link in the critical chain.

As Writer

Near the end of the study, I was thinking about all the interesting things that came of writing with my students during this study. I happened across an article in *Newsweek* magazine (Herman, 2007) that helped reiterate some of the thoughts that lingered beyond this study about autobiographical writing. It detailed the story of a father, who since the day his son was born, had been journaling the experiences of his son's life from his own perspective but informed by experiences accounted by his son at different ages. The journal, which spans eighteen years, was a deeply felt and emotional treatise of a father and his only son. But that is not what I found compelling. The article was really about specific purposes for personal writing and how it serves not just as a compilation of our memories, but as a way of documenting the moments of our lives against the passage of time. In addition, it suggested that there is greater meaning when we allow multiple narratives, however limited the vocabulary and experience of those narratives, to

better understand the events and experiences before us. This particular excerpt illustrated the point and was an interesting analogy for what I often had difficulty articulating about collaborating with students who, despite their lack of research experiences offered much wisdom and valuable input.

> *My wife [and my son] sat on the front steps of our home and watched as a bird crashed headfirst into our front window. My wife turned to our son silent and confounded. Unshaken by the limits of his two-year-old vocabulary, he turned to my wife, put his hand to his head and quietly offered up his assessment of the bird's plight: "Helmet" was all he said.*

Personal writing is the most clearly translated example of *praxis* that I have ever found, because personal writing, when we are diligent, is a fully realized critical act. It is writing, it is text, it is collaboration, it is action, it is reflection; it is transformation.

Writing allows us to not only inscribe or "fixate meaning," but create meaning which "can persist in a way its actuality cannot" (Gertz, 1983, p. 30). Writing is a way to put a little bit of the unsayable into a containable form through language. But even then, it often fails to evoke all the emotions of the moment. Co-writing with my students changed me in every conceivable way. First, it shattered my ego. It required relinquishing much of my need for control.   Part of the control was driven by how this manuscript would be received, initially by my doctorial committee and later by my colleagues and academic superiors. How would such an amateurishly written dissertation be taken seriously? How could *this* kind of writing possibly pave the way for my place in academia? But now, at the close of two long years, all the easy definitions of what constitutes "good scholarship" and "good writing" have been utterly abolished. I now believe that writing is less about a static scale of measure and more about affirmation of life and all of its

complexities and contradictions. Additionally, because our writing can be shared with an audience, our work here is a witness that even though flawed, critical pedagogy is powerfully dynamic. As such, I no longer feel the impulse to questions the validity or value of our writing herein.

Another significant thing that happened is that I learned solo writing and collaborative writing can co-exist as a single narrative. I often thought of the *Canterbury Tales* as our own frame story was evolving. Chaucer, however, created all of the individual voices in his story himself. When you actually write with other writers, you get to experience perspectives and styles you might never approach yourself or have been able to craft alone. I believe that added greatly to the depth and creative strength of our work.

Finally, I learned that writing has its own specific gravity. It is evidence of the power of language to startle, to outrage, to incite inquiry and to deeply stir emotion. Therefore, it is a well suited companion to critical theory. Their story, yours, mine—it's what we all carry with us on this trip we take, and we owe it to each other to respect our stories and learn from them (Williams, 1929). We all have a story to tell. During my lifetime, I have known people who have a litany of stories in their personal repertoire, one for every occasion. Metaphorically speaking, I have only two. The one that is already written and the one I am writing—the first marks the passage of where I have been the second maps the way forward. This manuscript is now the former, a written record of a place I have been but will not be able to return except in memory. Because the details of this moment were written down, it becomes part of my living history— full of immediacy and expectation. This is to say, what remains, is for it to be read and experienced anew by someone else.

As a Critical Theorist

Rosenblatt (1978) described the objective of her work, "to immerse myself in a rich source of insights, not merely to accumulate a body of codified data (p. x). The work of critical theory is human work. Intimate. Painful. Hopeful. Dangerous. But mostly, it is the opportunity to know the self better—and to come to know others. For me critical theory is about connectedness. It is visualizing a "coming together in one place" (Capra, 1996, p. 27) in contexts and relationships to understand how we are part of a larger reality. In coming to understand the interrelatedness of our world, we began to appreciate the shared experience of living. While many of my students were socially privileged beyond even my own frame of reference, they had each have known suffering and injustice of some kind. Critical theory is nothing if not a path to greater empathy and a way to understand that pain is the great human equalizer. And while there are varying degrees of pain and oppression in the world, it is an experience from which none of us are exempt. Those who subscribe to the tenets of critical theory, and practice critical pedagogy, know that if the focus of how we live and work, how we engage in relationships with others, finds its center in our humanness, that pain is lessened. By embracing dialogue and multiple ways of knowing, we empowered each other as collective agents of social change from which everyone benefited, even if imperceptibly.

For Student Researchers

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the students also contributed to the findings of this study. We designed our study from location to practice, using a mixture of previously learned theories, experience and reflection-in-action, in order to develop new practices. In an effort to draw some conclusions from our work, we sought to accomplish this by "naming"

where that growth occurred in the study and what literature, theory, or experience led us to that growth. During the study, I asked students to compartmentalize their reflective practice into the following categorizes: Researchers, Readers, Writers and Critical Theorists. Each student was asked to write a reflection paper addressing each category at the end of the study, a process with which they were quite familiar by the completion of the semester. The student researchers constructed the paper from reflections from their notebook, written during the study, that they wanted to include in the manuscript about our work, not subjected to critique or input from the group or me. These constituted the student "Findings" portion of this dissertation that allowed the students to quantify some of their work as I quantified mine. I did not offer my own analysis of their comments; I felt this would dilute their power by giving me the last word. (See Appendix H for excerpts).

Implications

As we learn in qualitative work, there are countless ways to shift a paradigm. As implicated by the work here, the high school classroom offers many opportunities to explore hegemonic thinking and attitudes and challenge them through interactions, actions, reflective thinking, critical reading, critical writing and research like ours. As other teacher researchers undertake new critical studies in collaboration with students, there are some challenges I faced in this study that I feel are important to consider. While I do believe that students became more open-minded as a result of our work here, I don't know to what degree there was acceptance of difference. I think all of the students had moments of awareness that challenged their existing ideological positions and made claims which indicated the possibility of transformation during our study. But it is only through our action and reflection that those claims actually become

commitments (Freire, 1970). It is impossible to know the sustained effect of our work now that the current study is complete.

For many students, I think the study was simply a long and complex assignment and the critical reading and writing simply tasks of that assignment. When the assignment ended, so too did the analysis and mindfulness of the critical lens. I hope that when the students experience multiple realities in college and beyond and are exposed to diverse groups of people who communicate their various ways of knowing, they will be reminded of our study and can once again access this year to help them continue what we started here. For some, our work will remain and for others it will not. Even so, our collaboration is one example in a growing body of literature that that shows how hegemonic influences can be addressed in the classroom and beyond. And once we learn this, we can choose, through persistent and diligent action, to attempt to dismantle them.

Co-research and co-writing offers an intimate exchange between teacher and student that is at the heart of critical pedagogy. However, it is also a very daunting task. Teacher researchers who work in collaboration with their students must be aware that unlike studies with a primary researcher, there are countless negotiations that must be made. For example, this study often represents the priorities of the students that were counter to my own. Many aspects of this study that I felt were important were not included because the students failed to see any significance. Creating an ebb and flow in collaboration is difficult, particularly when the students far outnumber the teacher in such a design. The students were often resistant to my ideas and many times those ideas had to be abandoned in the interest of our group. The final manuscript represents this and includes obvious areas where student's interests overruled my own.

Finally, our study is a testament that we are all the experts of our own life stories. Through the interpretations of those stories and the experiences we shared together, my co-researchers and I gave each other new understandings and those perspectives complicated our own. It was in this dynamic exchange, I believe, the most authentic critical work existed; in those moments of hearing our own voice in a symphony of many. The narrative aspect of the study, while at many times frustrating and tedious, was a rare opportunity to see my students taking critical risks that was initiated by me (and their classmates) doing the same. Because I had the benefit of seeing their writing outside the study, I was witness to the vulnerability they exhibited when they could write and be represented confidentially (and often anonymously) within the study. It suggested a deep level of trust developed within our group and the collective investment in our work.

This study is nothing if not a challenge to other qualitative researchers to consider the field of untapped possibilities of critical collaboration. Often we need others to help make meaning of our experiences and give us new ways to think about the world. "Both inside and outside the classroom, collaboration nurtures the expression of ideas, the negotiating of meanings, the creation of understandings that extend beyond what an individual could see alone" (Kutz & Roskelly, 1991, p. 320). The students and I co-constructed our ideas about the ways in which our study could be useful to others. While I added the final implications from my perspective, the students informed what I felt was important to pass on. Many times during this study my students would query me about my own intent regarding teaching. The questions were along the line of, "Why don't you just teach like everyone else?" (The translations of this is, "Why don't you just prepare us for taking college English and passing the SAT and give all that social justice nonsense a rest?") And at times, I thought this a relevant question. Some of the

teachers that I believe incited my great thirst for academics; teachers that led me to this very moment were, by contrast to what I advocate here, conservative and authoritative. But they also allowed students to produce knowledge for themselves, and in doing so, surrendered some power. And while I still recognize these teachers as having exercised a great deal of control over my learning perhaps by not advocating classroom democracy, there was still space to create my own ideas and to challenge authority. That fact alone is radical and anti-hierarchical. Maybe critical pedagogy exists on a spectrum. Perhaps critical pedagogy begins with the degree to which that allowance is fostered and what is done with that space.

Shor (1992) defines desocializing the classroom as:

> Understanding and challenging artificial, political limits on human development; questioning power and inequality in the status quo; examining socialized values in consciousness and in society which hold back democratic change in individuals and in the larger culture; seeing self and social transformation as a joint process. (129-130)

Maybe to those new to critical pedagogy, that is a hopeful and ambitious starting point. And that can lead to what I think is the most resounding implication for teachers summed up in a comment Brittany made during the study, which was meant to be off the record, but was recorded on our audio tape during a discussion: "I have been in school twelve years and this is the first time where I felt my role in the classroom was as, if not more important, than that of the teacher."

Questions for Further Study

Our study leaves many questions yet to be explored. How do we continue to create opportunities for personal writing as expression of critical reading and analysis in the classroom?

How can teachers model the importance of critical work by reading and writing with their students? How can collaborative inquiry advance critical scholarship? These are just some of the questions that will persist beyond this study as I continue to create and recreate my critical pedagogy and my co-researchers use this experience among many that will shape their lives and inform their own ways of knowing.

AFTERWARD

Somehow when I began this journey, I thought the beginning was the greatest hurdle. But now I find the ending equally difficult. Maybe that is because I am not confident of what, if anything, I have done here. So here I am, more of less complete with this project and yet still grappling with my own academic insecurity and the looming question of what comes next. I think it only fitting that I close the way I began—with literature. It is what led me here to begin with.

About a year into my dissertation I "hit the wall", a term fellow runners and I use to describe that point in a marathon where the physical and mental fatigue of it all becomes so overpowering that the desire to quit is stronger than the will to finish. This is the point in the marathon where you cannot remember why you even began the race in the first place. The finish line is an insignificant, imaginary goal that can hardly be worth the pain you must endure to get there.

When I reached this moment in my dissertation, I felt I could not muster the courage to continue. I went searching for support to quit. I went back to the book that was always my anchor in childhood; the one that gave me permission to question boundaries set by others. The one I thought would convince me that even though I had come this far, I could still change my mind. I could still decide that I did not want to be "sivilied" by academia. The book, of course is *Huckleberry Finn*. What I discovered in the rereading of this beloved story, was not the "out" I was looking for, but a revision of what had drawn me to this novel, this character, so many years before. It had the exact opposite effect that I thought it would—it was the inspiration to *continue* my work here not to suspend it. What I recalled about Huck's adventures with Jim from my

earlier reading was that it provoked a kind of personal rebellion against authoritative expectation. This is what I would have said before my rereading if asked why I treasured this particular novel. But what it really was that resonated with me, even though I believe I could not have articulated or perhaps even understood in my first encounter with the story, was Huck's fortitude, his persistence to seek what he knew to be best for him against all well meaning advice from others and seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

As a teacher, a researcher, a scholar and a writer, this too is my quest. In college I read *The Green Hills of Africa* (1934) in which Hemingway comments that all American writing begins and ends with *Huckleberry Finn*—"There was nothing before. There has been nothing as good since." At the time, I interpreted this to mean that the novel was the truest representation of the individual and collective American spirit; determinism and ingenuity. But now, in light of my rereading at that critical juncture in my graduate work, I think Hemingway may have meant something else.

As humans we are always driven to do something beyond what we think is possible. But in my estimation, we set out on our adventures—well meaning and with good intention— and a great many of us find we aren't as brave as we thought we were. When it gets hard, when the waters are too rough, when we are afraid and riddled with uncertainty, we abandon our raft and turn for the safety and familiarity of home. But a few of us are compelled to stay the course. We can always hear the waters lapping against the shore and something within us, something greater than ourselves, compels us to ride the rapids. We will never be content to live our lives on solid ground. Because even if it all ends in disaster tomorrow, think of the stories I could tell. Like Huck, I too will always be restless for the river.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

Timeline of the Study

August	September	October	November December	January-March	April-July
Distributed consent forms and planned design of the study. Read memoir 1 and audio taped dialogues and completed first installment of cultural memior. Begin journal writing and photography. Begin coding data.	Developed set of secondary questions for the study. Read trade memoir 2 & 3. Audio taped discussions continued. Completed second installment of cultural memoir. Included now are also written responses to particular topics reflected in the secondary set of questions. Continued journal writing and photography. Continued coding data.	Read trade memoir 4 & 5. Audio taped discussions continued. Completed third installment of cultural memoir. Written responses to particular topics reflected in the secondary set of questions continued. Continued journal writing and photography. Continued coding data.	Read final trade memoirs 6 & 7. Wrote final installment of cultural memoir. Reviewed writing submitted during the study. Reviewed of audio tapeddiscussions (transcription) and photographs taken.	Final coding of data. Collaborative data selection with participants. Met with Critical Consultants to review choices for final selection. Conducted analysis of data. Data write-up began	Final assembly of data representation into completed manuscript. Reviewed and revised manuscript for submission to committee.

APPENDIX B

Data Analysis Sample

Narrotological analysis has two components, looking at the narrative and looking at the action

that influenced the narrative. The first component asks you to look at who tells the story. Whose

focus does it represent? In other words, whose view do we have? For example, is the narrator a

man or woman? Is the narrator narrating their own experience or the experience of someone

else? Narratological analysis recognizes that any written, visualized or broadcast (spoken) text

contained within it a critical perspective, mirrors the reality of the subject and object, i.e., that

which is written about, that which is spoken about and that which is visualized. Narration here

refers to the process of presenting, representing or making something come alive. In the case of a

memoir, for example, that which is presented is material that constitutes knowledge. Readers

receive such knowledge via a person who narrates in an individual, subjective way. In fiction, for

example, the author presents a voice that is the narrating figure. Narratological analysis

acknowledges that often there are multiple actors and voices in the same text, presented via any

given medium. The aim of the analysis is to identify the different elements within both the

written words and the implied representations in the text. Narratological analysis proceeds by

asking and responding to a series of questions that reveal the ideological positions of a text. The

questions posed to provide qualitative and quantitative data relate to action, focus, visualization

power and use of language. In the action component, the actions of the narrator are identified and

quantified by ideological positions.

The following questions are asked:

   • Who acts and who is the recipient of that action?

   • What kind of activities are involved?

• What race, class, gendered position makes the action and reception of that action

possible?

• How often does the action occur?

• Who initiates what sort of action?

• Is there a hierarchy of actions/activities?

• Who is at the top of the hierarchy and why?

• What implications are there for those higher up and lower down in

the hierarchy?

Steven: It is not like I can help that I was born with money. Everyone has their place in

society and this just happens to be mine. It could have just have easily been

something else. (Steven narrates from his own position of privilege which he

claims is predetermined but simply a matter of chance, as if a lottery. The

narration possibly suggests a belief that a higher power (fate or God) is

responsible for assigning social positions and that position is not determined by

the individual. The word "place" seems to indicate a fixed location on the

socioeconomic spectrum.)

Holly: But our goal is to recognize the social and cultural advantages that come with

affluence in our society. (Change justification to acknowledgment of the way this

material wealth increases social power. Attempts to open the narration)

Patrick: It just seems like I am suppose to feel *guilty* for not being poor. (The word

"guilty" suggests an emotional response to wrongdoing for which there should be

some retribution (action). "Suppose to" a direction from someone other than self)

Holly: No. It is only awareness of how your social class allows you greater access in the world.

Allison: We do recognize it, but it just seems like it is overanalyzed. Maybe some people just have money and other don't. There is a reason for everything. (Who is overanalyzing. Why is the narrator feeling like the object of analysis? Narrative action is to oversimplify. Make and either/or situation. Again the narration includes language that indicates wealth is a matter of chance. "There is a reason for everything" might be a biblical reference. The last sentence seems to be conclusive.)

Lauren: Society would not work if everyone had money anyway. (What is meant by the word work? "Work" seems to indicate reproduction of status quo here. The implication is that society is currently working. Action is the "operations" of social class. Could it be the working class is supporting the needs and interest of the privileged class? A hypothetical equality would eliminate this social structure.)

Patrick: And it's not like we don't live in a free society. Everyone has the opportunity to make more money. It's not like poor people can't work to get ahead. There is no one saying, "No! You have to stay poor for the rest of your life!" (Is "free" meant that we have choice? That there is no price to pay in society? Narrative action is overgeneralization, "everyone" has equal access to wealth. Narrator has inconsistencies. Why would he need to feel guilty if everyone can make money? Narrator addresses an unnamed audience. Who is intended? Language indicates authority and giving permission to a receiver of the narrative.)

APPENDIX C

The Things They Carried

…They carried USO stationery and pencils and pens. They carried Sterno, safety pins, trip flares, signal flares, spools of wire, razor blades, chewing tobacco, liberated joss sticks and statuettes of the smiling Buddha, candles, grease pencils, The Stars and Stripes, fingernail clippers, Psy Ops leaflets, bush hats, bolos, and much more. Twice a week, when the resupply choppers came in, they carried hot chow in green mermite cans and large canvas bags filled with iced beer and soda pop. They carried plastic water containers, each with a two-gallon capacity. Mitchell Sanders carried a set of starched tiger fatigues for special occasions. Henry Dobbins carried Black Flag insecticide. Dave Jensen carried empty sandbags that could be filled at night for added protection. Lee Strunk carried tanning lotion. Some things they carried in common. Taking turns, they carried the big PRC-77 scrambler radio, which weighed 30 pounds with its battery. They shared the weight of memory. They took up what others could no longer bear. Often, they carried each other, the wounded or weak. They carried infections. They carried chess sets, basketballs, Vietnamese-English dictionaries, insignia of rank. Bronze Stars and Purple Hearts, plastic cards imprinted with the Code of Conduct. They carried diseases, among them malaria and dysentery. They carried lice and ringworm and leeches and paddy algae and various rots and molds. They carried the land itself - Vietnam, the place, the soil - a powdery orange-red dust that covered their boots and fatigues and faces. They carried the sky. The whole atmosphere, they carried it, the humidity, the monsoons, the stink of fungus and decay, all of it, they carried gravity. They moved like mules. By daylight they took sniper fire, at night they were mortared, but it was not battle, it was just the endless march, village to village, without purpose, nothing won or lost. They marched for the sake of the march. They plodded along slowly, dumbly, leaning forward against the heat, unthinking, all blood and bone, simple grunts, soldiering with their legs, toiling up the hills and down into the paddies and across the rivers and up again and down, just humping, one step and then the next and then another, but no volition, no will, because it was automatic, it was anatomy, and the war was entirely a matter of posture and carriage, the hump was everything, a kind of inertia, a kind of emptiness, a dullness of desire and intellect and conscience and hope and human sensibility. Their principles were in their feet. Their calculations were biological. They had no sense of strategy or mission. They searched the villages without knowing what to look for, not caring, kicking over jars of rice, frisking children and old men, blowing tunnels, sometimes setting fires and sometimes not, then forming up and moving on to the next village, then other villages, where it would always be the same. They carried their own lives. The pressures were enormous. In the heat of early afternoon, they would remove their helmets and flak jackets, walking bare, which was dangerous but which helped ease the strain. They would often discard things along the route of march. Purely for comfort, they would throw away rations, blow their Claymores and grenades, no matter, because by nightfall the resupply choppers would arrive with more of the same, then a day or two later still more, fresh watermelons and crates of ammunition and sunglasses and woolen sweaters - the resources were stunning - sparklers for the Fourth of July, colored eggs for Easter - it was the great American war chest - the fruits of science, the smokestacks, the canneries, the arsenals at Hartford, the Minnesota forests, the machine shops, the vast fields of corn and wheat - they carried like freight trains; they carried it on their backs and shoulders - and for all the ambiguities of Vietnam, all the mysteries and unknowns, there was at least the single abiding certainty that they would never be at a loss for things to carry(p.10-12

APPENDIX D

The Things I Carry

I carry the spunk and spirit of a blonde headed tomboy who wore pink ribbons in her hair and cowboy boots on her feet.

I carry the memory of a racially segregated childhood where hatred spewed from the mouths of children, plastered the bumpers of cars, and oppressed so many amazing people who shared my zip code on the other side of the tracks.

I carry the powerful dichotomy of a public and private education.

I carry the baggage of a child who never really felt a sense of belonging.

I carry the knowledge that my grandmother underwent two illegal abortions; one that was unsuccessful. She was a woman so ill prepared for the weight of motherhood that she could only find release in physically abusing and abandoning her child. It is remarkable that her daughter, my beautiful mother, survived such a childhood. My thankfulness that there was only one child instead of two cannot be measured.

I carry membership cards for Pi Beta Phi, The University of Alabama and The University of Georgia alumni associations, The Human Rights Campaign, The Human Rights Campaign, The National Democratic Party, The Humane Society of America, The League of Women Voters, and The National Organization for Women.

I carry the images of a young, single, exhausted mother working two jobs to raise her only daughter, her eyelids heavy from sleepless nights and constant worry that what she gives me will never be enough. And yet she still carries me when I am too tired to walk.

I carry the dangerous mixture of love and hate for my native South. A topography that often leaves me breathless but a beauty sometimes diminished by persistent prejudice and inequality.

I carry the weightlessness of water that has so often been my salvation; a swimmer, a coach, a rower. Oh, how I have imagined the final breaths of Virginia Woolf.

I carry everything with the same graceful hands as the man who ideologies I have spent a lifetime opposing. The same man who votes Republican, went to Harvard, sits as Vice President of a fortune five company, is a Sunday school teacher in the Baptist church and has been absent from my life for over three decades. He weighs heavily on my mind.

I carry the photograph of a young boy who was beaten to death in the desert of Arizona where I once lived because he loved another boy and told him so in a letter. The weight of the earth now presses against his lifeless body and his heartbroken mother paces across the hardwood floors of her kitchen late at night screaming for her only son.

I carry the words of poets like Sharon Olds, Margaret Atwood, Adrienne Rich, Billy Collins; writers like John Irving, Alice Walker, Jeanette Winterson, Amy Bloom, Toni Morrison, Amy Tan, and Michael Cunningham who speak a truth this world needs to hear.

I carry the gracefulness and strength of women I have loved and who have loved me, who taught me the meaning of "mirror geography"

I carry the warmth of my golden retrievers when the world is too much with me and their immeasurable capacity for affection (and slobber!)

I carry my pen and paper to write the world as I see and feel it; to say the important things that make my life worth living.

I carry the inspiration of gifted teachers and countless students.

I carry the miles of over forty marathons on my feet; a metaphor of endurance, the importance of training, and the ability to cross a finish line despite the pain of getting there.

I carry my camera to record the heart stopping beauty of this planet that is my home and the people who inhabit it; a reminder of Proust's legacy "it is not in seeking new landscapes but in seeing with new eyes".

I carry the name of a student who took the very best of my classroom practice and made it her own. She, my legacy, is the best of who I am and yet she does it all with more intellect, grace, fire, eloquence and beauty than I ever could.

I carry the encouragement of friends who embody all that I know of love and its properties.

I carry the courage of people who risk everything to change the world, even at the expense of their own lives—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jane Goodall, Mother Theresa, Harriet Tubman, Gandhi, John Lennon, Nelson Mandela, and countless others.

I carry images of world atrocities (9/11; Hurricane Katrina; political, civil and religious conflicts; the Tsunami, etc.) to remind me of the powers greater than humanity and powers abused by humanity.

I carry the responsibility of sharing my human rights conviction with my students and my children so that their world may be a little better than mine.

I carry the right to reinvent myself every day and the desire to leave indelible fingerprints of hope upon this earth for those who follow me.

I carry the burden of making it all mean something.

I carry my heart on my sleeve.

I carry on.

APPENDIX E

Style Choices for Cultural Memoir

<u>Position Paper</u> A position paper is a short paper in which takes a "for or against" position about an issue, theory, or event. Writers must their positions by using supporting evidence from the text or our transcripts.

<u>Description</u> A description paper paints a verbal picture of a person, place, or thing. The details used in this type of writing usually appeal to the five senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch.

<u>Narration</u> Narrative writing is telling a story to make a point. In this type of writing, students usually answer the journalist's questions: Who? What? When? Where? and How? Answering these questions simply tells what happened at a particular event. Most narratives, however, also answer the question Why? In these narratives, students go beyond merely reciting events. They also discuss the motives, influences that underlie the events.

<u>Compare-Contrast</u> Comparison examines the similarities among things; contrast examines the differences; comparison-contrast examines both similarities and differences. The purpose of compare-contrast writing is to understand things more clearly, and at times, to make judgments about them.

<u>Process Analysis</u> Process analysis writing explains how something is made or done. To analyze a process effectively, writers must know it thoroughly and be able to divide it into steps.

<u>Cause and Effect</u> Cause examines the reasons why actions, attitudes, events and conditions exist. Effect examines their consequences.

<u>Argument-Persuasion</u> Argument-persuasion is writing that takes a position on an issue then defends that position with supporting evidence from the text or our transcripts with the purpose of persuading someone to accept the position. Argument relies on logic and reasoning to convince the reader, while persuasion appeals to the reader's emotions, values, and beliefs. Although argument and persuasion are slightly different, writers usually combine the two to produce an essay that has both reason and emotional appeal.

<u>Classification-Division</u> Both classification and division are writing that sorts things by placing them into categories or groups. Classification takes a number of items and groups them into various categories. Division takes one item and breaks it down into its parts.

<u>Definition</u> Definition writing goes beyond the dictionary definition of a term. In this type of writing explains a term. This type of writing is called, "extended definition" and presents a clear, contextualized definition of a term supported with examples.

<u>Reaction Paper</u> Reaction papers offer personal insights about the meaning and significance of an issue that may have many different perspectives

APPENDIX F

Excerpt from Sarah's Research Glossary

<u>**Critical Consciousness**</u>

Paulo Freire (1982), *concientizacio´n* is defined as the development of a critical awareness of how personal dynamics unfold within social and political contexts: that if people were to become critical, escape a naive consciousness, and increase their capacity to reject the prescriptions of others, progress could be made toward dismantling systems of oppression.

> **Freire, P. (1982). Pedagogy of the oppressed. New York: Continuum**

Martı´n-Baro´ (1994) further elaborated how critical consciousness develops and its possible impact on people's lives. Martı´n-Baro´ explained that ''reality'' is too often defined by those who, because of their social locations and unexamined social beliefs, remain unable or unwilling to identify the contradictions between their personal experience and larger systems of domination. The process of raising critical consciousness presupposes that when we transform ourselves, we simultaneously transform our relationships with others and the communities that embrace us.

1. The human being is transformed through changing his or her reality.
2. Through the gradual decoding of their world, people grasp the mechanisms of oppression and dehumanization. Critical consciousness of others and of the surrounding reality brings with it the possibility of a new praxis, which at the same time makes possible new forms of consciousness.
A mythological consciousness refers to a person who recognizes oppression but reacts mostly based on his or her emotions (Korin, 1994).

> **Korin, E. (1994). Social inequalities and therapeutic relationships: Applying Freire's ideas to clinical practice. In R.V. Almeida (Ed.), Expansions of feminist family theory through diversity (pp. 75–98). New York: HawaAh Press.**

Critical consciousness is in essence optimal consciousness, characterized by the integration of the intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual aspects of a human being.

> **Mustakova-Possardt, E. (2004). Education for critical moral consciousness. *Journal of Moral Education*, 33:3, 245-246.**

3. People's new knowledge of their surrounding reality carries them to a new understanding of themselves and, most important, of their social identity. They begin to discover themselves in their mastery of nature, in their actions that transform things, in their active role in relation to others. (p. 40)

> **Martı´n-Baro´, I. (1982). A social psychologist faces the civil war in El Salvador. *Revista Latinoamericana de Psicologı´a*, 2, 9–111.**

APPENDIX G

Cage Metaphors

The free bird thinks of another breeze
and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn-bright lawn and he names the sky his own.

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings with a fearful trill
of things unknown but longed for still
and his tune is heard on the distant hill
for the caged bird sings of freedom.

~Maya Angelo

***

On the following day everyone knew that a flesh-and-blood angel was held captive in Pelayo's house. Against the judgment of the wise neighbor woman, for whom angels in those times were the fugitive survivors of a spiritual conspiracy, they did not have the heart to club him to death. Pelayo watched over him all afternoon from the kitchen, armed with his bailiff's club, and before going to bed he dragged him out of the mud and locked him up with the hens in the wire chicken coop. In the middle of the night, when the rain stopped, Pelayo and Elisenda were still killing crabs. A short time afterward the child woke up without a fever and with a desire to eat. Then they felt magnanimous and decided to put the angel on a raft with fresh water and provisions for three days and leave him to his fate on the high seas. But when they went out into the courtyard with the first light of dawn, they found the whole neighborhood in front of the chicken coop having fun with the angel, without the slightest reverence, tossing him things to eat through the openings in the wire as if weren't a supernatural creature but a circus animal.

~Gabriel Garcia Marquez

***

From the Prison Diary of Robert Gerard Sands, commonly known as Bobby Sands was an Irish republican and a former MP who died in HM Prison Maze but formerly known as Long Kesh 66 days after first refusing to eat. The 27-year-old republican spent the last days of his life on a water bed to protect his fragile bones:

I am standing on the threshold of another trembling world. May God have mercy on my soul.

My heart is very sore because I know that I have broken my poor mother's heart, and my home is struck with unbearable anxiety as I sit in this cage. But I have considered all the arguments and tried every means to avoid what has become the unavoidable: it has been forced upon me and my comrades by four-and-a-half years of stark inhumanity.

I am a political prisoner. I am a political prisoner because I am a casualty of a perennial war that is being fought between the oppressed Irish people and an alien, oppressive, unwanted regime that refuses to withdraw from our land.

I believe and stand by the God-given right of the Irish nation to sovereign independence, and the right of any Irishman or woman to assert this right in armed revolution. That is why I am incarcerated, naked and tortured.

<div align="center">***</div>

So, so you think you can tell
Heaven from Hell,
Blue skys from pain.
Can you tell a green field
From a cold steel rail?
A smile from a veil?
Do you think you can tell?

And did they get you to trade
Your heroes for ghosts?
Hot ashes for trees?
Hot air for a cool breeze?
Cold comfort for change?
And did you exchange
A walk on part in the war
For a lead role in a cage?

Pink Floyd

<div align="center">***</div>

Pigs have intelligence beyond that of an average 3-year-old human child. They are smarter than dogs friendly, loyal, and affectionate. When in their natural surroundings they are social, playful, protective animals that bond with each other, make beds, relax in the sun, and cool off in the mud. Research shows that pigs dream, recognize their names, lead social lives of a complexity previously observed only in primates. Pigs on today's farms are denied their every innate desire; they never run across sprawling pastures, bask in the sun, breathe fresh air, or do anything else that comes naturally to them. Mother pigs (sows) spend most of their lives in tiny "gestation" cages, which are too small for them to turn around in. They are continually impregnated until they are slaughtered. Piglets are taken away from their distraught mothers after just a few weeks,

and their tails are chopped off, the ends of their teeth are snipped off with pliers, and the males are castrated.

APPENDIX H

Student Reflections

Reflections as Researchers

When we first began this project, I was terrified. This was important stuff. My teacher was going to get her next job on what we did here and that just seemed like a lot of pressure. I remember in the beginning of the project when we were sorting out what literature we would use to help us think about doing critical research, there was one article that said, "critical researchers can use the system against itself by using the public perception that claims about knowledge made by professional credentialed scholars are more legitimate than the same claims made by other people" (Martin, 1998). That was the one moment that really energized me. Basically, the critical researcher is the one who can make high brow academics and mere mortals understand that the voices that go unheard are often the very ones who have the most important things to say. (Lauren)

When we first started this study, I thought eighteen people were just a recipe for disaster. I have never been able to *collaborate* with my four best friends on anything without it suddenly turning chaotic. I really thought Mrs. Isserstedt had bitten off more than she could chew and I think at first, she may have been nervous about that too. But what happened that was different from what I expected was that I found out *collaboration* is not the same thing as *consensus*. When we read the chapters from *Narrative Inquiry* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) we learned that a co-authored dissertation is expected to have the imprint, "unique stamp" of each individual who contributes to the bigger thing (p. 151). This meant that we could have different ideas, comment on each other's ideas and not be required to have one final say about a topic. This made changing my

opinions more possible. I could move a little toward a different way of thinking without being forced to be in one camp or the other. For example, when we were discussing the rising Hispanic population in our town, I began very far on the spectrum in opposition to any kind of integration of our community. But because I was able to voice my thoughts and ask my own questions, I started to feel differently by the end of that section because I was allowed to get there on my own, not because someone was telling me my ideas were wrong. (Brittany)

At first I was not sure I would like doing this project, but now that it is finished, I can't believe how good it is. I know Mrs. Isserstedt says that we don't know what other people will think about our work, but I don't really think that matters (except for her grade) because the whole thing was just cool. It was like a reality show, but in school. Not like what school usually is: where all the actors play a part and what we say and do has been decided in advance. It was unpredictable and crazy and out of control. And Mrs. Isserstedt really did not try to keep it neat. She just let it go where it went. But it was also the most real thing I ever did in a classroom. We were "love and beauty mixed inextricably with hatred and pain" (Segrest, 2003, p. 137). So even if everyone else who reads this hates it, it was life. And that sure beats school any day if you ask me. (Becca)

This project was hard, much harder than I thought it would be. Mrs. Isserstedt had high expectations and even though there were days I thought she was going to kill us all, she made us get through it. She refused to do the work for us. What I learned about research is that you produce all this data and spend hours and hours trying to analyze what you have. The end result seems kind of small in comparison. It sounds like I'm complaining, but really I'm not. I now

see how many oysters you have to open to find a pearl. It is exhausting. I'm never going to get a PhD. (Allison)

One of the things I never knew about research (or at least the critical research we conducted) was that it is meant to challenge power structures not just in academics but in actual real life situations. My idea of research was mostly that academics did research to "one-up" each other. That is what it always seemed my father did as a professor. I did not know that research is conducted also to better the world. Our study demonstrated in a real way that when people change, the world changes a bit too. (Jeff)

Reflections as Readers

I am not sure I can say that I enjoy critical reading. I say this a little "tongue in cheek", but I am not sure I want to work this hard. What has happened to me is analogous to eating fast food all of your life and never giving a second thought to the political, environmental and health issues surrounding your meal. Then one day, you are part of a study that shows you the reasons why fast food is problematic. Now suddenly your innocent hamburger is a front runner in the demise of the planet and is clogging your arteries to boot. Well, what can you do now but join Greenpeace and become a vegan? Okay. This is a bit of an exaggeration, but all jokes aside, the *text* will never be the same. After you know what critical reading is you can never go back to the ordinary business of mindless reading. Thank goodness I read Harry Potter before all this madness began! (Kevin)

Critical reading was hard for me. I love to read and it is one of the few things in my life that really never seems to lose its thrill. I still want books to be a treasure hunt. I like to think about reading like gold digging; if I am a good reader, I will find that one nugget of truth somewhere buried in the pages of that book. Mrs. Isserstedt says that part of qualitative research is having new questions and that there does not have to be any resolution. So I guess my question is, can I be a critical reader and still believe in the magic of books? Can I still be critically conscious but leave the books out of it? (Katie)

I think one of the most important things I learned this semester was that books are written by people with their own biases and agendas. I just always assumed that books were the keepers of knowledge and by reading them; some of that knowledge is imparted on us. But after this study, I think that is a passive way to think about the act of reading. Reading means 'seizing' or 'grappling' with the text, both challenging it and being prepared to be challenged by it (Roberts, 1993). This is not something I have ever heard in my English classes. (Sarah)

I am one of those rare teenagers that would rather read than do just about anything. I know this probably means something is wrong with me, but whatever. Our critical reading process in this class taught me something that may be a little off topic here. I am not sure how to word this, but I only read books that I think will not go against my values and moral beliefs. I do not want to be influenced by a writer whose beliefs are counter to mine. After our study, I feel differently about this. I think I can gain more by opening myself to other ideas, other people's lives that are not like my own. Even if I don't like what they are saying or agree with what they write, my critique is meaningful and an act of living critically if only to confirm my own beliefs. (April)

I have always been a good student. I actually read the books they assign in school. What I learned the most in this study is about critical reading. I always thought you were supposed to look for information or to learn something about the subject matter of the text. I read totally differently now. I ask, why was this text written? What is it trying to do? What reason does the author have for writing this book? This does not sound that original, I know. That is what we were told to do in this study. But here is what is caused me to think about: What if we looked at people the way we look at books? Rather than just accepting what people say, or deciding we don't like them—or we do—what if we believe that we have a choice about how we critique people the way we critiqued books this semester. I really try to do that now, even though it is hard. I think it makes a difference. Even if they claim to be an expert on something, or they look a certain way, that does not tell the whole story of a person. (Bailey)

Reflections as Writers

I would say that I have always loved writing. I was never one of those kids that complained when I had to write a paper. But I think that is because writing has always been a form of therapy for me. A cathartic process. I never imagined that writing could be a process whereby you can examine your own belief about something. I never knew that writing could be the witness of social change. Even in my personal journal, I ask myself questions like, why do I say this particular thing? What bias causes me to feel this way? How would someone else critique my thoughts? (Trevor)

I loved the cultural memoir. But not because I think I'm a good writer or anything. I just think that most people don't really spend a lot of time going back to experiences in their lives to try to

find out why they are the way they are. This study triggered memories that I may have never thought about again. Looking back on those things, I can really see how I was shaped by those things, those people. I don't think that I was necessarily born a certain way anymore. I think that I am also molded by what has happened in my life. Writing uncovered this for me. I want to continue this assignment for many years. I hope I'll be able to keep it up. (Taylor)

I have written about a thousand papers in high school. I have never thought about my writing as *political*. I never thought it more than just getting through an assignment. I was very skeptical of our writing assignments for this study/class and our cultural memoir in the beginning. I thought it was just a cleverly disguised way to get us to produce more busy work; until we did group readings of our writing and began the critique/reflective part. During the second month of the study, my parents were in China for about four weeks adopting my little sister. This was a really exciting time for me and we had been waiting nearly two years to adopt. I wrote about this experience in my autobiography and I was shocked by what some in the group said about my entry, especially because it was so personal. Allison asked me why I wrote the phrase "my parents were too old to adopt a Caucasian baby" twice in my entry. I also said she was "beautiful" and "not very Asian looking." At the time, I was really defensive. I felt like Allison was just trying to impress the group by making me feel stupid. At the end of the study when I had to reflect on what I thought was most important, I now think this was it. I love my baby sister more than anything. And my parents are so happy now that she is home. It feels like our family is complete. But when I wrote that, I know that those were words of apology. I was apologizing to anyone who would not understand (maybe approve) that my family is biracial. (Steven)

I hate to write. I can't believe that I have made it though all my AP classes without even the slightest enjoyment of writing. I do, however, like debate and argument. Obviously, I have been doing that a lot in this study. But in our writing for this study, Mrs. Isserstedt kept asking critical questions like "Where did you get these ideas from?" "What value system are they informed by?," "What kinds of social institutions and relationships do they perpetuate?" About half way through our study, I started to feel like my arguments were not just knee jerk reactions. I actually am better at argument now because I try to ask these questions now before I speak or write. Being forced to, as Mrs. Isserstedt says, "name" my subjectivities, has really helped me. People are much more likely to listen to what I have to say because now my arguments are more like "critiques" than "assaults". (Patrick)

Reflections as Critical Theorists

It is hard for me to believe now that there were ever things I could not "hear". When the research group was discussing the Oprah transcript, I would have thought (before this study) that those comments were totally polite and totally harmless. I would have said, "Well, he is a little racist, but he means no harm." It is weird how now even in casual conversations with strangers in the mall or standing in line at Starbucks racism is amplified so loudly it hurts my ears. I have the impulse to begin explaining critical theory to people I have never met before and will probably never see again. (Ashley)

I never knew that as an individual I had a choice to resist or accommodate power systems in society. I just always thought that race, culture, sexual orientation, gender and socioeconomic

status were luck of the draw. You lived whatever code was prescribed to that place. If you were white, you were socially superior and therefore might be racist. If you were gay then you accepted your difference and found every reason to be proud anyway. I see how dangerous this belief is because it essentially absolves me of any social responsibility or accountability. I also know that having more social power as a white male means that I have even greater responsibility to be aware of how that power harms others. I do not fully know yet what "resistance" means. This study was only one semester. But I do know that if I question rather than accept the norms set by my dominant culture then I am honoring what I learned here. (Katie)

My light bulb moment was this (and I know you think I did not have any Mrs. Isserstedt!). In one of the handouts you gave us, Freire (1998) said, *Being tolerant does not mean acquiescing to the intolerable; it does not mean covering up disrespect; it does not mean coddling the aggressor or disguising aggression. Tolerance is the virtue that teaches us to live with the different. It teaches us to learn from and respect the different* (p, 42). I thought that I could say I was not a racist, not a homophobe, not a sexist, because I have never been openly rude or disrespectful to anyone. My parents taught me to be kind to everyone. But I decided that politeness and acceptance are not the same thing. Being polite may effectively cover up how I feel and allow me to lead a civilized life, but it does not mean I *feel* any differently at all. I'm not saying I don't do this anymore. I'm sure I do. But at least I don't think being nice to someone excuses how I really think about them but don't say aloud. (Jordan)

I know that Freire (1970) talked about the tension that exists between a vision of social justice and the current societal conditions. I know also that he believed that if people were to become critical, they could make some progress toward dismantling systems of oppression. But the "vision" part of Freire really frustrates me. As a gay person, I feel that most of the time, that "vision" of how things could be, is just that—a vision and not a realty. I think Freire thought that the action could not come without the vision, but to me, the dominant culture is a powerful force that will never lay its weapons of oppression just because a few of us believe they should. I guess what I am saying is I wonder how Freire would say if he could read a newspaper today. Would he say that we are transforming our world for the better? Or would he shake his head and exclaim that we are not making sufficient progress? (Jeff) [xiii]

APPENDIX I

Content Notes

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[i] Terms in section dividers excerpted from Non-Fiction Glossary. See:
 Perl, S. and Schwartz, M. (2006). Creative ways to talk about non-fiction. New York:
	Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

[ii] This is my rifle. There are many like it, but this one is mine. It is my life. I must master it as I must master my life. Without me my rifle is useless. Without my rifle, I am useless. I must fire my rifle true. I must shoot straighter than the enemy who is trying to kill me. I must shoot him before he shoots me. I will. My rifle and I know that what counts in war is not the rounds we fire, the noise of our burst, or the smoke we make. We know that it is the hits that count. We will hit.

My rifle is human, even as I am human, because it is my life. Thus, I will learn it as a brother. I will learn its weaknesses, its strengths, its parts, its accessories, its sights and its barrel. I will keep my rifle clean and ready, even as I am clean and ready. We will become part of each other.

Before God I swear this creed. My rifle and I are the defenders of my country. We are the masters of our enemy. We are the saviors of my life.

So be it, until victory is America's and there is no enemy.

Sturkey, M.F. (2001). Warrior culture of the U.S. Marines, Cleveland, OH: Heritage Press International.

[iii] I am struck here by how quickly the critical critique begins in our discussions now than earlier in our study. This is the first instance where I have not offered any questioning to employ our theory.

[iv] We returned to our transcripts from earlier in the semester when Bailey refered to Blacks "acting White". We again returned to the White Privilege section of our literature review in order to critique this notion that the dominant culture defines "normal".

[v] Our critical consultant sent us an email that discusses a metaphor that Toni Morrison (Daileader, 2005, p. 75) uses as a metaphor to describe the invisibility of whiteness: The fish bowl that contains both fish and water. Whiteness provides the context for meaning-making. It gives us the norms and categories by which me measure all other groups. But they are invisible categories of restraint because we focus on what is inside them—the water and the fish. Not the fish bowl.

viIn a 2005 interview on *Good Morning America*, Winfrey recounted the biggest regrets of her career, and among them was her interview in Cumming.

"I felt in the early years of my career that it was necessary for me as an African-American to challenge anybody who was saying anything about black people," And then in the middle of one of those shows -- this is after Forsyth County -- I realized I was not doing myself nor anyone else any good."

Winfrey said she came to the realization when friends of racist guests on her show were cheering the racists on; it was because they were on television. "Then I thought, well, this is crazy, so I decided not to do it anymore."

vii Establishing a working meaning for white supremacy was at the suggestion of our cultural consultant. We did not recognize the varied, and often conflicting, uses of this term.

viii Our critical consultant wrote in an email, "Do not worry that you do not have non-white participants. This is a rare opportunity to have frank discussions not masked by pleasantries and posturing. Often authentic critical work happens when the dialogue is uninhibited. There is often richer possibility for critique when uncensored comments can be deconstructed."

ix While the final draft did not include our brief discussion, we also acknowledged an important contribution of this memoir to our larger critical conversation a question raised by Bailey, "Is it possible to love [someone] while strongly opposing his/her politics?" Likewise, can an individual in fact be 'very racist' but still manage to be a loving father or a caring partner or simply an overall decent human being at the same time? The students were reluctant to talk about this and did not want this transcript in our study. My assumption is because "naming" Mom or Dad or someone you love a racist, or calling your boyfriend homophobic, is deeply emotional, even as it is transformative.

x At this point in the study, I had a major crisis about the design of the study and had serious questions about whether or not it should have been more integrated in terms of addressing issues of race, class, gender and sexual orientation simultaneously. One of my critical consultants suggested that a more systematic and ordered (while stratified) approach in the beginning was likely a good choice for first time researchers new to critical theory and its concepts. She refered me to a passage in *Memoirs of a Race Traitor*, "White people could do much to combat racism if we did not become so overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task" (p.34) commenting that this design lessened the chance of "overwhelming" the researchers.

xi I thought I might end the study right here. Just let it drop off with this as the closing line. No explanation. No implications. Just skip the finality altogether. I was leveled by her insight and resisted the urge to express my overwhelming satisfaction. I simply responded, "You just may be onto something here."

^{xii}After this was written, they announced that Troy Davis was granted a stay of execution just 24 hours before he was scheduled to die by lethal injection. This was the first of three stays he was granted from July 2007 to October 2008.

^{xiii} I was compelled to share with this researcher some words of Freire (1996) that I found helpful in graduate school while struggling with the same frustration, "The future is not what it needs to be, but whatever we make it in the present" (p. 111). I believe that Freire may have felt the same hopelessness as this researcher at times and reminded us to always focus on what we are doing in the present moment to enact change. This co-researcher and I decided that to participate in our future rather than accept it as being engineered by the dominant culture, we are actively living our critical theory.