

RACE TALK IN A TEACHER BOOK CLUB

by

VICTORIA ELAINE WALLACE PETTIS

(Under the Direction of Margaret Graham)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to interview and observe 10 English teachers who participated in a book club at their urban public high school in a southeastern college town and examine, using critical race theory, how they negotiated issues of race in five books. Related research questions examined how various teachers responded to texts that included themes about stereotypes and racism, what connections teachers made about race in the texts to their own lives, and what ways membership in the book discussion club has been meaningful in the lives of secondary English teachers.

The predominant means of data collection for the five monthly book club meetings were participant observation and field notes, researcher's log, audiotapes, and interviews. Data were analyzed using the open coding method.

Nine themes emerged from the analysis: 1) making connections, 2) offering resistance, 3) expressing support/approval, 4) stories, 5) stereotypes, 6) white privilege, 7) institutional racism, 8) roles, and 9) benefits.

General conclusions surround teachers' selection of text that reflect diversity within American society and the creation of classroom environments that support a sustained dialogue about race and racism. Conclusions also reflect the need for teachers themselves to participate in teacher education and professional development programs to

educate them about how to foster conversations about race and institutional racism and to examine the teacher's role in addressing those issues in public schools. A final conclusion of the study was the need for teachers to consider creating their own book clubs among their colleagues and/or adopting the format in their classrooms so that readers are empowered to share their stories and connect with each other as a community.

INDEX WORDS: Critical Race Theory, Literature Circles, Multicultural Literature, Secondary English, Professional Development, Race, Reading Community, Reading Groups, Teachers, Teacher Book Clubs

RACE TALK IN A TEACHER BOOK CLUB

by

VICTORIA ELAINE WALLACE PETTIS

B.A., Jacksonville State University, 1988

M.Ed., University of Georgia, 1992

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment
of the
Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2004

© 2004

Victoria Elaine Wallace Pettis

All Rights Reserved

RACE TALK IN A TEACHER BOOK CLUB

by

VICTORIA ELAINE WALLACE PETTIS

Major Professor:	Margaret Graham
Committee:	Barbara McCaskill Elizabeth St. Pierre

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
August 2004

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the loves of my life: my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; my husband, Royce; and my daughters, Jasmine and Mariah. It is also dedicated to the memory of my father, Memphis Wallace and my mother-in-law, Christine Leslie Pettis.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For me, writing this dissertation involved more than just my own hard work and perseverance. First, I must give credit to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who inspired me to undertake this endeavor and carefully ordained, anointed, and ordered my success. This dissertation also involved a network of “human” support provided to me by the participants in this study, my dissertation chair and committee, mentors, family, friends, colleagues, and other young scholars. This document was made possible through the financial support of the American Education Research Association (AERA)/Spencer Pre-Dissertation Fellowship Program, the National Council of Teachers of English Cultivating New Voices of Scholars of Color Grant (NCTE CNV), and the Teaching Tolerance Foundation.

To Margaret Graham, my major professor, I thank you for being my first line of defense. You opened your home to me whenever I felt the need to talk through my confusion or yearned for your personal feedback, direction, or advice. You are the greatest listener any doctoral student could ask for. You made it easy for me to “feel dumb” with dignity. You provided the nurturing and gentle prodding I needed in a mentor/major professor when I was so unsure of myself.

To the other members of my doctoral committee, Dr. Barbara McCaskill and Dr. Bettie St. Pierre, I am so appreciative of the insight and expertise both of you freely offered to me throughout this process. To say that I am honored and humbled to have had this opportunity to work with scholars of your caliber is an understatement. Dr. St. Pierre, I want to thank you for helping me think through the hard stuff called “methodology” You have a knack for providing a young scholar with critiques that feel like compliments.

To Dr. Fenice Boyd, you acted as the big sister/mentor that I sorely needed during the first year of my doctoral program. I remember fondly how you pulled me aside into your office and bluntly told me that taking one class per semester would take me ten years. I would still be working on this degree if I had not taken your advice. I am especially grateful for the time you took me to lunch, inquired about my research and professional interests, and prodded me to take a look at teacher book club research. I would never have found my research niche if it had not been for you.

Dr. McCaskill, you are a young scholar's gold mine. Thank you for allowing me to call you at home when I needed to vent. I always felt better and more energized after our talks. I treasure the independent study we did together; it involved reading lots of great multicultural works that I later used in my own high school classroom. This phenomenal experience eventually led me to finding the five books for this study.

To Dr. Derrick Alridge, you helped me through the early years of my doctoral program by giving me the advice, "Bite your lip and get through the coursework." You were right. I prayed as I bit my lip. That habit got me through.

To my best friend, Vicki Hill, I thank you for waiting patiently while encouraging me from the sideline. You are truly my friend.

To members of Timothy Baptist Church – particularly my pastor Rev. Jerry F. Hutchins and members Rev. Jesse and Paula Halbert, Rev. Robert and Denese Williams, Rev. Sherman Crockett, Shirley Sims, Michael and Beverly Robinson, and Robbie and Karen Hooker – I want to thank you for praying me through this very difficult journey. Thank you for holding me accountable. It would have been easier to quit if you had only stopped asking about my progress. I am eternally grateful to two families, the Halberts and Williams, who helped sustain me by taking care of my daughters when I had to make various trips across the country to make presentations on earlier parts of this dissertation. You gave me peace of mind by taking care of my two most precious jewels.

To Arnetha Ball, NCTE CNV mentor, I thank you for your calming presence each time we met. I felt like I had no idea what I was doing as a young scholar, but you assured me that I had what it took to be in academe. Our pairing had to be ordered by God. Each time we met, you provided me with the confidence and direction I needed at different stages of my work.

To Gloria Ladson-Billings, my AERA/Spencer Pre-Dissertation Fellowship Program mentor, I thank you for introducing me to critical race theory (CRT). I was awestruck to sit with you, one of the top gurus in the CRT field, and hear you talk me through this theory, as well provide me with a list of other researchers and their works, which were critical to my understanding of this theoretical framework.

To the mentors and fellows at NCTE CNV, you acted as a family of supportive scholars. I am particularly grateful to CNV sisters KaaVonia Hinton and Cynthia Lewis. You two have been the best cheerleaders. Dr. Nancy Tolson, I want to thank God for meeting you. You helped me put the revision process in perspective. I admire you personally and professionally so much.

To my colleagues, Dr. Miller Jordan, Dr. Anthony Rucker, Dr. Chandra Power, Allison Nealy, Marlana Thompson, and Keith Wilson, I am so thankful for your sympathetic ears and encouragement you provided me on the job. Those days were too many to count. It was like God orchestrated the timing of your help so that it seemed like at least one person was encouraging me almost on daily basis.

To my husband Royce and daughters Jasmine and Mariah, I am blessed with the greatest family on earth. Thank you for sticking by me for the past five years. Royce, I love you for going beyond the call of duty as husband, father, and friend. What I will remember most in my darkest hours was your emphatic insistence that I was the smartest, strongest woman you knew. Jasmine and Mariah, you are the apple of your mother's eye. Thanks for demonstrating understanding and flexibility way beyond your youthful years. I hope that whenever in life you want to quit, you will remember the many obstacles I had

to overcome these past five years to achieve this goal. Put God first. Know that hard work and perseverance *does* pay off.

Finally, I want to thank my ten colleagues who agreed to participate in this study. For five months, you gave of yourselves and your time to faithfully attend the book club meetings. A year later, you continued to support this project by reading and providing feedback at every stage of this document.

For the part that each of you played in this dissertation, may God richly bless each and every one of you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	v
LIST OF TABLES.....	xii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xiii
CHAPTERS	
1 THE PROBLEM.....	1
In the Beginning Was Race.....	1
And Race Was Fully Deformed and Void.....	6
It Was Commanded: Someone Should Challenge Race.....	10
Ye Shall Unite with Others on Race.....	15
Eating from the Tree of Knowledge: Statement of the Problem	
And Research Questions.....	17
Significance of the Study.....	18
Structure of this Dissertation.....	19
2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	22
The High School Literary Canon and Multicultural Literature.....	23
White Teachers and Race.....	27
Racial Stereotypes and Teacher Expectations.....	31
Teacher Book Clubs.....	40
3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	49
4 METHODOLOGY.....	63
Qualitative Research	63

	Teacher Research.....	67
	The Pilot Study.....	70
	Entering the Field	73
	Site of Research and Study Sample.....	74
	Data Collection.....	76
	Data Analysis.....	80
	Data Representation.....	86
	Researcher's Role.....	91
5	CONTEXTS, TEACHERS, AND TEXTS.....	98
	The Setting.....	99
	History of the Lakeside High School English Department.....	104
	Description of the Participants.....	108
	Transcribing Race Talk.....	132
	The Texts	135
	Chapters Six through Nine.....	144
6	THEMES RELATED TO TEACHER RESPONSE.....	145
	Theme 1: Making Connections.....	145
	Theme 2: Offering Resistance.....	178
	Theme 3: Expressing Approval/Support.....	198
7	THEMES RELATED TO CONNECTIONS TO RACE.....	204
	Theme 1: Stories.....	204
	Theme 2: Stereotypes.....	216
	Theme 3: White Privilege.....	223
	Theme 4: Institutional Racism.....	241
8	THEMES RELATED TO THE TBC EXPERIENCE.....	271
	Theme 1: Roles.....	271

	Theme 2: Benefits.....	304
9	CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS.....	314
	Conclusions.....	314
	Limitations of this Study.....	333
	Implications for Further Study.....	337
	REFERENCES.....	341
	APPENDICES	
A	Letter of Authorization (School District).....	372
B	Letter of Authorization (Principal).....	374
C	Teacher Book Club Consent Form.....	376
D	Interview Guide.....	380
E	Implementation Schedule.....	382
F	Findings Letter.....	384
G	Email Reminder about Findings.....	388
H	Responses to Findings.....	390
I	Permission to use editorial cartoon in chapter 5.....	395
J	<i>The Hungry Mind</i> Race Questionnaire.....	397
K	Race: Where Do We Go From Here?.....	399

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
TABLE	
4.1 Teacher Book Club Participants.....	75
4.2 Themes of CRT.....	83
4.3 Conceptual Categories and Corresponding Themes.....	84
5.1 Teacher Book Club Participants.....	132
5.2 Teacher Book Club Texts.....	136
6.1 Teachers' Connections to TV shows, Movies, Plays, and Books.....	146
7.1 Book Club Meeting: <i>American Knees</i>	250
7.2 Book Club Meeting: <i>Indian Killer</i>	250
7.3 Book Club Meeting: <i>Down These Mean Streets</i>	251
7.4 Book Club Meeting: <i>Native Son</i>	251
7.5 Book Club Meeting: <i>White Teacher</i>	252
8.1 A Guide to the Participants.....	312

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
FIGURE	
5.1 Editorial cartoon.....	98
7.1 Data cartoon.....	198
7.2 Data cartoon.....	242
7.3 Schuerich and Young's (1997) Four Levels of Racism.....	256
7.4 Data Cartoon.....	303

CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM

Race is the most explosive issue in American life precisely because it forces us to confront the tragic facts of poverty and paranoia, despair and distrust. In short, a candid examination of *race* matters takes us to the core of the crisis of American democracy. And the degree to which race *matters* in the plight and predicament of fellow citizens is a crucial measure of whether we can keep alive the best of this democratic experiment we call America (West, 1994, p. 155-156).

In the Beginning Was Race

It started with my birth. It was no coincidence that I was born a person of color. Growing up, I remember checking the box beside the word “Negro” signifying my race. In the 70s, society classified me as “Black” (Sometimes this category is capitalized; other times it is lowercase.) More recently I have been reclassified from “Afro-American” to “African American.” Regardless of the change in classification, being a person of color has carried with it a keen sense of what race means.

In his book *The Souls of Black Folk*, DuBois (1989) argues that the African American “is a sort of a seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world” (p. 5). One would think that being born with a veil, an inner fetal membrane causing one to have the ability to foretell luck and precognitive powers, and this second sight, or “double-consciousness,” would be a blessing. In reality, the gift may be may be more of curse at birth and throughout life because of the heavy burden it carries with it. I agree with DuBois: This African American is always warring within herself. Her torment is an ever-present sense of twoness: two thoughts, two souls, two conflicting spirits. These unreconciled, warring souls in one black body – one American, the other African – are split, always conflicting with one another. One part of me wants to

join mainstream society as a full participant; the other part desires to reject it wholeheartedly and define the world from my own perspective of what it means to be black. I understand that tension because it has been the story of my entire life.

I have always been highly conscious of race and racism; yet, I have chosen to live as a “perpetrator” -- not a full participant -- in mainstream society at every stage of my life. As a little girl, I saw what Delpit (1995) calls “the culture of power” unfold right before my eyes in my elementary classrooms. There was a power struggle with winners (mostly white kids) and losers (mostly black kids). Although I could not articulate exactly what was going on, I knew that the winners knew the rules regarding talking, writing, dressing, and interacting. Intuitively, I sensed that it was imperative that I learn these power codes or rules for engagement power early if I wanted to be successful in the world. In elementary and high school, I worked twice as hard as my classmates to gain approval in the classroom. “The belief that blacks have to work twice as hard to get half as far has become an accepted truth among workday black Americans, be they judge or janitor” (Williams, 2000, p.118). I was so conscientious that I once cried when I received a grade of 98 on a health test in second grade. This pressure to be the best was not a burden placed upon me by others. It was an invisible badge of honor that I placed upon myself daily like the barrettes I clamped onto my braids. Each year, I would secretly pick the “rabbit,” or smartest white kid in the class, and “the race” would begin. I will never forget a white classmate of mine named Candy Whitelily. From elementary school to our senior year, we considered each other friendly enemies. Every class was a contest to see which one of us would wind up with the highest average. During my senior year in high school, we both received numerous awards and college scholarships in recognition of our intelligence and hard work. Candy received applause and whistles. So I did -- until I got up for what seemed like the fiftieth time to accept one of the most prestigious awards for seniors. It was then that I heard a fellow African American classmate mutter under her breath, “She’s a white folks’ nigger.”

After graduation, most of my African American classmates talked about attending predominantly black educational institutions for college; I was doggedly determined to attend a predominantly white university so that I would be better equipped to work in the mainstream and make a difference. While a student at Jacksonville State University¹, I became a staff writer on the college newspaper staff and worked my way up to the top position. I became the school's first African American editor of *The Chanticleer* in 1986. In the novel *Invisible Man*, Ellison (1995) wrote about an unnamed black narrator's invisibility as he attempts to discover his identity and purpose in a hostile, confusing world that refuses to acknowledge his existence. Reading this book had such a powerful effect on me personally and professionally that I wrote an essay for my sophomore English class, and then used my position as a news staff writer to vent my frustrations as a black student on a predominantly white college campus in *The Chanticleer*. In the opening paragraphs of the essay I titled "The Invisible Black Woman," I wrote in 1986:

I am a black woman living in a white man's society. Sometimes I feel like the invisible woman – an unwanted alien in the white society and amongst my own people. I have been called everything -- from a "nigger" by white bigots and racists to "a white folks' nigger" by prejudiced blacks. The reason? I am an actress playing a role in two different worlds – one black, the other white. Both pitted against each other within me. I am an invisible woman trying to make a mark in both worlds.

Further into the essay, I commented that I had seen some of my invisibility either increase or decrease at different stages of my life. I hated the burden of being a spokesperson for my race. Sometimes it was thrust upon me, like when white teachers expected me to speak for my race in class discussions. Other times I felt forced to speak up on behalf of my race, i.e., when overhearing racist conversations. I wrote, "I guess they think I have some hidden resentment against whites that I need to drain out of my system. But that's

not the case.” After reading it, my English instructor, Mrs. Lovett, responded in her usual fat, green cursive handwriting.

I don’t think you are the least bit invisible yourself; on the other hand, I think you are intentionally (and probably partly unconsciously, too) aggressive in an effort to eliminate the invisibility of “your people” as you have every right to be. You are going through one or more strong struggles now. (My intuition works overtime.) I hope you are trying to make the best decision(s). If you are trying to make up your mind to stop writing and leave *The Chanticleer*, I hope you fail. You need to keep writing. You need to stay on staff and do the best job you can to continue the paper. You could become a good (in the sense of excellence) writer if you would discipline yourself to learn the rules involved with basic errors you make and work on structure and style. You have worked hard. I have listened to you handle yourself professionally in telephone interviews and I cannot help but hear and see a young woman growing, maturing before my eyes and I am proud of you and for you. You will lose so much if you give up and so will others, both white and black. Do think carefully. Also, talk to me if you feel like it.

Besides assignments in her English class, Mrs. Lovett also served as *The Chanticleer* faculty sponsor. This meant she saw a great deal of my writing. She once pulled me aside and compared me to another black male staff writer, who was never outspoken about any issue, including race. “Why do you have to be so militant? Your writing comes off as so angry.” The rest of her conversation implied I should take on Roy’s mild-mannered demeanor. I was furious! Why did she expect all black people to be the same? This angered me enough to continue writing about race. By 1986, I had worked my way up from staff writer to news editor when the editor’s position became available. Since I had proven myself as a writer and had the most seniority of any other

¹This university is located in Jacksonville, Alabama.

staff member, I applied for the position (holding no hope at all). Imagine how shocked I was to hear that the JSU faculty committee had chosen me over my rival, the sports editor who was both white and male. I would be the first African American ever to serve as editor of the college newspaper. In my two years on the staff, I had observed that the previous editors and predominantly white staff had rarely addressed the needs of the African American student population. One could count on photographs of black athletes in the sports section, but there were no articles or pictures depicting black student life on campus. Readership was low. The newspapers remained in the newspaper boxes around campus.

Once I took on the title, I made sure our news coverage was more inclusive – both written and visual. In many of my editorials, I challenged readers to think about relevant issues, current trends, and topics, such as the racism and bigotry behind the disease Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, or AIDS, which was a relatively new, fatal disease to the world. I worked hard to bring more people of color on staff. With an African American editor and the support of a multicultural staff, the newspaper continued to be a hot topic of conversations around campus with students and professors. My office was flooded with letters to the editor each week. The letters did not necessarily agree with my columns, but they were willing to debate. The demand for the paper exceeded supply so we had to print more and more copies each week. The news boxes were emptied just as quickly as we could stock them each week. A staff member once commented that she overheard the JSU campus police chief remark that the name *Chanticleer* should be changed to *Ebony* or *Jet* because of our consistent coverage of students of color. In spite of my challenging two years as editor, I followed Mrs. Lovett's advice about continuing my writing as an activist until my graduation in 1988.

And Race Was Fully Deformed and Void

A few months after graduation, my journey led me from Jacksonville, Alabama, to Athens, Georgia where I accepted a job as a news writer for the *Athens Daily News/Banner Herald*. I found the work less than satisfying because I found the writing to be dull and uninteresting. I quit after less than a year. It was then that I turned to a different profession in my quest to make a difference: Teaching. In those 15 years, I have had many more life experiences and encounters, which have ignited my anger, sharpened my sense of what race means, and reactivated my desire to become an activist. Wearing these dual roles -- being part of the mainstream while being an activist for my race -- can be a schizophrenic act as Patricia Williams (1991), an associate professor of law, recognizes.

When I get up in the morning I stare in the mirror and stick on my roles: I brush my teeth, as a responsibility to my community. I buff my nails, paving the way for my race. I comb my hair in the spirit of pulling myself up by the bootstraps. I dab astringent on my pores that I might be a role model upon whom all may gaze with pride. I mascara my eyelashes that I may be “different” from all the rest. I glaze my lips with the commitment to deny pain and “rise above” racism (p.196).

Before going out the door, I look in the mirror and try to pull together a face that says I am in control. Like Williams, I realize my face shows contradictions, but I try not to wear them all at once. “I pick and choose among them; like jewelry, I hunt for this set of expectations that will go best with that obligation” (p. 196). I inhale all the expectations placed on me, and then I swallow all the experiences, all the stories, and all the roles. I exhale for what seems like an eternity. I am hoping that my exhaling will somehow renew my zapped strength. It is exhausting to always have to work twice as hard as your white counterparts, only to find out that you are still judged by old stereotypes and assumptions. Whites – colleagues, teachers, and store clerks -- quickly made judgments about me without even getting to know me. Their actions showed that

they assumed that I was lazy, irresponsible, loud, promiscuous, and stupid. They seemed actually surprised when I could speak with some degree of intelligence in college classes. I became accustomed to what Williams (2000) calls “the look” each time I met a white individual in person after speaking with him or her over the phone. “It starts with an expressionless stare. The eyes begin to squint. The mouth opens slightly. And you know you’re being analyzed or sized up. It is a look whites often give blacks who don’t fit the composite notion of a Negro. If you’re black and you’ve lived long enough, you know ‘the look’ when you see it” (p. 31). They made assumptions based on the same old equation: My articulateness + my last name² = white woman. Writing and speaking with passion – no matter how eloquently – about race issues garnered me the label “militant.” In graduate courses, peers, who were white teachers, told me they were intimidated by my presence in classes. I must have brought that presence into stores too, because walking in certain retail stores meant being followed. Williams (2000) talks about the aggravation she suffered whenever she went shopping dressed down. Unless she was dressed properly – nothing less than business attire – and made it quite apparent that she carried money or credit cards, she risked being mistaken for a shoplifter.

Her story (and mine) is just one of many such experiences of any black person; the stories are equal in their uniqueness and horror. Society provides a constant reminder that you are not one of them. Mrs. Lovett might have been right in her summation of me. I was angry; I *still am*. But I have chosen throughout my life to channel that anger into my role as an activist for change. My attempts to put race aside and focus on other issues throughout the years have been unsuccessful. My race is as much a part of me as my being female. I cannot ignore it. You might say I am intrigued by race. Haunted by race. Maybe even obsessed. I am drawn to discussions surrounding race. At every opportunity,

²Ironically, my maiden name used to be Wallace. Even more ironic is the fact that I am from Alabama, the same state which had one of the racist politicians as its governor (George Wallace).

I love to listen, debate and discuss the issue with my family, friends, colleagues, or my own high school students. I am not alone. DuBois (2000) believes each African American “has always felt an intense personal interest in discussions as to the origins and destinies of races: primarily because back of most discussions on race with which he is familiar, have lurked certain assumptions as to his natural abilities, as to his political, intellectual and moral status, which he felt were wrong” (p. 79). As a person of color living in America, I cannot help but see race and its effects in every facet of my day-to-day living. Research is no exception.

During the year of this study, I had been an educator for fifteen years in the Annox County School District. For the first ten years of that career, I was a middle school language arts teacher. Five years ago I transferred to Lakeside High School where I have been teaching junior and sophomore English. Looking back over my career in Annox County, I have always known that the racial makeup of teachers versus students was mismatched. The majority of the student population was of color; yet, most of the teachers were white. A 2003 report compiled by the district’s multicultural task force found the Annox County School District student population was 56% African American, 25% White, 13% Hispanic/Latino, and 3.1% Asian. Ironically, with more than half of the student population African American, a 2000-2001 state department of education report card revealed that only 24% of the teaching force was African American.

These statistics do not place my school district in *The Guinness Book of World Records* but reflect a national phenomenon. As classrooms across the nation are becoming increasingly racially diverse, the teaching population continues to remain predominantly white. A National Education Association (NEA) report found that even though 40 percent of the student population was composed of minorities, white teachers have accounted for 90 percent of the teaching profession for the past three decades, including 2001 (Feller, 2003). African American teachers accounted for only six percent of the teaching force; the rest came from other racial groups (Feller, 2003). Despite

efforts by some school districts to hire minority teachers, most districts still fail to hire minority teachers in proportion to the increasing number of minority students in schools. NEA attributes eight reasons for the increasing decline of minorities in education, including: 1) demographically, a region, state, or school district contains few minorities locally available for its teacher pool; 2) burn out and frustration are caused by on-the-job hazards, such as poor working conditions, discipline problems, spreading school violence, and a lack of support from colleagues; 3) inadequate schooling leaves some minority students ill-prepared and unmotivated for higher education. Standardized tests often have cutoff scores that exclude minority students from higher education, teacher training, and teacher certification programs; 4) tests screen out minorities disproportionately; 5) salaries are low for teachers compared to salaries for other professionals, which lowers the prestige and social value of a career in teaching for many potential minority teachers; 6) minority students find more career opportunities outside of teaching; 7) the declining numbers of black and Hispanic students majoring in education is steeper than the overall decline in education major; and 8) minority teachers leave teaching at higher rates than white teachers do (<http://www.nea.org/recruit/minority/overview.html>). NEA believes this critical shortage could lead to a failure of all American students to learn the academic, personal, and social skills they need in the multicultural workplace of the future, so it has formulated a policy resolution on minority educators:

The National Education Association believes that multiracial teaching staffs are essential to the operation of schools. The Association deplores the current trend of diminishing numbers of ethnic minority educators. The Association urges local and state affiliates and appropriate governing bodies and agencies to work to increase the number of ethnic-minority teachers and administrators to a percentage at least equal to, but not limited to, the percentage of the ethnic minorities in the general population. The Association further urges U.S. Department of Defense

Schools to actively recruit and hire ethnic-minority educators

(<http://www.nea.org/recruit/minority/overview.html>).

It Was Commanded: Someone Should Challenge Race

After transferring from a local middle school within the district to Lakeside High School five years ago, I began observing my veteran colleagues, particularly their selection of literature and teaching practices. After two years, I made an important observation about my colleagues – most of whom were white -- in the English department: They all fit the profile of the “traditional” high school teacher – one who teaches strictly from the literary canon. Studies support that the composition of the high school literary canon -- dead, white men – has not changed much throughout the years (Applebee, 1993, 1996; Fuhr, 1996; Greenbaum, 1994; Thomas, 1996; Tuft, 2001). Literary scholars agree that American literature as a whole serves to preserve the white male view and power (Greenbaum, 1994; Morrison, 1992). As a high school teacher and emerging African American scholar, I find it distressing to see my colleagues cling to teaching novels from the traditional literary canon, such as *The Scarlet Letter*, *Tom Sawyer*, and *Great Expectations*. Studies indicate that the canon marginalizes and mutes voices of color (Greenbaum, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Stallworth, 1999; Tuft, 2001). Teaching these books in isolation prohibits teachers from developing and expanding multicultural understandings and confronting issues of race in all its complexities with their students (Goebel, 1995; Oliver, 1999; Stallworth, 1999).

When I look back on my own experiences with literature from elementary to high school, I realize my first experience with discussing race within a school setting was during my sophomore year in college when I registered for a black literature elective course. Up until then, I had only been exposed to “the classics,” popular works written primarily by white male authors. In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Morrison (1992) talked about this tendency in American literature to position its writers as white and how this affects the literary imagination. How is it

possible that I never knew classics such as Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sing* existed? I was a voracious reader, consuming twenty novels every two weeks; yet, I was never required to read a novel by an author of color. Required reading always meant reading white authors, but I never questioned it. I was unconsciously indoctrinated from an early age that black people did not contribute to the literary landscape. American literature meant white American writers, so as far as I was concerned, blacks made no appearance at all in literature.

During my graduate school years, I began reading multicultural literature and made instant connections to the authors and how they depicted life. I began experimenting with its use in my own classroom. Throughout the years, discussions surrounding multicultural literature have empowered my students and me to engage in discussions on race. Sometimes these discussions quickly turned into debates as my students dared to lay the race card on the table and talk earnestly to me and to each other. These experiences have convinced me that multicultural literature can be used to initiate "cross-racial dialogue about racism, for the expressed purpose of dismantling institutional racism, and addressing needs and issues that most people share" (McIntyre, 1997, p. x). Historically, the hot lava topic of race has always been high on America's list of top concerns (Bell, 1987; DuBois, 1996; King, 1996; West, 1994).

Race has become metaphorical – a way of referring to and disguising forces, events, classes, and expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body politic than biological "race" ever was. Expensively kept, economically unsound, a spurious and useless political asset in election campaigns, racism is as healthy today as it was during the Enlightenment. It seems that it has a utility far beyond economy, beyond the sequestering of classes from one another, and has assumed a metaphorical life so completely embedded in daily discourse that it is perhaps more necessary and more on display than ever before (Morrison, 1992, p. 63).

Regardless of its national importance or impact on people, race in the twenty-first century continues to be a taboo subject. Morrison (1992) insists that when it comes to matters of race, silence and evasion have always ruled, particularly in literary discourse.

It is complicated by the fact that the habit of ignoring race is understood to be a graceful, even generous, liberal gesture. To notice is to recognize an already discredited difference. To enforce its invisibility through silence is to allow the black body a shadowless participation in the dominant cultural body (pp. 9-10).

Some people might argue that we talk about race and racism too much in this country, but Dalton (1995) equates America's avoidance and silence to race as a festering wound that has not been allowed to heal.

We have run away from race far too long. We are so afraid of inflaming the wound that we fail to deal with what remains America's central social problem. We will never achieve racial healing if we do not confront each other, take risks, make ourselves vulnerable, put pride aside, say all the things we are not supposed to say in mixed company – in short, put on the table all of our fears, trepidations, wishes, and hopes (p. 4).

Dalton suggests that people need to continually break the silence about racism with meaningful talk whenever possible in homes, within schools, at places of worship, at work, and within community groups. West (1994) believes race continues to be a problem for the United States because of this country's failure to "confront the complexity of the issue in a candid and critical manner" (p. 4). Generally, when discussions about race do occur, they are directed to black people and the problems they pose for whites. A serious discussion of race needs to begin with "flaws rooted in historic inequalities and longstanding cultural stereotypes" (p. 6). Perhaps Americans loathe confronting each other on race because they are afraid of "tapping into pent-up anger, frustration, resentment, and pain" (Dalton, 1995, p. 3). Maybe this can explain why schools – which should empower students to tackle provocative topics – also sidestep it.

Oliver contends that educators must develop the ability to deal with race issues openly and honestly, so selection of literature texts must be chosen with care. "Racism rages as one of the most destructive forces in our culture today threatening more damage if we do not find ways in which to curb its strength. But I believe that we can do something about this disturbing state of affairs, and we can do it, in part, through the voices that emerge through literary texts," (Oliver, 1999, p. 49). Oliver maintains that the first step is for educators to acknowledge that racism exists and help students address the troubling issues they face by acquainting them with writers from diverse groups. The mission of English/language arts teachers is to allow students to find their identities, assist students in learning about the world, and expose students to the rich cultural heritage through its diverse writers.

Incorporating multicultural texts within the traditional canon and promoting discussions of race and racisms are excellent pieces of advice, but moving from concept to practice can be a daunting task for any teacher. Is it possible for teachers to promote discussions on race if they do not come equipped with the language tools to ignite, sustain, and facilitate conversation? How can we as educators deal with the complex issue of race with our students without first examining the issue ourselves? Teachers in today's classroom must come equipped with pedagogies that empower students to critique what they read in terms of race, class, and gender (Hade, 1997). How is this possible when the teacher education programs themselves rarely challenge pre-service teachers to critically examine their own beliefs and practices (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Hyland, 1998; Otoy-Knapp, 2001)? Based on their own life experiences and vested interests, teachers already bring to the profession perspectives about what race means (Sleeter, 1993). When teachers bring their limited and distorted understandings about inequity and cultural diversity, it is a recipe for conflict (King, 1991). White teachers tend to avoid addressing issues of race because they lack the experiential tools or informational knowledge to know what they should do (Hyland, 1998). This avoidance to

discuss race produces a domino effect: Because racism is rarely discussed in school, few teachers know how to handle class discussions on the issue (Freedman, Simons, Kalnin, & Casareno, 1999). Until teachers examine their own pedagogical beliefs and practices through a lens of race, students of color will suffer (Hyland, 1998). What about teachers examining their own biases and prejudices? Critical race theorists and educational researchers are often called upon to engage in action research that will provide teachers with opportunities to examine their own practice and learn to teach students of color. This collective examination should focus on racial ideologies and knowledge construction and include teachers of all races. Here Hyde (1998) elaborates on how race is treated in education.

So much of what is written in the curriculum and instruction ignores race. Topics such as multiculturalism, equity, and race are covered in elective courses in teacher education programs. In subject area methods courses, race does not enter the dialogue. At worse, race is treated an invisible factor in learning to become a teacher. At best, race is a side issue that can be examined, but is not central to learning to teach (p. 37).

In *The Miner's Canary*, Guinier and Torres (2000) offer the canary used by miners as a guiding metaphor for how we treat race in this country. Just like the canary's distress that warned miners of poison in the air, the issues of race should signal dangerous conditions in American society.

Racism explains the canary's condition as its own problem, without further investigating or even questioning the conditions of the mines. Racism locates the dominant explanation for the depressed socioeconomic, health, and educational condition of people of color and their over-representation in the criminal justice system in the character of the people themselves, rather than in the structures of power that create the conditions of their lives. The content and experience of racism varies depending on local conditions, but like the air we breathe or the

economic system we share, it affects us all. As with second-hand smoke, the closer to the source you are, the more toxins you breathe, but even at the periphery the smoke is still toxic. We all could see the smoke in the room, but we allowed ourselves to believe that if we were not smoking ourselves, we were not at risk (pp. 292-293).

Guinier and Torres (2000) believe that America's attempts at ignoring race have demonstrated repeated failure, so they propose shifting the way we think about it and putting it to political use. Because race and power intertwine at every level including classrooms, they argue that cross-racial coalitions are needed to expose and eliminate embedded hierarchies of privilege. They call this idea of enlisting race to resist power *political race*. There are three aims of political race: to remedy racial injustices; to empower people at the grassroots level of all races to struggle together; and to improve the life chances of anyone who has been "raced" black. They believe such a commitment to race would both revitalize the civil rights movement and transform democracy.

Ye Shall Unite With Others on Race

My interest in race and multicultural literature prompted me to conduct an informal poll of several of the most experienced (in terms of number of years of teaching) teachers in my department in 2000. I asked them what literature, if any, was used to teach and discuss the complex issue of race. Except for the only other African American teacher at the time, my white colleagues admitted rarely ever using any literature to discuss race. They told me they felt uncomfortable and inadequate themselves discussing the topic. Why? Could this be the reason my white colleagues clung so tightly to the traditional canon?

I talked about my frustrations with the canon and the results of that poll with a local professor in language education. She suggested that I might find research on teacher book clubs interesting. Studies of teacher book clubs reveal that they have become increasingly popular since the 1990s because they provide an intellectual social forum

where educators can share ideas, thoughts, feelings and reactions to a piece of literature (Florio-Ruane, 2001; Flood & Lapp, 1994; Goldberg & Pesko, 2000). In these studies, teachers used the book club format to study various genres of literature, including historical fiction, ethnic autobiographies, children's literature, young adult literature, and multicultural literature. After reading these studies, I began searching and reading every article and book I could find about teacher book clubs.

Then I began dreaming. I saw ten members of the Lakeside High School English Department and myself sitting comfortably in the school media center. The tables were littered with novels, drinks, and food. Conversations were schizophrenic. At one point, laughter permeated the room as we discussed books and related personal stories. Just as quickly, these discussions became heated and tense as we unearthed our attitudes, biases, and perceptions about racial groups and how this thinking translated to the expectations we held for student performance and achievement.

I envisioned my peers leaving this experience with transformed ways of seeing U.S. society and the positions they held. I saw both veteran and new teachers struggling as the discussions pushed them to examine how issues of power and dominance have influenced and continued to influence life in this country. By the final book club meeting, these teachers had come to a realization: We are all racial beings. The white teachers -- two women and six males -- felt empowered to examine how race shaped their lives, not just the lives of people of color. They realized they had taken their whiteness for granted -- that they had spent their whole lives benefiting from their "white privilege." At the end of their participation, they were at a crossroad: Should they use white privilege to maintain the status quo or challenge it?

Puff! I awakened; the dream was over, but I was left with a seed of a vision. What would forming a teacher book club within my own department mean for my peers and me? Would it give them a less threatening environment in which to read and grapple with race issues? What would that book club talk sound like? What would it look like? Would

such a forum provide them with an opportunity to examine the baggage they carry into the classroom -- packed with prejudices, attitudes, and perceptions about the racial groups they teach? Questions like these led me to my dissertation research. Recent teacher book club studies involved teachers reading ethnic autobiographies, such as Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, or multicultural novels, such as Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* with the focus of discussion on learning about other cultures, or multiculturalism. When these studies ended, the race talk had only just begun. My study was significant because my book club began and centered its discussions around the issue of race and how it infiltrated the personal and professional lives of teachers, who are expected to teach increasingly diverse classrooms. It gave my colleagues a chance to read literature that represented voices usually silenced within the literary canon and a forum for them to examine their own issues with race – including perceptions and attitudes they carry about their own students.

Theoretically, this study took a critical look at how teachers dialogue about books in terms of analyzing racism. This analysis provided teachers an opportunity to express their own feelings and experiences about race and how race affected their own lives. Using critical race theory as a theoretical framework, this study provided participants with a collegial-friendly, supportive environment in which to examine and critique the effects of race and racism in their everyday lives and teaching practices.

Eating from the Tree of Knowledge: Statement of the Problem and Research Questions

In this critical study, I interviewed and observed 10 English teachers who participated in a book club at their urban public high school in a southeastern college town and examined how they negotiated issues of race in five books using critical race theory.

1. How do various teachers respond to texts that include themes about stereotypes and racism?
2. What connections do teachers make about race in the texts to their own lives?

3. In what ways has being a member of a book discussion club been meaningful in the lives of these secondary English teachers?

Significance of the Study

If people are shaped by life experiences, then teachers bring our own identities – our backgrounds, values, attitudes, cultural norms, and prejudices – into the classroom (Obidah & Teel, 2001). We often mirror our own life experiences. Combine a predominantly white teaching force with classrooms dominated by students of color, there is bound to be friction. How can educators dare to bridge America's racial gap while ignoring race and its impact on their lives and the lives of their students? How is it possible to teach literature without confronting racial difference? Carbado (2002) believed that "race is the grammar that structures the experiences of, and interactions between, students and teachers" (p. 181). Put simply, educational institutions act as sites of racial discourse that produce racial knowledge and racial subjects.

Today, students are taught two additional R's in their quest for an education: about race and how to be raced (Carbado, 2002). Recently, studies have indicated that the high school literary canon is expanding its diversity to include multicultural works and young adult literature (Cook, 1996; Goebel, 1995; Oliver, 1999; Thomas, 1996). This new direction can only lead educators to the inevitable: discussing race with their students. It was my position that teachers must first critically examine their own beliefs and practices before they can duplicate this practice in their classrooms.

Taking this position by the horns was where my dissertation filled in the gap. It provided my ten colleagues and me an opportunity to examine our perspectives about what race means. Most teacher book club research admits that its membership is limited to white females. My study was unique because the membership was diverse in age, teaching experience, gender, and ethnicity. Participants' ages were spread between 25 to 59 years; teaching experience ranged from two to 26 years. More than half of the participants were male and three members were African American. My role as an African

American researcher, facilitator, and participant also made this study distinct. By doing this work, I took up Hyland's (1998) challenge with the teacher book club study: Teachers were given an opportunity to examine their own pedagogical beliefs and practices through a lens of race. As the researcher of this study, I chose critical race theory as my glasses to "see" and theorize what was taking place as the teachers and I negotiated the issue of race in our book club discussions.

In his essay "Self-Reliance," Ralph Waldo Emerson (1997) once said, "Trust thyself. Every heart vibrates to that iron string. Accept the place the divine Providence has found for you" (p. 225). It is my belief that I was born to do race work. Writing this dissertation has forced me to do a lot of soul-searching about my purpose. My life has come full circle. Mrs. Lovett, my former JSU English professor and Chanticleer sponsor, once advised me to think carefully before deciding to quit writing. According to her, quitting would be a double loss -- both for me and for "the others" -- both black and white. For me, race has always been about life. Writing about race in this dissertation was just a start to my life's work.

Structure of this Dissertation

In writing this dissertation about race, I was driven to write this first chapter with my own story. It is a story of hard work, struggle, conflict, and determination. It is a story of blood, sweat, and tears; yet, it also has its moments of triumph. Writing this chapter was therapeutic because I was dredging up old, buried memories. Writing this chapter made me realize that I still carried unresolved anger with Mrs. Lovett. (I forgive you, Mrs. Lovett. I know now you meant no harm by the things you said.) I did follow her advice though. I continue to struggle with the feelings of being invisible but throughout my life, I have been intentionally -- and probably unconsciously -- aggressive in an effort to eliminate this invisibility. Mrs. Lovett urged me to keep on writing. I have done just that in numerous papers and speeches I have written from my first year of college in 1984 up to the writing of this dissertation.

Chapter two presents a review of the literature, which most directly informed my study in content. In this chapter, I identify, describe, and evaluate four areas of literature that have most directly informed my study: 1) multicultural literature and the high school literary canon, 2) white teachers and race, 3) racial stereotypes and teacher expectations, and 4) teacher book clubs. The final section provides the summary of how my study fits into the literature.

Chapter three covers the theoretical framework for this study. The discussion in this chapter focuses on Critical Race Theory (CRT), which serves as the macro-level theoretical framework for this study.

Chapter four covers the methodology used to collect, analyze, and represent the data. My first discussion describes qualitative and teacher research. Next, I elaborate on the pilot study and the steps taken to start data collection. Then, I discuss the processes I used for data collection, transcription, analysis, and representation. Finally, I discuss issues related to my role as researcher

Chapter five provides contextual information for this study, including a description of the setting where this study takes place, a history of the Lakeside High School English Department, and portraits, or individual descriptions, of the participants. In addition, this chapter includes a section where the transcriber describes the profound effect transcribing the book club discussions and participant interviews had on her personally. The chapter ends with sections discussing the texts read by the teachers and explanation for what will follow in chapters six through nine.

Because of the length of my discussions for each theme, I have chosen to dedicate a separate chapter for each of the three conceptual categories. Chapter six includes a discussion of themes one through three, which represents the “teacher response” category. Chapter seven focuses on themes four through seven under the “connections to race” category. Chapter eight discusses themes eight and nine, which represents “the TBC, or

teacher book club, experience” category. Readers will notice that poetic transcription and editorial cartoons are used to illustrate the research findings in these chapters.

Finally, chapter nine presents the conclusions, limitations, and implications of the study. Readers should consult the appendices for locating resources beyond the scope of this study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Using critical race theory as my theoretical framework, I interviewed and observed 10 high school English teachers who participated in a book club at their urban public high school in a southeastern college town with the purpose of examining how they negotiated issues of race in five books. This chapter will identify, describe, and evaluate four areas of literature that have most directly informed my study: 1) the high school literary canon and multicultural literature, 2) white teachers and race, 3) racial stereotypes and teacher expectations, and 4) teacher book clubs. The final section provides the summary of how my study fits into the literature. Due to its length, the theoretical framework will be discussed in chapter 3.

Looking back to the beginning of my research journey, my study grew out of my concerns related to the lack of diversity in the high school canon. My exposure to multicultural literature in college courses opened up a whole new world of cultures that I never knew existed, including my own. At that point, my hunger for diverse literature was ignited. When I began teaching English over a decade and a half ago, I automatically exposed my students to both the classics and multicultural literature. When I transferred to Lakeside, I made one important observation: My colleagues' choices of literature mirrored the same high school novels from my own high school reading lists. Because my study began as a result of this observation, I will begin this chapter with a discussion of the research literature of both the high school canon and multicultural literature.

The High School Literary Canon and Multicultural Literature

Picture it: An English major reviews his transcripts for his undergraduate and graduate degrees. He counts a total of twenty-five courses in English and American literature. As he takes a stroll down memory lane, he realizes that except for one book during his sophomore year in high school, none of his English classes included texts written by African American writers. This is not fiction. Moreover, it occurs with alarming regularity in American schools. Recalling the above experience, Cain (2001) argues that this “literary injustice,” an absence of African American texts from reading lists, prohibits students from knowing the full range of English and American literature. “The American literary tradition that I was taught wasn’t just inadequate, it was *wrong*. The ‘tradition’ does not make coherent sense when African-American writers are absent from it” (p. 5). There is a certain set of assumptions -- based on white male views -- about what constitutes knowledge which has been conventionally accepted and circulated among literary historians and critics (Morrison, 1992).

Nodelman (1992) defines the *canon* as “the group of texts considered to be particularly worthy of study” (p. 236). Because the origin of the word *canon* means “rule or measure,” the lists serve as criteria for selection; every society and culture has a canon, a body of works which are considered central to a group’s self-definition (Purves, 1993). Robinson (1997) traces the term back to the Bible; the term only recently held a literary connotation. “The canon is the set of books that make up the Book. This inclusion has a basis in scholarship, the application of certain standards – theological, philological, and historical standards – to a text” (p. 142). The term entered literary studies, Robinson notes, with a very restricted meaning – a name applied to works of literature recognized by experts in the field as being written by some particular major author. Initially, the word was meant as a “mild, self-deprecatory academic joke, for certifying a play or poem as the authentic word of Shakespeare” (p. 142). Additionally, the term was applied to a body of literature known as the tradition, or Great Books. More recently, the term has applied to a

select group of authors in American literature – predominantly white, middle class males – whose works are judged to possess exceptional literary value (Bennett, 1992).

Opponents have not allowed the canon to become a sleeping dog; it has undergone constant change for centuries. “Challenges to the dominant canons and paradigms within mainstream academic knowledge come from both within and without. These challenges lead to changes, reinterpretations, debates, disagreements and ultimately to paradigms shifts, new theories, and interpretations” (Bank, 1994, p. 9). In its effort to accommodate new populations rather than ignoring them, the educational system has reacted by adding classics of any newly recognized culture; as a result, the canon has changed by revolution (Purves, 1993). Gates (1992) points to race as critical factor in the initiation of creating separate canons created for various groups. Research studies challenge the European conception of the canon with its distortions, repressions, and silences but support one based on the concept that American identity is contingent on Americans becoming more fully engaged to Native American, Mexican American, Asian American, African American, and women’s literature and history (Okihiro, 1994; Pinar, 1993; Powell, 2000).

The significance of the canon is that it is more than just subject matter or a choice of books but radiates attitudes, perspectives, and values of a culture (Cain, 2001; Gates, 1992; Levine, 1996). If this is true, then educators should question: Whose voice is silenced? The curriculum debates over what is taught in schools question: What constitutes the American self and identity? Who we are as Americans? How do we understand that identity past and present (Levine, 1996; Pinar, 1993)?

Studies conducted on the reading lists of high schools echo a chilling response: Being an American means white, male, and Anglo Saxon (Altmann, Johnston, & Mackey, 1998; Applebee, 1993, 1996; Greenbaum, 1994, Tuft, 2001; Willis, 1997). “We inhabit real institutions where very little seems to be changed, where there are very few changes in the curriculum, almost no paradigm shifts, and where knowledge and information

continue to be presented in the conventionally accepted manner” (hooks, 1994, p. 143). Ironically, today’s students are expected to join an intellectual community even though their learning has been based on a “traditional” education. As a result, the students have only experienced disconnected glimpses of curriculum, which has shielded them from potential controversies between texts (Graff, 1992). Hade (1997) proposes that teachers need to expose their students to injustice by preparing their students to “naturally” read for issues involving race, class, and gender. To ignore injustice issues in texts, he warns, is merely choosing to impose these ideas rather than challenge them openly. “Silence is the oxygen of racism and bigotry. Silence allows the dominant assumptions about the inferiority of the poor, women, and persons of color to remain unchallenged” (p. 237). Even pre-service teachers acknowledge the tension between their desire to build on their students’ linguistic and cultural resources, yet preparing them to participate in the dominant culture (Cochran-Smith, 1995). This dual agenda requires a balance – students “need to know something about the ‘canon’ of history and literature and how and when to utilize the conventions of standard English, but they also need to see their own experiences reflected in novels and history books, and they need to draw on and develop their considerable linguistic resources” (Cochran-Smith, 1995, p. 554).

Even though there has been an increase in the number of written and published literature representing groups historically underrepresented in the canon, multicultural literature still has not found its place in high school or college curriculums (Willis, 1997). For teachers in today’s diverse classroom, the choice to maintain the literary canon means to ignore the majority of the students. The maintenance of the literary canon suggests that teacher-training institutions are ill preparing future teachers to deal with the ever-increasing, diverse student population. Rather than throwing out the canon in its entirety, research supports implementing a more inclusive canon in an effort to meet the needs of diverse classrooms (Johannessen, 1992; Purves, 1993; Stallworth, 1999; Sunstein, 1994). A few studies suggest alternatives to eliminating the canon altogether, such as using

canonical texts to teach the controversies surrounding the canon and mixing the "old" literary canon with the new (Hesse, 1989; Howland, 1995; Weidauer, 1996).

Diverse classes call for diverse literature. Using multicultural literature is important because it helps students develop balanced perspectives, creates opportunities for positive transcultural interactions, and fosters an environment where racism, misconceptions and stereotypes can be discussed and begin to be dispelled (Goebel, 1995; Oliver, 1999; Stallworth, 1999). "Racism rages as one of the most destructive forces in our culture today threatening more damage if we do not find ways in which to curb its strength. But I believe that we can do something about this disturbing state of affairs, and we can do it, in part, through the voices that emerge through literary texts," (Oliver, 1999, p. 49).

Goodson (1994) urges educators to consider the emergence of the so-called "culture wars" in contemporary American society. Considering that society does not share a common core of values and beliefs and schools are a reflection of their society, wars of culture are played out in the classroom. "If we view 'English' as something other than a canon of great works and a collection of mechanical skills – something that grows organically out of the needs and interests of our students – we run the risk of jeopardizing our political stability in the school community" (pp. 21-22). Instead of choosing to be passive victims, he argues that English teachers recognize the culture wars for what they are and use them to their advantage. If school is viewed as a context for communication, then the teacher's sole responsibility will be to dictate appropriate or inappropriate literacy-learning activities. If teachers see school as a "rhetorical situation," they will strive to provide students with opportunities where they can see controversial issues from various aspects and then determine (with the help of their own communities) where their own views fit within a range of differing opinions. In the process, Goodson foresees students experiencing their assumptions being challenged and, hopefully, seeing and understanding their own biases. "The work of the English classroom becomes neither the

transmission of preordained knowledge and skills (from anywhere along the political spectrum), nor is it an orgy of the subjective and the intuitive. The English class becomes the place for dialogue” (p. 24).

History demonstrates that debates about the nature of the canon – particularly high school novels -- used in literature classes have raged over the past several decades. These debates clearly are part of the larger “culture wars” that have become a part of the American cultural landscape. In this decade, teachers are faced with challenges they have never faced before -- namely, a teaching force composed of majority white, middle class females charged with teaching student populations dominated by cultures of color. These teachers can no longer afford to ignore the debates and wars played out in their classrooms, departments, or college campuses.

White Teachers and Race

Ignoring diversity will not make it go away. A National Education Association (NEA) report found that white teachers have accounted for 90 percent of the teaching profession for the past three decades, including 2001 (Feller, 2003). What does that mean for today’s classrooms dominated by children of color? Teachers are ill prepared to adequately address the needs of students who are not only multi-racial and multi-ethnic, but also different in terms of language, religion, learning ability, and socioeconomic status (Ladson-Billings, 2001).

Most teachers have little or no experience with cultures different from their own. Although many teacher education programs offer courses, workshops, and modules that address multicultural education, these offerings tend to be superficial and tangential to the real lives of students. Although most of these programs are aimed at “exposing students” to other cultures, they rarely involve a close look at the assumptions, worldviews, and perspectives that prospective teachers come with (p. 78).

If these teachers fail to recognize and examine their own beliefs, values, and biases, how can they be successful in engaging students in examining *theirs* (Zuniga-Hill & Barnes, 1995)? Sleeter (1993) argues that teachers bring to the profession perspectives about what race means, which is constructed on the basis of their life experiences and vested interest of justifying their power and privilege. These teachers bring with them “dysconscious racism,” which is the limited and distorted understandings that white educators have about inequity and cultural diversity (King, 1991). Delpit (1995) describes what happens when teachers confront students who are unlike them, or “other people’s children,” as a deadly fog – one in which “the cold mist of bias and ignorance meets the warm vital reality of children of color in many of our schools” (p. xiii). Although these teachers -- white and black teachers alike -- see these children as “damaged and dangerous caricatures,” they see themselves as wanting to help, not damage them (Delpit, 1995). Ladson-Billings (1994) agrees.

This is not to suggest that these teachers are racist in the conventional sense. They do not consciously deprive or punish African American children on the basis of their race, but at the same time they are not unconscious of the ways in which some children are privileged and others are disadvantaged in the classroom. Their “dysconsciousness” comes into play when they fail to challenge the status quo, when they accept the given as the inevitable (p. 32).

This impaired sense of consciousness justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the status quo as a given and makes it difficult for some white teachers to be in favor of equitable education (King, 1991; Klassen & Carr, 1997). Dyconsciousness is directly related to some whites’ tendency to avoid challenging and questioning norms, superiority, and the privilege they enjoy or the mainstream views and practices that dominate in schools and it may also be responsible for the guilt and hostility that white teachers feel when confronted with diversity (King, 1991). These feelings of guilt and hostility certainly come into play when white teachers are confronted with the issue of race in

classroom discussions. Studies support the contention that white teachers fail to address issues of race because of the inadequacy they feel due to a lack of personal experience of diversity, understanding of the inequality diverse groups experience, and the experiential tools or informational knowledge needed to relate to people of color (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Hyland, 1998; King, 1991; Landsman, 2001; Paley, 1979/2000; Tatum, 1999). Because racism is so rarely discussed in school, few teachers know how to handle this issue in classroom discussions – particularly when the discussion centers on slavery (Nieto, 1999; Tatum, 1999). Daring to explicitly discuss issues of race can be painful and potentially explosive in the classroom, but the rewards can be bountiful for students when teachers choose to face the issues head on (Grayson & Martin, 1990; Nieto, 1999).

White teachers, both pre-service and veteran, do not see themselves as racists, and acknowledge their sense of uneasiness in acknowledging racial differences in students (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Paley, 1979/2000; Sleeter, 1993). “Therefore, in an effort not to be racist themselves and to treat all children equally, many white teachers try to suppress what they understand about people of color, which leads them to try not to ‘see’ color” (Sleeter, 1993, p. 162). This attempt to be colorblind only serves to mask “dysconscious racism” (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Delpit (1995) argues that teachers who say they love all children and then claim that they are colorblind are in denial. “If one does not see color, then one has not really seen the children” (p. 177).

Where do white teachers learn that it is acceptable to be colorblind? Hyland (1998) submits that some teacher education programs are the root cause. These programs unknowingly support the colorblind myth by reinforcing the belief that race should not be talked about, supporting the deficit theory by placing issues of culture on the fringe, and reinforcing and perpetuating the dominant epistemology. Hyland (1998) further argues that much of educational discourse ignores race. For the most part, topics of race, equity, or multiculturalism are the focus of elective courses, not subject area methods courses. Race is treated like an invisible factor that can be examined, but has little to do with

learning how to teach. The result: Many white teachers are taught not to examine their own positionality. Studies claim that if the perspectives of white teachers are to change, the transformation must begin with the teacher educators themselves who must begin to recognize, rethink, and interrogate their own experiences with race as well as their own teaching practices (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Grant & Sleeter, 1987; McIntyre, 1997).

Numerous studies have been conducted by white teachers and teacher educators who themselves have coupled their desire to learn how to teach students of color with an opportunity to examine their own teaching practices (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Hyland, 1998; King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001; Landsman, 2001; Obidah & Teel, 2001; Otoy-Knapp, 2001; Paley, 1979/2000; Pang, 1994; Sleeter, 1993).

Hyland (1998) and Hooks (1994) argue that teachers of all races and levels engage in a collective examination of racial ideologies and knowledge construction.

“To engage in dialogue is one of the simplest ways we can begin as teachers, scholars, and critical thinkers to cross boundaries, the barriers that may or may not be erected by race ... and a host of other differences” (Hooks, 1994, p. 130). In McIntyre’s (1997) foreword, Sleeter argues that cross-racial dialogue involving white people is often rare and difficult to develop and sustain.

Dialogue requires that people be able to articulate some analysis of racism and one’s own position in a racist structure, one’s own feelings and experiences, and the choices one has for acting differently. Most white people do not talk about racism, do not recognize the existence of institutional racism, and feel personally threatened by the mention of racism (p. x).

McIntyre (1997) examined what she called the “white talk” of her own middle- and upper-class student teachers. By examining their discourse, she explored white racial identity, whiteness, and the difficulties they all faced in thinking critically about race and racism. Conversations of these young white females revealed that they had had few experiences in discussions involving people of color. In her work with white university

students, Tatum (1997) found that fear was the source of some whites avoiding opportunities to discuss race and racism with people of color. This fear, both powerful and paralyzing, comes from a variety of possible intimidating outcomes, according to Tatum. These outcomes include: If I say something offensive, will that cause me to be isolated or alienated from my family or friends? If I offend someone, will they respond by rejecting me? Will I lose privilege or status if I speak in support of those who have been marginalized? If I ask a naïve question or make an offensive remark, what wrath should I expect from people of color?

Before a dialogue among teachers of all races can begin, the support of school administrators (principals and superintendents) and teacher educators is essential to recruit teachers of color. Delpit (1995) talks about the silent dialogue that often occurs among educators – discussions where the voices of black teachers and parents are conspicuously absent. White teachers could benefit from a dialogue involving teachers, families, neighborhoods, and communities of color, who would bring to the table their own life experiences and viewpoints (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Comer & Poussant, 1979/2000; Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Landsman, 2001; McIntyre, 1997; Paley, 1979/2000; Pang, 1994; Sleeter, 1993).

Racial Stereotypes and Teacher Expectations

Racial Stereotypes

Allport (1979) defines a stereotype as “an exaggerated belief associated with a category. Its function is to justify, or rationalize our conduct in relation to that category” (p. 191). The assumptions we make about people are based on factors such as background, personal experiences, and the images received from the media. Movie producers for *Rush Hour 2* (Ratner, 2001), *Friday after Next* (Raboy, 2002), *Up in Smoke* (Adler & Chong, 1978), *The Joy Luck Club* (Wang, 1993), *Real Women Have Curves* (Cardoso, 2002) and novelists Kotlowitz (1998) and Griffin (1960) explore the stereotypes we hold about blacks, whites, Asians, and Latinos.

Although some assumptions we make about other people can be traced to our own experiences, Tatum (1997) adds that some assumptions come from what we have *not* been told. “The distortion of historical information about people of color leads young people (and older people, too) to make assumptions that may go unchallenged for a long time” (pp. 4-5). She says school curricula, filled with examples of omitted information, can have similar effects, including a member of a stereotyped group internalizing the stereotypical categories about his or her own group. This combination of stereotypes, omissions, and distortions contribute to the development of *prejudice*. “Prejudice is a preconceived judgment or opinion, usually based on limited information” (Tatum, 1997, p. 5). Because America is a mixed-race society, Tatum (1997) believes prejudice is an inevitable consequence.

Cultural racism – cultural images and messages that affirm the superiority of Whites and the assumed inferiority of people of color – is like a smog in the air. Sometimes it is so thick it is visible, other times it is less apparent, but always, day in and day out, we are breathing it in. None of us would introduce ourselves as “smog-breathers” (and most of us don’t want to be described as prejudiced), but if we live in a smoggy place, how can we avoid breathing the air? If we live in an environment in which we are bombarded with stereotypic images in the media, are frequently exposed to the ethnic jokes of friends and family members, and are rarely informed of the accomplishments of oppressed groups, we will develop the negative categorizations of those groups that form the basis of prejudice (p. 6).

Delpit (1995) argues that when teachers look at children of color in schools, they see “other people’s children”-- “damaged and dangerous caricatures of the vulnerable and impressionable” (p. xiii). Because they live in American society, teachers make big assumptions about students of color by judging “their actions, words, intellects, families and communities as inadequate at best, as collections of pathologies at worst. These stories can be justifiably interpreted as examples of racism” (Delpit, 1995, p. xiv).

Although American society nurtures and perpetuates stereotypes, educators have crucial parts to play if these stereotypes are to be broken down. “We may not have polluted the air, but we need to take responsibility, along with others, for cleaning it up” (Tatum, 1997, p. 6). This responsibility, according to Tatum (1997), begins with people “engaging in conscious acts of reflection and reeducation” (p. 7). Failure to do this as parents can mean these same prejudices are passed down to the next generation.

For teachers, defining stereotypes provides a valuable tool for teacher educators to examine how racial stereotypes function to justify certain attitudes and behavior towards students of color (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Racial and ethnic stereotypes can be placed into three categories: intelligence and educational stereotypes; personality and character stereotypes; and physical appearance. These same stereotypic traits identified are used to justify: having low educational and occupational expectations for students of color; placing students of color in separate schools and in separate classrooms within schools; remediation or “dumbing down” the curriculum and pedagogy for students of color; and expecting students of color to one day occupy lower status and levels of occupations (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Stereotypes directed at African Americans, Latinos, and Native American are often interchangeable. In the media, these groups are often portrayed as dumb, violent, lazy, irresponsible, and dirty.

Studies indicate that African American students constantly battle with stereotypic views held by educators (Asante, 1991; Hale 1980; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Pigott & Cowan, 2000; Shaw, 2003; Steele, 1999; Williams, 2000). According to Asante (1991), blacks continue to experience failure in school because the educational system maligns everything black. “When it comes to educating African American children, the American educational system does not need a tune-up, it needs an overhaul” (Asante, 1991, p. 179). Among African Americans, the black male is a special target. He is often characteristically regarded as both a monster and sex maniac. In his controversial book *Native Son*, Wright (1940) explored these two stereotypes of the black male in his

character Bigger Thomas. West (1994) adds that the sex myth, which is applied to both black women and men, continues to exist because Americans are obsessed with sex and fearful of black sexuality. Culturally, both sexes equally battle the image of “acting colored” or like a “nigger” – that is, a low-class black person laughing too loudly, using “Black English” (Ebonics), dressing vulgarly, having too many children, begging for government handouts, and always whining about racism (Espinoza & Harris, 2000).

Latinos generally suffer from the same collection of negative stereotypes experienced by both African Americans and Asian Americans (Lee, 2000). For example, Latinos, like Asian Americans, are perceived as immigrants, foreigners, and outsiders. African Americans and Latinos share the “criminal” stereotype. Studies support teachers directing racial biases against students who are Hispanic (Armendariz, 2000; Bonetati, 1994; Valdes, 1996; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). In her ethnography of 10 Mexican-origin families, Valdes (1996) found that teachers automatically blamed the family when Mexican children failed in school and automatically assumed these families needed family intervention programs that targeted the childrearing practices of the mother and programs that focused on language deficits. Teachers’ perceptions about the students were often influenced by the views they already held about Mexican-origin families. For more than a decade, Moll (in press) collaborated with colleagues in studies in education that had as a central theme the cultural mediation of educational practice. He believed educators should move away from normative notions of culture – the assumption that a monolithic, harmonious vision of culture exists with its own standardized rules for behaving –and toward “more dynamic, processual, or practice interpretations, what we call in Spanish la cultura vivida, how people live culturally” (p. 2). Here Moll (in press) elaborates on these interpretations.

Instead, we argue for a focus on the processes of how people live culturally. There is no clearly defined culture out there in the world; these static notions do not take into account the everyday lived experiences of children and their families, which

may or may not coincide with normative cultural behavior (pp. 17-18).

Stereotyping also extends to Native Americans. Stereotyping of this ethnic group may be traced to the teachers themselves who possess little knowledge about this ethnic group. Although teacher education programs strive to prepare preservice teachers to address various diversities, Writer (2001) submits teacher educators rarely have their students explore the Native American identity. Teachers generally formulate what they know about Native Americans through the stereotypes, historical imagery, and cultural assumptions they hold about this group. Teachers generally judge Native American children against the white, middle-class standard where only standard English is accepted (Scollon, 1981). Using this yardstick, Native American students are often judged erroneously and labeled as “nonverbal.” “What is often missed in these descriptions is that these children are as verbal and eager to share their knowledge as any others, but they need appropriate contexts -- such as small groups -- in which to talk” (Delpit, 1995, p. 171). In an interview, Pam Martell, a Native American scholar at the University of Michigan, commented that improving education for American Indians would mean teachers implementing practices that consider Native American children's differing cultural and learning backgrounds. To avoid stereotyping, Martell advises teachers to become aware of their own biases and stereotypes regarding Native Americans and recommends teaching students about Native Americans in a developmentally appropriate sequence by exposing youngsters to Native Americans and their culture in a contemporary context (Heckard, 1993). Martell adds that rather than reducing the study of Native Americans to units, educators should make the study of Native Americans a natural, integral part of school curriculum (Heckard, 1993).

Attempting to provide instruction about American Indians and Alaska Natives, teachers are often doomed to fail because of the inadequate training they receive from their teacher education programs, ongoing racist portrayals of Native Americans in society, and the difficulty of locating accurate materials (Almeida, 1996). Generally,

teachers use approaches that either portray Native Americans as extinct or show only the exotic components of the culture. Both approaches are based on simplistic generalizations about Native Americans, which can lead to teacher stereotyping. Teachers are urged to examine their own beliefs and assumptions about Native Americans and critically examine the cultural images in books and the mass media and then use this information to develop an anti-bias curriculum. Teachers can only avoid stereotyping Native American students by learning the differences in culture and values among Native groups and between Natives and whites, gathering information about Native American families, using appropriate communication strategies, addressing language issues, and developing cultural sensitivity (Scollon, 1981; Sparks, 2000).

The fact that racial groups share some stereotypes with each other should be comforting; yet, when they stack up against whiteness, there seems to be a hierarchy with black faces being at the bottom of the pile (Bell, 1992; Espinoza & Harris, 2000).

In the American collective unconscious, some nonwhites are more unequal than others. When compared with “whites,” Latinos, like Asian Americans and Native Americans, are all considered abnormal, exotically different, inferior, or somehow ominously superior. But when compared with another, blackness is the worst kind of non-whiteness. Words like “chink” and “spic” dehumanize. But they lack the horrific obliteration of *nigger*, a word reserved for black people. The paradigmatic image of the racial Other in American life has been the black body. Thus, learning to have fear, loathing, and contempt for niggers is central to American white supremacy in a way that racism against “other whites” is not (Espinoza & Harris, 2000, p. 443).

Although stereotypes generally carry a negative connotation, they do not have to be negative to be destructive to the group they depict. Stereotypes of Asian Americans run from two extremes -- from “yellow peril” to “model minority” Both are equal indices of national anxieties about Asian Americans. The “model minority” myth constructs

Asians as the most successfully assimilated minority group (Dalton, 1995; Delpit, 1995; Lowe, 1999; Okihiro, 1994; Yao, 1988). “There is a widespread belief that Asian American children are the ‘perfect children,’ that they will do well regardless of where they are placed. This stereotype has led to a negative backlash in which the academic needs of the majority of Asian-American students are overlooked” (Delpit, 1995, p.170). Goto (1995) examined the myth of the universal Asian American success by conducting an ethnography on a group of high-achieving Chinese American high school freshmen in Northern California. Goto found that the two explanations of Asian American achievement – family/cultural hypothesis³ and the status mobility hypothesis⁴ -- failed to account for conflict among Asian American students and their parents, teachers, and peers or conflicting values within the group.

It is interesting to note that despite the documentation of stereotyping of minority groups, many conservatives in the U.S. argue that these groups benefit because of their race, i.e., quotas, affirmative action, racial preferences in college admissions, etc. Colleges and universities across the nation can no longer attract students of color using racial preferences in their admission without being sued – i.e., the University of Michigan, the University of California in Los Angeles, the University of Georgia and public universities in the state of Florida have all made headlines surrounding their admission practices that included racial preferences/ (Kent, 2003; Lash, 2003; Markman, 2004; Thernstrom, 1998). Although college students tend to support diversity, a large percentage is opposed to giving preferences to minorities in the admissions process

³The family/cultural hypothesis is based on the belief that Chinese Americans are successful in school because they believe in the importance of education because they see it as a means to advance.

⁴The status mobility hypothesis is based on the belief that Chinese Americans try hard in school because they believe their future success is dependent on it.

(Thernstrom, 2000). At the University of Michigan, one professor led a campaign against racial preferences (Cohen, 2001/2002).

After studying the admission policies of 47 colleges and universities, Lerner and Nagai (2001) concluded that the average difference in academic credentials among those admitted – whether considering test scores, grades, or high school class rank between blacks and whites (and to a lesser degree, between Hispanics and whites) -- was very large. There were few such differences between whites and Asians. Interestingly, the study found that the more selective colleges and universities were more likely to use preferences for black applicants than their less selective counterparts, but few colleges and universities used no preferences at all (Lerner & Nagai, 2001).

With the legal problems that accompany racial and ethnic preferences in college admissions processes, Clegg (2000) submits that the continued use of such policies are based on three possible goals that are legally "compelling" for the use of preferences, including to avoid discrimination, to provide remedial discrimination in an effort to make up for past discrimination, and to encourage student diversity. The issue of over privileging minorities in college admissions has served to isolate conservatives and liberals. Using the experience of the University of California in abandoning its affirmative action admissions policies to explore the real consequences of the removal of minority preferences in law and medical schools, Thernstrom (1998) argued that although racial minorities would be reduced in the short run, the change would benefit students with solid qualifications. Cross (1994) believed that the abolishment of affirmative action in college and university admission policies – particularly in graduate and medical schools – would mean the admission of fewer Blacks to higher education. Research is clear on this point: Minority groups do constantly battle the issue of race in the form of stereotypic views held by educators. Despite these battles, admission departments of

colleges and universities across the nation say they will no longer accept race as a favorable factor in admitting students from diverse backgrounds.

Teacher Expectations

Lumsden (1997) adds that all schools claim to hold high expectations for all their students, but the reality is that what is professed is not always practiced. Although some schools and teachers maintain uniformly high expectations for all students, others hold "great expectations" for particular segments of the student population but minimal expectations for others. The expectations teachers have for their students and the assumptions they make about their potential have a self-fulfilling prophecy where student achievement and behavior is concerned (Merton, 1948; Paredes & Frazer, 1992; Smey-Richman, 1989; Tauber, 1998).

The term "self-fulfilling prophecy" was first coined by Merton (1948), who believed: If a person defines situations as real, then they are real in their consequences. The basis of a self-fulfilling prophesy (SFP) is that once a student has been pegged ahead of time, the chances are increased that a teacher's treatment of the student will help the negative prophecies or expectations come true. SFP research shows that teachers form expectations of and assign labels to people based upon such characteristics as body build, gender, race, ethnicity, given name and/or surname, attractiveness, dialect, and socioeconomic level, among others (Good, 1987). Sizer (1992) elaborates in the following quote:

When race and low socioeconomic status overlap, it presents a double trouble for the student. Race and class snarl in many teachers' perceptions of students, leading to stereotypes. If you're black, you're poor. If you speak English haltingly, you're stupid. If you're white, you have a future. Blacks are basketball players. Blond is beautiful" (p. 37).

Contrary to popular belief, Delpit (1995) submits that erroneous assumptions and judgments made about students of color are not limited to white teachers. Middle class

African American teachers hold these same stereotypes, because they fail to identify with the poor black students that they teach. Most educators have good intentions; they are not bad people. “They do not wish to damage children; indeed, they likely see themselves as wanting to help. Yet they are totally unable to perceive those different from themselves except through their own culturally clouded vision” (p. xiv). Research suggests that teacher education programs address the following with their teachers: challenging teachers to acknowledge the influence of their background and attitudes; empowering teachers to identify and evaluate the stereotypes they may bring into the classroom; and encouraging teachers to develop a racially responsive pedagogy to eradicate racial biases (Cook-Sather & Reisinger, 2001; Hayes, 1995; King, 1994; Renault, 1995).

A racially responsive pedagogy can only be accomplished through teachers constantly reflecting on the stereotypes they hold, the racist language they use, and the racism they tolerate. To recognize the strengths of students of color, teachers must have knowledge of children’s lives outside of school by observing students in and out school and have students read books written by authors of color. Ignorance of students’ strengths is what leads teachers to “teach down” to students from communities that are culturally different from their own. Consulting with more people of color, including teachers, parents, and community leaders, is also paramount to the success of students of color in school (Delpit, 1995; Hayes, 1995; King, 1994). A sense of community can be instilled among students by encouraging curiosity and dialogue about race.

Teacher Book Clubs

Walk into any traditional high school English classroom in 2004, and you might find the scene has remained unchanged from one almost fifty years ago. The only difference is the major players have changed. Teenagers sit passively at their desks as the teacher drones on and on about the meaning of a novel. Some students are making honest attempts at staying awake, while others fight a losing battle as they daydream, scribble notes, or sleep. This teacher talk is usually followed by a question/answer period. Once

the novel has been “discussed,” a test or quiz is given. When duplicated year after year, this situation can create frustration for students who are given “little opportunity to raise topics of interest, pursue lines of thinking, or collaborate in critical problem solving - a situation more pronounced for poor readers” (Raphael, Goatley, McMahon, & Woodman, 1995, p. 67).

For some educators, the reason they entered the teaching profession was due to their love of reading and talking (Marshall, Smagorinsky, & Smith, 1995). In their studies of large-group discussions of literature in English classes, Marshall, Smagorinsky, and Smith (1995) found that these discussions seldom produced the kind of talk that drew educators like themselves to the profession. They argue that teachers would like to think that literature discussions in their classrooms involve a “free-flowing exchange of ideas” (100), but the reality of maintaining a politically correct classroom constrains what students and teachers actually say and how they say it. If educators are to promote love of reading, encourage provocative conversations, and stimulate higher level thinking in today’s diverse classrooms, they must create classrooms where students engage in real conversations about books.

According to Galda (as cited in Raphael, Florio-Ruane, & George, 2001), studying literature in the company of others can become a powerful tool for critical thinking -- helping both students and teachers to understand their own perspectives while challenging them to face some of their own biases and stereotypes as they make connections across cultures and time. Potentially, literature can serve as a mirror for students and teachers to reflect on their own lives; additionally, Dasenbrock (as cited in Raphael, Damphouse, Highfield, & Florio-Ruane., 2001) believes literature can serve as a window through which readers can understand “their own perspectives as cultural and therefore limited, relative, and in many ways different from experiences of people in other times, places, and groups” (p. 6).

Perhaps the English classroom has remained so teacher-centered throughout the years because of two factors: the nature of teaching and the reading experiences of the teachers themselves. First, the nature of teaching isolates teachers from their peers. With so many day-to-day demands in the classroom, many teachers feel there is little time to read themselves or to talk about literature with friends or colleagues (Fisher & Shapiro, 1991; Florio-Ruane & Raphael, 2001).

The contexts in which teachers work today tend to be isolated from other professionals. They are embedded within a layer hierarchical system in which the teachers' day-to-day activities are governed by external forces: administrative mandates, parental requests, and, somewhat unique to today's climate, legislative directives. Missing from the lives of teachers is the opportunity to articulate and investigate with others the means for improving our practice and the learning of those with whom we work. Study groups provide an activity setting in which these voices and view can be expressed as part of learning (Raphael et. al, 2001, p. 9).

Goldberg and Pesko (2000) maintain that teachers usually read for two main purposes in their profession – practicality and professional. For practical reasons, teachers read literature to choose books for their students, or they read students' texts and their own teacher's editions for their own teaching. Professionally, teachers read educational journals and books, or they attend conferences or workshops or take graduate courses. By limiting their reading to educational books and journals, educators distract from their processes of reading and reflecting and rarely experience the true pleasure of reading. Attending conferences, workshops, and graduate courses may serve their purposes, but what they lack is intimacy because they fail to foster a "community of adult learners" who cooperatively explore and apply pertinent ideas to their classrooms (Sanacore, 1993).

Teacher book clubs allow educators an opportunity to experience both pleasure and practicality by providing them with a group experience where they can "understand

students' needs as readers by engaging in reading and reflecting on their own reading styles and responses to literature" (Golberg & Pesko, 2000, p. 39). The book club experience provides teachers with "reauthentication," or an opportunity to re-experience pleasure reading, which gives them more strategies and renewed passion about reading. Reading books in the company of other educators gives teachers rare opportunities to explore what they do as readers and connect what they know about literature to pedagogical knowledge about how to teach it; in addition, they feel their participation increases their potential for more informed decision-making (Bealor, 1992; Goldberg & Pesko, 2000; Sancore, 1993).

Oprah, Amazon.com, and Book TV have all capitalized on America's obsession with groups of people meeting and discussing books. Most, if not all, book clubs are established around shared factors, i.e., gender, profession, geography, history, nationality, race, age, sensibilities, and interests (Lester, 2001). Although it is hard to estimate the number of book clubs in the United States and abroad, estimates run as high as 50,000 in Britain and 500,000 in the United States (Hartley, 2002). Book clubs (also referred to as reading groups, study groups, literature circles, or book discussion groups) reached such prominence in the UK that the "The Book Group" TV show was created; in the U.S. book clubs were featured in the "Simpsons Cartoons" and episodes of the "Sopranos." Major institutions followed with book clubs being established at universities and colleges, in churches, within private homes, and at schools across the country.

During the 1990s, book clubs increased in popularity both with the general public and with educators (Flood & Lapp, 1994). In its March 11, 1990, issue, *The Chicago Sun-Times* reported, "These days, it's positively de rigueur among baby-boom intelligencia to carve out a few hours a month to pick apart a piece of literature and a buffet table" (p. 574). Teachers join book clubs for a variety of reasons, including: starting a new hobby; establishing friendships and camaraderie with colleagues; providing members with the opportunity to consider new ideas among considerate friends; exposing oneself to

literature outside the comfort zone; and participating as part of a study group, graduate studies, or professional development course (Clark, 2001; Goldberg & Pesko, 2000; Lester, 2001; Matlin & Short, 1991; Pelletier, 1993; Richardson, 2001; Sanacore, 1993).

Studies on teacher book clubs provide a litany of praise for membership. The welcoming atmosphere of book clubs motivates teachers to share diverse points of view, different narrative techniques and writing styles, and new ways of looking and thinking about students (Flood & Lapp, 1994; Flood, Lapp, Ranck-Buhr, & Moore, 1995; Lester 2001). Study groups such as teacher book clubs focus on what teachers consider important and emphasize cooperative sharing, which stimulates educators to seek out professional literature, such as monographs, books, and journals.

A true study group requires voluntary commitment, builds community and caring, challenges the thinking of educators, and integrates theory and practice (Birchak, Connor, Crawford, Kahn, Kaser, Turner, & Short, 1998). This network of sharing valuable information can lead to substantive support for classroom change, which can have a major impact on students (Sanacore, 1993). For some teachers, the book club experience is so powerful that they chose to adapt and implement book club procedures, such as response journals in their own classrooms (Flood et al., 1995). Book club participation offers pre-service teachers a rare opportunity to reconsider their role as “student teachers” by placing them in multiple roles as teacher, learner, and teacher researcher. For one teacher research group, the book club format offered the participants a network of support, which encouraged them to share successful ideas, offer potential solutions to problems, and vent their frustrations as they discussed professional readings and their own teaching (O’Donnell-Allen & Hunt, 2001). In the context of a graduate course, use of book discussion groups helped teachers to understand course readings better, encouraged them to engage in practical talk about teaching, and motivated them to become active, engaged learners (Cantrell, 2002). Some teachers in the Cantrell study identified conflicts within their own belief systems and even within their own school

districts. Instead of accepting the conflicts between the current literacy curriculum and the evaluation of student reading and writing, teachers use book discussion groups as a way of developing alternative strategies (Matlin & Short, 1991). Whether the teachers are reading novels or professional literature, all of the research points to a common outcome: Teacher and students come out as winners in the end.

To be a “teacher book club” per se, does not mean participation is restricted to solely teachers. Some groups are composed of educators at various levels, while other teacher book clubs also include administrators (Lapp, Flood, Kilbdis, Jones, & Moore, 1995), teacher educators (Cantrell, 2002; Ketter & Lewis, 2001; Lewis & Ketter, 2003, in press; O’Donnell-Allen & Hunt, 2001; Smith & Strickland, 2001), other professionals (Lester, 2001), students (O’Donnell & Hunt, 2001), or parents (Armstrong, 2003; Zaleski, 1997, 1999). The genres selected for study by these book discussion groups are just as varied as their reasons for joining, including reading and studying: social studies texts (Mathis, 2001); historical fiction (Fisher, 1991); nonfiction, historical and contemporary fiction, and adolescent fiction (Bean, Valerio, Mallette, & Readence, 1999; Goldberg & Pesko, 2000); canonical works (Lester, 2001); multicultural literature (Flood & Lapp, 1994; Flood, Lapp, Alvarez, Romero, Ranck-Buhr, Moore, Jones, Kabildis, & Lungren, 1994; Lapp et al., 1995; Smith & Strickland, 2001); ethnic autobiographies (Florio-Ruane, 1994; Florio-Ruane, Raphael, Glazier, McVee, & Wallace, 1997; Florio-Ruane & Raphael, 1999; Glazier, McVee, Wallace-Cowell, Shellhorn, Florio-Ruane, & Raphael, 2000; McVee, 1999); minority literature (Bealor, 1992); and children’s literature (Zaleski, 1997, 1999).

Where My Study Fits: So What?

This literature review identifies, describes, and evaluates four areas of literature that have most directly informed my study: 1) the high school literary canon and multicultural literature, 2) white teachers and race, 3) racial stereotypes and teacher expectations, and 4) teacher book clubs.

The first section on the high school literary canon and multicultural literature provides support for my observations about the high school literary canon: It has remained virtually unchanged for decades in its lack of representation of authors of color. It is no wonder that my colleagues cling so tightly to the canon. Teaching the classics seems almost hereditary. It has become such an accepted, traditional part of high teaching. Studies on the high school canon do not suggest that all of the classics be thrown out, but they do suggest that today's teachers should develop a canon that is composed of both the classics and multicultural literature. The authors of these studies argue that a more inclusive canon in today's classroom can be empowering to all students since it offers a more extensive context for students than the traditional literary canon and readings give opportunities for discussion around issues of race, class, and gender. Although it is not a guaranteed that students will make the connections between what they read and their own life experiences, these studies indicate continued sole use of the literary canon assures that the experiences of underrepresented groups will remain marginalized and unvoiced in schools.

The section on white teachers and race elaborates on the issue of how white teachers deal with race. With the majority of the student population composed of children of color, teachers are entering classrooms ill-equipped to adequately address the needs of students who are multi-racial, multi-ethnic, and different in terms of language, religion, learning ability, and socioeconomic status. Although teacher education programs offer courses, workshops, and modules that address multicultural education, these offerings rarely have enough time within a semester to encourage their prospective teachers to take a close look at their own assumptions, worldviews, and perspectives. Studies echo my thoughts about white teachers and race: If these teachers fail to recognize and examine their own beliefs, values, and biases, they will be unsuccessful in engaging students in examining theirs.

The section on racial stereotypes and teacher expectations discusses the effects of teachers' perceptions about race to the expectations they hold for all their students. Studies suggest that when race and low socioeconomic status overlap, it presents a double trouble for the student. Teachers tend to automatically revert to stereotypic thinking: If you are black, you are from the projects. You probably play football or basketball. If you speak English haltingly, you are stupid. If you are white, you have a future. Studies claim that students of color -- African Americans, Asian Americans, Native American, and Hispanic/Latinos -- constantly battle with stereotypic views held by white educators. White teachers tend to judge every word or action as inadequate. When problems occur, the families and communities of students of color are blamed. These studies conclude that although society nurtures and maintains stereotypes, educators should take on the challenge of eliminating racism by engaging in conscious acts of reflection and reeducation.

Finally, the section on teacher book club is of obvious importance to this study. This study builds on the work of the most recent teacher book club studies conducted by teacher researchers Susan Florio-Ruane, James Flood, and Diane Lapp. Their studies focus on teachers reading either multicultural literature or ethnic autobiographies as a way to gain insights about cultures in which they have limited knowledge (Florio-Ruane, 1994, 2001; Florio-Ruane et al., 1997, 1999; Flood & Lapp, 1994; Flood et al., 1994, 1995; Lapp et al., 1995).

Of particular interest to this researcher was the study conducted by Florio-Ruane and Raphael (2001), in which they analyzed conversations around works written by African American authors. Jocelyn Glazier, a participant observer in their book club, chose to examine more closely the reason teachers tended to avoid discussing topics such as racism, sexual assault, inequality, and social class. Glazier et al. (2000) called topics like these "hot lava," which referred to the "children's playground game where the goal is to run a course yet avoid stepping on spots of hot lava" (p. 295). Why were "hot lava"

conversations more difficult to focus and sustain? When the topic of race appeared on the floor, why did participants often dash around it? She found participants became more willing over time to engage in the race talk only after they grew more familiar with each other, the book club format, diverse authors and texts, and their own discourse habits (particularly their habit of avoiding certain topics in conversation) (Glazier, et al., 2000; 2003).

My study extends the work of Glazier and her predecessors. Race is a driving force throughout. Readers will see race as an essential core throughout this study -- from the problem, research questions, literature review, and theoretical framework to the researcher herself.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In her spring 1993 class notes, educational researcher Patti Lather once advised her students to see interpretation as two different activities: description and analysis. The first step, description, involved the researcher coding, categorizing, and looking for themes and patterns in the data, including the negative cases. The second step is analysis, or theory building. During this step, the researcher is attempting to answer the question: What is happening here? And then more importantly: Why is such-and-such happening? “Theorizing is the cognitive process of discovering or manipulating abstract categories and the relationships among those categories. It consists of playing with data and ideas. It is used to develop or confirm explanations for how and why things happen as they do” (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 239). Lather believes that theorizing involves explaining -- simultaneously going beyond the facts while using them as a buttress. In my effort to address the “why” question of this study, I discovered critical race theory (CRT) would adequately serve as a macro-level theoretical framework for this study.

Critical Race Theory

Although America can be proud of its racial progress since slavery, DuBois (1996) argued that the problem of the twentieth century was the problem of the color line. In *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism*, Bell (1992) writes:

Black people are the magical faces at the bottom of society’s well. Even the poorest whites, those who must live only a few levels above, gain their self-esteem by gazing down on us. Surely, they must know that their deliverance depends on letting down their ropes. Only by working together is escape possible.

Over time, many reach out, but most simply watch, mesmerized into maintaining their unspoken commitment to keeping us where we are, at whatever cost to them or to us” (p. v).

A century later, West (1994) submits that Americans still struggle with this issue in the twenty-first century. Bernice King (1996), an ordained minister and the youngest daughter of slain civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., believes that race relations is probably the most prominent issue of the twenty-first century, but Americans cannot seem to move past its history, where race, separatism, and segregation once ruled.

On one hand, we promote ourselves as one nation under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for all. On the other hand, our daily existence suggests that we are a nation divided between the blacks and the whites, the haves and the have-nots, the North and the South, the hip-hop culture and the traditional mainstream cultures, the conservatives and the liberals (p. 47).

Arguably, racism is an integral, permanent, and indestructible component of U.S. society (Bell, 1992). “It is a fact that America is a racist nation. Whether we like it or not, whether we agree with it or not, most of us are caught up in an identity crisis dictated by race” (King, 1996, p. 48). Throughout America’s history, racial issues have always been one of the country’s most important concerns on the minds of both politicians and citizens (Bell, 1987). Race has been a major force in shaping the world (McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993); yet, ironically, with all its significance and impact, Americans treat race as a sensitive, taboo topic that they would rather avoid talking about. West (1994) adds that race continues to be a problem for the United States because of this country’s failure to “confront the complexity of the issue in a candid and critical manner” (p. 4). Generally, when discussions about race do occur, they are directed to black people and the problems they pose for whites. A serious discussion of race needs to begin with “flaws rooted in historic inequalities and longstanding cultural stereotypes” (p. 6).

Race Talk in Schools

Some people believe the perfect place to initiate such volatile, thought-provoking conversations would be our educational institutions. “White and non-whites cannot share an experience of ‘race,’ so difference must be mediated through education. Education becomes relevant when it creates an opportunity for us to better understand and appreciate one another” (Peterson, 1999, p. 91).

Ideally, schools *should* be places for discussing controversial issues; yet, educators avoid this responsibility as if it were smallpox. Woodson (1990) points out that even “mis-educated” African American teachers try to delay discussing the race problem – hoping students will study the problem at the college or university level. “These misguided teachers ignore the fact that the race question is being brought before black and white children daily in their homes, in the streets, through the press and on the rostrum. How then can the school ignore the duty of teaching the truth while these other agencies are playing up a falsehood” (p. 135)? He notes that when elementary and secondary teachers do give the race problem the attention it deserves, they see their efforts rewarded: The attitudes of these children, who would have been “hopelessly warped by the general attitude of the communities in which they have been brought up,” (pp. 135-136) are often softened and changed.

West and Woodson are not alone in their call for frank discussions surrounding race. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) contend that discussions of race and racism are often muted and marginalized; as a result, a new dialogue is needed to give voice to marginalized voices and to rekindle the desire to end racism (Peterson, 1999; Romany, 2002). “As race relations continue to shape our lives in the new century – setting the stage for new tragedies and new hopes – critical race theory has become an indispensable tool for making sense of it all” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. xxi). Ladson-Billings (1999) adds that CRT is “an important social and intellectual tool for deconstruction, reconstruction, and construction – deconstruction of oppressive structures, reconstruction

of human agency, and construction of equitable and socially just relations of power” (p. 10). Critical race theory, or CRT, treats race as central to the law and policy of the US; racial injustice is not a matter of individuals acting out, but is composed of systems that are already in place (Carbado, 2002; Crenshaw, Gotando, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Valdes, Culp, & Harris, 2002).

The CRT Movement

Delgado and Stefancic (2001) define the CRT movement as “a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (p. 2). In publishing terms, CRT is composed of more than 400 leading law review articles and dozens of books. The CRT movement and the civil rights movement both share the same interests, but CRT “questions the very foundations of liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law” (p. 3). CRT is influenced by the humanities – particularly cultural studies, sociology, psychology, and history -- as well as the philosophical movements of postmodernism, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism (Vargas, 2003).

Americans first learned about CRT when Lani Guinier, a University of Pennsylvania law professor, was fired from the Clinton administration because of her legal writings, which critiqued the representation of electoral system during political elections (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Actually, CRT began as a movement in the mid-1970s among lawyers, activists, and legal scholars. The movement was initiated over frustration of two men -- Derrick Bell (a black man) and Alan Freeman (a white man) – who observed the slow pace of racial reforms following the civil rights movement. The movement, which builds on two previous movements, critical legal studies and radical feminism, came about in response to new theories and strategies needed to combat the subtler forms of racism that were on the rise.

Romany (2002) credits the long absence of “critical schools” of thought in legal academia for paving the way for CRT. Inspired by leaders such Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., W.E.B. DuBois, Rosa Parks, the early writers were Bell, Freeman, and Richard Delgado, who held their first conference in Madison, Wisconsin, in 1989. Although CRT began as a movement in the law, it quickly spread to other academic departments, including education, cultural studies, English, sociology, comparative literature, political science, history, and anthropology (Crenshaw & Crichlow, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). What sets CRT apart from other academic disciplines is its activist 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).

The Development of CRT

The visibility of CRT in the 1970s continued for the next three decades with the publishing successes of Bell (1987; 1992), Delgado and Stefancic (2000, 2001), Patricia Williams (1991), and Kimberly Crenshaw (1995; 2000). Ladson-Billings and William Tate, IV, both educational scholars and well-known critical race theorists, are credited for linking CRT to education when they published the landmark article “Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education” in the journal *Teachers College Record* (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Their work was followed by Ladson-Billings’ (1999) article “Just What Is Critical Race Theory, and What’s It Doing in a Nice Field Like Education?” Critical race scholars at other major universities followed the lead of Ladson-Billings and Tate and forged ahead in the field. CRT generated so much interest in academia that three journals responded with special issues on the subject: *Equity & Excellence in Education* (Lynn & Adams, 2002), *Qualitative Inquiry* (Lynn, Yosso, Solorzano, & Parker, 2002), and *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* (Parker, Deyle, Villenas, & Nebeker, 1998).

In the May 2002 special issue of *Equity & Excellence in Education*, the CRT framework is used to analyze a variety of topics and racial groups, including: critical race theory as framework to analyze and challenge educational structures, processes, and discourses (Yosso, 2002); critical race theory as a method of analyzing the relationship between race and language and the educational experiences of bilingual students (Revilla & Asato, 2002); critical race theory as a method of examining the perspectives of black male teachers in the Los Angeles Public Schools (Lynn, 2002); a critical race ethnography written about the schooling of black male, high school students (Duncan, 2002); critical race theory as a method of analyzing the racial climate and educational experiences of Asian Pacific American students in schools (Teranishi, 2002); a critical race counter-story of race, racism, and affirmative action (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002); and critical race theory as a framework for analyzing how the “apartheid of knowledge” in higher education is used to marginalize, discredit, and devalue the knowledge and resources of scholars of color (Bernal & Villalpando, 2002).

A core thesis of CRT is the insistence that racism is an ordinary and not exceptional happening in the day-to-day lives of people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, 2001; Solorzano, 1997; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Race is not based on isolated, one-on-one instances that can be named and understood because it is so deeply ingrained in the American landscape. CRT looks beyond the popular belief that simple ignorance of racism will eliminate it (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Valdes, Culp, & Harris, 2002) and challenges three mainstream beliefs about racial injustice: blindness to racism will eliminate racism; racism is a matter of individuals, not systems; and an individual can fight racism while ignoring other forms of oppression or injustice such as sexism, homophobia, and economic exploitation (Valdes, Culp, & Harris, 2002).

Delgado & Stefancic (2001) have observed that critical race thinkers have divided themselves into two distinct camps. The “idealists” such as Carbado (2002) see race as a social construct, so they believe racism and discrimination reside in society’s thinking,

attitude, discourse, and mental categorization. The contrasting school called the “realists” (also known as “economic determinists”) believes that racism is a means through which a society allocates status and privilege. Racial hierarchies determine which racial groups reap tangible benefits, such as the best jobs or the best education. CRT places whiteness under a lens and examines what it means to be white and the automatic privileges that come with membership in the dominant race. A number of studies have focused their attention on critical white studies, an emerging strain in CRT that focuses on the role “whiteness” and “white privilege” play in society (Grillo & Wildman, 2000; Harris, 1995; Lopez, 2000; McIntyre, 1997; Rothenburg, 2002; Ross, 2002; Wildman & Davis, 2000).

The *interest convergence* component of CRT, also called material determinism, supports the notion that because racism has advanced the interests of whites – both materially and psychically – the dominant culture has had little incentive to eliminate it (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). In the *Harvard Law Review* legal scholar Derrick Bell argued that the consensus against school segregation in the 1950s was the result of a convergence of interests by whites and blacks (Dudziak, 2000). Bell believed that without the convergence of whites and blacks on this issue, *Brown v. Board of Education* would never have occurred. CRTs believe that large segments of society have never had any reason to eliminate racism because it benefits white elites materially and working class people psychically. It is believed that the interest convergence theme of CRT may explain the reason the triumph of civil rights litigation may have come about due to the self-interest of elite white rather than a desire to help African Americans (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Bell believes that elite whites will tolerate and even encourage advances for blacks but only when doing so will benefit them. “Other Criticalists question whether civil rights law is designed to benefit folks of color, and even suggest that it is really a homeostatic mechanism that ensures that racial progress occurs at the right pace: Change that is too rapid would be unsettling to society at large; that which is too slow could prove destabilizing” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, p. xvii).

CRTs also critique liberalism and support “the call to context” – that is, the use of new forms of writing and thought, such as biography, autobiography, stories and counterstories, humor, satire, parables, chronicles, poetry, fiction, revisionist histories, and narrative analysis to reveal the self-serving nature of legal doctrines or rules and to illustrate the realities of the oppressed (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Ladson-Billings (1999) submits that a main theme of CRT is “voice,” or “naming one’s own reality,” in the form of storytelling. Historically, storytelling has acted as a medicine to heal the wounds caused by racial oppression. It involves analyzing “myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms that make up a common culture about race and that invariably renders blacks and other minorities one-downs” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2000, p. xvii). The “voice” component of CRT provides an opportunity to communicate the experience and realities of the people of color, which is the first step on the road to justice and understanding the complexities of racism (Ladson-Billings, 1999).

With their unique ability to tell stories, Patricia Williams and Derrick Bell are credited for the ideas of CRT reaching the public. For Parker and Stovall (2003), the storytelling component of CRT is empowering for research informants who are allowed to speak for themselves. They are motivated to challenge racist assumptions in research and take an active part in the design of the research so that they are represented as part of the solution, not part of the problem. Unlike some traditional research, which locates the problem within students of color or their parents, CRT seeks to connect *with* the experiences and the ways of thinking, believing, and knowing of racial communities as they struggle for equity in education. Linking critical race theory to education, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) contend that the voice of people of color is required if a complete analysis of the educational system is the objective. Ladson-Billings (1999) argues that if researchers are truly interested in solving issues of race, racism, and social injustice in schools and in classrooms, they have to be serious about undertaking an “intense study and careful thinking of race and education” (p. 2).

CRT in Education

CRT challenges discourse on race and racism as it relates to education by examining how educational theory and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups. A CRT of education has at least six themes that form its basic perspectives, research methods, and pedagogy: 1) Since race is an ordinary, natural part of American life, it recognizes the central role that racism has played in the structuring of schools and schooling practices, and recognizes that racism intersects with other forms of subordination including sexism and classism; 2) It expresses skepticism toward the dominant culture's claim of neutrality, objectivity, color blindness, and meritocracy and examines the system of education as part of a critique of societal inequality; 3) It is committed to a social justice research agenda that leads toward the elimination of racism, sexism, and poverty, and the empowering of underrepresented minority groups; 4) CRT recognizes that the experiential knowledge of women and men of color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, practicing, and teaching about racial subordination; 5) CRT is interdisciplinary and crosses epistemological and methodological boundaries; and 6) CRT challenges ahistoricism and the unidisciplinary focus of most traditional analyses and insists on analyzing race and racism by placing them in both an historical and contemporary context using interdisciplinary methods (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Solorzano, 1997; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso, 2002).

The ideas of CRT are used in education to: understand issues of school discipline and hierarchy, tracking, controversies over curriculum and history, and IQ and achievement testing; describe, analyze, and challenge racist policy and practice in educational institutions; expose traditional curricula supported by white privilege and challenge educators to dismantle them; and expose and challenge contemporary forms of racial inequality disguised as "neutral" or "objective" processes, structures, and discourses in school curriculum. CRT helps to better understand how experiences of race can impact teachers and learners (Peterson, 1999). The overall goal of CRT in teacher

education is to develop a pedagogy, curriculum, and research agenda that accounts for the role of race and racism in U.S. education and to work toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination in education. A CRT in teacher education asks these questions: How do educational institutions, structures, processes, and discourses function to maintain racism, sexism, and classism? How do students of color resist racism, sexism, and classism in educational structures, processes, and discourses? How can educational reforms help end racism, sexism, and classism? Using the themes of CRT, educators are challenged to identify and transform concepts of race, racism, and racial stereotypes (Solorzano, 1997; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

CRT as a Theoretical Framework

To say that CRT has its critics would be an understatement. Delgado and Stefancic (2000) and Crenshaw (2002) provide a list of critiques of CRT. First, CRTs have been accused of just telling stories (and bad ones); mainstream critics challenge CRT's claim to stories and parables saying they can be even more misleading than ordinary analysis. Second, "race-Crits" are viewed as too negative with their despairing images of racial progress, which leave little room for hope and improvement. Third, critics charge that CRTs play fast and loose with truth by playing "the race card." Fourth, CRT has been labeled "anti-Semitic" because of its critique of the over-representation of Jews in the nation's colleges and universities. Fifth, CRTs have been accused of being "part of the 'lunatic fringe' of the academy" (Crenshaw, 2001, p. 23); media reports have called the work of CRT "backward, racist, unsophisticated assortment of half-baked scholarship" (p. 25). Some opponents believe the work of race-Crits is crude and beyond reason and that it offers no analysis or law. Sixth, some opponents believe CRT provides an intellectual foundation for black separateness, and they add this provocative description of race-Crits: They are not supporters of the civil rights movement, since they believe race relations are no better than 30 years ago, and that the law is a useless means of social reform.

Perhaps this long list of criticisms compiled by Delgado and Stefancic (2000) and Crenshaw (2002) may come from misconceptions about race-based methodologies, suggests Pillow (2003) and Lopez and Parker (2003), who list four misconceptions of CRT scholarship: 1) it is labeled as “identity politics;” thus, the work of CRTs is dismissed as mere ideological and political propaganda; 2) it fails to distinguish itself from other qualitative methods and/or research paradigms; 3) it is often classified as a “new” and “proliferating” theory because it is associated with postmodernism and other “new wave” theories and is rejected based on it being “unscientific”; and 4) it fails to provide “hard data” to certify its claims.

White researchers Schuerich and Young (1997) published a provocative paper citing a critical factor in CRT being unwelcomed into mainstream research: Educational researchers lack understanding about “how race is a critically significant epistemological problem in educational research” (p. 4). Theorizing race is a relatively new phenomenon. Until CRT’s emergence on the research scene, scholars had either failed to theorize race at all (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) or undertheorized it (McCarthy & Critchlow, 1993). CRT in education seeks to connect teaching and research to general practical knowledge about institutional forces that impact racial minority communities (Parker & Stovall, 2003).

Current research epistemologies – from positivism to postmodernism and poststructuralism – grow out of the history and culture of the dominant culture and race, which means these epistemologies reflect and reinforce the social history of that group while excluding epistemologies of other groups. As a result of “epistemological racism,” negative consequences are the result for racial cultures with different epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies. CRT is a race-based epistemological and methodological approach to study racial inequality in the field of education. CRT represents conversations that locate race and racism at the center of educational research and analysis (Lynn & Adams, 2002). For educators, the use of CRT makes the study of race

the core of the issue of this discipline. Understanding race is not just an interesting footnote; it is an integral challenge in one's level of practice (Vargas, 2003). Used as an analytic framework, (Ladson-Billings, 1999), CRT can serve as "an alternative methodology and a source of theoretical and practical knowledge" (Romany, 2002, p. 303); in addition, Romany (2002) maintains it can provide researchers with both a working "theoretical vocabulary for the practice of progressive racial politics" and "a set of tools for thinking about race that avoids the traps of racial thinking" (p. xxxii).

Some scholars of color have even chosen to stay within the realm of mainstream research paradigms, such as critical theory -- no matter how ill-fitting the dominant research epistemology has been to their needs. This lack of legitimacy for race-based epistemologies is due in large part to the fact that most white scholars are unfamiliar with this kind of work because it often appears in academic journals that cater to race-oriented research or is published by race-oriented publication companies (Scheurich & Young, 1997). Criticisms leveled at CRT and other race-based methodologies "suggest the topic of race is not largely viewed as a legitimate arena for 'doing' good qualitative research" (Lopez & Parker, 2003, p. 204).

For scholars of color who wish to be successful in tenure and promotion, these race-oriented journals are not as respected as the mainstream ones. Schuerich and Young argue that the critical tradition, which many scholars of color use in their research, is exclusively drawn from "European-derived paradigms." "One of the main problems in critical theory is dealing with the centrality of racism in education and its strong philosophical roots and connections to the political economy" (Parker & Stovall, 2003, p. 6). The other different critical approaches -- feminism, lesbian/gay orientations, and critical postmodernism -- have all been criticized for their racial biases. Scheurich and Young suggest that advocates of the critical tradition need to support the emergence and the acceptance of other epistemologies like critical race theory that are derived from different racial or cultural histories. Regardless of whether more supporters are added to

the CRT bandwagon or not, CRT has demonstrated its willingness to survive the doubts, sneers, and attacks of its opponents by flourishing as it enters its second decade of existence with spin-off movements that include: Asian Pacific American Legal Studies⁵; critical race feminists, critical race queers, and Latino/a critical theorists (LatCrits)⁶; and critical white studies⁷ (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Valdes, Culp, & Harris, 2002; Vargas, 2003). In addition, a group of Native American scholars have made their focus related to indigenous people's rights, land claims, and sovereignty (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

The Use of CRT in this Study

CRT is beginning to receive more attention inside and outside of the academy, but very little work has been done with CRT inside and outside of U.S. classrooms (Yosso, 2002). This study brought CRT inside a high school setting. Of interest to this researcher were the teacher book club studies that focused on multicultural literature or ethnic autobiographies as a way for teachers to gain insights about the cultures represented by their students in which they had limited knowledge (Florio-Ruane, 1994, 2001; Florio-Ruane et al., 1997, 1999; Flood & Lapp, 1994; Flood et al., 1994, 1995; Lapp et al., 1995). By examining the book discussions surrounding works written by African American authors (Florio-Ruane, 2001), Glazier (et al., 2000, 2003) noticed that white teachers tended to avoid discussing the "hot lava" topic of race. Participants became more willing over time to engage in the race talk only after they grew more familiar with each other, the book club format, diverse authors and texts, and their own discourse habits (particularly their habit of avoiding certain topics in conversation). My study was

⁵Asian Pacific American Legal Studies focuses on Asian Pacific Americans as a distinct ethnic/racial group.

⁶Critical race feminists, critical race queers, and Latino/a critical theorist (LatCrits) have added "sexual oppression, transnationality, culture, language, immigration, and social status" to their agenda (Valdes, Culp, & Harris, 2002, p. 4)

⁷Critical white studies focuses on whiteness and white privilege.

significant because it took what I think was the next step in teacher book club research. It used critical race theory as a theoretical framework to look at how teachers negotiate issues of race with their peers.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

Learning to do qualitative research is like learning to paint. Study the masters, learn techniques and methods, practice them faithfully, and then adapt them to your own persuasions when you know enough to describe the work of those who have influenced you and the ways in which you are contributing new perspectives (Glesne, 1999, p.3).

In chapter three, I provided a discussion of critical race theory, the theoretical framework used to inform this study. This chapter discusses the methodology used to collect, analyze, and represent the data. I will begin with a discussion on research that is qualitative and teacher research. Next, I will elaborate on the pilot study and the steps taken to start data collection. Then, I will describe the context of the study, including the setting, the participants, and the texts. Next, I will discuss the processes I used for data collection, transcription, analysis, and representation. Finally, I will discuss issues related to my role as researcher.

Qualitative Research

Researchers in anthropology and sociology have relied upon “qualitative research” for a century while the social sciences began using the term in the late 1960s (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). “The word qualitative implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000. p. 8). This study was qualitative in the sense that I used several research strategies that share certain characteristics with qualitative research. First, the data collected were described as rich, thick description of people, places, and conversations. For me, the

written word was vital in recording data and writing up my findings. As a qualitative researcher, I could not afford to take the collection of data for granted. Everything was dangerous.⁸ Very little was taken for granted. I took an unusual interest in the details of the room where our book discussions took place. The expressions, body language, and the silence or laughter of the participants did not go unnoticed. I was especially concerned with my own assumptions as a participant and researcher – so much so that I constantly placed them under scrutiny. My research questions were formulated to investigate the topic of race in all its complexity. While conducting this qualitative research, I never felt compelled to test any hypothesis. Numbers and figures could not adequately tell this story.

Qualitative research is often called *naturalistic* because “the researcher frequents places where the events he or she is interested in naturally occur” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 2). I was drawn to doing what Glesne (1999) calls “backyard research,” studying my own workplace, specifically the teachers at my own school for several reasons: my workplace provided easy access and convenience; the rapport with my colleagues was already established; the research would be useful to the professional and personal lives of all the participants; and the time needed for various steps in the research process would be reduced.

Unlike quantitative research, I analyzed my data inductively. The *a priori* theory I used was critical race theory. I found the analogies Bogdan & Biklan (1998) used for data collection and analysis very useful. Data collection was like putting together a puzzle without the aid of the picture before me. The theory for my study did not become clear until after I had spent time in the field. It was only as I collected and examined each piece of data that the picture became clearer. Data analysis was like looking through a funnel.

⁸My committee member and methodologist Bettie St. Pierre often gave this advice to students in her qualitative research courses. By saying everything was dangerous, St. Pierre was referring to researchers taking anything for granted. Nothing in the research process should be taken for granted.

“Things are open at the beginning (or top) and more directed and specific at the bottom” (Bogdan & Biklan, 1998, p. 7).

This qualitative research was driven by my need to make meaning. I was interested in how my participants and I made sense of: what they read, conversations in the group, and race in their own lives. My choices for analysis – open coding and data transcription -- were based on my concerns for the participants’ perspectives (Erickson as cited in Bogdan & Biklan, 1998). My major concern was capturing my participants’ perspectives accurately. To ensure the accuracy of my interpretations, I offered my participants opportunities to provide feedback so I could check their interpretations at every step of the research process. This study reflected my concern with the significance of capturing my participants in the interpretation as accurately as possible.

For me, the process of doing this qualitative research meant a perpetual dialogue between my participants and me beginning mid-February 2003 and lasting until April 2004.⁹ First, I distributed copies of the interviews and participant portraits to each member.¹⁰ Second, I offered book club members copies of the book club discussion transcripts and drafts of chapters available upon request. Plus, I placed a three-ring binder containing copies of the five book club meeting transcripts in the English department’s workroom so that teachers could have access to them at their leisure from mid-February 2003 to April 2004.¹¹ Third, I delivered to my colleagues a letter containing my initial findings and an invitation for them to give me feedback on my interpretations.

Teaching at the high school level is an extremely hectic, stressful job, so I was very grateful to receive any feedback, albeit much of it informal – usually in the form of

⁹February 2003 marked the end of data collection. On February 6, 2003, the teacher book club had its last meeting where we discussed Julie Landsman’s book *A White Teacher Talks About Race*. Around mid-February, I conducted interviews with the teachers about their experience in the book club.

¹⁰All research documents included pseudonyms for all the participants, except for me.

¹¹The English department’s workroom stays locked.

teachers voicing their opinions about what I had written as we were standing in the hallway or through emails. For example, one day the tardy bell rang and Kasey and I were about to simultaneously close our doors (our rooms were across the hall from one another) when he used his finger to beckon for me to meet him midway. He said reading the first chapter, which described how the issue of race impacted me personally and professionally throughout my life, helped him learn something about me. “I now understand you better,” Kasey said. Another example of collegial feedback came from Roberto, who requested reading the entire dissertation. One day after school, he and another student walked past me carrying tape and a big bundle of bulletin board paper when he said over his shoulder, “Ms. Pettis, I already read most of your dissertation. I really like chapters one and five.” “Why?” I asked. “Well, chapter one was about you. It was all heart and soul. It was very well written,” he continued. “I liked chapter five for the way you described the department.”

I did not limit feedback to the participants only. I sought the opinions from my transcriber, fellow peers at my university, my major professor, and my committee on my interpretations. After reading an early draft of chapter seven, dissertation committee member Bettie St. Pierre strongly urged me to offer one participant named Kasey an opportunity to comment about my interpretations of his silence in the book club meetings. (See chapter seven for Kasey’s feedback.) In addition, I presented my work in two different public forums – the National Council of Teachers of English Cultivating New Voices among Scholars of Color (NCTE CNV) and the American Education Research Association (AERA).¹² Below are examples of dialogue I initiated with my colleagues in order to check my interpretations at different stages of the writing process.

¹²I was a fellow in the National Council of Teachers of English Cultivating New Voices among Scholars of Color Grant Program during the 2002-2004 year. During the annual meeting in November 2004, I presented my preliminary findings of “Race Talk in a Teacher Book Club” in a poster session. I was also a fellow in the American Education Research Association/Spencer Pre-Dissertation Fellowship Program. During their annual meeting in Chicago in April 2004, I shared my struggles with transcription in a roundtable discussion. The feedback I received in both programs was very beneficial.

Victoria's email to participants: For those of you who wanted copies of one or more of the book club meetings, they are in your boxes. I have placed a three-ring binder in the lounge if you would like to read at your leisure. Let me know your thoughts.

Victoria to Roberto in the hallway: Hi, Roberto. Here's the transcript of your interview. Let me know if there are any errors. If you want to elaborate on anything you said, let me know.

Victoria's Post-It Note attached to each participant's portrait: Attached is a copy of your participant portrait. It was based on the survey you filled out and what I know about you personally and professionally. Let me know your thoughts. If you think I need to make changes, let's talk! My main concern is: Did I capture you accurately?

Finally, my role as researcher was significant in the design of this study. I found Denzin & Lincoln's (2000) analogy of the researcher as a bricoleur, or quilt maker, an apt description of my role as researcher. I found myself employing many different tools, methods, and techniques in order to fashion my research study into a whole that was recognizable from many different angles, representing many different voices, ideas, and stories of my participants and myself.

Teacher Research

Crotty (1998) defined methodology as "the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes" (p. 3). According to a description provided by the Book Club Plus Inquiry Group (1999), besides the fact that this research involved a teacher doing research among her colleagues, this study had all the qualities of "teacher research."

What "counts" as teacher research? The complex interweaving of people, places, and exploration of questions of practice helps our practitioner research to inform

the local, immediate concerns of participants in the site of the research and, over time, to inform a broader community of professionals involved in literacy education. In addition, our effort at communicating across our diversity creates a new, alternative professional discourse community whose inquiry is enriched by the presence of many voices (Book Club Plus Inquiry Group, 1999, p. 53).

According to Birchak, Connor, Crawford, Kahn, Kaser, Turner, & Short (1998), teacher research is only one of seven types of teacher study groups. Participation in teacher study groups affords these advantages: it requires a voluntary commitment; it builds community and caring; it challenges the thinking of educators; and it integrates theory and practice. The strength of teacher research is its collaboration (Christiansen, Goulet, Krentz, and Maeers, 1997). True collaboration occurs within a climate of caring – both in a personal and professional sense. It encourages different voices to speak, asks participants to be reflective and open about taken-for-granted assumptions, encourages participants to listen to each other, and builds relationships and communication. In collaborative research, both the researcher and the participants are integral parts of the process. When participants and researchers are open in collaboration, they not only learn about context, they also learn about themselves. If teachers are critical thinkers, they need to change their teaching practices by talking to one another and creating collaborative discussions that cross boundaries (i.e., race) and creates spaces for intervention (hooks, 1994).

The teacher research I did in this study was one that took the *emic*, or insider view (Fecho & Allen, 2001). Using such teacher research, the educational community can gain deeper social-contextual understandings of the ways race transacts with literacy in and out of schools. In addition, this kind of teacher research gives other teachers opportunities to read about what these teachers and I have learned. It is my hope that they will respond by examining their own classroom practices. There were three teacher research studies that come very close to what I did in this study.

Otoya-Knapp (2001) studied the cases of four pre-service teachers, who were enrolled in a critical multicultural education course. Throughout a semester, the student teachers read and discussed topics that challenged their thinking about race, class, gender, and sexuality. The main source of data were the teachers' portfolios, which contained journal reflections on the assigned readings, opinion pieces on newspaper articles they chose about education issues, midterm and final papers, and classroom observations. In addition, participant observations were recorded after class and personal communications between the instructor and students were documented.

McIntyre (1997) studied a group of white middle-class female student teachers in their quest to examine their "whiteness" and develop teaching strategies that aim to disrupt and eliminate the oppressiveness of white privilege in education. In addition, they explored how racial identity is implicated in the formation and implementation of teaching practices. The methods of data collection included semistructured interviews, field notes, and a personal journal kept by the researcher. In addition, eight group sessions were audiotape and transcribed. The group sessions allowed participants to discuss readings, share personal stories and teaching experiences related to race, and engage in critical dialogue about issues concerning whiteness, white racial identity, race, racism, and teaching.

Freedman, Simons, Kalnin, and Casareno (1999) investigated issues of learning, bias, inequality, and diversity within a national teacher-research network composed of English and social studies teachers and university faculty. They found teacher research that focused on diversity and social injustice in education had a direct link to changing learning as well as transforming students, teachers, and the teacher researchers themselves. This transformation was possible because both the teachers and students underwent changes as they were exposed to knowledge about racism and inequality, which are topics generally not part of the regular school curriculum. This same exposure empowered teacher educators to think more globally about their own curriculum and

practice and how they (and their pre-service teachers) could impact school policies and practices.

In my reading of teacher research studies, I discovered the work of my major professor Peg Graham (Graham, Hudson-Ross, Adkins, McWhorter, & Stewart, 1999) and two professors at the University of Georgia (Fecho & Allen, in press; Fecho & Allen, 2001; Bisplinghoff & Allen, 1998). I was impressed by the abundance of topics that these research groups have explored, but I made an interesting observation of one factor – one drawback -- that all these studies had in common: Except for the studies involving Fecho and Allen (in press, 2001) and Freedman, Simons, Kalnin, and Casareno (1999)¹³, the researchers and teacher participants were European women. Like Fecho and Allen (in press), I questioned: Why did these studies rarely include males or people of color (of either gender) conducting teacher research? Was it because such articles were not being written or published? Like Delpit (1995), I wonder what the research community is either ignoring or misinterpreting because of its failure to invite and hear other voices. Delpit writes about this “silenced dialogue” in schools and universities where the participation of teachers of color is conspicuously absent. They are seldom included in conversations about what is good for children. This is how my study will be different from other studies on teacher research and teacher book clubs. My study includes a diverse group of participants in terms of race.

The Pilot Study

During the 2001-2002 school year, all ten members of the Lakeside High School English Department agreed to participate in a pilot study entitled “How High School Teachers Use Literature to Talk about Race.” In that qualitative study, I investigated

¹³I was intrigued by the study conducted by Freedman et al. (1999), which investigated the issues of difference and social justice with a diverse group of high school English and social studies teachers and university faculty.

teachers' practices/strategies involving use of multicultural literature, approaches to discussing issues of race/racism with students, and experiences with book clubs. The purpose of this pilot study was to examine the attitudes and pedagogical practices of how members of a high school English department use literature to either deliberately ignore or confront the issue of race and/or racism with their students. The following research questions guided the pilot study:

1. How do teachers approach discussions of racism in their classrooms?
2. Are discussions about race brought up as a result of a deliberate attempt by the teacher or do these discussions spring up unintentionally?
3. Regarding personal pedagogy, do teachers use multicultural literature, the traditional canon, or a combination of the two? Why?
4. What experiences do teachers have with participating in book clubs?

In my effort to answer my research questions, ten members of Lakeside High School completed a teacher survey, which contained eleven, open-ended questions dealing with use of multicultural literature, approaches to dealing with discussions on racism, and experience with book clubs. From the survey responses, I selected to interview the four senior members of the department (Kasey, Phyllis, Al, and Peter¹⁴). Averaging 30-45 minutes, the interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Participants were presented with a written copy of their transcript for review and no clarification was needed during the transcript review session.

Using the teacher surveys, I was able to make a list of multicultural literature taught by the teachers. From the list, I collected the novels and texts cited. Next, I made copies of each grade level's (grades 9-12) table of contents of *Elements*, the literature

¹⁴Peter chaired the English department when I conducted the pilot study. During the 2001-2002 school year (the year of the dissertation study), Al took over the position. Peter declined an invitation to be part of the book club; he retired at the end of the school year.

text. Using the list and the tables of contents, I was able to highlight every multicultural poem, play, and short story mentioned by the participants. Data from these multiple sources -- survey forms, teacher interviews, and archival information (books, texts, and tables of contents) -- were analyzed by looking for patterns in the interviews and documents that responded to the research questions. My analysis revealed several themes.

First, teachers selected literature according to their own personal preferences (what they enjoyed reading) coupled with what they were exposed to in their high school and college English classes. A second theme was that teachers encountered forms of student resistance when discussions centered on race or involved multicultural literature. A final theme was the strategies teachers developed in an effort to counter student resistance to race and multicultural literature. Participants were informed orally and in writing (the consent form) of my intent to use the knowledge I gained from the pilot study as foundation to the dissertation.

Readers may look at my questions for the pilot and dissertation study and notice I made I change. Why? In the pilot study, I was interested in finding out how teachers approached discussions of racism in their classrooms. Along this same vein, I wanted to know whether these dialogues about race evolved as a result of a deliberate attempt by the teacher, the types of literature chosen by the teacher, or a combination of both. I also wanted to know how each teacher's personal pedagogy related to his/her selections of literature representing primarily the traditional canon, multicultural literature, or a combination of the two. Finally, and most importantly, I wanted to know what, if any, experience teachers had with participating in book clubs and how interested they would be in a book started within the English department.

I must also emphasize that when I conducted this pilot study, it was done to satisfy the requirements of two qualitative research classes: To learn how to code, analyze, and represent data. The findings of my pilot study did not reflect a theoretical framework. My pilot study served as an information-gathering tool. The information gathered from the

pilot study would serve as a foundation for this dissertation study. The pilot study enabled me to see how teachers *said* they dealt with issues of race with their students using literature. Some of them felt uncomfortable talking about race because they felt they did not possess the language. Others clung to the traditional canon because they were imitating what they had been taught in their own high school and college English classes.

Finally, the result of the pilot study revealed an almost unanimous support of a teacher book club being developed for members of the English departments to read and discuss issues of race. The change in the research questions from the pilot study to the dissertation reflects a change in focus. Unlike the pilot study, the dissertation study's coding, analysis, and data representation are accomplished through the lens of a theoretical framework. The teacher book club format was used as a vehicle to promote a risk-friendly environment for Lakeside High School English teachers as they negotiated how they personally and professionally dealt with the issue of race as they read and discussed five books.

Entering the Field

For me, doing the paperwork necessary to begin this study was a job in itself. March to September 2002 was the most hectic time of my life. During what I called the "pre-implementation stage," I continually updated the teachers about the progress of the dissertation research and expectations for their participation. Members were given their latest update about the book club during the August 5, 2002, departmental meeting. During that meeting everyone was informed about the expectations for participation, and the novels and reading deadlines were distributed.

In an effort to gain entrée to my own school, I wrote and distributed letters of authorization to the Annox County School District curriculum director and to my principal Martha Eckerd. My research proposal was accepted by the dissertation committee in September 2002; I received IRB approval just days away from the first

meeting scheduled for October 14, 2002 meeting. Teachers were officially invited to participate and consent forms were distributed, signed, and returned.

Participants were guaranteed confidentiality such that their identities will not be revealed or linked in any way to their responses during book club discussions or interviewing. Audiotapes and transcripts will remain with the researcher and will be destroyed no later than January 1, 2012. Names and background information were changed in the research report so that confidentiality is ensured. Pseudonyms chosen by the participants themselves were used in all written documents. Copies of participant portraits and transcripts of the interviews were provided to the teacher participants. Copies of all five book club discussions were placed in a three-ring binder, which was available for book club members to peruse at their leisure in the English department workroom plus individual copies were made available upon request¹⁵. Besides the researcher, the transcriber was the only person who had access to the audiotapes. She was carefully instructed concerning the critical importance of confidentiality.

Site of Research and Study Sample

In this critical study, I interviewed and observed 10 English teachers who participated in a book club at their urban public high school in a southeastern college town and examined how they negotiated issues of race in five books using critical race theory. Lakeside High School, a local public high school located in an urban school district in a small college town in the Southeast, was selected as the site for this research because it was the researcher's place of employment. The pool of participants – Al, Daphne, Jane, Kasey, Lisa Lloyd, Paul, Phyllis, Rico, Roberto, and Victoria (the researcher) -- was drawn from the Lakeside High School English Department.

¹⁵Only English teachers had access to the locked English department workroom.

The six white males, two white females, and two African American females were selected to participate in this research because they are the researcher's colleagues. They range in age from 25 to 60 years of age and represent teaching experience from one to 26 years. The initial group of participants included the researcher's student teacher Terry, but he asked to be dropped from the study due to his heavy course load at McPherson College. After the first meeting, the ESOL teacher, who divides his time between the English and foreign language departments, asked to participate in the study. Only one member of the English department chose not to participate in the study. (See page 87 for Table 4.1, which contains demographic information on the participants.)

Table 4.1. Teacher Book Club Participants

Name	Age	Teaching Experience	Race	Gender
Paul	32	8	White	Male
¹⁶ Jane	34	10	White	Female
Lisa	25	1	Black	Female
Rico	42	14	White	Male
Kasey	46	21	White	Male
Roberto	26	1	White	Male
¹⁷ Al	60	22	White	Male
Daphne	37	7	White	Female
Phyllis	49	26	Black	Female
Lloyd	35	5	White	Male
¹⁸ Victoria	37	15	Black	Female

¹⁶Jane is married to Lloyd.

¹⁷Al served as the head of the English department.

¹⁸Victoria wore three hats in the teacher book club study: researcher, book club facilitator, and participant.

Data Collection

Crotty (1998) defines methods as “the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyze data related to some research question or hypothesis” (p. 3). In this study, I used the lens of critical race theory to examine the conversations of teachers as they discussed issues of race and racism in five books. During our August 2002 department meeting, teachers were given the five novels and a reading schedule. Data collection began with the first book club meeting on October 14, 2002 (following IRB approval). Book club meetings took place over a five-month period at either 8:30 or 11:30 A.M. Grant money allowed me to pay for either breakfast or lunch for each meeting. With enthusiastic support and approval of the department, I chose October 14, 2002, November 5, 2002, December 20, 2002, and January 3, 2003, as meeting dates because they were scheduled as teacher planning days. For teachers, this means a day without students but one filled with meetings. The fifth and final meeting took place during the month of February. Since February was the only month without a planning day, the teachers and I agreed to meet February 6, 2003, at 3:45 P.M. Appetizers and drinks were provided at that meeting.

I facilitated and documented monthly book club meetings in four ways, including participant observation and field notes, researcher’s log, audiotapes, and interviews. Studies on teacher research and teacher book clubs supported the four methods of data collection I used (Elliot, 1991; Flood, et. al., 1994; Flood et. al 1995; Florio-Ruane et. al, 1997; Florio-Ruane & Raphael, 1999; Macintyre, 2000; Florio-Ruane, 2001).

First, I observed the participants and took field notes. Dewalt and Dewalt (2002), Macintyre (2000), Glesne (1999), Burns (1999), Elliot (1991), and Spradley (1980) praise the value of participant observation. Spradley (1980) says the participant observer comes to a social situation with two purposes. First, the participant observer is there to engage in activities appropriate to the situation. Second, the participant observer actually observes the activities, people, and physical aspects of the situation. The participant observer’s job is to become explicitly aware of things normally blocked out by others. To do this, one

should approach observation like a wide-angle lens, taking in a broader lens of information. Acting as both an insider and outsider simultaneously, the researcher must increase her introspectiveness, using herself as the research instrument.

Glesne (1999) notes that an observer can adopt four different stances: 1) observer (the researcher has no involvement with the people or activities studied); 2) observer as participant (the researcher serves primarily as an observer but has some interaction with participants); 3) participant as observer (the researcher becomes more of a participant and less of an observer); and 4) full participant (the researcher serves simultaneously as a member of the research community as well as the investigator).

In a similar fashion, Spradley (1980) suggests that participation comes in five different degrees: 1) nonparticipation (the researcher has no involvement with the people or activities studied); 2) passive (the researcher is present but does not participate with people); 3) moderate participation (the researcher balances participation with observation); 4) active participation (the researcher does what the people are doing); and 5) complete participation (the researcher studies a situation where he/she is already an ordinary participant). Acting as a book club member, facilitator, and researcher, I was a participant involved in complete participation.

Macintyre (2000), Glesne (1999), Burns (1999), and Spradley (1980) support researchers writing field notes as a way of recording descriptions of people, places, events, activities and conversations and making notes about behavior and patterns. In addition, field notes can serve as a place to write down ideas, reflections and hunches or to make quick observations of something happening. An added advantage to field notes is that recording can be on the spot or recorded later. "From my perspective, acquiring the skill and understanding for conducting qualitative inquiry has three dimensions: reading, reflecting, and doing. Preferably, all three are done simultaneously so that the outcomes of each continually interact" (Glesne, 1999, p. xiii).

I recorded field notes of my observations both during and after book club meetings. During the first 20 minutes of the first book club meeting, I observed that my note-taking made several teachers self-conscious. For example, a colleague sitting next to me kept leaning over to see what I was writing. He actually took my pencil and wrote a note to me on my stenographer's pad. Several teachers sitting across from me seemed to be curious about what I was writing. After about 30 minutes, I decided I could not fully participate and take notes so I put my pencil down. This action caused both my colleagues and me to relax and concentrate on the conversations taking place.

What would I do about field notes? I had an idea: I would use my tape recorder to "talk" my field notes immediately following the meetings. This system worked better than trying to write or type field notes because time was a factor. Usually another meeting was scheduled immediately after the book club meetings. I also kept a field note journal in my classroom desk to record data that was occurring between meetings.

In addition to field notes, I kept a researcher's journal where I recorded my own observations and personal reflections about the study. I started this journal as a haven for recording successes, internal conflicts, and steps in the research process during the doctoral comprehensive exams process.¹⁹ I became so dependent on this journal that I continued it throughout the dissertation study. Taking Glesne's (1999) advice, I used my research journal as if it were a diary to reflect both before and after each step of the research journey. Unbeknownst to my writer partners and major professor, my points of discussions with them came from notes written in my journal. This research journal described my research practices – in essence serving as "an audit trail of the research" or "personal methods book that contains the insights that result from the interaction of reading, reflecting, and doing good research" (Glesne, 1999, p. xiii).

¹⁹Actually, I began the research journal through a research class I took during the summer of 2001. I continued it during my doctoral comprehensive exams as a way of capturing my thoughts in the early stages of preparation for the study.

The book club discussions were audio taped and transcribed after I received permission from the participants. Some people may believe audio taping is a new method of data collection, but it has been widely used for some time now. Linguistic anthropologists make extensive use of audio recording of normal, everyday encounters. It is complemented by participant-observation and field techniques such as ethnographic notes, drawings, maps, interviews, and still photography (Duranti, 1997).

Finally, participants were interviewed about their experience at the conclusion of the book club experience. The purpose of the semi-structured interview was to show whether the book club experience had any impact on the way teachers viewed the role of race in their lives and in teaching. Studies support interviewing as a note-worthy method of data collection (Burns, 1999; Elliot, 1991; Glesne, 1999; Kvale, 1996; Macintyre, 2000; Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Seidman, 1998, 1991). I chose this method of data collection because I was interested in other people's stories (Seidman, 1991, 1998).

According to Kvale (1996), an interview is "literally an inter view, an inter change of view between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest" (p. 2). During the interview process, the research interviewer is the research instrument. "Advance preparation is essential to the interaction and outcome of an interview" (Kvale, 1996, p. 126). Preparation for the interview included preparing an interview guide, which lists the topics and their sequence in the interview. Interviewing was advantageous because it is most consistent with people's ability to make meaning through language and affirms the importance of the individual without denigrating the possibility of community or collaboration (Seidman, 1991). "It is a powerful way to gain insight into educational issues through understanding the experience of the individuals whose lives constitute education" (Seidman, 1998, p. 7). In the semistructured, or focused, interview, the interviewer introduces the topic and guides the discussion by asking specific questions (Kvale, 1996; Rubin and Rubin, 1995). I viewed my role as the interviewer for the teacher book club as Kvale's (1996) metaphor of the miner – one whose role is to unearth

knowledge, or buried metal. The interview process was seen as the potential for nuggets of essential meaning, or knowledge that was waiting to be unearthed – uncontaminated -- by me, the researcher or miner. As the interviewer, it was my job to dig for nuggets of data and meaning out of my participants' experiences.

My research dictated bringing different kinds of evidence from different angles and perspectives together so I could compare and contrast them. Originally, the term “triangulation” was taken from surveying and navigation; in the research arena, it is the practice of relying on multiple data collection methods (Glesne, 1999). Research supports triangulation as a way of increasing the validity and reliability of research findings (Elliot, 1991; Glesne, 1999; Burns, 1999). In addition, teacher book clubs research supports the use of these same methods within one study (Fisher & Shapiro, 1991; Flood et al., 1994; Florio-Ruane, 1994; Flood et al., 1995; Florio-Ruane et. al., 1997; Florio-Ruane et. al., 1999; Florio-Ruane, 2001)

Data Analysis

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) suggest that the analysis of any qualitative data can prove to be an intimidating task even to the most experienced researcher. With the various methods of data collection I used in this study, I believed the key to successful data analysis was collection and analysis happening simultaneously. Coffey and Atkinson agree.

Letting data accumulate without preliminary analysis along the way is a recipe for unhappiness, if not total disaster. We must recognize that it can happen, and however diligent we are, we will face major tasks of data management and analysis at some state in a research career. Paralysis and despair can easily occur (p. 2).

After studying various methods of inductive analysis in my second qualitative research class, I became immediately intrigued by open coding. I loved open coding because it produced immediate results, and I found the process relatively simple to do.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) define open coding as an “analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data” (p. 101). Using this method in my pilot study, I was able to open up one interview with the purpose of exposing the thoughts, ideas, and meanings contained within. Using this process, I was able to uncover, name, and develop concepts in my own data. Breaking my data into discrete parts (events, acts, ideas, or incidents), I was able to examine my researcher’s log and interview and book club discussion transcripts for similarities and differences. Those discrete parts, found to be similar in nature or related in meaning, were then grouped into categories. Open coding can be done in one of three ways: line-by-line analysis, analyzing a whole sentence or paragraph, and perusing the entire document

For the purpose of analyzing my data for this study, I chose to use the line-by-line open coding analysis. Line-by-line analysis involves closely examining data by each line and then defining the actions or events within it. Charmaz (2000, 2002) maintains that this type of data analysis forces the researcher to study her data throughout and remain attuned to her participants’ views. I used Bogdan and Biklen’s (1982) discovery and coding process on my field notes, researcher’s log, and interview and book club discussion transcripts..

First, I read through each data set several times to become familiar with the data again. Because I had spent the past month working on other areas of the dissertation, I felt the data trail had grown cold. As if I were preparing for a date, I wanted to reacquaint myself with the data. I did not want the experience to be rushed, interrupted, or constrained by taking notes. I wanted to enjoy this date with the data without any interruptions. I wanted to enjoy the words of the participants freely as they washed over my brain – similar to the way I experience a novel -- so I resisted the urge to make any notes during the initial run-throughs. Next, I began open coding by highlighting recurring words, phrases, events, behavior, and other patterns for each line of the book club discussion transcripts, interviews, and researcher’s log. At this point, I began writing

possible codes, ideas, and hunches in the margins for each piece of data. For example, in my examining and coding the first ten pages of the first book club discussion on *American Knees*, I wrote the following comments in the margins: “white privilege,” “race is not an issue,” “concerns as a white woman,” “makes references to movies,” “telling a story,” “individual racism” “effects of book club participation,” “resistance to reading,” “makes references to titles of books,” and “stereotypes.”

Next, I began looking for themes. Ryan and Bernard (2000) describe themes as abstract, fuzzy constructs that researchers identify before, during, and after data collection. I able to group codes together under common titles, or themes that captured the essence of the piece of data. For example several of my codes – “telling a story,” “giving an anecdote,” and “giving an example” – I was able to group together under the theme “stories.” Other examples of themes included: “institutional racism,” “stereotypes,” “teacher book club tensions,” “teacher book club benefits,” and “teacher resistance.”

Themes can come from a variety of sources, including the researcher’s own experiences with the subject matter, the researcher’s set of hypotheses, the literature review, the theoretical or conceptual framework, or even the text itself (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Ryan & Bernard, 2000). I found this fact to be true as my first set of themes from open coding came from several of these sources. According to Coffey and Atkinson (1996), an alternative way to start coding is to create a list of codes prior to reading the data or even prior to the fieldwork. (I did not use this method.) After the process of open coding, I turned to my theoretical framework and my research questions, where I began to develop a list of themes to be used as codes (see Table 3). Coffey and Atkinson (1996) support this method of beginning to code by starting from the research questions. I returned to the data set and began matching codes, ideas, and hunches written in the margins that corresponded to CRT themes (see Table 4.2) and the research

questions as well as creating general codes for everything else that was occurring within the data.

Table 4.2

Themes of CRT	
•	Stories
•	Stereotyping
•	White Privilege
•	Racist policies and practices of schools
•	Claims of neutrality, objectivity, color blindness, and meritocracy

Using five to six different stenographer pads, I organized and grouped common information. From that common information emerged 13 themes: participants questioned, participants resisted, participants referenced/related/connected, stories, white privilege, acknowledgement of stereotypes, family influences, issues in books, institutional racism in schools, roles, tensions, evaluations/impressions, and effects/benefits. In January 2004, I hand-delivered a letter to nine of my ten colleagues and invited their feedback. The typed letter listed the 13 themes, their three corresponding categories, and supporting data for each of the themes (see Appendix F). I emailed the letter to Phyllis, who was now living in another southeastern state. All ten of the respondents participated in the member checks through either email or through personal contact.

After developing the themes, my next step was made based on the advice of Miles and Huberman (as cited in Ryan & Bernard, 2000): Link the set of themes to each other in a theoretical model. My intuition led me back to my research questions, which asked:

1. How do various teachers respond to texts that include themes about stereotypes and racism?
2. What connections do teachers make about race in the texts to their own lives?

3. In what ways has being a member of a book discussion club been meaningful in the lives of these secondary English teachers?

My intuition led me to my research questions for two good reasons. First, my effort to perfect the wording of the themes led to a revision in the themes by the time the reading committee²⁰ read an entire draft of the dissertation. Second, I was able to formulate my three conceptual categories -- teacher response, connections to race, and the TBC²¹ experience. All 13 themes fit comfortably within the three conceptual categories linked to my research questions.

Feedback I received from my reading committee convinced me that I needed to reconsider the 13 categories, and with the help of my NCTE CNV mentor²², I downsized my 13 themes to nine (see Table 4.3 on the next page).

Table 4.3. Conceptual categories and corresponding themes²³

Conceptual categories	Themes
Teacher response	1. Making connections 2. Offering resistance 3. Expressing support/approval
Connections to race	4. Stories 5. Stereotypes 6. White privilege 7. Institutional racism
The TBC experience	8. Roles 9. Benefits

²⁰The reading committee consisted of my major professor and two other members of the dissertation committee.

²¹TBC stands for Teacher Book Club.

²²Arnetha Bell, a professor from Stanford University, served as my mentor during my 2002-2004 participation in the National Council of Teachers of English Cultivating New Voices among Scholars of Color Grant Program.

²³Themes were derived from transcripts of book club meetings and individual interviews plus the researcher's field notes.

Managing the Study

In my efforts to manage this qualitative study, I viewed my research study as a process that was perpetual, flexible, and cyclical. Each time I facilitated a book club meeting, the process was the same -- not necessarily in any particular order. I was observing, reflecting, analyzing, writing, reading, interviewing, listening, member-checking, and debriefing. Appendix E provides a chart outlining a timeline I used for the teacher book club dissertation study. The chart provided me with an organized, workable schedule for each step of the process. It was like a paper clock that kept ticking, and thus, kept me working to stay on schedule.

Member Checks

As I stated earlier in this chapter, I continually involved colleagues in the data collection, analysis, and interpretation. I asked for feedback from book club members themselves as well outsiders. This meant offering copies of transcripts (book club discussions, individual interviews, and participant portraits), drafts of chapters, and the entire dissertation. In addition, each of my colleagues received a letter containing my initial findings and an invitation to provide feedback (see Appendix F). An email served as a reminder to those members who had not responded by the initial deadline (see Appendix G). All ten teachers responded: seven by email and three in person (see Appendix H). Throughout this study, I used my field notes and personal reflections in my journal to critique my feelings and attitudes. Assisting me in this process were my writing partners, major professor, NCTE CNV mentor Arnetha Ball, the transcriber, and my NCTE CNV peers²⁴. Also, two Lakeside High School High teachers, who obtained their doctorates from area universities, served me in this capacity.²⁵

²⁴I was a participant in the National Council of Teachers of English Cultivating New Voices Among Scholars of Color Grant Program during 2002-2004. Through that program, I was able to meet and receive feedback for my work from my mentor as well as other doctoral students of color from across the country.

²⁵One teacher was a new member of the English department during the 2003-2004 school year. She did not participate in the book club. The other teacher was a special education teacher.

Data Representation

It was not until the decade of the 1990s that a revolution began within the world of social science research. Until then, the message to emerging scholars was simple: If you desire success in the research world, get published. To get published, you must follow the traditional conception of research and knowledge (Eisner, 1997; Commeyras & Montsi, 2000). In discussions of qualitative research methods, having your work published meant writing ethnography, because it was safe, proven, and accepted. And above all, it was definitely considered publishable.

Discussions followed. Qualitative research methods were not solely used by ethnographers, were they? Sociologists, clinical psychologists, historians, and writers of all kinds used these methods. Discussions such as these led to bigger debates: What constitutes legitimate forms of inquiry in education? Of those forms of inquiry, what should count as research (Eisner, 1997)? From these discussions and debates, conversations in the 1990s about alternative forms of data representation began and have continued on into the millennium (Barone & Eisner, 1997; Bochner & Ellis, 2002; Denzin, 1997; Eisner, 1997; Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Richardson, 1993, 1997, 2002). Stories, pictures, diagrams, maps, theater, demonstrations, poetry, and the novel are just a few examples that alternative forms of data can take (Eisner, 1997; Denzin, 1997).

As Eisner (1997) suggests, I found the two exclusive agents of meaning in social science – language and number – too confining. “What is clear is that forms we use to inform, the forms that we display what we make of what we have chosen to call ‘data’ are as old as the hills; they may be new in the context of educational research, but they have been around forever” (p. 5). It was my “desire to open up new ways of seeing and saying” and to “stand on the edge of inquiry” (p. 4). In my study of alternative ways to illuminate what I learned in my study, I finally decided on two additional forms of data representation for this study: poetic transcription and editorial cartoons.

Poetic transcription. It was sociologist Laurel Richardson who was credited as the first empirical researcher to construct a poem from interview data (Commeyras & Montsi, 2000) and then propose it as a method for “seeing through and beyond sociological naturalism” (Richardson, 1993). Others have either imitated Richardson (Kumashiro, 1999) or expanded the idea by constructing data poems out of student-written essays (Commeyras & Montsi, 2000) or evaluation comments from college students (Fecho, Commeyras, Bauer, & Font, 2000).

What attracted me to this method of analysis was its sense of giving the researcher a license to be creative yet encouraging me to use the words of my participants. As an English teacher, I am quite familiar with the poetic form so the opportunity to use poetic transcription to create “poem-like pieces from the words of interviewees” (Glesne, 1999, p. 183) is exciting. In one of my research courses, I first used poetic transcription in my research journal to make sense of the dense articles I was reading. I was pleased with the resulting poems, and it helped me with my comprehension. In another research course, I used it once again to help me make sense of my interview transcripts for my pilot study.

Why use poetry as a method of analysis? “Poetry was invented to say what words can never say. Poetry transcends the limits of language and evokes what cannot be articulated” (Eisner, 1997, p. 5). I decided to employ the poetic in data interpretation in both my pilot and dissertation studies for several reasons. First, like Commeyras and Montsi (2000), I wanted to convey understanding that was different from scientific expository writing or narrative prose. Second, like Kumashiro (1999), I wanted to construct poems using the words and experiences of my participants. Third, like Glesne (1999), I wanted to get at the essence of what my participants said, the emotions expressed, and the rhythm of speaking.

Because my first method of analysis (open coding) resulted in themes, I used poetic transcription to compose poetry using the participants’ words as support. Each time I have used this method, I have had to answer: What would the poems say? How would

they flow? Where would I start? How would I determine what words got into the poem? In constructing the poems for this dissertation, I followed the advice of scholars in the field of poetic transcription (Richardson, 1993, 1997, 2002; Kumashiro, 1999; Glesne, 1999).

Editorial cartoons. Besides storytelling, people convey what they know by using pictures. “Pictures depict. They do many things; among the most important is the obvious: They show us what things, places, and people look like” (Eisner, 1997, p.5). The most recent edition of the APA²⁶ manual recognizes illustrations other than tables as figures. Types of figures used to represent data include graphs, charts, maps, drawings, and photographs.

During the analysis stage of this study, there were three big pictures that kept nagging at me. Those “pictures with strong messages” were in the form of editorial cartoons that kept swimming around in my head. Maybe my thoughts about using editorial cartoons in this dissertation came from my assigning this task to my students throughout the years. I was excited! My excitement quickly faded as I began conducting numerous searches to find out what work had been done in this area. My search revealed a plethora of research on either the use of editorial cartoons as a teaching strategy or the examination of people’s reactions to them. Multiple attempts (even with several different people at the university’s main and science library) to locate instances where qualitative researchers used editorial cartoons as data representation yielded no results. Giarelli & Tuman (2003) explore the use of cartoons as a useful source of data. They argue, “Cartoons are a legitimate, interesting, and engaging source of data” (p. 945). Why use cartoons? Giarelli and Tulman (2003) cite several advantages. First, personal preferences might dictate a reader preferring an image representation of data. Second, cartoon humor

²⁶The APA abbreviation refers to the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (5th ed.) Published in 2001. This was the style manual I used in writing this study.

can reveal common dominant assumptions, values, and expectations as well as mock, point out, or challenge the status quo. Third, cartoons represent reality constructed by the cartoonist. Finally, cartoons are generally accessible to large, diverse audiences.

Perhaps my use of editorial cartoons in this study is groundbreaking. I have taken on Eisner's (1997) challenge. I have dared to stand at the edge of methodological inquiry. I agree with Eisner: "Edges can be treacherous, but they can also be exciting" (p. 4). My purposes in using editorial cartoons match those Eisner lists as advantages of using alternative forms of data representation: 1) to shape experience and enlarge understanding of what happened in the teacher book club; 2) to engender a sense of empathy and not criticism for the teachers who participated; 3) to provide a sense of authenticity to the research; 4) to generate insight and call attention to the complexity of this study and its participants; 5) to increase the variety of questions that can be asked about this study; and 6) to appeal to individual aptitudes (I would also add tastes and intelligences.²⁷).

A growing number of educational researchers have begun to explore arts-based educational research ("Arts-based educational research," 2002; Barone & Eisner, 1997; Fordon, 2000; Springgay, 2002). "Arts-based research is defined by the presence of certain aesthetic qualities or design elements that infuse the inquiry and its writing" (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 73). Some arts-based genres that have gained prominence and acceptance among respected educational researchers include: educational criticism, narrative storytelling, literary case studies, literary history, literary ethnography, life histories, teacher and student lore, novels, and short stories. To some degree, Barone and Eisner (1997) argue that aesthetic elements are already evident in educational research. The more pronounced they are, the more the research can be characterized as arts-based.

²⁷By intelligences, I am referring to Howard Gardner's groundbreaking *Multiple Intelligences* (1993). Once I read Thomas Armstrong's *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom* (1994), it totally changed my teaching instruction and strategies that I used with my students.

Barone and Eisner submit that there are seven features or elements of arts-based educational inquiry: 1) the creation of a virtual reality; 2) the presence of ambiguity; 3) the use of expressive language; 4) the use of contextualized and vernacular language; 5) the promotion of empathy; 6) the personal signature of the writer/researcher; and 7) the presence of aesthetic form.

I would argue that my use of poetic transcription and editorial cartoons qualifies my study as arts-based because my work exhibits five of the elements: the presence of ambiguity, the use of expressive language, the use of contextualized and vernacular language, the promotion of empathy and the personal signature of the researcher. First, my overall purpose in using these forms of data representation to illustrate my findings is to encourage multiple readings and a variety of interpretations. Second, I hope my use of language in this study is appealing and accessible to a variety of readers, including what Barone & Eisner (1997) call “nonresearcher readers.” Third, I talked earlier in this study about my constant thoughts of “intersubjectivities” as I have written about my colleagues. I hope my construction of words will promote readers to see my colleagues’ own perspectives rather than rushing to judge them. Finally, the work in this dissertation – both traditional and untraditional – signifies my own vision and represents my own personality.

Giarelli and Tulman (2003) argue that researchers should consider cartoons as legitimate, interesting, and engaging sources of data. In chapter five of this document, I place a new argument on the table for discussion and debate: Editorial cartoons are a legitimate, interesting, and engaging way of representing data²⁸.

²⁸The three editorial cartoons used in chapter five of this dissertation were my ideas (drawings and the words), but I did not have the artistic ability to carry them out. I sketched out my ideas and paid Faatimah Stevens, a reputable high school art student to draw them for me.

Researcher's Role

Glesne (1999) calls the type of qualitative research I did with my colleagues “backyard research” because I chose to study my own place of employment. I have to admit that my reasons for choosing my place of employment are selfish. Doing so all but eliminated two hurdles early in process: access and rapport. I had easy access to my colleagues and a place for a meeting. Rapport was already established. Of most interest to me was that this research would be useful in the personal and professional lives of everyone involved.

What became a true balancing act for me was my role in the process. I was forever questioning myself: How do my colleagues view me? How will this process change the way they view me and vice versa? I was your one-size-fits-all researcher, book club facilitator, and participant. I have to admit I found myself in a state of confusion over which role I was in or should be playing. Sometimes I found myself acting as all three simultaneously. These roles made me highly conscious of the significance my research decisions would have on the process as well the participants, including my selections of the texts, when I chose to speak or remain silent in the book club meetings, my decision to not take notes during the book club discussions, and even where I chose to sit (in the middle of the table) during the meetings.

I used multiple opportunities (department meetings, small group discussions, and one-on-one situations) to explain the purpose of my research. Participants knew that it was the “race talk” that I was after in these meetings. Although that was my objective, it was my choice to allow the conversations to flow naturally. I did not want to be a race dictator and push the issue, nor did I redirect conversations if they got off topic. For me, being a participant meant being fully involved in the conversation. Listening. Thinking. Processing. Responding. I saw my role as the facilitator to start on time and to sense “instinctively” from my colleagues when the conversation should end. This seemed to work well until the final book club meeting in February in which we discussed Julie

Landsman's *A White Teacher Talks About Race*. Perhaps I should have taken more of an aggressive role to keep us all on track. Participants expressed their disappointment that, from their perspective, we did not continue our level of race talk. (Note: The book club meeting and interview transcripts did not support their feeling. Race was implied in issues brought up in that final discussion.) The only other time that the issue of my role as the researcher came up was when certain participants questioned my selections of particular texts that made them uncomfortable. This experience taught me that my colleagues held a certain ideal of what they thought I represented or perhaps who I was as a person.

Ethical Issues

Ethical issues are a major concern in qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Christians, 2000; Glesne, 1999; Hoonaard, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 2001; Spradley, 1979). Doing backyard research can create ethical and political dilemmas (Glesne, 1999). Fieldwork can be messy, because it involves "conflicting values and a wide range of possible choices" (Spradley, 1979, p. 34). I followed the American Anthropological Association's *Principles of Professional Responsibility* by adhering to six principles (Spradley, 1979).

First, I considered my participants my paramount responsibility in this research. Whenever there was even a hint of conflict, my colleagues came first. I did everything within my power to protect their welfare and to honor their dignity and privacy. Second, it was my responsibility to safeguard rights, interests, and sensitivities of my participants. If colleagues pulled me aside and told me things "off the record," then that information did not find its way into my field notes. In writing the implications of this research, I kept in mind my participants' vantage point. Third, I communicated my research objectives throughout the process. Teachers were given informed consent documents at the start of the research process and the methods of data collection were explained to them.

Fourth, the right to privacy for the participants was important to me. The consent process involved each participant selecting his or her own pseudonym. This pseudonym

was used in all written documents, including my field notes. Fifth, it was important that I in no way exploit my participants for my own personal gain. Although I knew participants would gain personal and professional benefits from participating in the book club discussions and the results of this study, I worked hard to make sure that participants reaped tangible benefits from their participation early on, including grant money I secured which paid for their five novels, refreshments during the meetings, and \$300 to purchase multicultural novels for their own classrooms.

Finally, I made reports available to my colleagues, including book club discussion and interview transcripts, participant portraits, drafts of chapters, and the entire dissertation. I was very careful that my colleagues did not feel pressured to read the reports, but I extended invitations for feedback along with friendly email reminders of deadlines. For several months, teachers had access to a three-ring binder containing copies of the book club discussions. This binder was placed in the English workroom, which remained locked.

As an established insider, I did not want to succumb to the temptation to become a covert observer. It was important that I fully participate in this endeavor with my colleagues. It was also important that my colleagues in turn participate fully during the writing stage. This meant offering them multiple opportunities to provide comments or critiques on my interpretations.

Researcher Subjectivity

Peshkin (1988) wrote concerning the issue of researcher subjectivity: “It is no more useful for researchers to acknowledge simply that subjectivity is an invariable component of their research than it is for them to assert that their ideal is to achieve objectivity” (p. 17). “Subjectivity” used to be a dirty word in research. It was thought that subjectivity should be kept out of one’s research. In Peshkin’s eyes, one’s subjectivity is like a garment a researcher wears that cannot be removed. Recognizing that subjectivity is operating during the entire research process, it is a popular practice for researchers to now

identify their subjectivities and monitor them for more trustworthy research (Glesne, 1999). Left unexamined, subjectivity can have the capacity to “filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe, and misconstrue what transpire from the outset of a research project to its culmination in a written statement” (p. 17).

From the beginning of the research process, I confessed my subjectivity. Throughout the process, I have worked to keep my subjectivity at the forefront. Writing about my emotions at different stages of the process has been both therapeutic and helpful. Therapeutically, I get my emotions out. Writing about them in my research journal has allowed me to keep track of my subjectivities. By showing my subjectivities – my big, fat warts – I have learned more about my own values, attitudes, beliefs, interests, and needs. In writing chapter one of this dissertation, my subjectivities allowed me to tell a story of how I came to be the person and researcher that I am today. Equally important to acknowledging my own subjectivity is my awareness of *intersubjectivity*, “a term used to highlight the fact that the subjectivities that shape research are not those of the researcher alone” (Glesne, 1999, p. 110). For example, intersubjectivity was at work during data interpretation when I found myself constantly thinking about the subjectivities of my colleagues. Throughout this stage, I kept asking myself: How will my colleagues react to my interpretation? Does my interpretation romanticize? Is my interpretation in any way paternalistic? Both subjectivity and intersubjectivity kept my arrogance in check. I was quite humbled throughout the entire process.

Validity and Reliability

The plethora of studies on trustworthiness, or research validity, suggest its importance during the research design as well as data collection (Altheide & Johnson, 1994; Glesne, 1999; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Kvale, 1996; Lather, 1986, 1993; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Lenzo, (1995); Scheurich, 1993). A researcher cannot afford to discuss it as an afterthought. After all, the credibility of one’s findings and interpretations depends on establishing trustworthiness (Glesne, 1999). In my effort to ensure validity

from the outset, I used eight verification procedures in qualitative research: triangulation; peer review and debriefing; clarification of researcher bias; member checking; rich, thick description; prolonged engagement and persistent observation; minimizing the errors that can occur in data collection and transcription; and respondent validation (Easton, McCormish, & Greenberg, 2000; Glesne, 1999; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Lapadat, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Poland, 1995).

As I said earlier in this chapter, my research was based on triangulation because it relied on multiple data collection methods and multiple sources. (Glesne, 1999). Second, peer review and debriefing was important because it allowed me to step outside my work and allow external reflection and input on my work (Glesne, 1999). The beauty of peer review and debriefing is that other people acted as my “fresh eyes.” I found that after several days of writing and rewriting a chapter, I did not trust my own objectivity.

As I planned, collected and analyzed data, and wrote up my findings, it was important to receive that clarity, or feedback, from others. In addition to my colleagues, I had several writing buddies, my transcriber, my spouse, and my major professor to serve in this capacity from my subjectivity statement to my chapter disseminating my findings and interpretation. Third, in the previous section labeled “Researcher Subjectivity,” I discussed the process I used to reflect upon my own and others’ subjectivities and my effort to monitor it throughout my research. Lave and Kvale (1995) support the use of field notes and reflective journal as way of constituting “a kind of verification, the insistence you want for yourself that what you are arguing as you write is robustly persuasive as an interpretation and not just something you made up out of whole cloth or private concerns” (p. 225). Four, I employed member checking. That is, I shared transcripts of the book club discussions and interviews with my colleagues, participant portraits, analytic thoughts, preliminary finding, and drafts of chapters in my effort to involve them in representing them and their ideas accurately. Then they had the opportunity to verify that what I had written about them was accurate, inform me about

sections that they found personally or politically problematic, and help me develop new ideas or interpretations (Glesne, 1999). For example, I shared with Kasey what I thought might be a problematic section in chapter seven I had written interpreting his silence in the book club meetings. In my effort not to “slam him” as committee member Bettie St. Pierre pointed out, I sent Kasey a copy of the excerpt via email attachment and asked for this feedback. The next day at work, he talked with me briefly about the body language he displayed (folded arms) and then presented me with a hard copy with his written comments. As any researcher can guess, adding his comments not only contributed to a richer interpretation but it allowed me to see this participant’s perspective.

Five, I used what Geertz (1973) describes as “rich, thick description” of data. I used words to paint a research context for a reader throughout this research document. Six, there was prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field. The amount of time needed to gain entry to Lakeside was cut because I already worked with the participants. Rapport was established before the research process began. Engagement was prolonged because I worked with the participants during an 8-hour, five-day workweek. During those five monthly meetings, I was free to focus on those details that were most relevant to my research. Seven, I focused on minimizing errors that occur during data collection and transcription: equipment failure, environmental hazards, and transcription errors.

Articles have been written about the pitfalls that can be encountered in qualitative research, but very little has been written about the problems that plague data gathering and transcription (Eatson et al., 2000; Lapadat, 2000; Poland, 1995). There were several measures I practiced during data collection to avoid the pitfall of equipment failure. First, I checked equipment ahead of time by recording and playing back the tape I planned to use in order to make sure equipment was functioning. I made sure I adjusted the volume and equalizer settings. I also brought backups and spares of everything, including an extra tape recorder, batteries, audiotapes, extension cords, sharpened pencils, pens, and

stenographer pads. Second, it was important that our book club meetings and the individual interviews take place in relatively quiet spaces where there would be minimal interruption. (I was unable to avoid announcements over the intercom.) Finally, I was able to weed out transcription errors by spending one summer vacation dedicated to listening to the tapes and checking, rechecking, and revising texts transcribed by Mary, a person who came highly-recommended as an efficient transcriber.

It is widely acknowledged that researchers should ensure that interview and focus transcripts are close to “verbatim” accounts of what transpired but little has been written in the literature about the significance of the researcher routinely reviewing the quality of transcripts before analysis begins (Poland, 1995). Poland (1995) argues that establishing the trustworthiness of the transcripts should be a fundamental component of rigor in qualitative research and adopted as a routine practice by researchers.

Finally, I used what Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) refer to as “respondent validation.” In my effort to obtain feedback on my findings and increase the awareness of my own subjectivities (as well represent the intersubjectivities of all the participants involved), I asked my colleagues to respond verbally and in writing to my observations and interpretations throughout the data collection and analysis processes. Although obtaining reactions from participants to a researcher’s work is time-consuming, Glesne believes the benefits outweigh this one disadvantage when the researcher considers that participants are able to: verify the accuracy of reports involving them; inform the researcher of sections that they find personally or politically problematic; and help the researcher develop new ideas or interpretation. In this vein, the use of respondent validation can be problematic if a researcher regards it more highly than another source of data, warns Hammersley and Atkinson (1995). “Whether respondents are enthusiastic, indifferent, or hostile, their reactions cannot be taken as direct validation or refutation of the observer’s inferences. Rather, such processes of so-called ‘validation’ should be treated as yet another valuable source of data and insight” (p. 230).

CHAPTER 5

CONTEXTS, TEACHERS, AND TEXTS

Most people I know are so exhausted from making space for the ‘race’ lady that they have no energy to consider what she is supposed to *do*. For them it is enough for her to just *be*. But, of course, just being quickly becomes a spectacle, and around come the stories again. I am as trapped in this cycle as anyone – so I am concentrating on stories which show how this happens, trying to get a handle on this tangled dynamic I am living. Don’t listen if you hoped to be moved by my honesty (who says I’m not a liar? do you really believe everything you read?) – instead, listen if you want to think about why our choices as teachers and learners are so constrained (Bhattacharyya, 2000, p. 488).



Figure 5.1. Editorial cartoon²⁹

²⁹From [www. Alanen.com](http://www.Alanen.com) by E. Alanen, 2004, Copyright 1991 by Erkki Alanen. Reprinted with permission

of the author. This cartoon was one of many editorial cartoons under the name: Borderline. It first appeared in the El Paso Times on September 27, 1991.

Between October 2002 and February 2003, I facilitated a book club composed of my colleagues in the Lakeside High School English Department. During this five-month critical study, I interviewed and observed 10 secondary English teachers and examined how we negotiated issues of race in five books using critical race theory.

This chapter provides contextual information for this study, including a description of the setting where this study takes place, a history of the Lakeside High School English Department and individual descriptions of the participants. In addition, this chapter includes a section where the transcriber describes the profound effect transcribing the book club discussions and participant interviews had on her personally. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the texts read by the teachers.

The Setting

The setting of this teacher book club was at Lakeside High School, one of two urban public high schools in a southeastern college town named Sethan. Sethan, a university city, is part of Annox County. The following discussion covers background information on the Sethan community and the school district, Lakeside High School, and the school's media center.

The Community and School District

Sethan is a prospering, vibrant city that defines sophisticated Southern culture. This university city of over 100,000 residents offers visitors a unique blend of Southern heritage, the Old South and contemporary entertainment, while developing in cultural and industrial areas. At the heart of a three-county metropolitan area, Sethan is a college town in every sense of the word. When its founders were looking for a site for Bellson University, they sought a remote location where students would be isolated from the temptations of urban life. Like most cities, Sethan's population is also composed of the working poor who live in one of several trailer parks or housing projects located

throughout Annox County. A daily newspaper, an independent student newspaper *The Bellsonian*, six local radio stations, two hospitals, and more than 80 churches serve the people of Sethan-Annox County.

The Annox County School District (ACSD) serves a diverse student body. Over 11,000 students attend one of 19 schools, including thirteen elementary schools, four middle schools, and two high schools. The race/ethnicity figures for the student population reveal: 57% African American, 27% White, 11% Hispanic/Latino, 3% Asian American, and 2% multiracial. Other characteristics of the student population include: 62% of the student population were eligible for free and reduced lunch; 13% were classified as limited English proficiency; and 16% received special education services.

The demographic profiles of the community and the school district must be weighed against the educational performance and success of students. Evidence suggests that there is a sharp distinction among groups of students based on race and ethnicity with African American students overpopulating those groups that are retained or quit school. At the end of the 2002-2003 school year, 484 students were retained. Racially, this translated to 70% of the 484 students were African American students compared with 11% who were white students. Graduation rates paint a dismal picture: Slightly less than half of the freshmen class who began high school dropped out by the time their class graduated. The majority of those who dropped out were African American and Hispanic high school students. This pattern is typical of the Sethan adult population: Over one-third of African Americans aged 25 years and older had not completed high school compared with just 11% of whites.

The High School

In 1954, Lakeside High School was then named Sethan High School. It was an all-white high school, which had been in operation for only two years when the U.S. Supreme Court declared in *Brown v. The Board of Education* that “separate but equal” education was unconstitutional. Because schools across the country were ordered by the

court to desegregate “with all deliberate speed” in 1955, the city and county public school systems merged, and the all-black Sethan High and Industrial School – one of the first accredited black public schools in the state – relocated to a new building, which was named Benny-Hancock High in 1964 in honor of two former principals and prominent educators. In 1963, under the “freedom of choice” plan adopted by the Annox County School District Board, four young black girls integrated the public school system in Annox County.

Up until the year 1970, the city of Sethan had two separate black and white school systems: Sethan High School and Benny-Hancock High School. Unrest broke out on April 16, 1970 when local school officials decided the two high schools should merge. What followed was a week of racial turmoil and widespread absenteeism. In the fall Benny-Hancock opened as an integrated junior high school, and Sethan High School became Lakeside High School. Lakeside adopted red and gold as its school colors and the Sethan High School Trojans Athletic teams merged as the Lakeside High School Gladiators. Black and white students worked together to share leadership roles and formed a coalition to smooth the transition for all involved.

Over three decades later, Lakeside High School has established itself as central to the Sethan community; it prides itself on its rich heritage and tradition. Lakeside is located in the center of Sethan and is a vital part of the residential community, as well as the business and shopping area. Students are able to walk to most of the critical areas in the community, including Bellson University, surrounding residential areas, and major shopping establishments.

During the 2002-2003 school year, Lakeside High School served 1,514 students in grades 9-12. About 60% of that figure represented students of diverse racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Lakeside considers its diversity to be one of its greatest strengths. Lakeside is known for its academic, as well as athletic success. Averaging a score of 2000 on the SAT, students attend major and Ivy League colleges and

universities, as well as small area colleges and technical colleges. During the last four years Lakeside has increased the completion rate for senior classes by 14%.

During the 2002-2003 school year, Lakeside High School reported a total of 124 full- and part-time faculty members. Faculty includes principals, administrative staff, media specialists, counselors, and teachers. The average number of years that faculty members worked at Lakeside was 12 years. Faculty members were required to have a minimum of a four-year college degree. At Lakeside High, 66.1% of the faculty also had a masters degree or higher. Interestingly, the racial breakdown of school's faculty supports the contention that there is a need for improvement in the area of hiring more minority teachers. Of the 124 faculty members, only 22, or 18%, were African American. This figure was disproportionate to the reported 57% of students in the school who were African American. NEA believes this critical shortage of teachers of color could lead to a failure of all American students to learn the academic, personal, and social skills they need in the multicultural workplace of the future.

The Media Center

During recent years Lakeside High School has been involved in several building renovations and construction projects, including a new food court, new media center, auditorium, instructional and competition gymnasium, and nine classrooms. A new girls' softball field was built and the football stadium, baseball field and practice field were all refurbished. Currently, aesthetic wrought iron fencing is being installed around Lakeside to enhance the beauty of the campus. In addition, a new baseball press box and concession stand are in the process of being built. Further renovations with district school funds will include a new annex in the back of the building that will house approximately 17 new classrooms. Students and faculty also expect to have a new roof, new electrical system, new heating and air conditioning, and new front office facilities. Classroom computers, several large and small computer labs and three portable wireless computer labs provide Lakeside faculty and students with technology for learning.

Upon entering the media center, one will see a bustle of activity involving students and faculty reading, researching, and making use of technology for learning. To the immediate right, you will find media aid aide Thelma at the sign-out desk checking out items to students and teachers. Right next to her is a book cart stacked with returned books and videos; directly behind Thelma is her office. Media specialists Sarah and Lucy may be found assisting individual students or whole classes with locating resources from books, periodicals, or on the Internet. With the assistance of one parent aide and three aides, Sarah, Lucy, and Thelma run a smooth business for they are responsible for keeping track of over 15,000 books, 31 periodicals, 20 computers, a various assortment of audiovisual materials, overhead projectors, TV/VCR combination carts, laptop carts, and videos. Various size bookcases surround the walls; others stand in rows throughout the media center. A few inches away from the sign-in desk is an intimate, mini-living room area composed of cushioned chairs and coffee tables. Padded chairs can be found at every computer station and each of the twelve rectangular tables has room for four people to comfortably read, study, and discuss. Display boards exhibit student work from various disciplines. Books are placed provocatively on top of shelves in order to entice readers to check them out.

In the back of the media center are five more rooms: two offices for the media specialists, a teacher's lounge, a conference room, and the teacher workroom. It was the teacher's lounge and the conference room where the book club meetings took place. Both places were available to teachers, who sign up. The October meeting took place in the lounge. A window facing the sun, loveseat, a microwave, several chairs, two mini-refrigerators, a sink, and several rectangular tables provide a bright yet intimate place for teachers to relax and eat lunch. It was the researcher's intention to use the lounge for the remaining four meetings, but the principal's urgent need to use the room for conferences the day of the second meeting forced the meeting to take place in the conference room. Much smaller, the conference room contained a 25-inch TV on a small table against the

wall and one long rectangular table in the center of the room surrounded by twelve cushioned chairs. Equally sunny and even more intimate than the lounge, teachers generally signed up to use the media center conference room when they needed to meet with small groups of no more than 10-12 people. The media center conference room turned out to be the better choice for a meeting place for the teacher book club.

History of the Lakeside High School English Department

Being the New Kid on the Block

The make-up of this teacher book included a diverse group of people. Racially, three African Americans (including the researcher) and eight whites made up the teacher book club. By gender, there were five women and six men. Years of teaching experience divided the book club into two groups: the veterans and the new comers. The veteran teachers Al, Phyllis, and Kasey had worked together at Lakeside for more than 15 years.

I became part of the Lakeside faculty five years ago after I made the decision to transfer from Haley Middle School, where I had been a language arts teacher for almost a decade. I decided to make the change for two reasons: 1) I no longer felt professionally challenged teaching middle school-age children; and 2) I had become increasingly frustrated with the policies and procedures of middle school teaching. During my last year at Haley, I began an all out investigation of high school teaching. After talking with some friends of mine who were educators within the district, I found that their answers to my inquiry spurred an excitement within me that I had not felt in some time. I pressed them further to tell me what they knew about the two high schools within the district. What were they like?

Of the two schools, people told me Lakeside High School was the more conservative. Lakeside English teachers loved their jobs so much that they stayed on average 15 years. It was rare for even one position to become available. This was not the case at Dixon Springs High School. There was a regular turnover rate within Dixon Springs' English Department. Like clockwork, they had several English positions open

each year. Also, the leadership style of the department chairs was in direct opposition to each other. People told me Lakeside's department chair was easy-going. Peter made few demands on his teachers and allowed them lots of freedom in their teaching. Dixon Spring's Pamela was much more restrictive. She called lots of meetings and ruled with an iron hand. These comparisons spoke volumes to me. I knew right away that I wanted to teach at Lakeside High School. I interviewed with Peter, Phyllis, Lakeside Principal Mark Patman, and one of the assistant principals. I was offered the job. I learned why the English department was known for its conservatism. Phyllis was the only teacher of color in the department. By gender, the department was equally divided.

As I learned what was taught at each grade level that first year, I saw a common theme: The literature was represented overwhelmingly by dead, white, male authors. The summer reading and required novel lists mirrored the same works I read when I was in high school ... almost 20 years ago. (Gulp!) Very few, if any, authors of color were represented. Race talk would probably be equal to nil. How can this *still* be? I did not struggle with these questions alone. I asked several veteran teachers that I had come to respect if they used multicultural literature and how they discussed the issue of race with their students. I directed my inquiry to Peter, Phyllis, and Mary (the gifted coordinator). Although she taught British literature to seniors, Phyllis said she made talking about race an integral part of her teaching. She added that throughout the years she had observed that it was her white, middle class students in her advanced classes that had expressed the most discomfort in discussing race. The Hispanic and African American students in the lower level tracks always seemed to welcome such discussions. Mary did not even attempt to circumvent my question. She admitted that she had avoided the issue with her gifted students. She asked: With only one or two students of color represented in each class, how can you discuss such a hotbed topic without drawing attention to them? When I asked what multicultural works she taught, Mary named one work by Langston Hughes. She then admitted weakly, "I just don't have the language, Vicky." A white male himself,

Peter was quite the advocate of teaching multicultural works and discussing race with his gifted and advanced English students. He adamantly believed that whites and blacks did not talk enough about race and that it was a topic that teachers needed to explore with their students.

Those conversations served as small seeds in my spirit. Several years later, I found myself taking a doctoral research course that required me to do a pilot study using interview data. My mind immediately flashed back to those three conversations. As a result, I conducted a pilot study titled “How High School Teachers Use Literature to Talk About Race.” A year later, I used the same data (interviews and surveys) in another research class to try out different methods of coding, analysis and representation. It was during that semester that I was introduced to poetic transcription as an alternative form of data representation. Using the words of my four interviewees – Peter, Phyllis, Al, and Kasey – I was able to construct poems to represent each of my three themes. Until this writing, I had not made the connection that those earlier conversations matched the themes for the pilot study. Excerpts from those data poems provided below echo the conversations.

I've had some very heated exchanges.
 I had to just take them both aside.
 Debate the question.
 Discuss those issues.
 Open up the discussion!
 That's how sensitive people are.
 We don't have the right language.
 We have to be careful about the audience –
 Living in eternal fear of hacking somebody off
 I approach it honestly.
 Don't be afraid to break the mold.
 Don't be afraid to try.
 I tend to do the older works for the sake of comfort
 To keep down controversy.

 Uh,
 Controversy
 We don't talk about race honestly

I think there are many reasons for that.
 I don't think we have the language.
 I don't think we always have the familiarity with each other –
 the comfort level,
 et cetera, et cetera!
 I try to pick pieces – whether they be novels or poems -- that do [talk about race]
 And if that means making people uncomfortable,
 Then damn it, so be it!
 I think sometimes I deliberately choose them
 So that people will get mad.

I think the majority of us recognize the diversity of this school.
 She heard something racial!
 It might have been the tone of my voice.
 The baggage kids bring every single day is so very alarming.
 But in that laundry there are racial issues.
 Race is always under the surface.
 It's always just under the surface.
 And I don't think it can be kept down.
 Racial issues –
 Whether they are literature or life –
 Are always just under the surface...
 WAITING.

Learning the Ropes

After my first year at Lakeside, the superintendent fired Mr. Patman, who was embroiled in a scandal, and hired a former elementary and middle school principal. During Martha Eckard's four-year tenure, I observed huge turnovers in the English department as well as school wide each year due to attrition. When I transferred to Lakeside five years ago, the average teacher had been there at least 15 years. Many had between 25-30 years of service at Lakeside. When I transferred into the department five years ago, I was one of two teachers who had less than 15 years of experience. Since then, I have seen the department dwindle from one predominately composed of veteran

teachers to one of newcomers with 10 years or less of teaching experience, including Jane, Roberto, Lloyd, Lisa, and Daphne.³⁰

In those four years, I witnessed the department chair position change hands several times. A year before this study took place, Peter gave up the position after serving in that capacity for 20 years to Phyllis and Kasey, who served as co-chairs. Al was the department chair during the year of this study. Mimicking Peter's style, Al believed in a hands-off approach in leadership. Like Peter, we meet very rarely. We meet during three occasions: faculty meetings, department meetings, and occasional lunches. Until this study, we only knew each other personally on a superficial level: who was married or single; who had kids; and who were Christians. During the few times we did congregate together, we got along with each other.

Description of the Participants

In addition to the researcher, ten members of the Lakeside High School English Department participated in this study. Because the participants brought unique perspectives to the book club discussions, this section provides a portrait, or snapshot, of each participant. To construct each portrait, I used information from the pilot study (survey data) as well as personal and professional observations I had made about each individual. After completing all of the portraits, I distributed copies to all the participants and used their feedback to make corrections. In my effort to write my own portrait, I offered the participants an opportunity to write one of me. Paul, Jane, Daphne, and Kasey accepted the challenge. My portrait is a collage of their words. During the consent process, each participant chose a pseudonym, which was used throughout this study. (Table 5.1 on page 154 provides a quick reference for a list of the participants and demographic information, such as age, years of teaching experience, race, and gender.)

³⁰Rico, a newcomer to Lakeside during the time of this study, was the exception. He had 14 years of teaching experience.

Paul

We have all been in situations where appearances were deceiving. Paul demonstrates that appearances can be dead wrong.

Paul looks like a youthful version of the late Telly Savalis, an actor in the popular 70s detective series *Kojak*. Intimidating in appearance because of his broad shoulders, muscular physique, and bald head, it is quite easy to picture this thirty-something male hollering out orders in the ROTC department or ordering kids to give him 100 push-ups in the hallway for minor disciplinary infractions. Instead, Paul can be found standing and greeting kids as they pass by his classroom, which is situated just inside the English hallway's double doors. During another class change, Paul is handing out Jolly Ranchers candy to anyone who needs a sweet jumpstart to his or her day. Ninety minutes later, Paul is "giving dap"³¹ and "talking junk"³² to his African American males who stand in droves just outside his classroom. This same room cannot even breathe a sigh of relief during the lunch period because of a crew of "regulars" opt to return there each day to hang out and eat. So many kids find Paul's corner of the world such an attractive place to congregate that several fights have broken out just outside his classroom door. One heated exchange over a basketball game began in the P.E. locker room and turned into a free-for-all brawl - - spilling inside Paul's classroom. It was not surprising to hear kids report that Paul was in the thick of the fisticuffs -- pulling the offending kids apart and restoring order.

Paul's room door is like the hallway double doors just to the right of his classroom: Both are always open. Except for his planning period, students are packed inside his classroom like human sardines. Paul is often up and about milling around as his students are fully engaged in some writing or reading activity. Paul's baritone voice can be heard posing questions for an impending discussion or giving directions for the next

³¹The slang term "giving dap" is used to describe (usually black males) people greeting each other with a handshake and asking, "What's up, folk?"

³²The slang term "talking junk" is used to describe people joking around or teasing with each other.

activity. Kind, mild-mannered, and courteous, Paul is more of an observer than talker. He is quick to listen and slow to anger – regardless of whether he is having a conversation with his own students, his colleagues, or the principal. Like E.F. Hutton, when Paul does decide to speak on an issue, he does not have to speak loudly. People listen and respect what he has to say.

For the past eight years of his life, Paul has been teaching high school English. Two years ago, he came to Lakeside High School, where he has been teaching sophomores and juniors. Describing himself as a student-centered educator, Paul says he likes to give his “clients” a lot of control of his class including opportunities to select works the entire class will read. A proponent of multicultural literature, he prefers to select work from the high school literature text written by African American writers: Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks, James Baldwin, Alice Walker, Fredrick Douglass, Martin Luther King, Jr., Zora Neale Huston, and Richard Wright. Besides the school textbook and novels, Paul seeks multicultural works from magazines and another textbook titled *Crossroads*. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and *Hoops* are among his top choices for novels to teach his students. It is these novels that naturally lend themselves to discussions about race. “In terms of historical context, I try my best to present the facts of how it really was,” Paul maintains. Students from other English classes often consult him for recommendations for good reads. Students check out more books from his shelves than from the school library.

Paul’s ease at recommending high interest, multicultural novels may be attributed to his own exposure as a high school student – from Wright’s novels *Black Boy* and *Native Son* to Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*. Interestingly, he cannot recall being exposed to any multicultural literature during his teacher education program.

For Paul, his personal life and profession often merge inside Lakeside High School. His wife and two young daughters visit and eat lunch with him about once a month -- bringing with them assorted doughnut holes for the enjoyment of both his

students and department members. He beams every time he mentions his wife Sally. Although she finished her doctorate at the local university this year, she continues to do consulting work so she can stay at home with their young daughters, ages two and six months. It is not uncommon for a student to shout in the middle of any English class, “Look!” In the glass section of the door is the smiling face of the blond, curly haired toddler or the sleeping face of her baby sister with their doting parents. During each visit, each department member gets a break to see a man strut like a peacock as he walks his three girls from room to room.

Jane

In her early thirties, Jane has the energy and ambition of ten teachers. Marriage and motherhood are just two of the hats she juggles. She is married to Lloyd, who is also a member of the English department. They have a 5-year-old daughter Emily, who attends a Montessori school in town. The first eight years of her career in education, she spent time working as a middle school teacher within the district. For a while, she and Lloyd worked together at the same middle school before she transferred to Lakeside two years ago. This year Lloyd joined the English department. Working at the same school affords Jane and Lloyd the opportunity to shoulder childcare responsibilities. When Emily suffers from minor childhood illnesses, Jane and Lloyd take turns taking her to the pediatrician and staying home with her.

Problems and challenge do not scare this 10-year career educator.

Several years ago, the principal, Jane, and other freshmen teachers decided to tackle the harried problem of the high school dropout rate among ninth graders. In response, they wrote a \$100,000 grant, which funded the reorganization of the ninth grade into smaller learning communities called academies. Besides her leadership role with the freshmen academies, she participates on numerous committees and study groups within the school. In addition, she has won awards and accolades celebrating her excellence in teaching.

Looking back on her high school English classes, she sadly admits that her exposure to literature was limited to the “dead white male” literary canon. It was only during her teacher education program – obtaining her bachelor’s and master’s degrees – that she was introduced to “a tremendous amount” of multicultural literature, including Sandra Cisneros, Sook Nyul Choi, and Walter Dean Myers. It is these experiences that have shaped the teacher she has become today. “I would characterize myself as progressive. I think I strive to focus on what really works and I realize this might or might not vary according to my classes.” Using the high school literature text, she loves to teach her freshmen an excerpt from Richard Wright’s *Black Boy*, Langston Hughes’ short story “Thank You, M’am” and play *Cora Unashamed*, Sandra Cisneros’ short story “Salvador Late or Early,” Gary Soto’s “The Talk,” and selections from Maya Angelou. Each year Jane can look forward to teaching Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Walter Dean Myers’ *Monster*, which create interesting discussions among her freshmen students. She recalls a provocative discussion of race over a newspaper article she had with her ninth graders that served as enlightenment for her personally:

In reading the local paper twice a week with my classes, interesting issues come up. One involved a study about people receiving tickets for speeding. The article explained that the study was to see if African Americans were pulled over more frequently and/or received citations more frequently. I was alarmed when several students expressed their feeling that African American drivers are pulled over and cited more often because they speed. One student (himself African American) believed that raising the age African Americans could drive was actually a viable solution. This was one of those occasions I had to point out that their generalizations about drivers and race weren’t valid at all. I was surprised to have to point out that the real reason for the study was to see if police officers were engaging in unfair practices. This whole discussion was startling (and lengthy). It

opened my eyes to how people can internalize a generalization (even a negative one) and come to believe it.

Lisa

When I say Lakeside, you say High!
Lakeside!
High!
Lakeside!
High!
When I say red, you say gold!
Red!
Gold!
Red!
Gold!
When I say number, you say one!
Number!
One!
Number!
One!
Lakeside High, red and gold, number one!

Over the years, the extracurricular activity known as cheerleading has become more and more competitive. Lisa is a member of a new generation of cheerleading coaches who has raised the standards for the sport. “Being the chosen one” is no longer based solely on popularity and beauty. Female students who aspire to become a Lakeside High School cheerleader must also demonstrate exceptionality in two other domains: athletic ability and academics. Although tough on her girls, she is a cheerleader’s dream of a sponsor. Her room looks like a cheerleader’s haven. The colors red and gold dominate her room. It is not uncommon to see a steady stream of cheerleader traffic during class changes as well as before and after school. Some girls carry decorated paper bags containing assorted snacks and candies. During spring try-outs, potential cheerleaders rally teachers to sign their recommendation forms. Because Lisa regards her cheerleaders as representatives of the school, she checks with teachers periodically about grades and behavior. To maintain their spots on the squads, her cheerleaders must remain good citizens and maintain high academic standards.

All of this toughness comes from a woman who looks like a teenager herself. Lisa is an African American in her mid-20s with a bachelor's degree in English education. Do not be fooled by her youth. Lisa is a go-getter. She is not afraid of hard work. Working a perfectionist's hours – getting to work early, leaving late, and working weekends -- Lisa balances her responsibilities as cheerleading coach with teaching freshmen and sophomore English. Neither of these responsibilities does she take lightly. She has earned a reputation as an English teacher with high expectations. She makes kids write. And then rewrite. Then rewrite again. For her, reading can take on a variety of purposes. One significant purpose of reading is exposure to – and making sense of – literature representing other cultures. In her own high school experience, her exposure to multicultural literature was limited to Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* and works written by Langston Hughes and Maya Angelou. Once she began college, there was a 180-degree turn. "I attended a historically black college, so the focus was on multicultural reading. I read hundreds of works by people of different backgrounds."

Any other English teacher's room would have standard school blinds covering the windows. Not Lisa. Store bought curtains? Not exactly. Colorful murals – paper curtains of a sort – are taped on the windows – serving two purposes: to decorate Lisa's windows and keep the temperature cooler in an otherwise hot room that faces the sun. These curtain murals represented students' understanding of multicultural novels *The Joy Luck Club*, *Always Running*, and *The House on Mango Street*. "I think I am rather progressive. I like to try many different things and I believe in using a variety of resources to do it," she explains. Lisa goes beyond teaching the expected works in ninth and tenth grade, like William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, novels *To Kill a Mocking Bird* and *Watership Down*, and *The Odyssey*. "I use almost all of the multicultural writings in the *Elements* text. There is not one story I have not taught at one point or another," she explains. Her favorite high-interest, multicultural novels include Walter Dean Myers' *Monster* and Richard Wright's *Native Son* and *Black Boy*.

Being one of three African American teachers in the department, race is an issue that has always been central to her own life so she has carried this philosophy into her teaching. “I approach issues of race very directly. We discuss myths, stereotypes, etc. as we read literature, and we work on various issues through our journals.” She has noticed that excerpts from Richard Wright’s *Black Boy* and Alice Walker’s novel *The Color Purple* lend themselves naturally to discussions on race. Generally, discussions of race come up because of the literature she has chosen; occasionally, something that has happened in the news sparks such conversation.

Rico

Rico, the newest member to the English department is a man on a mission. Between each class change, students part like the Red Sea as they see the man with the gray cart coming through the halls. With the manners and charm of Cinderella’s Prince, Rico offers gentle reminders to students of school rules.

“Take off your hats, guys.”

“People, clean up the language.”

“Pull up your pants, young man.”

“Let’s get to class, folks.”

Students – regardless of age, race, or gender -- usually comply without any disrespect. This is not characteristic behavior of students to new teachers. Perhaps they immediately respond because they sense that this forty-something teacher is actually a fourteen-year veteran. As the full-time English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teacher, Rico fills a part-time position in two different departments -- foreign language and English. With a double major in English and journalism, he spent the first thirteen years of his career teaching English at the middle school and high school level. During the time of this study, this was his first year at Lakeside High School. Here he is responsible for teaching native speakers from other countries English. Due to his allegiance to two different departments and the shortage of classroom space, Rico spent

his first year at Lakeside as a “floater” – a teacher who must depend on the kindness of other teachers and float from classroom to classroom. High school teachers learn that part of the initiation goes, “If you’re the last one hired and there’s a shortage of classrooms, you’re the designated floater.”

The man with the mobile classroom does not allow his situation to determine the quality of his instruction. Along with his signature cart, this man brings a smile and positive attitude every day. He acts with such enthusiasm about his position that one might think he has won the lottery. If you expect to see his freshmen and sophomores doing worksheets, you have the wrong ESOL teacher. His cart is filled with so many multicultural paperbacks that it looks like an uneven stack of flapjacks minus the syrup. (Somehow though, he has successfully maneuvered the cart without any mishaps between hall changes.) From his actions, he apparently believes that second language learners acquire English best when the spoken and written words come together simultaneously. Depending on the period, the room switches but the picture remains the same: Rico standing with a novel in his hand reading out loud as twelve to fourteen bent heads are following along. His students are obviously engaged and motivated by what they are reading. When interrupted, Rico finishes out his last sentence; the students never raise their heads to identify the intruder. They keep reading silently.

If not on his cart, the rest of Rico’s possessions can be found in the office area of the English department’s lounge. The cramped office is complete with computer for anyone’s use in the department, an oversized desk for Rico, and a closet stuffed to overcapacity with paper, various supplies, and an odd assortment of obsolete computer parts. By the looks of the room, it is obvious that Rico needs a classroom of his own. A meteorologist would argue that a small tornado hit here; some force has spewed books, supplies, and teaching materials to everywhere imaginable in the entire room -- on Rico’s desk, on the floor, on the bookshelf, and inside the closet. A teacher seeking supplies from the supply closet is subjected to a pathway that tell one that Rico loves to teach

multicultural literature. Eight copies of *Fallen Angels* sit side-by-side on the shelf. Five copies of *Ironman* are stacked on the floor. Ten copies of *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* sit together in two uneven piles on the filing cabinet.

Rico draws his enthusiasm for teaching multicultural literature to his second language learners from his own experience in high school. He remembers studying South American and Russian writers, particularly Fyodor Dostoevsky. During his teacher education program, he was introduced to more Russian writers, Hispanic author Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Asian philosophy and poetry, African author Chinua Achebe, and other African novelists. Perhaps this is the reason he chooses to be a risk-taker when it comes to choosing literature and teaching strategies. “I’m willing to take chances if I believe a novel can teach important lessons.” Such novels include *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Education of Little Tree*, *The Cay*, and *Holes*, which lend themselves naturally to discussions on race with his students. “With frank honesty, I openly encourage discussions about racial (and religious) tolerance – stressing that we all have more things in common.”

Kasey

Kasey has to be the most conservative member of the Lakeside High School English Department.

Dress. Most days you will find him dressed in khaki pants, a short sleeve, button-down dress shirt, and dark shoes. For dressier occasions such as the Parent Teacher Organization’s (PTO) Open House and graduation, Kasey dresses in a dark blue suit and bow tie. Regardless of how wild his colleagues or students may dress during homecoming week – pajama day, red and gold day, or 60s day -- Kasey stays consistent.

Eating habits. Teaching as a profession provides numerous opportunities to splurge on food and drink. Most faculty meetings offer a variety of cookies, brownies, and other sweets. Once a year, teachers choose their favorite ingredients to create their own ice cream delight. During exam days, every variety of pizza is provided so that

teachers can do their grades and not bother about lunch. On any given day going into the English department's lounge, one may find any number of delicious surprises for consumption. With so many temptations to splurge, Kasey's self-control seems to stem from a higher power. Like the student athletes he teaches, Kasey treats his body as a temple. It is rare to see him eating sweets, not even a candy bar. He stands by his door greeting students as he eats raw carrots – without any aid of Ranch sauce as dip. He prefers drinking water or hot tea to caffeinated sodas. Once or twice a week, some colleagues in the English department skirt off campus for a few minutes to bring back their favorites from local fast food restaurants. Like clockwork, Kasey can be found in the lounge warming up nutritious, homemade cuisines such as spaghetti, soup, or fresh vegetables in the microwave.

Teaching. With a bachelor's degree in English and a master's degree in English education, Kasey has been teaching English at the high school level for 21 years. Looking back on his own education he says his high school and college professors exposed him to a literature curriculum devoid of any multicultural literature – even the young adult literature strictly focused on white kids. As a senior English teacher, he describes the British literature curriculum as restrictive in terms of its representation of diversity. “The senior text doesn't really lend itself to multicultural literature,” Kasey admits. Five years ago, Kasey took on the responsibility of teaching Encore, a course for students who had failed ninth grade English one or more times. Because the freshmen English curriculum allows for a more diverse selection, Kasey has more opportunities to teach multicultural literature, including “Poison,” an excerpt from Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, Langston Hughes' short story “Thank You, M'am,” “Blues Ain't No Mockingbird,” “When I Lay My Burden Down,” and Sojourner Truth's poem “Ain't I a Woman.” His most favorite novels he teaches to freshmen each year are *Warriors Don't Cry*, *The Watson's Go to Birmingham*, and *Holes*, which has now been made into a Disney movie. Although the central character in *Holes* is white, the novel is extremely popular with his students

because the students like the author's narrative style and the relationships between the kids.

In addition to novels and selections from the high school textbook, Kasey provides his students with current stories from *Read* magazine. "Many issues of *Read* have articles or stories about race and racial relations," he maintains. As the teacher, he feels it is his job to remain objective by example. "I try to be as frank as possible. If the kids need to discuss something, I don't hesitate." Discussions on race and racism usually stem from the selections he has students to read from the literature book. Although discussions on the sensitive topic of race abound in his Encore classes, they are rare occurrences with his seniors. "The problem with race is in this school, [this] community, [this] country [is] we *don't* talk about it as objectively as we could. People (sometimes rightfully) become too emotional in their discussions." Thinking back, he recalled one of his most memorable discussions of race was one that happened in one of his advanced senior classes. Even though he cannot remember the source or context of the discussion, he remembers vividly that stereotypical remarks were brought up.

I was very uncomfortable for the two quiet black students and one quiet Hispanic student. I attempted to guide those white kids into seeing how silly their remarks were. I don't know if I succeeded. I did have the two black kids tell me after class how much they appreciated what I said.

Roberto

After watching the movie *Of Mice and Men*, juniors can never see Roberto as just an English teacher again. Roberto closely resembles the actor who plays Curley, the short, dark, curly-haired nemesis of Lenny in the novel. In his mid-20s, Robert was in his second year of teaching at Lakeside High School. After obtaining a bachelor's degree in secondary education at the Bellson University, Roberto student taught at Lakeside's archrival Dixon Springs High School before landing his first teaching job at Lakeside, where he was assigned tenth and eleventh graders.

During his first year, he became the sponsor of the school's literary magazine, which had been out of commission for five years. With his students, he dedicated every spare moment after school selling ads, taking pictures, and editing student work. The publication of the school's second literary magazine during the year of this study was so impressive that a prominent university professor wrote a letter to editor to the newspaper praising Roberto as the sponsor and the literary magazine's professional look. With energy to spare, Roberto decided to return to Bellson to begin his master's degree.

His passion for multicultural literature comes from two sources: his own background growing up and training he received in the teacher education program at Bellson. As a young, white male originally from Brooklyn, he is used to issues of race coming right out in the open. In his own high school English classes, he studied works written by Maya Angelou and writers of the Harlem Renaissance. During his teacher education program, he was given the opportunity to read *Braided Lives*, an anthology of multicultural works, and to read works by African American writers Sharon Draper and Walter Dean Myers. A graduate of Bellson University's teacher education program, he says, "I employ nontraditional strategies, texts, and approaches to engage students in our texts." Roberto has made his support of multicultural literature a public platform in department meetings. His students must sense this openness because they want to discuss issues like race. Sometimes this eagerness to discuss this sensitive topic is the result of the literature he deliberately chooses; at other times, the students bring it up themselves. *The Contender*, *Having Our Say*, and *Tears of a Tiger* are novels that lend themselves naturally to race. In approaching issues of race in his own classroom, he prefers open discussion. For written expression, he asks the students to respond by writing five-paragraph essays, surveys, and "think pieces," which are reflective opportunities to discuss a major theme or issue.

Some of Roberto's favorite multicultural authors include Langston Hughes, Toni Morrison, and Maya Angelou. After teaching the novels *Having Our Say* and *The*

Contender during his student teaching experience, he believed so strongly that young adult multicultural literature has an important place in the high school classroom that he argued that these novels should be added to the department's required reading list. He taught *The Contender* his first year at Lakeside and argued his case so eloquently to the media specialist that she purchased the video *Having Our Say*.

Using James Thurber's words, one might describe Roberto as "sitting in the cat bird's seat" for the next few years. Brand new class sets of *The Contender* and *Tears of a Tiger* sit on his shelves waiting to be taught to the next generation of Lakeside sophomores and juniors.

Al

Fiction: In the TV drama series *Boston Public*, Harvey Lipschitz, the oldest member of the Winslow High School teaching staff, is treated with such disdain and ridicule that he has been considering retirement throughout this season. Both the teachers and students regard this eccentric as an ancient relic left over from some forgotten era.

Reality: Sixty-year-old Al is the oldest member of the Lakeside High School English department and one of the oldest veterans working at the school, but he is no Harvey Lipschitz by any stretch of the imagination.

In this case reality *is* better than fiction.

With a bachelor's degree in English, Al has been an educator for 22 years. The first ten years he spent teaching at one of the local middle schools within the district; the last sixteen have been at Lakeside High School teaching primarily juniors and seniors. Al has been married to his second wife for the past 21 years. During the year of this study, their daughter Anna attended Lakeside Middle School, just an eight-block walk down the street. He plans to stay at Lakeside for one more year so he can see Anna through her freshman year. The year of this study he took on a new responsibility: department head. His colleagues would describe him as a laid back, easy-going guy. He rarely calls for

department meetings and when he does, it is a quick one to give out information or ask for consensus on a school-wide issue.

His dry erase boards tell a story of the love his students have for him. They remind you of the Belmont Tunnel in Los Angeles, which provides thousands of square feet of cement walls displaying graffiti masterpieces created by local spray-can artists (Rymes, 2001). Covering every inch of the boards, many multi-colored messages (“Hi, Al!”) and elaborate drawings (red Valentine hearts) are symbols of admiration from students; there are so many that one is hard pressed to find the date and class assignments. Years ago when students were allowed to choose the teachers for the courses they needed each year, so many kids clamored to be in his classes that the assistant principal would have to max out his rolls at 150 students. Minus the dry erase board, Al’s room is immaculate. Books are stacked neatly on the shelves, desks are lined in neat rows, and everything on his desktop seems to be in its rightful place. Several times a year he changes the arrangement of his room. He dusts and cleans like he is Martha Stewart. Walk into Al’s room during instruction, you will find organized chaos. Its noisiness reminds one of a newspaper office bristling with people performing a million actions at once. Al is often sitting at his desk typing at his laptop computer or grading papers. Some students are talking. Some are writing. Others are standing in the doorway.

Diverse classes call for diverse literature. Whether in his advanced classes or the college prep course (a mixture of proficient readers to non-readers), Al has learned the value of mixing multicultural works in with the classics he is expected to teach his juniors. As this veteran recalls his own high school experience, he was not exposed to any multicultural literature. His first exposure to multicultural works was during his training as a teacher. It was then that he was first exposed to Native American writing and African American writers like James Baldwin and Martin Luther King, Jr. Using the high school literature text, he teaches works by Frederick Douglass, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Horace Quinoia, Obadiah Equinox, and Lorraine Hansberry. His favorite novel is

Ernest G. Gaines' *A Lesson Before Dying*. Throughout his tenure at Lakeside, he has seen how increasingly diverse his classes have become. Describing his teaching style as conservative, he feels "I can move in any direction from a conservative point more easily than any other." Discussions about race are inevitable – especially when he teaches works written by African American writers. "Most of the time I do not approach race as a separate issue. I discuss writers and works from the point of view of how effective the work is and how meaningful the writing is," Al laments. "If race becomes an issue, then it is discussed." In his class, issues of race generally tend to come up as a result of the literature assigned for students to read in class. One of his particular favorites is Lorraine Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun*.

Considering himself a "good ole boy," Al often peppers conversations with comical anecdotes of how things used to be. These tales do not bother people rather they look forward to them. They are incredibly funny because Al tells them as an old ranch hand would – stories so beautifully crafted that just for a minute you think you are sitting by a cozy, cracking fire roasting marshmallows. In reality, you are standing in the middle of the hallway crowded with kids laughing, talking, and pushing their way to their next class.

Al should be the spokesperson for a "Keep America Healthy" campaign. Before his cancer surgery several years ago, he ran between four to five miles a day. As the track coach for Lakeside High School for seven years, Al's 6'2" sinuous frame could be seen running along side his high school athletes as they trained for different levels of competition each year. During a basketball game between the seniors and faculty one year, students roared when Al, acting as coach and player for the faculty team, scored two points in the first five minutes of the game. In response, gray-haired Al threw up a peace sign.

Nice score, Al. Nice score. In the case of Al and Harvey Lipschitz, two white male teachers standing at the end of their teaching careers, fiction can stand a reality check.

Harvey could have used some advice from Al about how to maintain the love and respect of students and faculty over the years.

Daphne

During the year of this study, Daphne was new to the faculty of Lakeside High School. She came to Lakeside with seven years of teaching experience and a bachelor's degree. The first four years of her career she taught language arts to sixth and seventh grade students at a middle school in another county. In her late thirties, she had been married for 13 years. Her three children attended schools in a neighboring school district. Tall and slender, she wore her red hair cut in a layered bob that fell just above her shoulders. She displayed the mannerisms of a genteel southern belle. She is rarely rude or loud. If angry or upset by a student, emotions are kept in check. She is always meticulously dressed. Besides color coordinating her tops with pants or a skirt, on a hot spring day, she can be found wearing matching sandals. During the summer months, her fingernails and toenails match her attire.

Passing her colleagues in the hallway, she flashes a Miss America smile and waves hello. As the day progresses and continued contact is made between her and other English teachers, she makes small talk, but the conversation is genuine. Each time she passed by a colleague, she winked or smiled when eye contact was made. Daphne and her next door neighbor made a pact with each other during the first few weeks of school: In the event of student discipline problem, they would use each other's room for time-out. Any number of times, Daphne would open Victoria's door and ask, "May this student sit with you? He [She] has work. Thank you!" Victoria reciprocated. At the beginning of the school year, administrators advised teachers to do two things: 1) keep the classroom door unlocked, and 2) keep the glass section of door uncovered. During the year of this study, the principal imposed a rule that student aides from both the main office and the guidance center would now come to teachers' rooms to deliver messages instead of interrupting with the intercom. This change was an effort to cut down on the number of intercom

interruptions. Apparently Daphne became frustrated with the number of students coming to her room so she taped red construction paper that covered almost all of the glass section in her door. The message in black writing read: “Learning is taking place in this room right now! Please do not interrupt unless it is an emergency!” [Note: A smiley face was drawn under the writing.]

What could be going on in Daphne’s room that she felt the need to protect the time she had with her freshmen? Reading. Lots of reading. Multicultural literature plays an important part in her classroom even though she was first introduced to poetry and essays written by African American writers during her teacher education program. Her passion for hooking students to reading means she is always looking for the new by way of selections, authors, and ways to teach literature. Her first year at Lakeside she chose to teach the short stories “Snow,” “Thank You, M’am,” and “The Colomber” to her freshmen. “I try to create an environment where students of all cultures feel accepted and validated. I also want my students to inquire and learn about students of other races or cultures.”

Discussions about race almost always come up as a result of the literature, Daphne admits. Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* naturally lends itself to discussions on race. “During a discussion of Tom Robinson’s trial in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, students were appalled that the jury could reach the verdict they did. This discussion led to a further discussion about how today there is still prejudice in some courtrooms.”

Phyllis

Very few public high school students expect to call their teachers “Mother.” An African American teacher in her late 40s, Phyllis has even the tallest, toughest, young males starting their sentences with “Mother Phyllis.” Students comply with this unusual request without question. Perhaps they do so out of respect or ritual; more often than not, Phyllis has taught two or more generations of their family. This is a giant of a woman both in stature, expectations, and experience. She has been a senior English teacher at

Lakeside High School for the past 26 years. Her teaching is so well respected in the community that teachers and professors adamantly request that their kids be placed in her class. She works students' fingers to the bone by making them write -- and rewrite -- every essay topic imaginable.

Early in her career, Phyllis's wisdom and insight told her that life must always have balance. Her relationship with God and her family are paramount. She often talks to new teachers about protecting themselves against burnout by dedicating 110% of themselves to their jobs as educators. That's fine as long as one leaves room for other aspects of life. For her, balance means: 1) her faith in God; and 2) her relationship with her husband, two daughters, and her own elderly parents. When her daughters were younger, she was an involved parent in their education. She frequented their extracurricular activities. Phyllis even taught each of her daughters in her senior English class.

Throughout her career she has modeled the priority of what makes a great teacher -- continuing her education and seeking professional development. With a bachelor's degree in English and 26 years experience in teaching under her belt, she decided to return to the local university where she obtained a master's of arts degree in teaching in English. Teaching British literature is a passion for Phyllis, even though the standard curriculum leaves little room for cultural diversity. "Since I teach British literature, there is little multicultural literature (African American literature) in the text." Consequently, she adds in works written by Ben Okri, Chinua Achebe, Derek Walcott, and Nadine Gordimer. When she has taught freshmen over the years, she taught the novels *Clover* and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, and Alice Walker's short story "Everyday Use." She experienced reading multicultural literature during her junior year in high school. It was her junior year in high school that she remembers studying an extensive multicultural unit, particularly focusing on writers from the Harlem Renaissance. In her training as a teacher, she recalls studying works by Jean Toomer, James Baldwin, Alice Walker, and

Toni Morrison. “I prefer to think of myself as conservative in the selection of materials. I love the classics! Yet my methodologies are progressive. I’m really big on nontraditional classroom environment, learning circles, and cooperative learning stuff.” As a testament of this, one will find students around tables instead of sitting in neat rows of student desks.

Because of her experiences as both a female and African American, she prefers to confront sensitive issues, such as racism, head-on. “I’m very straight forward in my classroom. For example, when I teach *The Heart of Darkness*, I try to make it clear how the Europeans exploited the natives and how the missionaries and other ‘emissaries of light’ took advantage.” Students often complain that other class discussions are dominated by teacher talk. Phyllis prefers to listen to what her students have to say. “I listen carefully to the responses and attempt to get honest responses.” Interestingly, she has observed that students’ comfort level about discussing race tends to run along racial lines. “The answer depends on the level of students that I’m teaching. The more advanced students tend to shy away from the issues of race. Possibly, they’re trying not to offend. The lower levels are quite candid about their ideas.”

Lloyd

No one person or character can quite capture the energy of Lloyd. Perhaps a combination of Energizer Bunny and comedienne/actor Robin Williams would come closest to describing this man who can talk a mile a minute. Watching Lloyd interact with faculty and students daily, one might not dismiss so easily his bachelor’s degree in acting and directing. He is quite the performer. No matter how many times you might see this Jason Alexander look-alike (an actor from *Seinfeld*), he always has a compliment or joke to pass the time away. Very few people – students or teachers, black or white, male or female – escape his detection and comments.

One time in the hallway, Lloyd passed one of the African American female English teachers and quipped, “Hello, you beautiful person you!” A few minutes later he

and the woman were both walking into the teacher's lounge. Opening the door for her, he joked, "You're stalking me, aren't you?" During hallway changes, he walks up and down the English wing bellowing, "Get to class, knuckleheads!"

In his mid-thirties, Lloyd teaches gifted and advanced English courses for grades ten through twelve at Lakeside High School. He has been married to Jane, another English teacher in the department, for 11 years. They previously worked at the same middle school within the district. Jane transferred to Lakeside just three years ago; he followed her over a year later. An avid family man, Lloyd adores his wife and their 5-year-old daughter Emily. During his planning period, he often goes off campus "for the little woman" and brings back lunch. Lloyd's absence from school is often traced to a dad caring for his sick daughter.

Whether his classroom door is opened or closed, excitement is the name of the game. "My teaching is not very dependent on traditional techniques, such as lecture. I lean more towards discussions, games, projects, and activities." Lloyd's students are not contained to his classroom. They can be found reciting lines in empty classrooms or painting murals in the hallway. Rumor has it that Lloyd rewards students with opportunities to play cards, their CD players and Nintendo games. His artsy classroom has a postmodernist, ready-to-explode feel. The room is usually dark except for the sunlight that filters through the blinds. Bulletin boards are filled to capacity; student work is plastered on every square inch of the walls. His desk is in disarray. Rather than arranged in neat little rows, student desks are clustered together to encourage collaboration.

His nontraditional teaching techniques may be attributed to his exposure to nontraditional works beginning in high school, including *Sunder*, *Roll of Thunder*, *Hear My Cry*, *Native Son*, *Invisible Man*, and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. He was given additional opportunities to read multicultural literature while studying to become a teacher and later obtaining his master's degree. He recalls fondly reading *Song of*

Solomon, Beloved, The Color Purple, and works written by Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, and August Wilson.

As a result of his sustained experience with multicultural experience, he loves to teach Langston Hughes' poem "The Weary Blues," Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, Lorraine Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun*, and excerpts from Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, Zora Neale Hurston's *Dust Tracks on a Road*, and Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano*. For Lloyd, having students discuss race issues is sometimes a deliberate act on his part. "I approach it in more than one way actually. Sometimes we'll read something specifically to use it as a springboard to address race; other times it comes up organically as part of a discussion. My general philosophy is to allow as much open and honest communication as possible." Although he agrees that discussions of race and racism generally come up from both the literature and the students bringing up the topic themselves, literature produces these discussions most frequently. In his experience, William Shakespeare's *Othello*, the novels *Night* and *The Color Purple*, and excerpts from *Black Boy* lend themselves more naturally to discussions on race.

Victoria

In Langston Hughes' poem "Theme for English B," Hughes is assigned to write an autobiographical piece. Throughout the poem, Hughes notes how he shares the same joys and needs that all humans do, but he also admits, "So will my page be colored that I write? Being me, it will not be white." In her teaching of American literature to her juniors, Victoria makes a deliberate effort to incorporate works by African Americans and other authors of color within the traditional literary canon. "I was an avid reader at an early age and I attribute that to some wonderful English teachers in high school, who exposed me to some wonderful works, but it wasn't until my sophomore year in college that I read my first novel by a black author. And I think the reason I was exposed to it then was because the class was a black literature class," Victoria admitted. During that year, she read classic works written by Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and Zora Neale

Hurston. That experience in college led her to hunger for more African American literature. Today she counts among her favorite authors: Maya Angelou, Richard Wright, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker. More recently this hunger had manifested itself in a different direction, leading her to read other authors of color, such as Amy Tan, Sandra Cisneros, Sherman Alexie, Piri Thomas, Rudolfo Anaya, Julia Alvarez, and Gary Soto. “Being a black female all my life, I have always been highly conscious of race and what it means to be raced so I don’t shy away from race issues. I confront them head on with my students. In my fifteen years as an educator, I’ve seen all of my students – regardless of race -- want to talk about race and racism. They’re more willing to take the risk than some adults I know!”

Victoria, like Hughes, acknowledges that while we are all the same in some ways, there is no denying or mistaking that being African-American is part of who she is, and she is proud of that. At Lakeside High School, Victoria serves as a successful African-American role model in a student population that is predominately African American. A proud woman. A proud African-American. A proud mother. A proud teacher. These parts that help make up the whole are all defined by the pride that she takes in being a role model in each of the aforementioned endeavors. Teachers are often criticized for all of the time and attention they give to other people’s children, while neglecting their own. The nurturing of her own children is a top priority for Victoria. Any time spent at Lakeside High outside of regular school hours – after school, preplanning and post planning days, and open house – one can expect to find Victoria with her two daughters, ages seven and ten. The personalities of her two daughters exude intelligence, respect, and a very nice mixture of happiness and friendliness blended together. It is so obvious that these are the children of Victoria, because they evoke every thought that comes to mind when thinking of her.

Victoria is an elegant lady who makes people take notice -- not only with her beauty and dress but the way she carries herself. Physically, Victoria walks the halls of

Lakeside High School with shoulders upright, chin held high, and a pair of eyes that always appears focused. There is no slouching or sloth in how she appears to those who look up to her everyday. Teachers at Lakeside High School appreciate the fact that when they see Victoria, they never sense a trace of defeat in the vibe that she emits. She is always cordial to her colleagues in the hallway and finds time to offer words of personal and professional encouragement. She resonates the willpower to do what needs to be done; some believe her students have no choice but to follow this role model. Seventeen-year olds think twice about complaining about lack of time to do her homework when they have a teacher who juggles so many other roles: a loving wife, a doting mother, and a doctoral student.

Victoria embodies two virtues teachers strive for constantly: consistency and high expectations. She is a polished, professional educator who has high expectations of her students. It is with these two values that she constructs her classes, building in opportunities for students to read, write, and practice their public speaking and presentation skills regularly. She can often be seen counseling students who seek her firm guidance. Her wry sense of humor combined with her deadpan delivery keeps her students and colleagues on their toes. She is an advocate for both teachers and students and insists on a level of professionalism.

Victoria might be described as a crossbreed in the cat family -- part tiger, part Cheshire. Students, who enter Victoria's class the first week of school, may think they will get away with clowning around and disrespecting each other. For those poor souls, "WATCH OUT!" Many a young man has stared at his shoelaces in the teacher's lounge while Victoria spoke to an unsuspecting parent about the lack of tolerance toward foolishness. The truth is many of those same misguided young men are the ones who hug Victoria the longest on graduation night. The young ladies would rather crawl under a rock than to be taken outside the door and reminded that an African-American female has the most obstacles to overcome in our society, so they better work twice as hard and not

demand but command the respect they deserve. Many times she can be seen in the hallway talking to students about situations going on in their personal lives as well as inquiring about how they are performing academically. Her concern is for the student as whole. Her concern for her students' behavior and academic progress is evident in the numerous phone calls she makes to parents during her planning period. She has an easy manner with the students and they respect and admire her. Victoria is, without a doubt, a dedicated cornerstone of the Lakeside High School English department.

Table 5.1. Teacher Book Club Participants

Name	Age	Teaching Experience	Race	Gender
Paul	32	8	White	Male
³³ Jane	34	10	White	Female
Lisa	25	2	Black	Female
Rico	42	14	White	Male
Kasey	46	21	White	Male
Roberto	26	2	White	Male
³⁴ Al	60	22	White	Male
Daphne	37	7	White	Female
Phyllis	49	26	Black	Female
³⁵ Lloyd	35	5	White	Male
Victoria	37	15	Black	Female

Transcribing Race Talk

When Mary sent me the final transcript via email attachment, we made plans to meet at her office on the next day so that we could exchange payment for the audiotapes.

³³Jane is married to Lloyd.

³⁴Al served as the head of the English department.

³⁵Victoria wore three hats in the teacher book club study: researcher, book club facilitator, and participant.

I thought the process would be a quick one. The meeting amounted to more than just a few quick pleasantries and then a simple exchange. Mary expressed her excitement about transcription process and the impact it made on her. She felt like she knew the participants. When they referred to their favorite books, she found herself stopping the tapes and writing down the titles she promised she would read later. The experience had changed her perception about this predominantly African American high school – particularly the school district itself. The “race talk” in the book discussions was so provocative that she found herself discussing the same topics with her husband John and their teenage children Samantha and Der, who attended predominantly white schools in a neighboring school district. “If you ever want me to write something for you about my experience, let me know!” Mary exclaimed.

Mary’s enthusiasm was contagious and convincing. How much richer would this study be if I included the transcriber’s voice? Poland (1995) notes that the opportunity to engage the transcriber more fully in the research is often overlooked because researchers generally see the transcriber as a mere “recorder.” Other than me, who would know these participants? Mary. At Mary’s invitation, I asked her to write her thoughts about the process plus I asked her to provide feedback on the participant portraits and drafts of various chapters of the dissertation. In the following quote, Mary elaborates on her experience.

As I begin to reflect on this transcription project, many thoughts run through my mind. I am amazed by the richness of the study, the passion of the researcher, the overwhelming sense of power in the readings, and the insightfulness of the participants. When I was first approached about doing this transcription, I was completing an equally powerful set of transcripts that dealt with the issues of race and education (Ward, 2003). Walking from that project right into this one was not coincidence. I knew it was divinely orchestrated by God. The similarities were so powerful that my life will forever be changed.

Mary says she has been typing and transcribing for graduate students for over ten years. Some jobs have been mind-numbing; a few have proven to be life changing. This project, she says, was one of those life-changing experiences. “There were times I got so caught up in the story that was being told that I would realize that I had completely stopped transcribing. It was riveting!” As she listened, she began reflecting on her own experiences with race and the exposure to multicultural literature she received in high school. Over two decades ago, Mary fondly remembers in particular her ninth grade and twelfth grade teachers. “They were purposeful in exposing us to the wide spectrum of literature. I remember studying other cultures, as well as reading some African American authors. One author stands out and is still a favorite of mine today – Langston Hughes.”

As she thinks back to the 11 teachers who participated in the book club discussions, she was amazed at the depth of knowledge and insight that was shared. “Most of the participants were honest and open--they seemed willing to share events and experiences that have shaped them into who they are as teachers and parents. They were willing to go places in reflecting that were happy and funny, as well as sad and extremely painful. These experiences, in my opinion, not only enriched theirs, they enriched the lives of their colleagues, and more importantly the lives of their students.”

Like most people, Mary often discusses her job at home. In her case, the discussions over the years with her husband and two children centered on the transcription topics in general, which served as springboards for rich family discussions. “As I discussed this topic with my husband and children, it was interesting to share insights and my own school experiences as well as listen to theirs.” She asked them several questions, including: Do you think that people will ever be able to discuss race without getting all bent out of shape? What authors, readings, or discussions of race have you encountered in school? Do you think that race is an issue for you? Her husband John responded that society placed greater emphasis on the issue of race than trying to find a solution of working and living together. Race is often seen as a power struggle. He

recalled growing up with many African American living in his community, but said he never remembered thinking: Why don't they go to school with me?

Mary's daughter Samantha an 18-year-old college freshman, said that she saw people using race as an excuse for being unable to accomplish one's goals. "It is not about what color your skin is. It is about being human." Race should not be an issue. "Everyone has a past. It is time to move on." Mary's son Der, a freshman high school student, felt people did not talk honestly about race, because they could only see their own perceptions. Most people's views on racism are at opposite ends of the spectrum; very few tend to be on middle ground. Samantha and Der attend schools in the Olson County School District. Unlike Annox County, Olson County boasts a majority white population. Because Olson County was mentioned in a couple of the interviews, Mary asked her children to tell her what books they had to read for their literature classes. She found their lists reflected almost no diversity in terms of authors of color.

Looking back on the experience, she described what she heard as "a building of community." She predicts that as these teachers continue working along side each other and sharing their own experiences with one another, this community will become tighter and create a ripple affecting the students they teach. "What a powerful message – community, honesty, and a genuine respect for those around us," Mary concluded.

The Texts

Why did you choose this book?

I lost count of the number of times my committee asked this question before I wrote the below rationale section for my dissertation proposal. Even after the proposal was approved, this question was not put to rest. As the book club meetings began, my colleagues began asking the same question as they read texts that covered more than race. (See Table 5.2 for a list of the texts we read in the book club.)

Table 5.2. Teacher Book Club Texts

Text	Genre	Author
<i>American Knees</i>	Novel	Shawn Wong
<i>Indian Killer</i>	Novel	Sherman Alexie
<i>Native Son</i>	Novel	Richard Wright
<i>Down These Mean Streets</i>	Memoir	Piri Thomas
<i>A White Teacher Talks About Race</i>	Memoir	Julie Landsman

Rationale for the Books Selected

In addition to my role as full participant and facilitator of the group, I chose the five novels to be read by the group. In my selection, I chose books that were controversial in nature because of they centered on race and stereotypes. In addition, my interest in my colleagues' responses to other "hot lava" topics such as graphic sex and language led me to choose more adult multicultural texts rather than those novels that are commonly taught in high school classrooms.

Through two independent studies I did with my major professor Peg Graham and committee member Barbara McCaskill and my own search of the Barnes and Noble website, I was able to narrow my selections to three novels and two memoirs. The multicultural texts represented these racial/ethnic groups: Asian Americans, Native Americans, Hispanic/Latino, and African American. My rationale for selecting these four racial/ethnic groups was based on several criteria, including my educational philosophy, the racial population of Lakeside High School, Native American contributions to American history and culture, and the diverse populations represented in the high school literature textbook.

My educational philosophy. As a teacher, it is my personal philosophy that students need to see themselves in the literature that they read. Bealor (1992) believes books can act as windows or sliding glass doors for readers by offering views of the world that may be real, imagined, familiar, or strange. Having students read a variety of literature helps them to understand the principles, underpinning values and traditions of

their own culture and the cultures of others (Agnes and Gillespie, 1992). Literature, Bealor suggests, is a powerful vehicle for the transmission and interpretation of culture. The problem with teachers continuing to teach a literary canon composed of primarily dead, white males is that students of color often read literature where they fail to see themselves.

Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflecting we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books. When children cannot see themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are part. Our classrooms need to be places where all the children from all cultures that make up the salad bowl of American society can find their mirrors (Sims, 1990 as cited in Bealor, 1992, p. 19).

The racial population of Lakeside High School. During the year 2002-2003 school year, Annox County School District implemented a new record-keeping system called the School Administrative Student Information, or SASI. According to records I was able to obtain from SASI, there were 1505 students enrolled for the 2002-2003 academic school year at Lakeside High School. Of that total population, the ethnic distribution breaks down to 52% black or African American, 32% white, 11% Hispanic, and 3% Asian/Asian American. Only three students, or .001%, in the entire school were documented as Indians, or Native Americans; the same is true for multiracial students. Looking at the minority populations served at CCHS, the figures supported my contention that the teacher book club selections should represent African Americans, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian Americans. For years, the growth of the African American population in schools has been the topic of discussions, but within the last decade the

United States has seen a continual increase in population by two other racial groups in the classroom and society at large – Hispanic and Asian Americans.

Straub (1997b) maintains that Hispanic Americans have played a major role in shaping both the culture and history of America since the European conquest of the New World. One can trace the roots of this highly diverse group to Spain or to the Spanish-speaking countries of Central and South America, Cuba, Mexico, or Puerto Rico. The 1996 U.S. Census Bureau reported that Hispanic children were the largest group of U.S. children after non-Hispanic whites; it is predicted that Hispanics will be the largest minority group early in the twenty-first century. With the number of Mexican American students entering Lakeside High School increasing each year, there is a need to use every vehicle necessary to ease the transition. I have often witnessed black and white students making racist remarks against “those Mexican kids.” Teachers are just as guilty in their remarks based on assumptions and misconceptions.

Asian Americans are also experiencing a population explosion; they are the fastest growing minority in the nation (Straub, 1997a). With a varied past, Asian Pacific Americans are a diverse group, which includes East Asians (Chinese, Japanese, Koreans), Southeast Asians (Filipinos, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians, Thais, Indonesians, Malaysians), South Asians (Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Sri Lankans), and Pacific Islanders (Hawaiians, Samoans, Guamanians). With so many groups represented, teachers can only anticipate their impact on the classroom. One battle that Asian American students continually fight is the stereotype that paints them as the “model minority” (Delpit, 1995; Okihiro, 1994; Lowe, 1999). “There is a widespread belief that Asian American children are the ‘perfect children,’ that they will do well regardless of where they are placed. This stereotype has led to a negative backlash in which the academic needs of the majority of Asian-American students are overlooked” (Delpit, 1995, p.170). Stereotypes of Asian Americans run from two extremes -- from “yellow peril” to “model minority” Both are equal indices of national anxieties about Asian

Americans. It is a myth that constructs Asians as the most successfully assimilated minority group (Lowe, 1999; Okihiro, 1994). Therefore, Asian American students and their classmates need to read literature which portrays them authentically in various situations, including in school where they experience day-to-day problems just like other students.

Native American contributions to American history and culture. Although the SASI figures do not support my selection of a Native American novel, I was adamant about including it in my selection of multicultural works because of the importance and significance of Native Americans and their contributions to the development of American history and culture. Though most Native Americans live on reservations and have little contact with the rest of the general population in the United States, their contributions and culture should be valued. I am not alone. Numerous websites are available which inform Internet surfers about the history of Native American literature, provide rationales for its importance and inclusion in the school curriculum, and offer links to additional resources such as bibliographies, indices, journal, magazine, and newspaper articles, literary criticism and book reviews, and dissertations. The Native American literature website (http://www.usc.edu/isd/archives/ethnicstudies/indian_lit.html) maintains that although Native American literature was the first American literature to be created, it has been the last to be recognized -- and, to some extent, is still waiting for full recognition. Beginning with its first thousand years of oral literature and continuing to the present time with writers in all the genre of literature, Native American literature is an important element in the literature of this country. For example, the American language borrows many of its words naming people, places, and things from the Native language (Anderson, Brinnin, Leggett, Arpin, and Toth, 1989). The greatest number of Native American words entered American English in the form of place names. Around the country, thousands of rivers, mountains, and towns bear Native American names. The names of animals and plants were among the first words borrowed from native languages.

Straub (1997c) adds that “Over the past two hundred years the orations of American Indian speakers have powerfully shaped the national consciousness, changed government policy, raised pride and determination among the many groups of native peoples, and countered stereotypes and complacency in the American public” (xiii). Even with such an impact on American culture, there is no such thing as “Native American culture.” Films, television shows, books, advertisements, school mascots, and humor of all sorts consistently have created the impression that Native Americans belong to a single, monolithic culture in which all ‘Indians’ look, act, and speak pretty much the same” (xviii).

Diverse populations represented in the high school literature textbook. How is it possible to accurately teach literature or history without talking about the Native American influence? After all, they were the first Americans, right? Native American literature should be an integral part of the school curriculum. Others are starting to see the light. Publishers like Holt, Rinehart, and Winston (1997) recognize and honor the Native American culture and influence by including Native American literature in their anthologies and school textbooks. Interestingly, one of the goals of the *Elements of Literature (Fifth Course)* text, the American literature text taught during the eleventh grade year, is for students to “learn about others, including those in their classrooms and communities, but also people of other cultures, other places, [and] other times” (27). The text provides a diverse array of reading selections representing African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans. Noticeably, the text begins with selections written by Native Americans. Besides, when one teaches American literature, how can it be done without starting with the literature of the people who lived here originally before Columbus stumbled upon its shores? Imagine a school curriculum in which the objective is to “study the myriad of ways in which Native American, Mexican American, Asian American, and African American cultures interact and intersect” (Powell, 2000, p. 9).

What effect would that have on our English classes across the nation? What would the literary canon look like then?

Some educators might argue that since most schools, like Lakeside High School, serve very few Native American students that time would be better spent reading about another minority population. Agnes and Gillespie (1992) disagree. They argue that studying the myths, legends, and songs of traditional Native literature helps readers understand contemporary Native literature and appreciate its differences from the mainstream. Attempting to do this type of study in schools can be problematic. Generally, the accepted canons of literature exclude works by American Indians and Alaska Natives. Furthermore, Agnes and Gillespie argue, the few literary works about Native Americans that have secured a place in the secondary school curriculum were written by non-Natives, are unauthentic, portray cultural information inaccurately, and perpetuate negative stereotypes. I agree with these authors that it is time for secondary schools to take note and introduce their students to this body of work and make the ongoing presence of Native Americans visible to a new generation of students. This was my very intention as I decided for its inclusion in the book club selection. The book club discussions on the Native American selection revealed what is typical of Americans: What little information teachers did know about Native Americans had been formed (and misinformed) by what they had seen in the media.

Book Club Meeting Date and the Texts

The first book club meeting was October 14, 2002. We discussed Shawn Wong's (1995) *American Knees*, which is a funny love story about an Asian-American couple who must negotiate family, race, sex, and other modern obstacles. Wong portrays the issues of Asian Americans and their relationships, and through the main character Raymond Ding, he amplifies the complexities of dating. Wong's sense of humor was what attracted me to this book. He overturns the racial stereotypes perpetrated against Asians in this country without sermonizing. For example, Ding finds himself constantly

trying to break the stereotype of the wimpy Asian man, which he explains is a result of historical portrayals of Asian men in mainstream America. Wong addresses a multitude of relevant Asian American issues, which he uses as a source of interaction between the characters and how it affects their relationships.

During our meeting November 5th, we read a Native American novel written by Sherman Alexie (1996). A National Bestseller and New York Times Notable Book, *Indian Killer* is about a serial killer stalking and scalping white men in Seattle. While this so-called “Indian Killer” terrorizes the city, its Native American population is thrown into turmoil. John Smith, an Indian adopted as a newborn baby into a white family, is increasingly dissatisfied with his life and dreams of the existence he might have led on the reservation. But he has an even bigger problem: He is gradually descending into madness. With each new murder, the city is gripped by fear, and hate crimes perpetrated by white men against the Native American community grow increasingly violent. As the murderer searches for his latest victim, and the Indian population of Seattle is filled with a strange combination of fear and relief, *Indian Killer* builds to an unexpected and terrifying climax. For me, this who-done-it thriller was very powerful because it combined great storytelling, mystery, and suspense. As the intensity of the book increases with every murder of a white man, so does the hatred for Native Americans. This book provided the book club with a starting point for exploring the stereotypes we have about this little known racial group.

We read a Hispanic/Latino memoir written by Piri Thomas (1997) for our December 20, 2002, meeting. *Down These Means Streets* is an unforgettable memoir of an American of Puerto Rican descent who overcomes intense discrimination and social pressure in Harlem's mean streets. In this gritty memoir of his coming of age on the streets of Spanish Harlem, readers see Thomas as the ultimate outsider. He is a dark-skinned Puerto Rican born to a family that refuses to acknowledge its African blood. *Down These Mean Streets* documents Thomas's plunge into the deadly world of drugs,

street fighting, and armed robbery. Thomas's book is a "classic" in the way he explores manhood, marginalization, survival, and transcendence with heart. Just as I anticipated, this book caused some book club members to feel uncomfortable because of its language and sexual content. The book is a "two-for-one" because the character struggles with both his Puerto and African American heritages. Our discussions on this book centered on the struggles that mixed-race and biracial children have with identifying with one race over another.

Beginning a new year, we discussed *Native Son* on January 3, 2003, during a breakfast meeting. Written by Richard Wright (1940), *Native Son* is about a young black man who commits the murder of a white woman during a moment of panic in 1930s Chicago. Wright's powerful novel describes the poverty and feelings of hopelessness experienced by people in inner cities across the country and of what it means to be black in America. Wright's novel created a sensation when it appeared in 1940 and was an immediate bestseller. Although I could have chosen a more contemporary novel, my decision for its selection is based on its potential for conversations surrounding the stereotypes of the black male and the volatile topic of black-white relationships. Although written 62 years ago, our provocative, consciousness-raising discussion of *Native Son* showed us the reason this novel is still required reading on many high school and college reading lists across the nation.

Because there were no teacher planning days in February, the February 6, 2003, meeting was the only meeting held after school. My final selection was not a multicultural novel but a teacher memoir. In *A White Teacher Talks About Race*, Julie Landsman (2001) recounts stories from her 25-year career in a multi-ethnic Midwestern high school and discusses the life lessons she learned from her street-smart, determined students. Leading readers through one composite day of teaching, Landsman focuses on the complicated lives of high school students who attend an academic support program in Minneapolis. Introducing the reader to her multicultural students—African American,

Asian American, Latino, Native American, and white— Landsman shares glimpses of their lives as they come in and out of her classroom. The students' voices bring their personal perspectives to bear upon issues surrounding race and education. Landsman writes about the intersections of race, culture, class, gender, education, and white privilege. She argues that it is often the case that there is a refusal to talk about race or racial differences. Writing from the standpoint of a white teacher, Landsman acknowledges her own mistakes and assumptions in dealing with issues of race and difference so that others might learn.

Chapters Six through Nine

Because of the extensive discussions for each of the three conceptual categories, I have chosen to dedicate a separate chapter for each. Chapter six will include a discussion of the three themes under the “teacher response” category: making connections, offering resistance, and expressing support/approval. Chapter seven will focus on the four themes under the “connections to race” category: stories, stereotypes, white privilege, and institutional racism. Finally, chapter eight will include a discussion of the two themes under “the TBC experience” category: roles and benefits. These chapters will include poetic transcription and editorial cartoons to illustrate the research themes. Finally, chapter nine will present the conclusions, limitations, and implications of this study.

CHAPTER 6

THEMES RELATED TO TEACHER RESPONSE

In this chapter, I discuss the three themes under the first conceptual category titled “teacher response.” The themes deal with teachers making connections, offering resistance, and expressing approval/support. These themes match the first research question, which asks: How do various teachers respond to texts that include themes about stereotypes and racism?

Theme 1: Making Connections

Over the course of five book club meetings, teachers made three types of connections as they read: to characters and situations in literature and the media, to family influences, and to issues in books.

Characters and Situations in Literature and the Media

Galda’s (as cited in Raphael et. 2001) claim that studying literature in the company of others could be a powerful tool for critical thinking proved to be right on target in this teacher book club. As a full participant, facilitator, and researcher for this book discussion group, I observed a process that involved my colleagues and me making connections across cultures and time (Galda as cited in Raphael et al., 2001). Perhaps of no surprise, this group of English teachers loved talking about literature. Our talk about literature consisted of more than just discussing the book for that month’s discussion. The five book club discussion transcripts reveal we made numerous references to literature and the media, including one TV show, 11 movies, eight plays, and 37 books (see Table 6.1 on the next page).

Table 6.1. Teachers' Connections to Literature

TBC 1	TBC 2	TBC 3	TBC 4	TBC 5
9 books 4 movies	5 books 3 movies 1 TV show	9 books 4 movies 3 plays	10 books 2 plays	4 books 3 plays

Teachers made these connections as they drew parallels between the books to other literature and their characters, storylines, or other authors. Sometimes teachers found they could relate the storylines and characters to current events, famous people, and even former students. Between the third and last book club meetings, teachers were able to make these same type connections and comparisons among the books selected for the book club.

One example of teachers making connections to literature occurred during our first book club meeting where we discussed Shawn Wong's novel *American Knees*. Roberto argued that Wong's way of writing the novel set him up to be the expert on Asian American culture. Below Phyllis agrees with Roberto's comment and responds by offering two books she had read as support for her feelings.

And that – Excused me. That-that really bothers me too because I just finished this book called *Homeless Bird*, and it's about this girl in India who's struggling. She has this arranged marriage and in two weeks her husband dies and so she is in this servile position and so it's really horrible but – I mean a horrible situation that she's in. But it's a wonderful book because it-it really -- to me -- led me, it led me more into more depth as to how – you know what was really going on. I just didn't have that sense when I read this [*American Knees*]. I had the same feeling that, you know, if-if I really took this on literal level I-I, you know, it was just very disappointing to me. I also read this book called *The Red Lantern*, which was about this arranged marriage in Japan. And, you know, I just had this sense that he

was leading me in a direction that I did not feel comfortable with. And then I had personal friends who are Asians that just are far more moral than what I am seeing in the book. And, so it was just very frustrating to me because I was saying, “No! [Hits the table for emphasis.] You know? No, this just won’t work for me.” And I was saying – but I would be hesitant to sort of, um, recommend it to someone as a way of finding about Asian, uh, culture.

In the above excerpt, Phyllis quickly dismisses the merits of *American Knees* based on her judgment that it lacks the morality of her knowledge of Asians. Phyllis objects to author Shawn Wong’s choice to depict his Asian American protagonist as a man who goes through multiple relationships with women – both white and Asian American – in a search to find the perfect relationship. As a critical race theorist, I believe her objection to Wong’s characterization is based on an American stereotype of Asian Americans as the “model minority.” One of the themes of critical race theory is for educators identify and transform concepts of race, racism, and racial stereotypes (Solorzano, 1997; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). The “model minority” myth constructs Asians as the most successfully assimilated minority group (Dalton, 1995; Delpit, 1995; Lowe, 1999; Okihiro, 1994; Yao, 1988). In schools, Delpit (1995) asserts, this stereotype is especially problematic to Asian American children, who are assumed to be the “perfect children” –the type of students who will perform successfully no matter where they are placed. The result of this type of stereotypical thinking by educators is that the academic needs of the majority of Asian-American students are overlooked (Delpit, 1995).

Phyllis argues her knowledge of Asian Americans was gained by reading two books about Asians and her own personal relationships with Asian Americans. She believes this knowledge gives her the authority to know what Asians are like as a people. She sees Asian Americans as generally a very moral group of people. I think Phyllis’s objection has implications for teachers in the classrooms. When exposing students to people of other cultures, teachers need to make sure they are giving their students

multiple opportunities to see people of color in different roles. For example, I remember a middle school language arts colleague of mine whose reading curriculum consisted of novels written by African American author Walter Dean Myers. Many of Myers' protagonists are black male teens from working poor families. I argue this type of exposure to diverse literature does more harm than good especially to those students who have little to no knowledge of a particular culture or for students who fit the ethnic/socioeconomic profile. For white students, for example, I think that type of limited exposure leads to stereotyping about black people. Black students, who fit the same type profile, need to read about blacks in other roles so they can see what other roles, opportunities, and possibilities are out there.

Another example of teachers making connections occurred during the fourth book club meeting where we discussed Richard Wright's *Native Son*. Travel plans may have prohibited Paul from attending our meeting, but a note he left the book club clearly outlined his feelings about the book and its protagonist as well as the connections he made to other characters, other pieces of literature, famous people, and current events. Paul's note is below.

Hello book clubbers,

Travel snafu has left me flying back January 3 (probably today for you when you find this). Disappointed that I will not be here for the discussion as I have really enjoyed them thus far. Anyway....

Was not a big fan of *Native Sun*, could never find sympathy or the will to root for Bigger. An unappealing character from the start with how he treats friends, girlfriend, pool owner, etc. He never stirred an emotion in me to understand his plight. His a

attorney's closing argument, though long winded, is spectacular and interesting, but those pages summed up Wright's thoughts -- four hundred pages after dragging us around with a character who did not have this reader hoping for a verdict like one does for say, Tom Robinson³⁶.

The bad fortune of the first killing is over shadowed by the ruthlessness of the second murder. Bigger lost me there. The mob mentality is a tad interesting, and one can see some interesting parallels to some modern manhunts (Rodney King verdicts, OJ's white Bronco) or incidents where people become blood thirsty or infatuated with revenge. The communism angle seemed self-promoting. I remember loving *Black Boy*³⁷ and being disappointed in *Native Son*. Fifteen years later, I still concur. Have a great chat!

Paul

Although Paul was absent for this meeting, his note illustrates the kind of free exchange of ideas that is possible within a book club composed of educators. In their examination of the nature of talk about literature that happens in three different contexts (teacher-led large groups, teacher-orchestrated small groups, and teens and adults talking about literature outside classrooms), Marshall, Smagorinsky, and Smith (1995) found that when the teacher controlled the flow of classroom discussions, student were less engaged and their contributions were limited to summaries and interpretations of information from the literature. Paul's note exhibits a high level of engagement with the literature. Marshall et. al (1995) found the same level of engagement with adults, who participated in book clubs. Paul feels free to offer his understanding and evaluation of Wright's character's actions and makes connections to current events. In addition, he compares his experience as a reader of another work written by the same author.

³⁶Tom Robinson is a African American character in Harper Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

³⁷*Black Boy* is an autobiography written by Wright.

Our ability to relate to characters in the books was far too real for some of us. For me, the protagonists in three of our books – namely John in *Indian Killer*, Piri in *Down These Mean Streets*, and Bigger in *Native Son* – reminded me so much of students I had taught over the years that I asked my colleagues if they felt the same way.

Excerpt 1

Lisa: But see I kind of wonder too, I feel like, I know this kid, I know this kid now!

Victoria: That was my next question: Do you all see Piri?

Lisa: Yeah!

Victoria: In some form, in your classes?

Lisa: Yes, this kid is so close to me. I mean I know, and I know this, so do I want [Victoria: Mmm, huh.] to -- find them more, give this to our kids who see this everyday as a reality?

Lloyd: Yeah, but what it does -- but see they-they see -- they see this part, right? And they have like anecdotal knowledge of this part maybe, but it is different...

Lisa: And how fun it is --

Lloyd: ...to walk through somebody's shoes through this part.

Lisa: So are you saying you don't think our kids are walking through shoes like this now?

Lloyd: I'm saying they are walking through the kids are young Piri, because they are young, but they haven't experienced 35 years of life as Piri.

Excerpt 2

Victoria: Do you see any of these characters in any of your students that you've had?

Al: I don't know. I would say, not to that extreme, but I think --

Jane: I have seen some Bessie's for sure.

Lisa: I've definitely seen some Buddy's.

Al: I hope to hell I don't see any Biggers.

Someone: Yeah.

Al: I think to an extent maybe.

Daphne: I've had one Bigger and he scared the hell out of me!

Al: Really?

Daphne: Yeah.

Lloyd: Well, I think that Bigger's thing is so circumstantial, man, I mean we've all seen the, the sort of like hopelessness and anger thing, you know? And I am mean what happens to Bigger is such a product of loose circum-, this chain of circumstances happened. And he's all about survival. I'm not sure that I haven't seen lots of potential Biggers. You know what I mean?

As a teacher, reader, and critical race theorist, it was a powerful experience for me to read a piece of literature and make instant connections from these protagonists to former students of color I had taught. It was almost a creepy déjà vu sensation. Reading about these characters and then making this connection offered me a possible view into the private world of my former students. I realized that I did not know these students at all. I was ignorant of the lives they lived outside of Lakeside High. In hindsight, I thought: Perhaps if I had had this inside knowledge when I had these students, I would have been better equipped at educating them. Even more powerful was Lisa's bond with the biracial character Piri from *Down These Mean Streets*. Piri reminded her of a student she had currently in one of her classes. She questioned whether we should present books steeped in reality like *Down These Mean Streets* to students who are already experiencing this reality in their daily lives. I say it depends. As Lisa points out, this may be shaky ground. I think we should go forward but tread softly when we make recommendations for reading materials. We never know how students will react to a book. Maybe reading a book like *Down These Mean Streets* will empower a dope pushing, 15-year-old to stop dealing crack cocaine before he ends up in the penitentiary like Piri did. Possibly a young

girl reading about a protagonist's decision to report a rape by an uncle will motivate her to do the same thing with her father, who has intimidated her into keeping an incestuous relationship quiet for the past eight years. When teachers deliberately prevent children access to these kinds of books and only offering safe alternatives in their classrooms, they are unplugging the potential for powerful connections between students and literature before they can have a chance to start.

Another example of teachers making connections to characters and situations presented in our readings occurred in our discussion of Richard Wright's character Bigger Thomas in *Native Son*. At one point in the conversation, members were talking about how the city of Chicago was thrown into a state of paranoia and hysteria as the police sought to track Bigger down for the rape of a white woman. Phyllis quickly pointed to how she could relate to the black people's fear of Bigger in the story. A similar situation happened to Phyllis, who had grown up in South Alabama in the 1960s while Martin Luther King was still alive. This was a time when Martin Luther King's speeches were sending ripple effects across the nation. There were people in her family and community who wanted to know how she felt about King. Her parent cautioned her, "You know this guy is really going to cause us a lot of trouble." Even people in the community and church warned, "You know we're going to have to suffer because this guy is so outspoken." Looking back on that part of her life, Phyllis said brought back those fresh feelings of fear. "I could really relate to the idea of people being searched and people being kicked out and people losing their jobs as a result of one person's act."

I think Phyllis's ability to connect to the characters' reaction in Wright's book supports my philosophy that readers need to see themselves in the literature English teachers provide. As a critical race theorist, I believe that providing students of color such reading opportunities are especially critical. Reading becomes an even more powerful experience when a reader connects with a character, a feeling, or an event. English teachers need to make sure that our reading lists provide students to relevant connections

to their daily lives. I think that is the reason that so many teenagers are turned off to reading. They have not been exposed to literature that provides them with relevant, real-world situations. They do not read about characters that have their same issues and conflicts. Choosing books that appeal to today's students mean teachers will have to suspend comfort zones and risk dealing with certain taboo topics.

It is interesting to note that one teacher in particular stood out when it came to making connections to literature and other media: Paul. Book club transcripts show Paul frequently interjecting ideas or concepts about people of color, which he attributed through movie watching. Very seldom did his narrations include information he credited to his own personal knowledge he had gained through relationships with people of color. Paul's pattern of exhibiting his knowledge of people of color from movies began in our first book club meeting where we discussed Shawn Wong's Asian American novel *American Knees*. Lloyd and I were talking about the expectations and pressures that the protagonist's family had for him marrying an Asian woman, when Paul added that he could see the same similarities as a Jew growing up in a Jewish family where one would be ostracized if he/she married a Christian. In the excerpt below, Paul explains his point and makes a connection to a Spike Lee movie.

Uh, that it is confusing for some people to have to deal with that because you want to be true to your heart, but you also have outside people looking in at you and you're in a fishbowl in that respect. And I think, uh, it might be also -- either *School Days* or *She's Gotta Have It* -- uh, one of those two, I can't remember which one but I remember them having an whole issue of the darkness, [Several book club members: *School Days*.] the darkness of the skin and when, when, uh, when African American males go for the light-skinned girls, and they get criticized by some of the more dark-skinned people who say, "You're selling out." And, uh, that was the first time I had ever heard of that so when I was reading this

I started thinking I guess like you're saying, "On a daily basis, I don't think about things like that."

This excerpt and other conversation tidbits Paul offered over the course of five months' worth of book club meetings demonstrated his lack of experience dealing with race. In CRT, scholars believe that whiteness shields white people from ever thinking about race, even though they have one (Grillo & Wildman, 2000). Even though Paul had taught students of color for many years, he knew very little about what their lives were like. The information about people of color that he did contribute to our discussions showed he was dependent on movies to provide him with contextual information about them, including their issues, struggles, and pain. As a CRT scholar, I see this as problematic if this is the only source of Paul's information. The problem comes when whites' sole knowledge about people of color (constructed from images and information gathered from what they see on movie screens) is a romanticized or essentialized version of race. When this Hollywood version clashes with the people of color they deal with in real life, the result can be disastrous, especially if the person is serious about establishing, maintaining, or repairing good race relations. Many times assumptions and decisions are made based on this information. Perhaps Paul's tendency to seek out movies that rely on the experiences of black people may be his attempt at having a secondary experience with race. This fact is particularly interesting considering his staunch belief as an English teacher in the power of literature.

In the book club discussion on Piri Thomas's *Down These Mean Streets*, Paul makes the point that although he grew up and went to school in the Bronx and rode the subway through Spanish Harlem, his knowledge about people who lived there came from characters in the movie he watched called *Brother from Another Planet*.

Paul: I'm feeding off what Roberto was saying. I grew up and went to school in the Bronx, and my subway went right through the Spanish Harlem and there is a movie called *A Brother from Another Planet*.

Roberto: Mmm, huh.

Daphne: Oh, love that movie!

Paul: Yeah, and there is a scene in there where they say, next stop 125th Street, which was my train, and he goes, “I can do magic, watch all the White people disappear.” [Laughter from book club members.] And all the White people get off, you know. [Laughter from book club members.] And, uh, you know at my school [Daphne: I haven’t thought about that movie since college!] we had a lot of people that were like the people in this book that-that went to his school.

Victoria: Mmm.

Paul: That were not there, you know. Their-their education was on the streets and that was just the culture and, uh, you know, growing up in New York, I mean this book didn’t remind me of my childhood; it reminded me that I did have friends who were in a situation like this. Probably two sections removed, you know. I knew somebody [**Daphne:** Mmm, huh.] that had a brother that was junkie, or you know.

Someone: Yeah

Paul: And it would be more romantic for me to paint this picture: I am Piri, but I am not.

I think this excerpt illustrates Paul’s awareness that he does not possess first-hand knowledge of people of color even though he lived in the same neighborhood and attended school with them. What few connections he was able to make to the character in *Down these Mean Streets* (a novel he read in high school) came from a movie that used the area as the setting. Paul’s only connections to the character were friends that lived the same life. Readers may argue that the fact that Paul seeks out these experiences of race in movies shows his willingness to engage with race. From a CRT perspective, I say it is a

lazy effort. Educators have a particular responsibility to engage with their students of color, including getting to know their families, communities, or other support systems. It is not enough to watch movies to learn about our students. I must also add one more significant point. Paul is a big supporter of exposing his students to multicultural literature in his classroom. I question his ability to both make accurate selections and initiate meaningful dialogue about race issues since both of these factors would be influenced by his Hollywood version of race.

The fact that my colleagues and I could sit together, talk about books, and make such connections from our reading to other selections of literature and various forms of media is one benefit of reading multicultural literature, according to Rogers and Soter (1997). Reading opportunities like the ones we experienced profit readers who are members of the dominant culture as well as those representing minority groups. These books provided us with situations and characters that we could relate to in our own lives – even when “our lives” meant information we had gleaned from either reading other pieces of literature or watching television and movies. The characters in these books were so real to us that it was creepy. For me, making these connections caused me to think about the implications for the big picture: Were we really doing a good job of educating other people’s children? Internally, I began questioning my own career: How effective had I been at teaching all the children in my classes over the years? What different strategies had I used to promote success? How was I part of the problem?

We all knew former students who were cardboard cutouts of Piri, John, and Bigger. Another implication was that since we could read this literature and quickly recognize our students, students might also read the literature and be able to see

themselves. I agree with Bealor (1992): It is important that teachers offer literature that acts as a mirror so that students can see themselves as well as learn about people who are different from them. Lisa disagreed. She believed that since many of our students at Lakeside High lived the harsh realities described in these books, we should not immerse them in it further by reading about it.

With classrooms growing increasingly diverse each year, research studies challenge the European conception of the canon with its distortions, repressions, and silences (Okiihiro, 1994; Pinar, 1993; Powell, 2000). In order to present students with a truly representative portrait of the world (or even American) literature, there is a need for teachers to expose themselves and their students to multicultural literature that represents vast range of experiences of Native Americans, Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, African Americans, and women's literature and history. CRTs believe this portrait may be the only snapshot students receive in their daily doses from history books, [the sole use of] literary canon, pop culture, and media, which still negatively portrays the images, heritages, and cultural experiences of people of color or treats them as an invisible entity.

The role of multicultural literature is to provide opportunities to build self-esteem by legitimating the images, heritages, and cultural experiences of people of color (Rogers & Soter, 1997). Reading literature of and by people of color offers white students the opportunity to learn about people who are culturally different from themselves and negotiate their own connections. Such experiences lead "them to value all peoples, accept differences as a natural aspect of human societies, and even celebrate cultural pluralism as a desirable feature of the world in which they live" (Rogers & Soter, 1997, p. viii).

As a CRT scholar, choosing these particular books was my way of supporting what CRTs term as “the call to context.” These books contained examples of what CRT recognizes as new forms of writing and thought, such as biography, autobiography, stories and counterstories, humor, satire, parables, chronicles, poetry, fiction, revisionist histories, and narrative analysis (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). My purpose in selecting such materials was to illustrate the oppressive realities that people of color face on a daily basis (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000).

As teachers, we need to carefully select literature that mirrors our diverse students and encourages multiple voices. We need to create classroom atmospheres where students encounter versions of literature that are either new or in conflict with the constructions they hold of themselves and others (Rogers & Soter, 1997). Placed in these sometimes uncomfortable situations as they read and discuss diverse literature, students must act like “social negotiators” – that is, “creating meaning about themselves and others while drawing on other cultural materials (equally infused with meaning) from home, peers, school, and other public sphere” (Rogers & Soter, 1997, p. 13). Multiplicities in these areas are important if our goal is to recreate a world where social justice and equity prevail (Rogers & Soter, 1997).

Family influences

A second connection that these teachers as readers were able to make was to their families and how they were brought up to think about race. The race talk in this book club supported Tatum’s (1997) claim that some of the assumptions people make about others may be traced to their own experiences. One of the topics of discussions that continued to resurface month after month was the relationship between a teacher’s current views of

race and the influence of his/her family upbringing. The stories these teachers told about growing up involved certain codes of behavior. Families – both black and white -- tended to set clear boundaries between the races, and the message was crystal clear: Stay with your own kind. Blacks had their place; white had theirs. In the following quote, Daphne elaborates on this point as she talks about the relationship she had with a black friend.

A really good friend of mine -- we went from kindergarten ... and then we ended up at the same middle school and high school. And we were friends throughout, played in the band together, played middle school basketball until I realized that I could not play basketball. [Laughter from several book club members.] She went on to play basketball at West Georgia, but you know, to have Tracy come spend the night at my house, I knew better than to ask. Although I wanted to include her, I knew better than to ask. [**Lloyd:** But this was never something that was overtly said to you.] No, my dad would sit next to her dad at basketball games and they would have a great time and they would cheer, but no, there was definitely a distinctive line drawn there. This is the line you don't cross. And it really – it-it made me uncomfortable growing up. [**Al:** But it's interesting --] But I knew that was there, and I also knew that with my father I had no power to change him.

From a CRT perspective, I see Daphne's story about the influence of her father's racist views on her own upbringing having implications for how she approaches race in her own classroom. It is possible that she has carried those same feelings of discomfort about race issues into her classroom. As Sleeter (1993) suggests, teachers bring to the profession perspectives about what race means, which is constructed on the basis of their life experiences and vested interest of justifying their power and privilege. I wonder how

she has chosen to deal with issues of race with her own children and her students in her classes. It was evident to me in her painful retelling of this story that she has yet to deal with the race issues of her past.

Her story also has implications for educators to consider. First, her story illustrates the strong influence parents have over their children about race. How do young people understand the distinctions — the unspoken and explicit messages sent to them by their parents (and peers) — that surround their relationships with students of other races? Daphne's story left no doubt that she understood her father's boundaries set for this interracial relationship. Her fear of him acted as a deterrent for her ever crossing the line. Second, her story supports the contention that educators must decide whether they want to risk changing these attitudes about race in our classrooms. The hard question is: What happens when what we are teaching about race conflicts with what is being taught at home? Daphne's story illustrates there are no easy answers, but that educators should take in account the differing attitudes about race that students bring to their classrooms when initiating race dialogues with their students.

Al, the department head and oldest member of book club, grew up in Sethan, where his dad was a well-known doctor in town. Like Daphne's parents, Al's parents believed the races should only socialize to a certain point. In the excerpt below, Al elaborates.

I don't remember growing up having many black friends.... I mean like I mentioned last time ... we used to get together, come over to the house, not in a social sense. If they want to come over -- a bunch of guys wanted to come over -- and get out in the backyard and play basketball. That was one thing. ...there were

times that, yeah, I would have really liked to have invited so-and-so over, but just I felt like it was best not to.

The gut-honest revelations made by Daphne and Al caused me to think about my own upbringing. Up until that point, I had only occasionally thought about my own family's views about race throughout the years. Then I thought about my own relationships with white people growing up. Sure, I had had relationships with white people. My own best friend in high school was white, but now that I thought about it, I had never invited her over to my house. I had never even considered asking her over for dinner, a movie, or even to spend the night. Whites were not the only ethnic group that created strict boundaries for their children. I had to speak up: Black families could be guilty of the same type of racism. In the excerpt below I acknowledged how my upbringing was so similar to the stories told by Al and Daphne.

Victoria: And I remember growing up, Daphne, back to what you were saying.

[Pauses.] It was not clearly said that you can't invite white folks over, but I just knew not to. [**Daphne and Al:** Mmm, huh.] I could be friendly with them at school. I remember having a [white] girl graduate with me, I mean we -- kindergarten all the way through. And I use to comb her hair in second grade, it was my fondest thing to do, [Laughter from book club members.] but I just knew that I couldn't invite

Daphne: Yeah

Victoria: And certainly it was out rightly said: Don't bring a white boyfriend home. [**Al:** Mmm, huh.] You just don't do that. So it's clearly – I mean it's not

just, you know, the other generations. It was my generation as well. [Al: Yeah!]

[Lloyd: Yeah.] At least in my culture, the culture I grew up in.

Al: Well, when you bring them home and then that becomes an omen of acceptability.

I think the stories that Al, Daphne, and I told about the roles our families expected us to play when we were growing up supports a CRT belief: The impact of racism starts early. All three of us talked about these race boundaries that prevented us from getting too close. Our parents were not trying to be racist. They did not teach us to hate the other race, just not get too friendly. For me, my painful history had taught me to be distrustful of white folks. Getting too friendly with them is what got black men and women lynched. I think Al and Daphne's history taught them the same lesson, except being too kind to blacks would mean being ridiculed and labeled a "nigger lover." Such friendships could also cost them their lives or their livelihood. Our parents did not see themselves as racists; they taught us to be law-abiding citizens, who had a respect for all people. They were merely trying to protect us.

As educators, we need to take family influence into account when we examine our own philosophies of race. I think it is virtually impossible to prevent these philosophies from seeping into our classrooms – whether we choose to explicitly state them or remain mute about them. Then we must also consider the philosophies of our students. How many philosophies of race are represented by the 30 bodies seated in our classrooms each period? How does a teacher negotiate and reconcile her philosophy along with those of her students?

According to Tatum (1997), children are exposed to misinformation about people of other races as early as preschool. Our stories revealed white and black families still living – by their own choice after *Brown vs. Board of Education* -- in their own segregated worlds – separate neighborhoods, communities, and churches where we had limited opportunities to interact with people different from our families. Relationships outside of one’s race would be tolerated only if they were maintained from a friendly distance. It was not said out right – no, that would be racist -- but you knew the rules: You can be friends with them at school or play basketball with them together on a court, but you better not dare bring one of them home. Do not even think of one of them spending the night. Do not even entertain the idea of interracial dating – or God forbid, marry one of them.

The power of reading multicultural literature for us was that it involved taking us all the way back to the beginning of our race thinking -- how our families taught us to think about race. Landsman (2001) argues that it is especially important that whites study their memories, paying particular attention to issues and factors in their childhood that formed their racial definitions and prejudices. Teachers should encourage such discussions in their own classrooms. In her undergraduate courses, Willis (1997) used multicultural literature to “open discussions of history, knowledge, power, culture, language, class, race, and gender” (p. 135). Using multicultural literature is important because it helps students develop balanced perspectives, creates opportunities for positive transcultural interactions, and fosters an environment where racism, misconceptions and stereotypes can be discussed and begin to be dispelled (Goebel, 1995; Oliver, 1999; Stallworth, 1999).

If race really matters, as West (1994) argues, then we must entertain public debates and discussions in schools about the subject where we talk both candidly and critically about the issue. This means empowering students to talk honestly about how they were taught to think about people of other races. Dalton (1995) compares America's racial affairs to a deep wound, which has been allowed to ooze and fester because people do not want to confront each other about race. Cleaning the wound, maintains Dalton, means allowing people to become vulnerable in mixed group settings like this book club where we felt uninhibited in sharing intimate stories about our lives. We did not let our worry about others' reactions stop the floodgate. Once it was opened, stories flowed freely. I thought my sharing would encounter judgment. Instead, I learned how both white and black families were operating out of fear. Making relevant "race" connections was a risk, but it was one that paid off for its members.

For me, the experience was cathartic – almost like our sharing was a therapy session or a confessional. It came very close to the way Warren (2002), a Christian author, describes "authentic fellowship" – an experience where people go beyond superficial chit-chat. Instead, they indulge in "genuine, heart-to-heart, sometimes gut-level, sharing" (p. 139). We felt comfortable enough with each other to step out on faith. We were honest about how we came to our present state of being. We wore our feelings on our sleeves as we shared how our families raised us to think a certain ways about race. At times, we felt weak and powerless to change our situations. After telling my story, I felt immediate relief for a burden I had not realized ever existed.

This type of sharing could serve as a model for what students should do in English classrooms as they discuss volatile issues like race. Teachers should seriously think about

sponsoring their classrooms as places where such frank discussions among their students can take place. Students want to talk about race and ask questions of each other without being subject to ridicule or retaliation. If teachers see school as a “rhetorical situation,” they will strive to provide students with opportunities where they can see controversial issues from various aspects and then determine (with the help of their own communities) where their own views fit within a range of differing opinions (Goodson, 1994). Although daring to explicitly discuss issues of race can be painful and potentially explosive in the classroom, the rewards can be bountiful for students when teachers choose to face the issues head on (Grayson & Martin, 1990; Nieto, 1999).

The following data poem represents our thoughts on how our families influenced our thinking about race.

Multigenerational expectations and pressures
 Human imposed
 Marry a Jew.
 Now that’s expected.
 Or would you have problems with the people in your community?
 They will call you hypocritical.
 It’s confusing for some to deal with.
 You have to be true to your heart.
 Frustrating.
 Well, I started dating this white guy.
 Then I said I can’t do this!
 The pressure, looks, comments.
 It was too difficult.
 I had to walk away.
 One mixed race couple won’t come to the south
 Growing up,
 there were definite divisions between black and white
 Painful situations
 You come to accept your family the way they are
 You’re not going change them no matter what.
 I’m not sure how I ended up with my views.
 My father grew up in a time when you were friendly to black people,
 But you didn’t associate with them.

He was never ugly to anybody, but there was definitely a line there.
 I liked Russell; the only problem was he was black.
 Dating someone else outside my race?
 I was 17 and scared of my father!
 That was a line you just didn't cross.
 My father was not racist; he was prejudiced.
 He's not hard core; he was just a product of his time
 I don't remember growing up having many black friends
 Now getting in the backyard and playing some basketball was one thing.
 I really would have liked to invite them in –
 Perhaps even to spend the night.
 Racism back then was blatant and in your face.
 Today it's in the closet.
 In this new generation, things are different.
 With our daughter, race is not an issue.
 To the best of my knowledge, the issue is never brought up.
 It's not a black and white issue.
 These are just her friends.

Issues in books

In addition to teachers making connections to literature and the media and relating their views of race to their family upbringing, teachers responded to several issues related to race presented in the five books, including mixed/biracial children and their conflict with racial identity, interracial marriage and dating, and the burdensome task of being a speaker for your race.

Mixed/Biracial Children and Conflict with Racial Identity. The discussion of mixed or biracial children and the conflict they have in establishing their own racial identity was a topic that teachers connected to in three of the five club meetings.

One such discussion occurred during the second book club meeting, where the group was discussing how the Native American character John Smith struggled with being raised in a white family in Sherman Alexis' thriller *Indian Killer*. We unanimously agreed that the intensity of John's internal conflict was the source of his mental illness. Thinking about the confusion John must have suffered as he struggled with his racial identity, Phyllis recounted a story about the tensions created for her family over a mixed child they chose to adopt.

Phyllis: Because in Larry's family – he has a brother and sister and they are dark-skinned. And they adopted this child that they thought was mixed white. And we also – and the first time I saw him was three months old. And everybody said, well, he's going to turn dark. He did not. And Terry is the only dysfunctional child in that family. They had three other children and they decided that this child had been abandoned because the mother said that her family would not allow her to keep the baby so my brother –

Jane: Because he was mixed or because –

Phyllis: Because he was mixed. And my, um, husband's brother's a minister so he decided to take him in so they adopted and reared him. And Terry has had an incredible number of problems, um, throughout his life because he was so different from everybody else.

Phyllis: This – reading the book was-hard for me because I could relate to Terry and all the things that-that he, um, suffered. [He] just looked so different from everybody else, you know? And just so loving, you know, just a very needy and loving person ... a dysfunctional person. [**Lloyd:** Yeah.]

Jane: So do you think Terry would he have had problems no-no matter who raised him or was it a question of was – did more problems come [Someone coughs.] from being different?

Phyllis: I think he would have been better served in another family. I honestly...

[**Jane:** really?] uh, think so. Cause it was just hard. It was hard for me, you know?

[**Jane:** Mmm, huh.] I-I – cause he was very quiet.... You know what I'm saying? But a loving person so you always had to approach him.

Lloyd: And you've got-got issues to start with [**Phyllis:** Mmm, huh.] and then you have these things that complicate it even more ... [**Phyllis:** Mmm, huh.]

Phyllis: And then we as a family had some tensions – we really thought, "He's going to darken up. [**Jane:** Mmmm.] I mean we thought he's going to be to fit in

better [**Jane:** Mmmm.] and he just didn't. I don't know if you realize this or not but with African Americans babies [Bell rings.], uh, you can tell by the fingernails what color that baby is going to be. Cause they all come out in the same color -- real reddish [**Victoria:** Mmm, huh. Mmm, huh.] and then you can look at the nails and tell. [We thought] surely he's going to darken up.

Paul: And-and takes this the best possible way I can say it. You just said our expectations. Do you think that possibly his-his problems may relate to a level of disappointment even though no one would come out and say, "We're disappointed that you haven't darkened?" [Someone: Mmmm huh.] But there possibly be -- You know a kid can read when people [**Phyllis:** Mmm, huh.] walk in the door. I mean like when he -- when he introduces his friends to his parents, he can read his friends' face.

Phyllis: And he married a very, very dark woman that looked [**Paul:** Mmm, huh.] just like his mother [**Paul:** Mmmm.] -- okay, his adopted mother. And it didn't work well, [**Paul:** Mmm, huh.] you know.

Lloyd: But that's just ... you know? [Someone: Mmm, huh.] About trying to strive for this thing that's been imposed upon you, you know?

Jane: So should kids -- do they need to be raised by parents that look just like them?

Phyllis: [She exhales.] That's a tough question. And I have biases because of it.

In conversations such as the one above, teachers questioned and debated several topics. Where should mixed/biracial children fit in society? Which culture is more accepting of these children? Which is less accepting? Is "passing" for one race over another wrong? What effect does the conflict with racial identity have on the children themselves? As Lloyd quickly pointed out to us, "I mean white folks are very quick to weed out non-white folk. You know what I mean?" Paul observed that so many biracial kids in his classes experience the "adoption syndrome," a feeling that they do not belong

to any one culture. Al added that he felt children of mixed marriages encountered a world that was entirely different from the one experienced by either black or white children.

Another discussion over mixed/biracial children and their conflict with racial identity happened in our book club discussion on *Native Son*. During that point in the conversation, I described a discussion I had had with a mixed race female student in my class. “I have Carry Rarewood – sweet Carry Rarewood -- in my 11th grade advanced class and I try to do a good job as you all know of presenting the different cultures in my classroom and she said to me, and I almost wanted to cry toward the end of the semester, you know. ‘How come you didn’t -- How come we didn’t read anything about somebody being mixed like me?’ ” In his interview, Kasey reminded me of that conversation. “It’s-it’s very tough to mix races and that a child looking for identity – You’ve seen it. I’ve seen it here. Where a child is of mixed origin, um, racially mixed, and doesn’t know with whom to hang ... is not a part of the white world, is not a part of the black world, and has to make a decision about that. That’s a tough thing for a fourteen, fifteen, and younger.”

Before I left his room, Kasey gave me a class set of *Read* magazines, which focused on the experiences and problems that mixed/biracial children face. In that magazine I found a poem titled “Me”³⁸ which captures the complexities of our discussion over the confusion biracial/mixed raced children face in a world that loves to put people in definite categories. Below are excerpts from that poem.

What am I?
 I’m a question. I’m an answer.
 I’m a resister of racial classifications,
 A defier of ethnic designations,
 A list of possible labels,
 And a navigator of niches that don’t quite fit.
 I’m a petitioner for no more pigeonholing,
 Who loves to keep you guessing.

³⁸The poem “Me,” written by Sara B. Busdiecker, appeared in the October 12, 2001 issue of *Read* magazine (volume 51, number 4).

I'm a medley, a mixture,
 A collage of colors.
 A blended body shifting shades,
 A cultural chameleon
 Of ambiguous ancestry and hybrid heritage.
 I'm creator of my own category.
 I'm inventor of my own identity.

I'm mixed, but not mixed up.
 I'm not about denying a part of me.
 I'm not about trying to pass.
 I'm no sellout, no traitor,
 No wanna-be, no mutt.
 I'm no tragedy, and no exotic other.
 ...If anything, I'm just another hue of you.
 I'm not about confusion
 (unless you mean other people's confusion)

I'm black + white + I don't know what else =
 both/neither/other, "half" transracially adopted,
 descendant of people I've never met. A freckled
 brown-skinned, curly/straight/frizzy brown-haired
 (with some black, blond, and orange thrown in),
 German-American raised, Spanish-speaking gringa
 And multicolorful part-time expatriate. I'm mixed.
 What I am is ME.

I think our discussions about biracial/mixed students carry an important implication for teachers. When teachers make their selections of literature, they need to be careful that they take in consideration students who are of biracial or mixed heritage. When students read literature and either fail to see themselves at all or see images that are distorted or comical, they interpret that to mean that they have little value in schools and society (Bishop, 1997). In choosing multicultural books, Bishop (1997) cautions educators to include books that "reflect the racial, ethnic, and social diversity that is characteristic of our pluralistic society and of the world" (p. 3). In addition to adding books to the high school literary canon that represent African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Latino/as, CRT would also advocate teachers remembering additional groups like "women, the disabled, gays and lesbians, and the

elderly, all of whom felt victimized, oppressed, or discriminated against in some way by the dominant culture” (Bishop, 1997, p. 2). As I pointed out in our discussions, as a teacher of American literature, I thought I was doing a great job of representing “American literature” by adding the voices of authors of color to the dead, white male canon. But where I had erred, as my student Carry pointed out to me, was that I had overlooked those students like her who were of mixed heritage.

Interracial Dating and Marriage. Another topic that book club members connected to was interracial dating and marriage. Usually a taboo subject among groups, members felt empowered to talk about this sensitive topic after Phyllis revealed in the first book club meeting that she had to walk away from an interracial relationship in college after just a few months because she could not handle the pressure, looks, and the comments from both the white and black communities. This elicited Lloyd and Daphne revealing that their siblings had married outside of their race. Lloyd addressed the complexity of interracial dating.

It’s in all cultures...the desire to hang on to racial identity. You know what I mean? With people ... [in] conflict within their own culture, their own society. Do they choose to date ... to mate outside of your race, your culture, you know? And there [are] parts of people’s families and cultures are so against that. Cause it’s like you’re giving something up – you’re abandoning something, you know? And- and in some cultures it seems race is another culture or it may just be our perception....

He added that the decision to go outside one’s race for a mate is a strong dividing force. On one hand, people want to be united regardless of race, color, or creed; yet, they want to hang onto their own ethnicity that makes them unique.

The issues of interracial dating in *American Knees* so affected Kasey that he shared a conversation he had with Sandy Chung, a popular Asian American female at Lakeside High School who was currently dating a white guy named Vick. He spoke to

Sandy about the issue of interracial dating and asked her if people looked at her differently when she was with Vick. "... and she didn't hesitate to say, 'Yeah.' She said even when she goes back to China, it's obvious she's been Americanized by the way she walks and her posturage." (For further discussion of this topic, readers should see the theme of "stories" in chapter seven.)

West (1994) argues that Americans are obsessed with sex and fear black sexuality, especially when it comes to the taboo relationship of black men and white women. This obsession and fear can both be traced to myths about black men and women, which present blacks people in a very negative light -- as either having a threatening sexual power over whites or as harmless, sexless creatures subservient to whites (West, 1994). "Black sexuality is a taboo subject in America principally because it is a form of black power over which whites have little control -- yet its visible manifestations evoke the most visceral of white responses, be it one of seductive obsession or downright disgust" (p. 125). We were able to read and discuss an example of the former in our fourth book club meeting on Richard Wright's character Bigger Thomas in *Native Son*. In the novel, Wright explores the myths of black sexuality, stereotypes of black and white people, and the sensitive topic of interracial relationships and sex (particularly when it comes to black men and white women) when Bigger accidentally kills the white daughter of his employer in 1930s Chicago. This book club was able to do what groups rarely do -- candidly talk about race and sex. For West (1994), the two go hand and hand if blacks and whites wish to have a candid dialogue about race. As a critical race theorist, I see the need for English teachers to use such books in their classrooms to initiate discussions where racial stereotypes are explored. In addition, I could see teachers giving their students historical context for how these racial stereotypes got their start.

Being a Speaker for Your Race. Finally, the three teachers of color -- Phyllis, Lisa, and I -- explained to our white colleagues how people of color are often placed in very uncomfortable positions -- usually in classroom situations -- when they are asked to speak

for their entire race. One such conversation happened during our discussion of *American Knees* when Lloyd asked Lisa, Phyllis, and I how we felt about having to represent our race. It was then that I went on an angry tirade about my alienating experiences as “the only one,” that is, the only person of color in graduate school courses at Bellson University.

Lisa: And if you don’t take up the cause then you get -- [**Lloyd:** Are you a betrayer? Yeah!] Yeah!

Lloyd: You know? You know what I mean? I mean I just I-I don’t know – [**Phyllis:** Mmm, huh.]

Victoria: I know exactly what you mean! And it’s particularly if you’re in a situation where you’re the only one! [**Phyllis:** Mmm, huh.] And you’re – that’s been thrust on me [**Phyllis:** Mmm, huh.] basically all my life! [**Phyllis:** Mmm, huh.] That has been my life. I’ve developed this attitude that I’ve had to really pray about because I didn’t – I don’t want to accept that responsibility. I don’t want to sit over at the Bellson University in a class and people look at me and they have these perceptions and attitudes about me. Cause, ah – it was a struggle to even go back and get this degree. I hated the thought of having to go back [**Phyllis** whispers: Mmm, huh.] to Bellson cause my experience with my masters program was so horrible because the people – and these were adults – of course, I’m in the teacher ed. program. And these were adults who would sit there and make thoughtless, racist comments and I’d be the only brown face in the crowd – [Someone: What question? It question, question.], you know? And then, you know, if I spoke out in class, [Male: ****.] they would look at me like I was some experiment – like you know, “She talks intelligent!” You know! And if I spoke out then I was labeled [Several females: Yeah!] I was always labeled militant. If I didn’t speak out, then they could just go on in this madness [**Phyllis:** Mmm, huh.] – would just continue. It is a burden! [Female: Yeah! Yeah!]

Obviously, my angry reaction to the subject of being the only of color in classes at Bellson University is a fresh wound that has not healed. I guess part of my resentment is I feel that professors should know better. Here Daphne expressed her anger after she listened to Phyllis talk about the alienation of being the only person of color in any group situation.

Phyllis: The isolation is horrible! [**Lloyd:** Mmm, huh.] It truly is! And I was one of those people who preferred just to speak out because I figured I was getting isolated anyway. And it was so hard with study groups because people would divide and study and I was always left out and so I had to do it on my own!

[**Victoria:** It's a horrible.] And it is a – it is a very bad point. It's like when I am close to 50 years old and still when I go in certain stores, you know, the look that I'm gonna get and it's like, "Oh, gosh! Stop watching me!"

Laughter from several book club members.

Lloyd: And they follow me down the aisle a little more! [Sung in a sing-song like fashion.] [Female: You know you're gonna get that look! Oh!] Just follow me on down the aisle!

Phyllis: Just-just track me down, you know! So you know, it's just – [**Al:** During the first time you walk in a store?] Yeah, and I know that this is gonna always be a part of my life. [**Al:** Sure!] And, uh, hopefully the next generations [Laughs.] won't have to go through –

Daphne: And I think, too, you may have to – I mean that-that would horrible. I-I and I have no idea what that feels like -- to be in that situation! But I think we also have to consider that you [all] spend your lives trying to break being old ...you know the... stereotypical, uh, white viewpoint, you know? Just like you don't want to be the spokesperson, I-I don't want some of those other people being the spokesperson for me and so you-you spend your whole life trying to do that [be a spokesperson].

Phyllis, Lisa, and I echoed the same sentiment: Acting as an “expert” or “speaker” for your race is both alienating and exhausting. People stare at you when you speak up in class as if your eloquence in speaking is astonishing. When group assignments are made, I told my colleagues, I am often excluded or last picked. When issues of race or questions about the African American community are prompts for discussions, heads turn in my direction and ask for the “expert opinion.” Whenever I spoke with any degree of passion, people automatically labeled me militant and intimidating. Do I speak this time or remain quiet? Sometimes I spoke up. Other times, I remained quiet but simmered. Whites often unknowingly appointed the only person of color in a group or class as the “speaker” or “expert” for the entire race. For me, the appointment was a burden, which carried with it a “damned if I do or damned if I don’t” conclusion. Below is another such conversation initiated by Lloyd. This time Lisa responds with the background affirmations coming from Phyllis.

Lloyd: I’m guessing culturally internally it’s a burden, too, with-with some folks being like very much like, “You have to speak out!” and some folks being like, “You know I don’t want to deal with that,” you know? And I know what you mean about the grad program thing. I was talking about McPherson College – Dr. Gina Braxton, who had a class of [Makes a slapping sound for emphasis.] white folks. And Gina Braxton was our-our instructor [Makes a thumping sound for emphasis.] and I mean anytime race would come up, it’s like every head would swivel over to Braxton [**Phyllis:** Right! Right!] Right? And she-she’d call us on it every time! [**Phyllis:** Mm, huh.]

Lisa: I think if you want go take that a step further – just kind of look at what’s going on right now with the controversy surrounding Colin Powell and that remark that Harry Belafonte [**Lloyd** (softly): Yeah.] about, you know, his, uh, his, uh, his blackness. Yeah! Whatever. And, um, I think when talking about two-two men, that are very obviously, um, well-educated, intelligent men who said, you

know, something was said and something [**Phyllis:** Hmmp.] wasn't appreciated and all that but to be the spokesman for your race -- I mean [be]cause you saw it -- you saw it in *American Knees* [Female: Because --] You saw them have to be the spokesman [**Phyllis:** Mmm, huh.] for their race when they were in a group with others. I mean you saw them have to answer all the questions.

If the use of multicultural literature in this teacher book club proved to have limitless possibilities in prompting discussions over race issues, the same could be said of its use with students. Ironically, English teachers expect their students to engage in critical and competitive exchanges as members of the intellectual community even though they prepare them with learning based on the "traditional" canon of works. These students go off to college having only experienced disconnected glimpses of curriculum, which has shielded them from potential controversies between texts (Graff, 1992). Hade (1997) proposes that teachers need to expose their students to injustice by preparing their students to "naturally" read for issues involving race, class, and gender.

One major goal of exposing students to multicultural literature with contemporary protagonists is to have all students realize that people from diverse backgrounds experience the same successes and frustrations growing up (Hayn & Sherrill, 1996). "It is critical to show students the universalities between culturally diverse males and females and to celebrate the differences and enhance the similarities" (p. 1). Before asking students to read works by authors such as William Shakespeare, teachers should transform their students into bibliophiles, suggests Tuft (2001). The first step in the transformation, according to Tuft, is teachers introducing their students to novels that reflect their lives. "Today's students don't understand the purpose of reading literature. They see English teachers as people who pick apart their writing skills, and make them read outdated books about subjects they don't understand" (p. 24). According to Oliver (1999), acquainting student readers with writers from diverse groups allows English teachers to accomplish three objectives in their mission as teachers of young adult

literature: it allows students to find their identities; it assists students in learning about the world; and it exposes students to the rich heritage of America.

In discussions involving issues dealing with diverse literature or race, well-intentioned teachers need to be wary of unintentionally pressuring students of color to speak on behalf of their race. Phyllis, Lisa, and I told stories of how burdensome we found being a spokesperson for our race and we were adults. It is unimaginable how stressful a teenager feels placed in such a position. I think teachers should make reading multicultural literature and talking about race an integral part of the school curricula so that conversations will become so commonplace that no one feels put on the spot for an opinion.

I will end this section with a data poem, which represents the teachers making these connections to racial issues mentioned in the books.

Interesting parallels
 Piri's story is much more hopeful
Native Son's a despairing cry
 I recognize Piri in some of my students.
 I have seen some Bessie's for sure.
 I've definitely seen some Buddy's.
 I've had one Bigger, and he scared the hell out of me!
Barbershop, School Daze, Jungle Fever
 Boo looking off the porch.
Monsoon Wedding, Words By Heart, The Education of Little Tree
 The Rodney King verdict
 O.J's white Bronco
 I remember loving *Black Boy* but being disappointed with *Native Son*.
 Incensed.
Crown of Punishment, Notes from Understand, In Cold Blood
 I know I shouldn't mention this as an English teacher, but
 I have no experience.
 I haven't read *Native Son* since I was an undergrad.
 I read *Down These Mean Streets* in high school.
 I didn't get the same feeling.
 I felt absolutely nothing.
 Originally, it was pretty neat.
 I had an opposite reaction.
 Now? I'm much more sympathetic.
 That was many years ago.

We look at things differently.
 Our mission is to expose these kids.
 Give them a variety of experiences, frames of reference, and contexts
The Outsiders, The Joy Luck Club, Monster, Julius Caesar
 Interesting, different pieces of literature
 It's like a smorgasbord
 We throw it out there –
 Some kids are going to relate to it; some kids are not
 At certain points during their four years in high school,
 They are gaining knowledge of others
 Living,
 Striving
 for the American dream.
 Hopefully, they'll pick up the bits and pieces
 And get a full meal deal!

Theme 2: Offering Resistance

A second type of teacher response was that of resistance. Teachers felt empowered to question two issues of conflict related to the book club: the authors' intent/agenda for writing the books and the selection of book club texts.

Authorial intent/agenda

One of the ways resistance manifested itself was in teacher empowerment: Teachers felt comfortable questioning and debating the authors' intent/agenda for writing the books. For what purpose did authors Shawn Wong, Sherman Alexis, Piri Thomas, Richard Wright, and Julie Landsman write their books? Did they have a particular intent or agenda in respect to their readers? Were they trying to get across a message? In respect to racial stereotypes, were they exploring them, destroying them, or affirming them? Was their purpose to display or dispel racial misconceptions? Teachers also questioned authors writing about their own cultures and debated the authenticity of works written by authors outside of the culture. We asked: Even if an author of color is writing about his/her own culture, how much of a spectrum should readers expect him/her to represent of that culture? Should white writers be encouraged or discouraged in writing books representing diverse cultures?

In their discussion of three books -- Shawn Wong's *American Knees*, Sherman Alexis' *Indian Killer*, and Richard Wright's *Native Son* -- the teachers debated at length about the intention or agenda of these authors. Authorial intent was a major topic of discussion during the first book club meeting where we discussed *American Knees*. Members toyed with these questions: What was Wong's intent? What was his purpose in writing this book? Was his intent to highlight stereotypes we have about Asians? Did he intend to turn stereotypes about Asians upside down?

Members expressed their frustration and dissatisfaction with trying to find answers to these questions. Roberto and several other members concluded that Wong's storyline was often confusing and superficial and failed to hold up to the several agendas they thought he had. In the second book club meeting, Lloyd thought Sherman Alexis' intent in *Indian Killer* was to speak on behalf of Native Americans. The discussion turned personal when members began talking about a Native American character in the book that questioned a white professor's credibility in teaching a Native American literature. Daphne asked the group point blank, "Is it okay for you to teach African American literature? Is it okay for a white person to teach Native American literature?"

Rico: If your heart's in the right place. [**Victoria:** Mmm, huh.]

Lisa: Yeah, but that was where my question was. What is the right place?

Roberto: Well his wasn't.

Lisa: See that is what I was saying, [**Daphne:** Some people --] that was my question with him. I didn't feel like his heart was necessarily in the right place.

[**Daphne:** Yeah --] I thought his heart was more [Someone: Patronizing] -- exactly.

Daphne: But -- and for some students --

Lisa: Self-aggrandizing.

Daphne: For some students, the fact that Victoria Pettis teaches African American literature is going to lend more authenticity to the course than if I were to teach African American literature.

Rico or Roberto: I agree

Jane: And I think it is also where you are. If we're in Hartford, Connecticut, and there's not anybody who steps up to take that role, then I think it might be okay

[**Daphne:** Exactly!] for me to do it, but I think, you know, I'd be laughed out of the building today, [**Daphne:** But I think that's where Marie was coming from --] which is fine.

Daphne: You know, she was like you know you have women professors teaching women's literature --

Jane: Right.

Daphne: Why don't you have a Native American professor teaching Native American literature?

Phyllis: Well, see I don't necessarily agree with that, simply because as an African American teaching British lit. [literature]

Several book club members laugh.

In their discussion of these same three books -- Shawn Wong's *American Knees*, Sherman Alexis' *Indian Killer*, and Richard Wright's *Native Son* -- the teachers debated for some time about the authors writing on behalf of their cultures. Should they be considered spokespersons? Did their race give them a unique inside scoop that an outsider would not have? Roberto, who was currently taking a master's course on race in children's literature, was often the ring-leader of discussions surrounding the credibility of authors writing outside their cultures and the burden authors of color carry when writing about their own culture. I observed that most of my colleagues would listen and chime in their agreement to the questions that Roberto raised for discussions. Can an author authentically write about a culture of which he or she is not a part? This same

issue has been at the center of debates played out in academic journals and university classes across the nation. The questions that Roberto was posing for the group were quite familiar to me since I had taken the same course with his professor about a decade earlier. One camp argues that “insiders” are better able to capture the inside world of the culture; the opponents claim that success in writing outside one’s culture is all about the author’s imaginative gifts, or aesthetic heat (Wolf, Ballentine, & Hill, 1999). In this decade of political correctness, Roberto did not feel it was possible. “How dare you presume?” he asked. Just because a person knows a lot about a culture does not mean he/she can write about it. Paul pushed the envelope a little further by asking if this extended across gender lines. Can a male author write from a female’s point of view successfully? Roberto responded, “The gender issues come in but it’s-it’s a highly contentious point like a lot of the children’s literature that has black protagonists was written by a white person, and you know. How can you do it? Is this true? Who is your – where do you get your information?”

Members pushed the discussion to different directions by asking these questions: Why is there little availability of diverse literature that accurately reflects minority cultures, particularly when it comes to Native Americans? Why is there a lack of legitimacy when white teachers attempt to teach subjects related to people of color like Native American or African American literature or history? Can an author of color really give readers a broad spectrum of his culture in a novel? Several book club members debated this last point as they discussed *American Knees*. Roberto argues that Wong had an agenda from the start: He was the expert on Asian culture. “And it kills me because, you know, here the average American reader is gonna to read this and go, “This is Asian American culture, by God! They wrote the book on it!” Jane believed that readers wanting a well-rounded view of a culture should consult edited anthologies.

This discussion points to the importance of what literature we select for our students to read. From my CRT perspective, I think it is vital that teachers pull from

various sources instead of choosing a token so that our students will have a broad spectrum in which to form their opinions. My doctoral committee warned me about essentializing when I proposed choosing only one book “to represent a culture.” I was hoping that teachers would realize that these authors should not be viewed as experts or speakers of their cultures. No matter how excellent the writing, the writer can only do so much within the confines of a novel. Just like a scriptwriter can tell only so much of a story within the limitations of a two-hour movie, an author of any race, gender, and social class can only give readers a certain array of those areas. As Jane suggests, telling the story of a race involves reading multiple perspectives, not just one point of view to get an entire rainbow.

Lloyd argued that Wong’s way of setting up the book placed this author in an unenviable position of speaking for his race. “I don’t hate the book, but I think he is such a – the author’s a fence-straggler in a lot of ways that makes the book unsatisfying, you know. It’s like, well, he’s trying to have it both ways in several different instances that makes me go, well....” Minutes later Al and Jane discuss the tendency for readers to want the author to supply them with an inside view of a culture.

Al: I don’t think there is in any culture to show me the way it is. And I think that there is no way to write a book without the personal opinion being in there. And in, uh – any race, any culture. There’s got to be a variety of –

Jane: I think we want there to be. I mean I think that it’s human nature to say, “Well, this is the way it is. This is the way [it is] Asian Americans.” Cause we can understand that. But then you have all these complexities, I mean – which issues are cultural? Which is your personality? Which issues are race? Which issues are religion? And you know.

Al: And when you knock it all down, it’s real hard to say with-with all the background everybody I think that you’re not going to find a definitive book

on Asian culture, or a definitive book on African American culture – any more than you [are] going [to] find definitive book on white culture.

Several minutes after Al's powerful comment about Wong's book, Lisa asked the group, "What were some of the definitives that you got about Asian culture from the book?" Roberto responded, "The women like sex!" Lisa then answered, "I didn't get many definitives." Jane noted, "But to me, that was part of the point...." Right on, Jane. That, too, was my point in selecting one per culture for us to read in this book club. I did not want to provide any definitive characteristics about any of the cultures represented. I wanted us to discuss our own conceptions about the ethnic groups represented in the books and how these matched or were incompatible to each author's. I was hoping they would arrive at the conclusion that no one author can represent all aspects of a culture. As educators, we must search and provide multiple opportunities to engage with various cultures, not just offer one hit-or-miss token as our way of saying we offered diversity in the curriculum.

As a critical race theorist, I would have to side with the camp that believes that an insider is better equipped to capture the inside world of a culture. I do not wish to debate that point that some authors are born with what Wolf, Ballentine, and Hill (1999) call aesthetic heat, or imaginative gifts. Female writer S.E. Hinton, the author of popular male-dominated novels *The Outsiders* and *Rumblefish*, is such a gifted writer. My question is not should an outsider have the right to write outside his/her culture. My question is: Why would you? What is the motivation? In her study of the development of African American children's literature during its first 100 years, Harris (1993) found that very few texts written by authors of color had ever been designated as classics even though they were determined to have "extraordinary literary merit, expand or reinterpret literary forms, or provide a forum for voices silenced or ignored in mainstream literature" (p. 168). Much of the literary canon consisted of books reflecting the "experiences,

values, perspectives, knowledge, and interpretations of whites, particularly Anglo-Saxons” (p.167).

“Voice,” a main theme of CRT, is all about people of color naming their own realities in their stories. CRTs believe people of color need to write their own stories. How else can storytelling act as a medicine to heal the wounds caused by racial oppression if we allow others to tell our story? The importance of the “voice” component of CRT is that it provides an opportunity to communicate the experience and realities of the people of color, which is the first step on the road to justice and understanding the complexities of racism (Ladson-Billings, 1999). I foresee the storytelling component of CRT being empowering to authors of color who are allowed to speak for themselves. They are motivated to challenge racist assumptions in society and the world at large while producing characters who are victors, not just victims of racism.

The data poem below reflects our willingness to question the authors of these books.

Eleven teachers in a book club
 Questioning,
 Questioning,
 Questioning the problematic.
 Was this a well-constructed story?
 Can the author speak for his race?
 What was the structure of this book?
 Whose point of view is the author representing?
 Were the characters rounded, believable, and well developed?
 Well, there were problems.
 With all that profanity and graphic sex!
 Both are problematic, even if they serve the storyline.
 The author’s prose?
 Unsatisfying!
 The book had a circular structure.
 The most interesting story threads were the least ones pursued!
 Dog gone it!
 Characters were used as symbols
 We wanted to know more about them for goodness sake!
 Very disappointing.
 The author was a fence straggler.
 Which side was he arguing for?

Frustrating!
 His passion for the subject matter should have dictated
 Digging deeper.
 Much deeper.
 Admittedly, some books provided compelling reading.
 Still, we eleven teachers were questioning,
 Questioning,
 Questioning the problematic.

Book Club Texts

Besides questioning authorial intent/agenda, some teachers demonstrated their disapproval of the books I had chosen for the monthly discussions. When I was in the process of selecting the books, I knew that the books I had chosen highlighted race issues. I was also very much aware that these books happened to include topics teachers might find questionable or personally offensive. I kept asking myself: How might they judge me for choosing such books? I knew controversy was a real possibility going in, but I was willing to take a chance.

Unbeknownst to me, discussions about my selections of the books were taking place in the teacher's lounge. Lisa and Phyllis made me aware of these conversations. Lisa said the only time she tried to participate in these conversations was when someone encouraged, "You make sure you have read this by the time you go in there." At times she would chime in with a sentence or two, but she tried to stay away from discussions because she did not want others' opinions to color how she felt. "The most interesting conversations to me were to the ones that always took place five minutes before the tape started rolling -- when you were going to get food or going to get the drinks. That's when people were the most candid and real about the books and it would have behooved us to have a little tape recorder that they didn't know was on I think," Lisa stated. The biggest topic of conversation was confusion over my criteria for selecting the books. "That was the biggest one. I cannot understand why this particular book was chosen. People were very open and honest about how they felt: I hated it. I liked it. I loved it. Worse book I've ever read. And you didn't get that in the actual meetings," Lisa elaborated.

When Phyllis and Kasey voiced their concerns about the subject matter presented in *American Knees* and *Down These Mean Streets*, I was not the least bit surprised after having known both of these teachers for five years. Christians by their faith, both teachers said they were concerned with the graphic sex scene depicted in the first book *American Knees*. “I-I struggled with *American Knees* ... and mainly because it seemed like I should be reading that on an airplane with all the sexual stuff in it,” Kasey explained. Phyllis, the African American female participant, added, “The thing that upset me the most was I felt as if the book were designed to lure us by giving us all the sex. And I thought as an intelligent reader, I don’t need all this in order to really enjoy this. I mean you really could have truncated most of that out!” Going into this study, I expected Phyllis and Kasey’s reactions, but Daphne’s response caught me completely off guard. It was not until the actual discussion of *Down These Mean Streets* that she revealed to us that she found the book so offensive that she had to stop reading very early in the book. For Daphne, reading *Down These Mean Streets* was a painful experience. She had a similar experience in high school when she read *Property Odds*, a book about young people who become heroin addicts.

I mean that’s been 25 years ago, but it seems like [it] ended up being a baby involved somehow, and I don’t know... I just remember it was very depressing, but it was one of those things where I, you know, I wanted to finish it, hoping that something good came out of it, and nothing ever did. And so I think it was [reading *Down These Mean Streets*] kind of like touching a hot stove. I didn’t want to go there again with that.

Daphne’s admission that she could not tolerate reading about pain led to other members listing subjects they found intolerable to read about, including drug use, retardation, human suffering, rape, incest, war, and horrific world events like the Holocaust. Surprisingly, Daphne admitted in her interview that she enjoyed the discussion on *Down These Mean Streets* so much that she wished we could have talked longer. She

says she knew she had the option of acting like Kasey – attending the book club meeting yet remaining silent – or giving her honest reactions to the book. She chose to vocalize her objections to the group.

I admit that there are some topics – such as incest -- that I, too, find very uncomfortable to read about (even the hate and evilness associated with racism is at times hard to take as a person of color and critical race theorist); yet I have not allowed my uneasiness to stop me from reading, enjoying, and teaching such novels as Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. I am ready to discuss those sensitive topics with my students, even when I am struggling with the issues presented in the novels. If I allowed my discomfort to hinder my reading, there would be very few “classics” that I would be able to teach my own students, including Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Richard Wright's *Native Son*, Elie Wiesel's *Night*, and John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. In my own defense, I must also say my selection of books for this teacher book club did not reflect who I am or what I stand for. Though I am a Christian, I do read books that contain profanity, sex, and subjects that make me cringe (i.e., rape, incest, serial murders, etc.), and I offer my students selections that explore these issues as well.

Kasey, Phyllis, and Daphne were not quiet in their disapproval of the book selection. Of the five novels, book club members talked about their feelings of being uncomfortable with three: *American Knees*, *Down These Mean Streets*, and *A White Teacher Talks about Race*. *Down These Mean Streets* had to be by far the most disturbing book for the book club. In protest, Kasey told me privately several days before the book club meeting that he would not be attending; he found the book too offensive to even discuss. Phyllis and Daphne attended the meeting, but admitted they were both unable to finish the book in its entirety for the same reason. Imagine my embarrassment when I was pulled aside not once but twice by Phyllis, a lady I considered a mother figure and my mentor. During those private conversations, she respectfully described her feelings of uneasiness in reading both *American Knees* and *Down These Mean Streets*. Below are

two excerpts taken from our discussion of *Down These Mean Streets* where Phyllis offers the group her thoughts on the reasons she found this book so objectionable.

Excerpt 1

Phyllis: It was too real for me and I did not like the book. I didn't finish, okay? And let me tell you why. When I first started reading, uh, the book, and I mean couldn't really relate to him as a person, you know. I-I felt his pain in trying to establish his identity, um, and the poverty. I could just really see it.

Rico: Yeah.

Phyllis: But when we got up to that sex scene, I was reading at two o'clock in the morning, and I got so upset, I mean just extremely upset, until I said I cannot do this, and I prayed about it. I am a praying person, and I just could not deal with it. And I have been trying to analyze why I could deal with *American Knees* versus this one. With *American Knees*, for me, you know we had the humor and we had two consenting adults, but this was so real to have a young boy, [**Paul:** Brutal. Brutal scene.] you know? [**Lloyd:** And **] And the initiation into that role, it was just too much for me to handle. I know with my age has a lot to do with it.

Excerpt 2

Lloyd: Well, it was jarring. I was shocked when I read it, but I mean, like you say we come from different generations. For me, it wasn't a deal breaker at all, obviously, but yeah I mean that was a really shocking scene in the book.

Phyllis: And maybe because again: I don't normally buy into that kind of reading. I am a person who...I love the classics more than anything, because I don't have all that.

Lloyd: You don't have to put up with that garbage! [Laughs.]

Phyllis: I don't have to put up with that garbage for me. And again, I am simply saying garbage for me, okay? Not ****. I just -- It was just shocking for me, and I

thought, you know, to see him, I could really see him engaged in that and it was just too much.

Besides the graphic sex scenes, teachers offered two other explanations for their reluctance in reading *Down These Mean Streets*: a graphic description of drug use and the time of year they were reading the book³⁹.

Jane: To me, the heroin was almost the deal breaker.

Daphne: That-that's where I just had to put it down. I couldn't read past, like page 20. Well, and I will go back and finish it at some point, but at that point, I was just, you know, this is just getting too depressing for me, right now. I can't handle this depression, I don't know if it's --

Lloyd: You don't think a little junky rehab at the holiday? [Laughter from several book club members.] Lighten up?

Lisa: But I think nurtures like a valid point: I think had I read this at a different time, it might not have affected me so strongly, but I – again with Phyllis, I totally hated this book! Would have never have bought it, would only have read it, only kept reading it, because it was for Victoria, but, um, I think a big part of that was I'm not wanting to read about your heroin use and this other stuff when I am trying to be in the holiday spirit.

Roberto: Yeah.

Lisa: So I think a different time of year for me would have been better.

Lloyd: I would have -- Well, what I thought. I would often, like I was waiting on *** I was waiting for the *Two Towers* to come out. So I would often like after I read this at night, I would put this down, and I would read like a chapter of Tolkein, because it was like a purification.

³⁹Teachers read *Down These Mean Streets* for the third book club meeting which was held December 20, 2002.

After listening to this conversation, Paul asked the group, “Why do we have a problem with this, but then when we read in *USA Today* about some cover story of some famous actor/actress/athlete who has been in rehab?” This prompted a conversation involving Phyllis’ thoughts on whether she would expose her own daughters to a book like *Down These Means Streets*.

Phyllis: I would not want my girls to read this in high school.

Jane: But I mean, for some, okay --

Phyllis: Or ever! Really! I just wouldn’t!

Jane: I would want my daughter to understand that there are people struggling with these issues.

Lloyd: It’s so real. Yeah!

Jane: But I mean, I think this is so much more effective.

Phyllis: There are ways you can do that though other than –

As a parent, Phyllis is not alone in her philosophy about what books are appropriate for her children. Some parent groups and concerned citizens often stir up enough hullabaloo over books with material they deem inappropriate and/or offensive that school administrators, media specialists, and teachers are forced to either pull them off library shelves or strike them from course reading lists. During my first year at Lakeside, I had a white parent inform my principal that he was unhappy because I was teaching a biography on Malcolm X. My principal told me that the parent complained that I was “teaching too much black literature.” Luckily my principal did not mandate that I not teach that biography. He was just informing me of this complaint.

Using Woodson’s (1990) term here, my CRT sense tells me we are “mis-educating” students when we presents works of literature that fail to deal with race or other taboo problems. Ignorantly, we hope our students will study these issues at the college or university level. That type of thinking is called “passing the buck.” Like race, the very topics we consider controversial – racism, sex, drinking, drug use, incest, rape,

etc. -- are being brought before students daily in their homes, in their schools, within their peer groups, and in the streets. How can we afford to withhold education that is vitally needed by our young people today?

For Roberto, the book club selection offered variety. He said he did not enjoy every book, but he certainly appreciated every book. "The books were all loaded, you know? Some of them had a bigger agenda than others." He believed reading these books afforded him an opportunity that is rare for the average American adult or even teen readers. Lloyd concluded that the book selections included some books he liked more than others, "but I read them all cover to cover, because I kind of thought that is what we signed up for." Describing himself as a "wide-ranging" reader, Lloyd said he did not find the graphic sex and profanity as objectionable as some of his colleagues.

For me, that was no big deal. It wasn't necessarily a big plus, but it wasn't a big minus either. I just didn't, I just didn't have, one, a big emotional reaction to it one way or the other. And I know part of that comes with, you know, for people, a lot of people have issues because of religious faith and things like that, and even though I'm a Christian I am a very non-denominational kind of a guy, so I don't really.... I-I don't feel any strong moral push to sort of judge what people are doing in the stories.

He was disappointed that some of the members of the English department chose not to fully participate and described their actions as "cheesy," "unprofessional," and "uncool." Although he understood some members' decision to "throw in towel" on two of the books, he noted that he would not have chosen to do that himself. He felt compelled to finish the books no matter what. "I-I don't know...but this whole bury your head in the sand thing. I just -- I just never get that. I never get that. You have to keep your eyes wide open and see what's out there."

Not many topics made Al feel uncomfortable. He says he was pretty open to most anything. "I don't particularly care for books in which the use of extensive language or

sexuality is used for the purpose -- none other than selling the book. If the language fits... the characters, if the language fits the story, I'm okay with it." Although a majority of book club membership was adamant about its dislike of the first novel *American Knees*, Al said he thought it was one of the best discussions because book club members discussed and debated the reasons they liked or disliked it. "And [what] I learned is we don't all have to agree and we can agree to disagree, but [what] we don't want to do is just disagree and that's where you run into problems." There was one novel, *Down These Mean Streets*, which caused him some concern. "You know, you reach a point where it's over ... it's saturated."

Paul was both surprised and disappointed by his colleagues' reaction to the books, particularly the members who came to meetings and reported that they found the books so offensive that they refused to finish reading them.

I thought as English teachers, if anyone should push forward and try to accept literature as just that, as someone expressing their view, uh, if it makes you uncomfortable then push on. If it goes out of its way to purposely offend you, then stop, but I didn't think that any of the literature that we had read was purposeful in its -- and especially, you know, the ones that were non-fiction. I mean this is what happens to people and this is a reality and if we just wanna put our heads in the sand, then are we really, I don't want to say are [not] we worthy to teach literature, but at the same time, uh, when a kid says I don't want to read *To Kill a Mockingbird* because it has a word in there that I don't like, then they're missing the big picture of the story and missing out on something that I think is a great story for all.

During his interview, Paul told me he also found my selection of the books surprising. His reaction, he admitted, was based on a preconceived, stereotypical view he held of me. Because of my Christian beliefs, he automatically assumed that the books

selected for the discussions would not include potentially controversial or offensive material.

I respected that [you could choose material that some might find offensive] because I thought it showed that you could separate your religious beliefs and the fact that literature is just that: It's literature and it doesn't necessarily mean that if you read the autobiography of a serial killer that you support that person, but as a person that's inquiring about how others think or how others live, that it could be interesting reading to further understand people in our society and our worlds.

Paul's admission that he held certain expectations about the book club selections during his interview empowered me to explain to him how my religious beliefs had a direct connection to my choices. Below is what I told him.

... I'm glad that you found that out about me, because you describe me exactly. I'm very devout and very real about my religious beliefs. It's a lifestyle for me, but I don't close my eyes to evil and hatred and just the ugliness of the world. I just don't. And I did struggle with my selection of the books because the question in the back of my mind was: What will they think of me? So I'm glad that you did find that out. You found out the truth about me... I'm glad that you found that out.

It was not until this study that I knew my colleagues saw me in such a rigid fashion. People know I am a Christian by my faith, because that is the daily lifestyle that I live in front of my students and colleagues. It is not something I boast about. When Kasey told me during his interview that he was careful what he allowed himself to read, spiritually, I could see where he was coming from. I, too, am careful about how much "trash" – for example, talk shows like Jerry Springer -- I expose myself to on a daily basis. But I do not isolate myself from the evil in the world of literature. I am very interested in how the human mind works. What better way to fight evil than to know its many forms? That is what reading does for me.

Rico learned a lot about his colleagues by participating in the book club, especially during the third book club meeting when “people had a tendency to let their shock or outrage make them want to discount the benefits of the book.” Why was he so surprised by their responses? “I just feel that as literature teachers, we need to have a pretty high tolerance and sort of more of a ‘let’s stick with it and see where this goes.’ And that was a rough book [referring to *Down These Mean Streets*] and especially the first fifty pages. Um, shocking, disgusting, yes, but there’s a pearl in the oyster and I feel like, but this is just me ...see where this is going.” Although Rico knew I was a devout Christian, he did not find my selections questionable because of my faith. In the following quote, he elaborates on the subject.

Yeah, to have a comfort level and never probe deeply into the human psyche, what good is that? You know ...some writer, he said if my demons take flight I’m afraid my angels will as well. In other words, I don’t want to be a cardboard cut out. To be real, I have to recognize that there is a struggle going on within me at all times, just like there is in the world itself. That’s why I think teaching books that are reflecting reality is the way to go.

He staunchly defended my book selection. “You know I don’t think the tenets of Christianity involve sugar-coating what the world is,” he continued. “It would be a beautiful world if things were nice all the time. Life isn’t like that.”

Jane could not fathom why some people chose not to fully participate even though they attended the meetings. She was particularly frustrated with Kasey’s silence. “I think that the whole package was not appealing to him. I don’t think that’s an issue that he wants to delve into whether it’s with him, about himself or in the world he lives in. I think that he is above that.” She also addressed those colleagues who refused to finish the books they found objectionable.

I think I was disappointed sometimes that people let that get in the way of either finishing the book or the enjoyment of the book. I mean I’ve certainly stopped

reading books and, you know, turned off movies and all that kind of thing. But... to me, I mean I almost thought of this as an assignment. This was an assignment that I've got to finish this book, and it wasn't a problem, but that was just on my priority list. I -- It wouldn't have occurred to me actually to come to a meeting without having, what, finished the book. I would have been pretty embarrassed.

Jane was equally supportive of my choices for the book club: Controversial stories like the ones represented in the books have to be told. "The ugliness has to be shown for us to heal and bond," Jane submitted. We have no way of knowing if we have any Johns, Biggers, and Piris⁴⁰ sitting in our classrooms. "Or even the... the lily white kid with everything, who's never thought about those things before," she concluded.

It is interesting that the three of us – Phyllis, Kasey, and I – were known in the department for our strong Christian faiths but our philosophies about selecting books differed. As Paul noted, he automatically assumed that my faith would mean a selection of books without any potentially offensive topics. Phyllis and Kasey both said their Christianity dictated that they choose materials that did not include profanity and graphic sex. Although reading books with these issues may have made me uncomfortable, that fact did not drive me to exclude such books from my own reading or the selections for this book club. This same philosophy of reading drove me to knowingly select challenged books such as *Of Mice and Men*, *The Color Purple*, and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* for my students. It is my belief that my job as an English/language arts educator is two-fold. First, Paul makes a good point. Naturally, as a CRT scholar I think it is important for teachers to create a classroom atmosphere that empowers inquiry into "the other" – how other people think or live. By encouraging students to read diverse literature, educators help students further their understanding of people, who are unlike

⁴⁰These names represent the protagonists of three of the novels read in the book club.

them in our society and our world at large. Second, my book club selections supported my philosophy that teachers should help navigate their students through tough issues, such as racism, sexism, murder, rape, molestation, and homosexuality. What I have found throughout my teaching career is that students want to discuss these issues in a non-judgmental environment where they can explore and developing their own feelings and opinions without fear of ridicule or reprimand.

Some of the teacher resistance I encountered due to my selection of books for this book club provides some reality checks for teachers. Perhaps we need to check to see if our teaching philosophies match with our actual classroom practices. We say we want our students to be critical thinkers; yet we offer them books void of potentially controversial material. It is much easier. No parental backlash to worry about if one sticks with the classics.

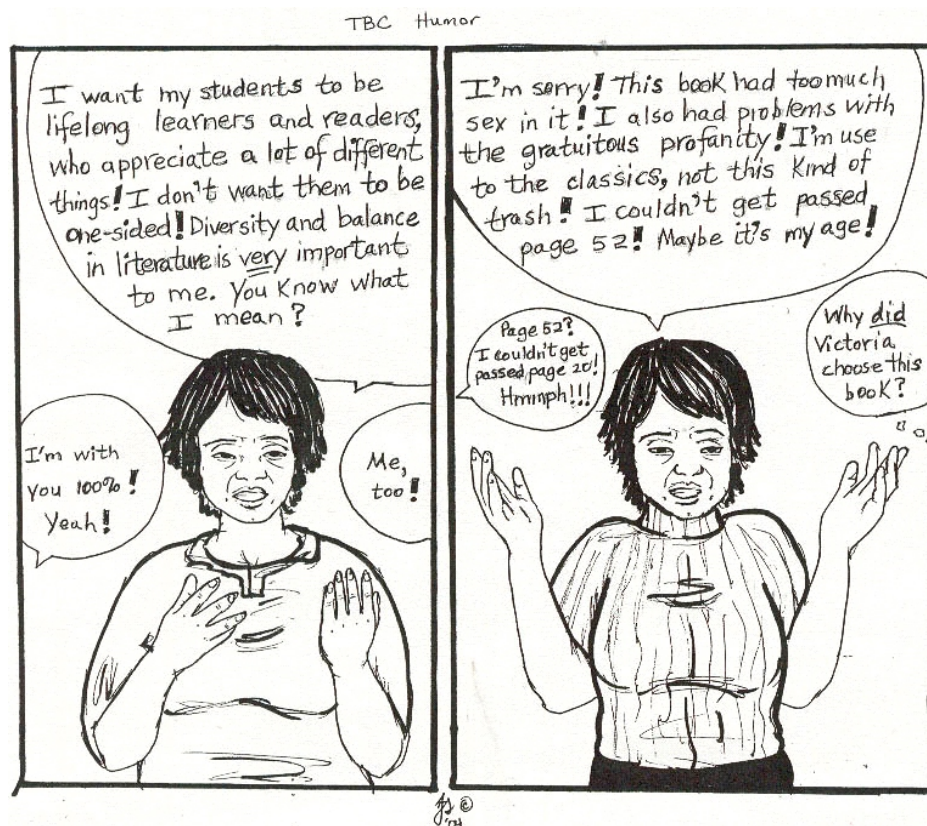
I am still struggling with Phyllis's resistance to the book selections. In those tête-à-têtes, she informed me that she had joined this book club with the intention of supporting me, but that she found the readings too repulsive. These conversations were so unlike the ones we had had for the past five years. Phyllis and I had often talked about our duty as English teachers to expose our students to diversity through the types of literature we offered in our classrooms. I knew some of the topics in the novels might prick the skins of the teachers I did not know. Phyllis's reaction half blindsided me. I had no idea she would react that way. Phyllis was right in asserting that her age was a contributing factor in her response.

The fact that Kasey and Phyllis both talk about their Christianity affecting their responses should also be noted as important, especially since my faith as a Christian did not drive me to have the same reaction. Teachers need to take into account such factors as age, religion, and life experience when they are exposing students to literature. By the virtue of their age, high school students come into English classes with varied experiences and lots of "baggage." We should not assume that students who share the

same ethnicity, religion, or socioeconomic status will react to a piece of literature in the same way, nor should we expect them to. We should also be prepared to respond to resistance from students when exposing them to diverse literature or discussing issues dealing with race. I would also add that teachers should not silence resistance, but empower students to articulate their reasons for resistance in small-group and whole-class discussions. Such discussions take work and a willingness to risk working through tough issues, but the outcome would be beneficial to the students and the teacher.

The following data poem was constructed from the words of participants who talked about their degrees of discomfort with certain texts.

I had a really hard time getting past that part.
 Oh! There's a lot sex happening here!
 It didn't add to the story!
 The artificiality is so embedded.
 It's tough for all of us when race issues come up
 They need to be aired out.
 We need to hear it.
 Don't stay away from the controversial.
 Take chances!
 Yeah. Well, it was too real for me, and I did not like the book
 There I was.
 Two o'clock in the morning, upset.
 I cannot do this! So I prayed.
 Is this a reality for our kids?
 I don't want to know!
 I know my age has a lot to do with it
 I don't normally get into that kind of reading.
 I love the classics!
 This ... was garbage!
 I just had to put it down.
 It's too depressing.
 I can't handle the depression.
 I was not a big fan.
 Should I recommend these books?
 Possibly.
 Definitely!
 It depends.
 Absolutely not!

Figure 7.1 Data cartoon⁴¹

Theme 3: Expressing Approval/Support

The act of resistance displayed by some of teachers in the book club may be so overwhelming to readers that it may give the false impression that resistance permeated all of the teachers' responses. This is not so. Analysis of the individual interviews revealed that teachers displayed positive responses to several aspects of the book club, particularly the use of the book club format and even the texts, which dealt with race, stereotypes, and racism. This combination in the book discussions, according to several

⁴¹The idea for this data cartoon was entirely mine. I gave sketches of my idea to high school art student Faatimah Stevens who drew it for me.

teachers, served to unify the English department by bringing the members together socially.

Book Club Format

Previously, members only gathered together in department or faculty meetings to discuss school business. Members agreed unanimously that the book club format served to bring everyone together for an enjoyable endeavor. For veterans like Phyllis, the book club format enabled her to get to know her colleagues better. She said the nature of teaching at the high school level leaves teachers little time to talk to other teachers. The book club, according to Phyllis, gave these English teachers the rare opportunity to come together as colleagues and read literature deeply and discuss its elements. This experience was such a revealing one that she was able to get know and understand people in her department – even Kasey and Al, who she had worked with for over 15 years. In the quote below, Rico explains his love for the book club format, which he found liberating.

It is so fascinating to hear the people, your colleagues ... you feel like we've known each other. But it's nice to know each other on a deeper level and to hear ideas bounced around that don't have to do with school. We get so caught up in our world of school so often that we're just trying to make it to Friday and you're dealing with home situations, personalities, learning difficulties and behavior difficulties that it's hard to get outside that box sometimes for us.

Jane noted that as the book club format enabled us to progress to higher levels of comfort with each other, so did the level of complexity in our conversations about race. In the quote below, Jane tells how our teacher talk serves as a model for the types of critical conversations teachers want their students to have in their English classrooms.

[You know] It's the kind of thing that we want our students to do -- to appreciate and talk about it, but we don't ever make time to do that... just us sitting there and talking. And then, you know, even working next to each other, we don't get to talk each other. I just think that it worked on so many levels. I think it let us be

scholars without too much stress...and then the fact that we were connecting as a department and then the topic of the books I think transcends all of that because we all see things a little differently.

Lloyd described the discussions as “some of the most substantive and meaningful talks we have had as a group,” since our department meetings were generally held during our 30-minute lunch times. He said his initial attraction to the book club was the fact that the group would be reading books about diverse cultures. It was his staunch belief that readers need to be exposed to multicultural literature; consequently, he uses the American literature book as tool for diversity with his eleventh grade students. Below Lloyd elaborates on how participation in the book club confirmed his beliefs.

The previous teacher who taught the gifted English 11 class didn't use the book and assigned novels by three white men. And my thing is, okay, I am stuck with these novels for at least a couple of years until we change it! Yeah, but-but o-okay, but what's in this book? Well, look. Here's a, here's a slave narrative about the middle passage, you know? Here's something by bell hooks. And, oh, here's something by Langston Hughes. As I go through, there's a whole thing about the Harlem Renaissance, and I'm like well, and there's Asian stuff and there is Native American stuff. But there's diversity in there and if that's my only tool for diversity I'll use it, you know! So it's [book club participation] made me more encouraged to do that, you know? And I hear people slamming the lit. [literature] book. [Exhales.] I'm like look! It's not perfect, and there's no grammar in it, but what I do have here is a diversity of American voices.

Raphael et. al (2001) argue that teachers rarely have the opportunity to do what we did in this book club: Sitting and talking with colleagues about books. Teachers live as isolated professionals, who act as rag dolls -- pulled in several directions at once, including administrative mandates, parental requests, and legislative directives (Raphael et. al 2001). “Missing from the lives of teachers is for improving our practice and the

learning from those with whom we work. Study groups provide an activity setting in which these voices and view can be expressed as part of learning” (Raphael et. al, 2001, p. 9). This book club produced the kind of talk that involves the “free-flowing exchange of ideas” that Marshall, Smagorinsky, and Smith (1995) describe. These are the kinds of discussions teachers always dream of having with their students. Perhaps English teachers should consider adopting the book club format in their classrooms to promote love of reading, encourage provocative conversations, and stimulate critical thinking. We all know of English teachers who continue to duplicate the lecture-test format year after year. These situations create nothing but frustration for students who are given “little opportunity to raise topics of interest, pursue lines of thinking, or collaborate in critical problem solving - a situation more pronounced for poor readers” (Raphael, Goatley, McMahon, & Woodman, 1995, p. 67). Based on my CRT perspective, I believe our students could benefit from this new strategy where they, like the teachers in this book club, would read books and discuss their opinions among their peers. Students ought to have such opportunities to understand their own perspectives as well as face their biases and stereotypes as they make connections across cultures and time.

Book Club Texts

Unanimously, teachers agreed that the experience served to support their belief that students should read from a high school canon that includes works by authors of color. Daphne commented, “It enlightened me in the sense that I don’t do nearly enough of it [exposing students to diverse works] and-and I really need to -- I need to make that a priority, you know.” She added that she did not want to mix her desire to provide her students with multicultural literature with tokenism. “I don’t just want to just bring in some literature because it’s by a black author, [or] because it’s by a Native American. I want it to be good.”

Roberto said reading the works and discussing issues of race and multiculturalism caused him to question what he was teaching in the name of American literature. Here Roberto explains.

Who is America right now? I think that's a question we need to ask in any 11th grade literature, but we don't because the tests don't. And-and you know we're working at: Do we teach the test or do we teach to broaden their horizons? And I think Phyllis kind of addressed that in our last meeting to an extent. It's hairy. Everything's... more questions. Did this experience teach me stuff? Yeah, it taught me to ask myself more questions about what we're doing and how we're doing it.

Reading such diverse texts during the five months of the book club meetings prompted Lisa to be more open to teaching multicultural novels to her students, including introducing works by authors that she had not taught before. For example, Lisa said for her novel projects she encouraged a group of her white, gifted girls to read Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. During the book club's five-month span, Lisa and these students shared a common experience: Enjoying a book that was written by someone outside of their culture. "So I definitely think it [the book club] served its purpose in opening my eyes to the importance of the multicultural unit --of novels in class. And just even myself, I need to become way more well-versed in, I would say, especially Asian American and Native American [literature]. I just don't know nearly as much as I should." Lisa was not the only teacher to respond to reading the texts this way. Jane, Lloyd, Paul, Victoria, and Rico often reported in book club meetings that they were recommending some of the book club selections – *Native Son*, *Down These Mean Streets*, and *Indian Killer* to their students to read for class assignments. Paul and Phyllis said that they had recommended Julie Landsman's *A White Teacher Talks about Race* to the student teachers they were hosting for the year.

Reading books containing sensitive topics (profanity and graphic sex) sent tremors through the book club. Kasey, Phyllis, and Daphne responded with resistance by their refusal to finish an offensive text. Kasey was so upset by *Down These Mean Streets* that he refused to come to the meeting for that book. Not all of the teachers reacted in this way. After reading my initial findings, Paul emailed me a piece of advice: Be careful when writing about the group's resistance to the texts. "This [theme of resistance] seems to insinuate that we all either refused to read or skipped a meeting based on offensive material. Personally, I read some things that were offensive to me, but it never stopped me from taking part in the discussion on the meeting date." Al said the experience gave him some ideas for material that he might consider using with his students that he might not have considered otherwise.

In their interviews, Jane, Lloyd, Paul, and Rico voiced their support of the book club reading material with potentially offensive or controversial topics in them. Rico was adamant in his opinion that teachers play an important role when it comes to recommending works that are relevant to students' lives. If we say as English teachers that we are interested in stretching the minds of our students and offer works that fit our own comfort zones, we are lying. Teachers never know the lives their students are living outside of school walls. Who's to say a female student might not benefit from reading about a female character who suffers verbal abuse from her boyfriend? How might a student dealing with an eating disorder relish reading a novel with a protagonist who struggles and then triumphs over the same condition? My student Carry urged me to consider selecting books that mirrored people like her who were of mixed heritage. As educators, we might improve our selection of literature for our students if we took a closer look at our own reading habits. We need to put aside our own comfort zones and consider taking risks in our own reading. These risks would be worth it for your students. As Rico said in his interview, real life does not always present young people with good lessons. Sometimes they need to find what they are looking for in good literature.

CHAPTER 7

THEMES RELATED TO CONNECTIONS TO RACE

Transcripts of the book club discussions revealed teachers made connections between the race and racism found in the texts to their own lives. This chapter will present the four themes related to the type of connections teachers were able to make from race to their own lives, including stories, stereotypes, white privilege, and institutional racism. These themes match the second research question, which asks: What connections do teachers make about race in the texts to their own lives?

Theme 1: Stories

“I found myself realizing that though I had personal friendships – communicated, ate with, lived with, worked with, [and] played with African Americans. They told me that, ‘You cannot understand. It is not possible for you to understand this.’ I experience now as a pastor in Dallas, Texas, as a pastor of an almost white congregation, similar struggles of trying to connect with black pastors and leaders in the African American community and find myself still wrestling with: How do you...how do you ever come to a point where there is coalition-building -- where there is a genuine attempt to try to make those connections -- when you are constantly being told continuously that this is outside of your normal experience and therefore you won’t understand?

--Rev. George Mason, a Baptist minister⁴²

Before beginning this study, my greatest fear in facilitating this book club was that there would be silence. How would I fill it? How would the teachers react? I came

⁴²See the appendix K for the reference for the video titled *America in Black and White: The Search for Common Ground*.

prepared just in case with thoughtful prompts. In reality, though, there was rarely a lull in the conversation. Often, when I wanted to interject a comment into the conversation, I had to jump in just as someone was taking a breath if I wanted to be heard.

What I found was that teachers in this book club loved to tell stories. What was interesting about these stories were that the types of stories ran along racial lines. The race stories of the black teachers – Phyllis, Lisa, and me – reflected our ongoing, personal experiences with racism. The majority of my white colleagues' stories revealed that their whiteness kept them from having day-to-day connections to race and racism. They were taught at an early age not to see color. As a result, their "race stories" were limited to second-hand information, or stories told to them by people of color who were either close friends or had married into their families. Grillo and Wildman (2000) summarize the differentiation of race stories this way, "To people of color, who are victims of racism/white supremacy, race is a filter through which they see the world. Whites do not look at the world through this filter of racial awareness, even though they also comprise a race" (p. 649).

Same Story, Divergent Realities

In her examination of 106 transcribed interviews about race/racism with a racially diverse group of college-educated adults, Bell (2003) also found that stories differentiated along racial lines: Whites told "hegemonic stories," or stories that supported the mainstream views of and assumptions about race and racism by minimizing racism, avowing the goodness and innocence of whites, and depicting history as progressive. In contrast, people of color told "counter-narrative stories," or stories that challenge the mainstream story by "telling on" or "bearing witness to" past and continuing discrimination that affected their daily lives. I found the central themes Bell (2003) found in her counter-narrative stories could be directly applied to the stories that Phyllis, Lisa, and I (the African American teachers) told in the book club. These themes were: personal danger and vulnerability in white settings; differential treatment in public arenas; attacks

on one's sense of worth and dignity; and white blindness, insensitivity, and cruelty. One such example of white insensitivity and cruelty came from Lisa telling a story of the negative effects of her father's mixed-race heritage. The excerpt below involves Lisa and Lloyd (a white male) telling the same story yet the reality of their experiences is diametrically opposed.

Lisa: But -- I guess I look at it a little, not differently, but just a different slant. My father is the result of a white man, um, he -- a white guy in the Navy got a black woman pregnant. Once he found out she was pregnant, well after that had nothing to do with, you know, the baby at all. So my father was raised and then his mother died when he was a baby, so my father was raised in basically like orphanages as a mixed child during that time. [**Daphne:** Oh, man!] So imagine, you know, now we're a lot more accepting, not saying it is acceptable in some places, but more accepting, but just -- and he will not talk about his childhood. But I can only imagine what he had to deal with as this mixed child of, you know, a black woman and a white man during this time. I guess I just look at it -- I will tell you another thing, over the Christmas break when the families that are overseas, the military people are doing, um, their greetings home. [Several: Mmm, huh.] We were all together, a bunch of us were together one night and we were watching something on one of the news channel and every few minutes we were being interrupted for these greetings. And, oh, yeah, but we started to notice and this is just blatant honesty. We started to notice all the interracial relationships. There was not one couple that came on that night that were [the] same race relationship. [**Lloyd:** Yeah.] And it got us to talking. A lot of these military people were stationed in Germany, um, and so it got us to talking a little bit. First, that we noticed it. You know and these are people that are very, you know, open-minded. Secondly, did it bother us? Honestly, did it bother us? So it's very interesting to

see that just this past Christmas. Everyone in that room noticed it, but nobody wanted to bring it up.

Lloyd: You know I grew up as-as an Air Force brat. And so-so did Jane. It's -- in the military it's extremely common. There-there's this line that my dad always taught me growing up that-that in the service, nobody was white, nobody was black, everybody was blue. He was in the Air Force. They say green if you're in the Army.

Jane: Well, you're NCO or an officer.

Lloyd: Yeah, there is a class distinction, but racially there wasn't that much of it, especially among NCOs. NCOs -- There wasn't much of a distinction. And I mean it was just totally common, not even thought about thing, which I'm grateful for.

Lisa: See and my dad tells a different story of his life in the Air Force.

Lloyd: Mmm, huh. Mmm, huh.

Lisa: He tells a completely different story. Of course the same thing NCO/CO -- big, big thing.

Lloyd: Big thing.

Lisa: But the subtle differences -- that race. [**Lloyd:** And I mean my dad's a white guy, you know? But you did see a lot more interracial relationships, I mean --]

In the excerpt of the conversation above, Lisa shares her experiences dealing with interracial relationships within the military. First, she describes the life of ostracism and alienation her father, who is the product of an interracial (white father/black mother) relationship, lived as a mixed-race child. During his early years, his white father abandoned him. After his mother died, neither blacks nor whites would accept him so he was forced to live in orphanages. Lisa said her father's life was so negatively impacted because of racism that he still refuses to talk to her about his childhood. One observation I made about Lisa was that her sense of race was affected by her own blackness and her personal connections to an interracial relationship. The latter made Lisa highly observant

of the increasing number of interracial families seen on television giving their Christmas greetings to their military men and women overseas. To a degree, she believed the fact that these families continue to grow represent society's slow acceptance of interracial relationships.

Lloyd responded to Lisa's story by offering his perspective on what he, a military brat, was taught concerning the military's views on interracial relationships: Race was not an important consideration. Military colors were what mattered. He also added that among the officers it was class, not race that distinguished everyone. One might expect that the portraits painted by both of these participants would be congruent. Instead, the portraits are incompatible. The stories told by Lisa's father, who was in the Air Force, described a military life controlled by race. How is it possible for Lisa and Lloyd's realities to be so divergent? As a critical race theorist, this phenomenon is not surprising. I expect stories to be similar only when the storytellers are of color.

It is interesting to note the pattern followed by these two teachers. First, Lisa told a personal story, which came from her father's experiences, who was both a product of a military interracial relationship and served in the Air Force himself. The stories that Lisa offers may come from her father's experiences but she still experienced the ramifications in their relationship today. Her story was a painful one for us to hear. To lessen the tension and perhaps to provide us with a story that minimized racism and showed racial progress, Lloyd counters with a different story: The military accepted interracial relationships. It was color blind; the only colors that mattered were military colors. I found it interesting that Lloyd qualified his story with the acknowledgement that his father was a white man. The indication is that Lloyd may recognize the reason he and Lisa tell stories with divergent realities: The race of their fathers.

An example of storytelling with the theme of personal danger and vulnerability in white settings occurred in our discussion of Richard Wright's character Bigger Thomas in *Native Son*. In that discussion, we talked about how the city of Chicago was thrown into a

state of paranoia and hysteria as the police sought to track Bigger down for the rape of a white woman. In the quote below, Phyllis explained how the black people's fear of Bigger in the story was all too real for her.

But there's-there's one part of the novel, for me, that was so real and that was that idea of how those other people were treated as a result of-of his crime. The fact [is] that so many other people suffered. I remember in-in the '60s with the situation with Martin Luther King. I remember my family and neighbors and others ...feeling uncomfortable as a result of some of the things that Martin Luther King had said and they weren't treated differently. I'm from South Alabama, and there were people who wanted to know, you know: How do you feel about Martin Luther King? And you know. I just remember my parents going, "You know this guy is really going to cause us a lot of trouble." And the people in the community and church feeling this way. "You know we're going to have to suffer because this guy is so outspoken." And so I could really relate to the idea of people being searched and people being kicked out and people losing their jobs as a result of one person's act.

The white teachers could not offer any personal connections to the emotion of fear experienced by the black citizens in the novel, yet for Phyllis, a person of color, reading about the experience brought back fresh memories of the fear she faced as a young girl growing up in Alabama while Martin Luther King, Jr., lived. I noticed that the white teachers rarely told race stories that projected themselves as victims experiencing fear. When they did tell such stories, they were about people of color, who had actually experienced the emotion.

After hearing Phyllis's story, Lloyd then made a connection to race. He relates the lynch mob experience of Bigger Thomas to an actual news story that happened several years ago in New York: A young black man was sodomized and beaten with a night stick

by NYPD⁴³ who mistook him for a criminal. It should be noted here that although both teachers were making connections through their storytelling, Lloyd's stories do not come from a white man's personal experience. His race stories are impersonal events that happened to other people of color. The person of color is not even someone he knows. In this case, he obtained his knowledge of this incident through the news media.

At the conclusion of Lloyd's recounting the news story, Phyllis makes another connection to her own life. She counters with a heartbreaking story of how her great-great grandfather was murdered because he refused to stay in his place. "They had this little narrow bridge, and this white guy approached the bridge at the same time and my great, great grandfather was expected to move back. He was supposed to move back, but for some reason he did not. Okay? And the white guy killed him. No justice was ever done."

Watching these stories go back and forth was similar to one sitting at a tennis match. The ball is put into action when we discuss an actual event that happened in our reading. The ball is hit over the net when Phyllis makes a connection and tells a story from her own experience. When Lloyd offers his own story, the ball is returned. This feeling of watching a tennis match when race stories were told became a common feeling in this book club. After one of the teachers of color would relate an actual experience to our own lives, it would follow that one of the white teachers (usually Lloyd) would offer another story.

The story that Phyllis told about her great-great grandfather's murder was a story of social injustice. My intuition told me this story had been passed down through generations in her family. As a person of color, hearing these stories was painful even when they did not happen in my family or happened generations before me. Stories of slavery had the same effect. Each year when I shared Tom Feelings' picture book *The*

⁴³NYPD is an abbreviation for New York Police Department.

Middle Passage to my juniors, it was heart-wrenching for me to read the narration and show the pictures. I feel like I am one of the slaves, reliving the horrific conditions and experiencing the vast range of emotions, on the ship.

Another example of this tennis-like action of race stories began after Lloyd made a comment about what he felt was Wright's dehumanization of Bigger. After Lloyd presented the arguments for his case, Phyllis told a story about a black female teacher in Annox County who was raped and received no justice from the court system (see theme one of chapter six for the exact excerpt). This story served as an example of Bell's (2003) theme of differential treatment of blacks in public arenas. As she tells the story of her friend's rape and her shock at the court's indifference, we get the sense that although Phyllis was surprised at the court's decision in this case, injustice was a common experience for blacks.

Listening to this story, my critical race theory filter tells me the court's decision to throw this rape case out, based on the belief that the sex between this black woman and her black perpetrator had to be consensual, can be traced to what West (1994) sees as whites' obsession and fear over black sexuality. West (1994) argues that whites view black sexuality as "one of seductive obsession or downright disgust" (p. 125). Black sexuality is a taboo subject for white Americans because it is an example of black power in which whites have little control (West, 1994). "On the one hand, black sexuality among blacks simply does not include whites, nor does it make them a central point of references. It proceeds as if whites do not exist, as if whites are invisible and simply don't matter" (p. 125). This form of black sexuality, according to West, places black agency in the center; the presence of whites is not required. "This can be uncomfortable for white people accustomed to being the custodians of power" (p. 125).

Another example of storytelling with Bell's (2003) theme of white insensitivity and cruelty happened in our first book club meeting where we discussed Shawn Wong's *American Knees*. Phyllis's connection to the main character dating outside his race

empowered her to tell of her experience with interracial dating while she was in college. Note that Lloyd joins in the conversation with his own race story but it is about his brother-in-law who is African American.

Phyllis: When I was in college, um, there were very few African Americans at my college so I started dating this white guy. And it was so hard until I said, “I just cannot do this!” I said this after a couple of months. And you know I’ve got a triple major [Laughs] and now he’s a wealthy man. [Book club members laugh.] I just could not handle the-the pressure, looks, [and] the comments. And on our very first date he’d arranged for another mixed couple – for us to be together, you know, but still it was too difficult for me. I had to walk away. It’s like

Lloyd: My brother-in-law is African American. He and my sister don’t want to come to Georgia, because when you live in the south, that they have a very strong expectation, uh, I-I don’t want to be a mixed-race couple. So they literally will not come to visit us because they’re so freaked out by, you know, like *Mississippi Burning*⁴⁴. That’s right.

Paul: Phyllis, was your – was your discomfort from the white or black community?

Phyllis: Well, both! Uh, it was just a very, very awkward situation.

Paul: The looks? The comments?

Phyllis: The looks. The comments. That was in the 70s – the early 70s that we’re talking about. So, uh, I was at Tennessee as well so... I just did not feel good about....

About thirty minutes later, Lloyd further elaborated on the racism his sister and brother-in-law have to deal with. “And my sister has talked about going to the doctor and

⁴⁴This title refers to the name of a movie.

people not knowing these are her kids, or like at a store, you know, and Andre with his sons. Well, I am sure these are his kids because they kind of look Hispanic and it is New Mexico, you know and all these things. It's so ridiculous that we even have to think about these things, but it's [a] reality."

Again, this excerpt demonstrates the tennis-like feel of competing race stories between black and white teachers in this book club. The match begins when members talk about the protagonist's involvement in an interracial relationship. Phyllis hits the ball over the net when she shares an intimate connection she makes with the character: She dated a white guy in college. This admission was a surprise to many of us who viewed Phyllis in the rigid role of a conservative, black, Southern woman. In his interview, Paul admitted that Phyllis's revelation empowered him to share with us that he was a Jew.

There is one final observation I would like to make concerning Lloyd's story involving his sister, who is married to a black man and has children. As he relates how people deny that his biracial nephews belong to his sister and brother-in-law, he said, "It's so ridiculous that we even have to think about these things, but it's [a] reality." I think he misspoke when he used the pronoun "we." Whites and blacks do not think about race in the same way. A core thesis of CRT is the insistence that racism is an ordinary and not exceptional happening in the day-to-day lives of people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, 2001; Solorzano, 1997; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Race is not based on isolated, one-on-one instances that can be named and understood because it is so deeply ingrained in the American landscape. People of color, who are victims of racism/white supremacy, naturally see the world through race filter. Even though whites are a race themselves, they do not look at the world through this filter of racial awareness (Grillo & Wildman, 2000).

I think my use of the tennis analogy was apt in describing the often competing race stories told by the black and white teachers in this book club. White teachers told stories that supported the dominant culture's views and assumptions about race. These

stories generally did three things: minimized racism, avowed the goodness and innocence of whites, and depicted history as progressive. In contrast, the African American teachers told stories that described past and continuing discrimination that affected their daily lives. Critical race theorists have long recognized this phenomenon of blacks and whites telling stories of the same experience with divergent realities as normal. According to Gutierrez-Jones (2001), storytelling involves both “tellers” and “listeners.” CRT seeks to connect *with* the experiences and the ways of thinking, believing, and knowing of racial communities as they struggle for equity in education. In the three previous examples, the purpose of Lisa and Phyllis telling their stories was to name their own realities (Ladson-Billings, 1999).

Voice

The storytelling element, or “voice” component, of CRT provides participants of color an opportunity to communicate their own experiences and realities, which is the first step on the road to justice and understanding the complexities of racism (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Being able to tell such stories is extremely empowering for research informants who are allowed to speak for themselves (Parker and Stovall, 2003). They are motivated to challenge racist assumptions in research and take an active part in the design of the research so that they are represented as part of the solution, not part of the problem. This teacher book club was unique because critical race theory was linked to education by including the voices of people of color in our analysis of the educational system (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Notice each time Phyllis or Lisa told her story, Lloyd felt compelled to narrate a similar race story of his own. It was quite evident to those of us in the book club that these race stories were painful for the teachers of color to tell. Personally, telling these stories was like reliving the experience. For a white teacher like Lloyd who offered his own stories, there was not the same emotional attachment. Grillo and Wildman (2000) claim when whites offer their own race stories it is their way of communicating that they

fully understand the experience of people of color. “Sometimes the profession of understanding by members of a privileged group may even be a guise for rejection of the existence of the pain of the unprivileged. For people of color, listening to whites who profess to represent the experience of racism feels like an appropriation of the pain of living in a world of racism/white supremacy” (p. 653). Sleeter (as cited in Tatum, 1997) offers another perspective: Whites often speak in racial codes, using communication patterns that involve telling race-related asides in conversations and making strategic eye contacts, jokes, and comments that assume an “us-them” boundary.

I think this book club with its three African American participants served as an example of how critical race theory can be linked to education (Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995). As Parker and Stovall (2003) noted, the storytelling component of CRT was empowering for the African American participants in this study because Lisa, Phyllis, and I were allowed to speak for ourselves. Just as important, I think my white colleagues gained some insight into the lives people of color have to live on a daily basis. “Engaging stories can help us understand what life is like for others and invite the reader into a new and unfamiliar world,” (Bell, 2003, p. 41). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) contend that the voices of people of color are required if a complete analysis of the educational system is the objective. They note that if researchers are truly interested in solving issues of race, racism, and social injustice in schools and in classrooms, they have to be serious about undertaking an “intense study and careful thinking of race and education” (p. 2).

Below is a data poem that paints a picture of how the stories we told were divided along racial lines.

We're not all the same.
Our stories are different.
I have unpleasant, angry memories about racism.
I have never had to think about race.
There are such dividing forces
What a mess!
Blacks sat in the balcony; whites sat on the bottom floor.
Racism is subtler today.

What a confusing, complicated thing to deal with.
 Pressures: Arranged marriages, passing, acting white
 You're a racist!
 Our culture loves to swing that pendulum!
 Finding a way to be racist to whichever group we're at odds with
 We have deliberately overlooked that part in our history now.
 It's been thrust on me
 To be the spokesman for my race
 I am the only brown face in the crowd.
 The perceptions, the attitudes, the stares.
 I am science experiment under watchful observation
 When I speak with conviction and passion, I am labeled militant.
 When the issue of race comes up, all the white heads swivel my way
 The isolation is horrible
 Left out of groups, I go it alone.
 What do most white people know?
 How many really dive in and try to learn about others?
 Many injustices.
 My great grandfather was killed.
 No questions asked.
 His crime? He refused to let a white man pass on narrow bridge.
 A friend of mine was raped.
 Because the victim and perpetrator were black, the case was thrown out.
 Interesting. I have conditioned myself, you know?
 That was the first time I had ever heard of such stories.
 On a daily basis, I don't have to think about things like that.

Theme 2: Stereotypes

"You walk down with a suit and tie and it doesn't matter. You carry yourself in a very respectful manner; it doesn't matter. Someone will make determinations about you – determinations that affect the quality of your life and the only basis is the one thing that will not change about you. I'm not going to take off black skin. I'm going to be black forever."

--Glenn Brewer in *True Colors*⁴⁵

Society may be responsible for nurturing and maintaining stereotypes, but educators cannot allow those stereotypes to go unaddressed. "We may not have polluted the air, but we need to take responsibility, along with others, for cleaning it up" (Tatum,

⁴⁵*True Colors* is a video. See appendix K for the reference citation.

1997, p. 6). The teachers in this book club took that responsibility seriously by “engaging in conscious acts of reflection and reeducation” (p. 7) as we identified and discussed various stereotypes we held about various ethnic groups.

“Mammie”	“Sambo”	“Pickinanny”	“Coon”	“Uncle”
<p>“Of all ethnic characters, the above names have been the most enduring. They are the great-grandparents of many modern images of blacks. These caricatures did as much harm as any lynch mob. True, their hurt was often indirect, yet because of this they left wounds that have proved to be far more difficult to heal.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">--from Ethnic Notions⁴⁶</p>				

In the first book club meeting, there was much discussion over Shawn Wong’s treatment of Asian stereotypes in *American Knees*. Jane commented, “To be – to say our stereotypes and when we think of Asians as being intelligent. We think of them as being disciplined. We think of them being focused, devoted to their families – see the fact that he put this layer on, even though I thought it was well over done, in a way that was saying, ‘I mean look! We’re talking about people,’ you know? And – they’re thinking about these things and, you know, doing these things. A lot apparently!” Jane asked the group if Wong had turned stereotypes about Asians upside down. Roberto replied, “I think he highlighted them more than turn them upside down. I-I think one of Raymond’s main concerns was, ‘I can be wimpy cause Asian guys are wimpy.’ And I think Wong is trying to show us that Asian men don’t have to be wimpy. They can be six feet tall, wear Armani suits and not be the tacky-tacky stereotype, you know, like his cousin.”

Lloyd gave book club members another point to think about when he talked about America’s history of mistreating certain groups depending on current events. Book club members agreed that the media was responsible for perpetuating many of the racial

⁴⁶Ethnic Notions is a video. See appendix K for the reference citation.

stereotypes Americans hold about groups of people. On the other hand, the pervasiveness of whiteness and racism in American society prohibited Daphne from identifying the Native American stereotypes used in naming sports teams. Here is an example of Daphne commenting on the issue.

Daphne: I guess maybe I'm just naïve and I always to see the good side of everything, you know? But when I [Clears her throat.] – I've always thought when-when I hear warriors... it isn't thinking Indian warriors. I think about the bravery and the courage and, you know, I think about that side of it. But I know that I've –

Lisa: I think that's an exception to the rule. I mean that's a great way to be, but I don't that most people [**Daphne:** Yeah, that's what I was getting at.], yeah –

Daphne: I think that is an exception. I don't think that most people think of it that way, but, um, you know....

Lloyd: Well ...when you choose something a-a name or symbol of like a mascot or some to name your team, it's a compliment because we want to be like that. And maybe people are well-intentioned but whenever you start taking somebody's whole culture and their race and saying, [**Daphne:** Right!] “You're going to represent us [Someone: Mmmm, huh!] because to us you mean something [**Daphne:** Right! Right!] savage and powerful – you're on a slippery slope there! [**Daphne:** Yeah! Yeah! Right!]

A core thesis of CRT is that racism is an ordinary happening in the daily lives of people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, 2001; Solorzano, 1997; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). For whites like Daphne, racism is so deeply ingrained in our society that they find stereotypes hard to recognize. As a person of color, I have always been highly sensitized to racial stereotyping. I have lived a life where I continually battle white people – especially white colleagues, teachers, and store clerks -- who quickly jump to the same conclusion: As a black woman, I should be treated as a lazy, unintelligent individual. As a

result of battling racial stereotypes of my own, my entire system seems automatically wired to alert me to society's use of stereotypes of other ethnic groups. The use of stereotypes comes in many different forms in society including movies, literature, media, and even in sports.

In addition to sports teams, teachers talked about stereotypes used in the movies and children's cartoons. Paul noted that movie producers often portray Russians as the bad guys on the big screen. Lloyd countered that even children's cartoons were guilty of stereotyping Asians. "You ever seen these Bugs Bunny cartoons or Superman cartoons from World War II and-and you see the racist caricatures of Asian folks?" Then Lisa told the members how a *60 Minutes* episode about racism in cartoons provided enlightenment.

Incredibly interesting man on *60 Minutes* [was on television] a couple of weeks ago. And he had done a study of children's cartoons and their representation and portrayals of Arab Americans. I never [Emphasis on "never"] thought about, you know? **[Phyllis: Hmmp!]** I never thought about it! And he was able to like show all these negative images of Arabs just in children's cartoons. Like think Ali Baba and Bugs Bunny or some of those things. This big, mean Arab-looking man with this big, long sword, [you know chasing after – well, you don't really think about that! But it's been inbred – I mean you know, it's been taught to these kids from [Slaps for emphasis.] cartoon age! And so now, uh, the onslaught of what happened with nine eleven, um, I think Paul brings up a very good point: It's almost dangerous to share your pro-, your heritage, and your ethnicity. And I think that at different times throughout our history... it's been hard on every – probably every group, you know, so.

As a critical race theorist, I think it is important that Americans acknowledge and deal with its "cultural racism." Tatum (1997) defines cultural racism as the cultural images and messages that affirm the superiority of whites and the assumed inferiority of people of color. Acting like smog in the air, cultural racism sometimes hangs visibly thick

in the air. Other times it is less apparent. Regardless of its level of visibility, each day we breathe it in. In the quote below, Tatum elaborates on her concept of cultural racism.

None of us would introduce ourselves as “smog-breathers” (and most of us don’t want to be described as prejudiced), but if we live in a smoggy place, how can we avoid breathing the air? If we live in an environment in which we are bombarded with stereotypic images in the media, are frequently exposed to the ethnic jokes of friends and family members, and are rarely informed of the accomplishments of oppressed groups, we will develop the negative categorizations of those groups that form the basis of prejudice (p. 6).

The fact that Lisa could cite a news program such as *60 Minutes* reporting their findings of the pervasiveness of racial stereotypes in children’s programming is promising. When mainstream media is able to point to one of America’s weaknesses, it is usually a sign that we are making a step in the right direction. I think our ability as educators to have such an honest discussion over racial stereotyping was awesome. Teachers rarely have opportunities to talk together about their gut-level reactions to groups of people.

The discussion on *American Knees* prompted teachers to take a look at what modern day stereotyping looks like in the wake of September 11, 2001. The horrific event, according to Paul, served to unite whites, blacks, Asians, and Latinos while alienating groups from the Middle East. Since that event, the media has reported many occurrences of flights being delayed and cancelled due to panic caused by overzealous passengers reporting every Middle Eastern person (usually innocent) on board. Our discussions on stereotypes allowed us to identify racial stereotypes perpetuated by the media. For teachers like Daphne, who suffered from color blindness, the discussion provided an eye-opening lesson about stereotypes. “It [Participating in the book club] opened my eyes to a lot of things -- particularly things that I had to see about myself. I think I am a pretty open-minded person, and a pretty tolerant person in most respects, but

it made me realize that in some ways, you know, I may have to rethink how I view groups of people and individuals, too,” Daphne confessed.

I think what the book club accomplished in the area of identifying and examining our stereotypes of ethnic groups serves as an example of how critical race theory can be linked to education. As an educator, I have been very well aware of how stereotypic traits have been used to justify: having low educational and occupational expectations for students of color; placing students of color in separate schools and in separate classrooms within schools; remediation or “dumbing down” the curriculum and pedagogy for students of color; and expecting students of color to one day occupy lower status and levels of occupations (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). CRTs believe that identifying and examining how racial stereotypes function can lead to understanding how educators use them to justify certain attitudes and behavior towards students of color (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Research suggests that teacher education programs address the following with their teachers: challenging teachers to acknowledge the influence of their background and attitudes; empowering teachers to identify and evaluate the stereotypes they may bring into the classroom; and encouraging teachers to develop a racially responsive pedagogy to eradicate racial biases (Cook-Sather & Reisinger, 2001; Hayes, 1995; King, 1994; Renault, 1995).

Although American society nurtures and perpetuates these stereotypes, Tatum (1997) argues that educators can play crucial roles in breaking them down. “We may not have polluted the air, but we need to take responsibility, along with others, for cleaning it up” (p. 6). This responsibility, according to Tatum, begins with people like the teachers in this book club “engaging in conscious acts of reflection and reeducation” (p. 7). A racially responsive pedagogy can only be accomplished through teachers constantly reflecting on the stereotypes they hold, the racist language they use, and the racism they tolerate.

The data poem below represents our conversations surrounding stereotypes.

Our stereotypes
 The all-America white guy
 The dirty Chinamen
 Asians
 Intelligent, disciplined, focused, and devoted to family.
 Asian men don't have to be wimpy.
 Looking for the real Indians!
 The mainstream's idea is a bloodthirsty killer!
 Warriors, Redskins, Cleveland Indians – all seem offensive
 Savage, powerful, and dangerous
 Offensive caricatures
 Chief Wahoo and little black Sambo
 Derogatory slurs
 We're still seeing that stuff because we permit it to still go on
 Maybe people are well-intentioned
 Taking someone's culture and saying, "You're going to represent us!"
 What a slippery slope!
 Unless you're Middle eastern looking.
 Muslims.
 The desert and poor squalid conditions
 The media prejudices us a lot.
 A study of children's cartoons
 Negative images of Arabs
 Big, mean ones with long swords
 It's almost dangerous to share your heritage and your ethnicity
 We caricature them in our movies
 We get to decide how they are depicted
 The stereotypical view of culture
 Pretty insidious.
Native Son's Bigger
 He must have brutally raped that white girl!
 You know black guys love them some white women!
 Shiftless and dumb,
 Shuffling,
 Looking down.
 White folks
 Stupid and condescending
 Calling him "boy."
 Tell me how your people live!
 How ridiculous, insulting, and embarrassing!
 Stand up! They are making racist comments!
 Turn stereotypes upside down.

Theme 3: White Privilege

In 1996, Oprah Winfrey claimed, “You cannot live in this country and not see color. We all need to step out of the naiveté box and stop pretending it really doesn't exist. We need to understand that we live in a world that gives certain people privileges because of the color of their skin.”⁴⁷ McIntosh (1997, 2002) sees white privilege as an invisible, weightless knapsack filled with “special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks” (p. 97). Whites are naturally taught not to recognize white privilege for two reasons: 1) it would make them accountable; and 2) it would cause chronic discomfort (McIntosh, 1997, 2002; Tatum, 1997). In many instances, whites cannot understand why people of color spend so much emotional and intellectual energy on the subject of race. They fail to understand that their white privilege shields them from having to think about race, even though they have one (Grillo & Wildman, 2000).

Whiteness

At different points during the five months, Jane, Paul, Daphne, and Lloyd all acknowledged that their whiteness allowed them the luxury of never having to think about race. In the first book club meeting on *American Knees*, I was caught off guard when Jane put her whiteness on the table for discussion. Bell (2003) notes that often when whites exhibit the ability to recognize race and white privilege it is because they have learned about racism through a close relationship with a person of color. Perhaps Jane's revelation about her white privilege came from a relationship she had with a person of color or maybe through her reading *American Knees*, a book with an Asian American protagonist. Regardless of the cause of her revelation, I did not expect that any of my white colleagues would “voluntarily” admit that they benefited from their white

⁴⁷Oprah Winfrey made the comment in 1996 on her talk show Oprah. The show was titled “An Exercise in Prejudice.” See appendix K for the reference citation.

privilege – and most certainly not during the first meeting – because we had never talked about this issue together as a department nor had any of my colleagues talked about this issue in any of the conversations we had had in the five years I had been in the department. Jane was one member who was willing to point out on several occasions that her whiteness caused her blindness to race on a daily basis.

In that same conversation, Paul later admitted that watching Spike Lee's movie *School Daze* taught him something about race. Until the movie, he had no idea that the lightness or darkness of skin color was an issue for African Americans. "...that was the first time I had ever heard of that so when I was reading this [*American Knees*] I started thinking.... On a daily basis, I don't think about things like that." I found his lack of personal knowledge about people of color surprising. Ironically, Paul had always represented himself as a white ally of black students. Yet, the knowledge he shared with us that he had learned about people of color did not come from his students but from movies. I expected his knowledge would come directly from his contact with black students. Perhaps he had this knowledge but did not share it. In this case, I can only make theorize on what he actually said: He had watched a Spike Lee movie where he had learned some accurate information. This is not always the case with movies. Stereotypes are often based on distortions of historical information about people of color, which leads to people to making assumptions that may go unchallenged for a long time (Tatum, 1997). School curricula are not even exempt. History texts to literature books are filled with examples of omitted information, which can have similar effects on people stereotyping (Tatum, 1997).

During the book club meetings, several of my white colleagues pointed out the pervasiveness of whiteness in this country. Even the definition of what it means to be "American," Roberto pointed out, translates to being white. Whiteness is everywhere and is privileged above all others – especially in American institutions such as schools. Jane

Eliot,⁴⁸ concluded in her experiment on race, “The way to get ahead in this society if you’re a person of color is to act as white as you possibly can. Now am I exaggerating? Is that the message this society sends? Assimilate really means ‘act white.’ Assimilate means ‘to be as similar to the power group as you can possibly be,’ which means ‘act white’.”⁴⁹ Growing up I remember the phrase “acting white” meant trying to act like the white folks – i.e., ways of talking, dressing, etc. African American students have to constantly battle the image of “acting white” in their own communities when they aspire to be successful in school. Tatum (1997) argues that African American students receive messages that academic achievement is associated with being white from cultural stereotypes. “While this frame of reference is not universally found among adolescents of African descent, it is commonly observed in black peer groups” (Tatum, 1997, p. 62). Tatum says the cultural stereotypes upheld by African American students can be broken by exposing them to images of African American academic achievement as early as elementary. If they are exposed to these images at a young age, students can see that African Americans have a long history of intellectual achievement. This means providing a balanced curriculum that no longer reflects only the achievements of the dominant culture. I think teachers, parents, and communities could work together to help African American students resist the stereotypes placed on them by society and redefine themselves with other positive images.

Race Obliviousness

Several white teachers admitted that “white privilege” had so obstructed their view of race that they did not see color – even their own. Dalton (1995) claims a natural consequence of whites being in the driver’s seat is this feeling of race obliviousness.

⁴⁸In the late 1990s, Jane Eliot conducted a diversity training workshop where an arbitrarily selected group of individuals was targeted to experience prejudice and bigotry. The workshop is based on her famous blue-eyed/brown-eyed exercise she conducted with her 3rd grade classroom in 1968.

⁴⁹*The Essential Blue Eyed* is a video. See appendix K for the reference citation.

Because whiteness is held up as societal norm, whites can easily sail through to adulthood and never have to think of themselves as a racial group (Tatum, 1997).

In a discussion of *Native Son*, the conversation turned to how families taught their children to think about race. Al began talking about Macy, his middle-school age daughter, and her group of friends. It was his belief that he and his wife had worked hard so that color would not be an issue with Macy. “She [Macy] has never seen.... I-I don’t see that she has seen it as a black and white issue. These are her friends. At least if-if that’s ever been something she’s thought about, it has never been brought up. We’ve tried our best, I mean we never brought it up to my knowledge, but, uh, these are just her friends.”

Lloyd added that he and his wife Jane grew up in military families, which meant their families did not privilege either white or black. The only privileged colors were blue or green – depending on the branch in the military. During her interview, Jane talked about a time when her mother praised her for her colorblindness. It was one rainy day during her third grade year when she was the last kid to get picked up because her great-grandfather had died that day.

Okay, so my mom comes to pick me up and I’m sitting in my teacher’s car because it was freezing cold and rainy and it was Mrs. Toole.... And so I get out of the car and get in my mom’s car and, you know, she talks to Mrs. Toole under the umbrella and it’s like thank you so much for blah, blah, blah and she gets in the car and she is like crying. Well, I think it’s because ga-ga has died. Later she tells me, um, she was so proud of me because I never mentioned Mrs. Toole was black.

CRT looks beyond the popular belief that simple ignorance of racism will eliminate it (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Valdes, Culp, & Harris, 2002). Consequently, I express skepticism toward whites who claim that because they do not see color, they do not see themselves as racists. The families of Al, Lloyd, and Jane actually thought they

were doing their part in eliminating racism by refusing to recognize race. McIntosh (1997, 2002) and Tatum (1997) argue that whites are naturally taught not to recognize white privilege. What whites fail to realize is that their attempts to be colorblind only serves to mask what Ladson-Billings (1994) and King (1991) call “dysconscious racism,” the limited and distorted understandings that white people have about inequity and cultural diversity. In the classroom, this dyconsciousness manifests itself in the mainstream views and practices that dominate in schools, and it may also be responsible for the guilt and hostility that white teachers feel when confronted with diversity (King, 1991). These feelings of guilt and hostility certainly come into play when white teachers are confronted with the issue of race in classroom discussions.

Daphne admitted that white privilege was responsible in dulling her sense of recognizing racial stereotypes, especially those involving the use of Native American stereotypes in naming sports teams. Teachers reported that the pervasiveness of whiteness in American society may be the reason they do not naturally see race in the same way as their African American counterparts or their failure to relate to students of color. For example, Jane elaborated on her inability to relate to the character Piri in *Down These Mean Streets* and then connects that to her inability to relate to her students of color.

One thing I noticed is that it [establishing oneself] is not part of my culture. Maybe it is in some subtle way, I don’t know, is how every group, every environment he went into, he had to establish himself and he had to let people know he wasn’t a pumpkin. There was some games he had to play and you know the way he would like single out the leader of the kids who came after him and how he would do that, it never would have occurred me to play the game in that way. I mean I thought he was going to kick their ass and it was going to be over, but the way he approached it and how that happened just repeatedly, whenever they switched neighborhoods and then again in prison and then, you know? That was fascinating to me. And then I started wondering how much of my students

posturing and all is – and I know that some of that is, are games in your classroom, but -- how much of that can I just not connect with and is really there, you know?

There are two lessons we can learn from Daphne and Jane concerning white privilege. First, a white person living a life without the knowledge that he/she benefits from the whiteness of his/her skin is like a horse living a life with blinders on all of the time. The horse is able to see, but what it sees is limited – and at times distorted. It rarely has the opportunity to see the bigger picture. Until our discussion about sports teams using stereotypes to name their mascots, Daphne remained totally in the dark. Our discussion served as a source of enlightenment for Daphne. If she had not been privy to such a discussion, who knows how long she would have lived in her ignorance? This experience points to the need for teachers to take part in discussions with their peers where issues of race are frankly discussed. We have a lot to learn about ourselves and others before we engage our students in examining their beliefs, values, and biases in classroom. It is important that educators experience the kind of race talk that they wish for their students to have.

Second, Jane shared a connection she made from reading about Piri to her students of color. This cultural game that children have to play in order to gain respect was a new revelation for her. For Phyllis, Lisa, and me, this was old news. We have done this type of “posturing” all our lives, so it was natural to recognize it in our students. Jane’s revelation supports the notion that teachers are ill prepared to adequately address the needs of students who are not only multi-racial and multi-ethnic, but also different in terms of language, religion, learning ability, and socioeconomic status (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Teachers bring to the profession perspectives about what race means, which is constructed on the basis of their own life experiences and vested interest of justifying their power and privilege (Sleeter, 1993). These teachers bring with them “dysconscious racism,” which is the limited and distorted understandings that white educators have

about inequity and cultural diversity (King, 1991). Delpit (1995) say when teachers confront “other people’s children,” the situation is like a deadly fog – one in which “the cold mist of bias and ignorance meets the warm vital reality of children of color in many of our schools” (p. xiii). Although these teachers – both white and black teachers alike -- see these children as “damaged and dangerous caricatures,” they see themselves as wanting to help, not damage them (Delpit, 1995). Providing a vast array of books with protagonists of color in our classrooms can only serve to help bring us and our students out of our ignorance. Having knowledge of the lives that our students of color live outside of school and reading about these lives in books can only help educators better serve this population of students. Consulting with more people of color, including teachers, parents, and community leaders, is also paramount to the success of students of color in school (Delpit, 1995; Hayes, 1995; King, 1994). A sense of community can be instilled among students by encouraging curiosity and dialogue about race.

In a discussion on *Native Son*, I asked the group their opinion on interracial relationships. “How far are we away from this taboo, such as a black male/white female? How far away are we from that now?” I asked. Lloyd and Jane immediately answered that they thought it depended on who you are and where you live. (I was thinking, “If you’re a black male, race does matter regardless of where you live!”) For Lloyd, it was not a topic that he had thought about very much. “I mean, for me, I-I never thought much about it until I got into college and started reading this kind of stuff, you know. But I guess, I guess everywhere it is.” Maybe these teachers had not thought about race because in their eyes they did not view themselves as racial beings. In the discussion of *American Knees*, Lloyd described himself as a mutt, or a person without a culture. “I mean I grew up, you know, white guy like so many people and racism, my heritage that’s -- I mean there is no heritage, you know? It’s like every heritage basically.”

This was a powerful admission of white privilege for Lloyd. Why is it so much easier for whites to define themselves by ethnic identity, religion, geographic region, or

profession rather than by race? Dalton (1995) argues that a natural consequence of white privilege is race obliviousness. Most whites are like Lloyd. They do not think of themselves in racial terms. This inability or unwillingness to think of themselves in racial terms produces the blind spots that prevent most white people from “seeing” how their own lives “are shaped by race just as much as are the lives of people of color” (p. 110). Daphne and Lloyd discuss in the excerpt below how their whiteness privileges them from being forced to learn about other cultures.

Daphne: ... We-we all need to – It’s a life-long process – a learning about each other’s cultures and heritages. Not so that you can say, “Hey! I-I know – I understand,” but so you can say, “How I tried to at least see a little bit,” you know? And [A three-second pause.] -- our heritage is just forced on everybody! I mean, when you think about it! Through every – like you were saying, every textbook we have. Everybody knows [**Lloyd:** Movies, TV, songs, books. **Phyllis** laughs] – Yeah! I mean everybody knows about white culture. But the what-what do most white people – how many really dive in and try to learn about -- not just African American culture but about all other cultures as well. I just think it’s very small....

Lloyd: One – and you’ve got the whole like, uh, “We don’t have to!” [**Daphne:** Yeah!] And America doesn’t make us! [**Daphne:** Yeah!] You can go the rest of your life and not have to learn jack squat about anybody else’s culture and get by just fine! And-and no, no minority has that ability in this country, you know what I mean at all! The keys to the kingdom are – it’s-it’s such racist thing.

I agree with Daphne. Learning about other people’s cultures is a life-long process. For example, English teachers should not wait until certain months to teach literature representing minority groups, such as women, blacks, or Hispanics. The fact that these months had be designated points to the pervasiveness of whiteness in the school curriculum. Multicultural literature should be infused into the high school literary canon

so that it is an integral part of the curriculum. In an act of tokenism, some teachers will choose one author of color to represent each of the minority groups just so they can boast that they offer diverse literature. The fact remains that the literature offered is still lily white except for those choices. This does not help our students.

I mentioned in the first chapter of this dissertation how I managed to go all the way to my sophomore year in college without ever having read anything written by a black author. Whiteness was so pervasive in my education that I never even thought to ask my English teachers the reason we only read works by white authors. I loved literature and never questioned the selections my teachers called “the classics.” I thought the literary canon was the norm. No one told me otherwise. As Daphne and Lloyd point out, American institutions do not encourage whites to learn about other cultures. When people from other countries move to America, they encounter a society that is hostile to their culture and language. They are forced to learn English. Their home language is not valued in American schools. The school curriculum is full of silences and omissions when it comes to diverse cultures. Hooks (1994) argues schools represent institutions where very little change has occurred in the curriculum, almost no paradigm shifts, and where knowledge and information continue to be presented in a conventional manner. Although we have made great strides in the types of history and literature textbooks being published and taught to our students, much of school curriculum overwhelmingly presents women and minority groups in limited roles. The significance of many of today’s teachers still clinging to the traditional high school literary tradition is that the canon is more than just subject matter or a choice of books but radiates attitudes, perspectives, and values of a culture (Cain, 2001; Gates, 1992; Levine, 1996). With many of our literature selections representing silences and omissions, English teachers need to call into question the voices that are being silenced in our classrooms.

This section’s discussion on white privilege is clear on the results: colorblindness, or race obliviousness. Generally, people of color view the world through a filter of race

(Grillo & Wildman, 2000). Dominance *does* make a difference. In settings where whites dominate, being white is not noteworthy (Dalton, 1995). “Being the norm allows whites to ignore race, except when they perceive race (usually someone else’s) as intruding upon their lives” (Grillo & Wildman, 2000, p. 653). My colleagues and other white people need to realize that even when they are not in the minority, their race matters, too (Dalton, 1995). For whites, race establishes their place in the social pecking order. “It hangs over the relationships they establish with people of color. Like it or not, their unchosen racial identity has a profound influence on their life prospects. Like it or not, their fate as individuals is tied in complex ways to the fate of Whites as a whole” (p. 6).

Before I conclude this section’s discussion on white privilege, there are two other observations I made about my white colleagues that relate to white privilege that I will discuss: silence and laughter.

Silence

Originally, I had intended on writing about the role of “silence” initiated on the part of Kasey, one of the white male teachers, in chapter 8. But as I began writing and reading about white privilege, I learned that another characteristic or privilege of whiteness was silence: Whites can opt to remain quiet when discussions on race become uncomfortable (Wildman & Davis, 2000). “That is the thing about the race dilemma in the United States, the inequity of it all: Whites can take up or put down the concept of race as they wish, having the considerable convenience of being both ‘particular’ and ‘universal’ in one fell swoop; whereas blacks have picked up the race burden, by necessity, from high tragedy to absurd comedy, as a twenty-four-hour exercise in self-realization” (Early, 1997, p. 188).

Tatum (1997) argues that whenever possible – in our homes, schools, churches, jobs, and communities – we should break the silence of racism by having meaningful dialogues among racially diverse groups in order to raise consciousness that lead to action and change in our society. This was the purpose of this teacher book club.

Kasey's resistance was not only noticed by me, but almost every teacher in the book club commented about his lack of participation in their individual interviews. He attended all of the book club meetings except the third one where we discussed *Down These Mean Streets*. His refusal to attend, he explained to me days earlier, was because he found the material too offensive. In his interview, he stated, "I had a problem with it -- mainly because, at this point, I am trying to separate myself from some things that I think are not of His kingdom and so there were a lot of things that ...while ...I understand that that's real life ... I get enough real life. So it wasn't... I just felt like it was something that I didn't need to be reading at that time." Book club discussion transcripts and my field notes revealed his participation in the other four meetings followed a pattern: He would make one or two comments early in the discussion and then sit with his arms folded until the end of the meeting.

When I asked Kasey if he thought we had discussed deeply the issue of race, he replied, "Well, Phyllis and I spoke about this. And I don't know if we-we ever, as white and black people ever can really talk face-to-face without worrying about insulting somebody or hurting somebody's feelings. I think we do a great deal of talking around race." When I asked him to evaluate himself as a participant in the book club on a scale of 1-10 (one being I rarely talked; ten meaning I talked all the time), he rated himself between a two and three. He said he chose to remain quiet for two reasons. One, certain members consistently dominated the discussions. Two, he felt more comfortable talking with children.

After reading the above section about the impact of Kasey's silence in the book club meetings, Bettie St. Pierre, a committee member who read an earlier draft of this dissertation, advised me, "Victoria, I think you need to let Kasey read this. You're slamming him here! See what he has to say." Then she said I should include his feedback in my interpretation.

I followed her advice. I copied and pasted the problematic section via email attachment, explained the need for writing about his silence, and asked, “What do you think of what I’ve written? Would you like to add anything else at this point to clarify? I would love to include your feedback.” The very next day at work, he stopped me in the hallway and talked with me briefly about the body language he displayed (folded arms) and then presented me with a hard copy along with his written comments. (I could tell from his body language, attitude, and tone of voice during that conversation that he actually respected and appreciated that I asked him for his opinion.) What follows below are his interpretations.

First, Kasey underlined the words “become uncomfortable” in the Wildman and Davis (2000) citation which read, “...whites can opt to remain quiet when discussions on race become uncomfortable.” He then wrote, “I would say I was never uncomfortable with race in any of our discussions.” Second, he underlined the phrase from Tatum (1997) which said “we should break the silence of racism,” and he wrote, “I much prefer meaningful dialogue with one or two other folk.” In the quote in which Wildman (2002) defines silence, Kasey explained, “My ‘problem’ arises when I am in a larger group. I am naturally reticent when I am the moderator – my personality.” He disagreed with Wildman’s assertion that silence may signify oppression or fear (“I would not say I was oppressed or fearful.”) and questioned whether his silence should be construed as “lack of participation” (“Is silence ‘lack of participation’?” he wrote.). Kasey offered a different interpretation for the reason he would make one or two comments early in the discussion and then sit with arms folded until the end of the meeting: “While I believe in body language, this seems to imply I was defensive. I was not defensive. These were voluntary meetings – if I didn’t like them, I didn’t have to come.” He also elaborated on the reason he sat with his arms folded.

Anyone who has observed me in any meeting of size (over three persons) would probably describe my behavior as you have above. I don’t think the racial

discussions had anything to do with my silence. Next time we have a department meeting – see this afternoon – see if I am not the same.

Finally, he addressed the role that silence played in the last meeting where we discussed Julie Landsman's *A White Teacher Talks about Race*. He agreed with Lisa's summation that "people were not ready to go there." He then wrote two thought-provoking comments, "While you talk about silence, do you also talk about major – or dominant – talkers? Just a suggestion. Another thought – people who dominate these conversations – are they expressing something ... indicating something ... because they speak too much." (I will explore Kasey's suggestion in chapter eight.)

Silence might also provide a partial explanation for the level of race talk at the final book meeting in which we discussed Landsman's (2001) *A White Teacher Talks about Race*. Several book club members expressed disappointment that our level of race talk was not on par with the first four meetings. Lisa and Roberto expressed privately to each other their disappointment in the way that the last book club discussion ended. Lisa dismissed possible explanations – the absence of major talkers, the bad weather, and the type and time of day – contributed to the difference in race talk. To put it bluntly, she felt that "people weren't ready to go there." She said she had numerous conversations with a Caucasian teacher in the department, who spoke to her at length about her struggles and inadequacies in dealing with her students of color. "But then in the meeting her comment was, '[I've] Been there, done that. I know already.' But then you've spent hours talking to me about it on a private level, so I know there needs to be dialogue, but it's just not happening." Roberto agreed with Lisa's conclusion. He thought teachers were quiet because the issues in Landsman's book hit too close to home. Responding to a second member check I conducted by email detailing the study's findings, Kasey elaborated on why he also felt that "people weren't ready to go there."

As I told you, maybe one reason we didn't speak too much about *White Teacher* was it addressed too real issues in our classroom and mind-set. Also, the author

lost some credibility with many of us because of her lack of judgment about things like profanity, sexual promiscuity and drug use. While I know it's not popular in this politically-correct culture to "judge," nonetheless I believe this is an important point as we read about other teachers & their responses to children—especially children of color. It was as if she was saying, "I'll cut these people slack because they are black, or Latino, or low-income, or unwed mothers, or dopers, or whatever." Oftentimes, no "judgment" = condoning behaviors which are, if not immoral (another politically-incorrect word), at the least illegal. I believe there are absolutes in this world, whether other people believe so or not.

I chose Landsman's book as the last one for us to read because I found this white teacher's perspective on teaching diverse high school students while keeping her awareness of race as a white person at the forefront refreshing. I thought the book would serve as a natural prompt for the interviews as well as tie our previous discussions together and provide us with some provocative conclusions and implications to think about long after the book club was over. As a surprise to some of us, the last book club meeting failed to meet the level of our expectations. The progression of race talk continued to climb over the course of four previous meetings but derailed during that last meeting, according to the evaluation of several teachers. (I will elaborate about the fifth book meeting in theme four of this section.)

All of the reasons cited by the teachers for their own or others' display of silence during the book club meetings support Wildman's (2002) theories. According to Wildman (2002), a person's decision to remain silent in a group discussion can be for several reasons. First, silence may mean the person is intensely concentrating on what is being said. I know that was the reason Paul and I cited for our decision to remain quiet at times. I was so busy processing my colleagues' contributions that it left me little room to comment. Sometimes, there was no need to comment. Second, silence can come from a person's feeling of oppression or fear. Several teachers expressed their reluctance to push

themselves or others out of their comfort zones. This was a department known for getting along with each other. No one wanted to rock the boat. Wildman cautions that regardless of the reason for silence in group discussions, the act of silence means there is little opportunity for criticism to be expressed. “What we do not say, what we do not talk about, allows the status quo to continue. To describe these unspoken systems we need to use language” (p. 89).

Looking back on this experience, it would have been interesting if I had done two things. First, I wonder if teachers would have written about their own or others’ silence if I had made keeping a journal a requirement. What different data, if any, would I have been able to obtain from the participants that they did not share with me in their interviews? Second, what would have happened if I had been a more aggressive facilitator? What would have happened if I had “respectfully” confronted Kasey about his silence during the book club meetings? What would have happened if I had called a group meeting after the interviews to discuss our disappointment with the last book club meeting and to readdress the issues raised by Landsman (2001)? My intuition tells me I may have lost some participants but the type of data I may have been able to gather may have been worth it.

Laughter

As the researcher, it was quite natural to pick up on silence as the kind of response used by the participants. I recognized that as early as the first book club meeting. I also recognized that there was a great deal of laughter and joking during our meetings, but I chalked that up to the clowning antics of Lloyd, who was our major talker and department comedian. It was nothing more than that – that is, until I read my major professor’s written comments on an early draft of this dissertation. She wrote, “It occurs to me that there’s a fair amount of laughter and/or anger registered in the excerpts you quote. That might offer you a way to comment on what you think is going on.” She then posed questions for me to think about and advised me to look for the nature of the laughter: Was

it nervous? Was it done to establish camaraderie? Was it hurtful or problematic? Was it done during times when teachers were feeling uncomfortable?

With this guidance, I began scouring the five book club discussion transcripts as I simultaneously replayed these conversations in my head. Her guidance led me to an important revelation: Although the concepts of humor and laughter are often intertwined, not all laughter was humorous (Stewart, 1997). The transcripts revealed that laughter was used for a variety of reasons, including: to act as a conclusion to a shared achievement between participants; to intensify or diminish the force of a face-threatening situation; and to close an old topic and start a new one (Howe, 1991; Stewart, 1997). Cox (1982) explores the tendency of people to laugh in everyday conversation. She found that speaker laughter usually accompanied statements that were boasts, challenges, emotionally laden, and humorous. My second review of the book club transcripts revealed that some of the laughter was due to humorous statements (usually initiated by Lloyd) and to support camaraderie. I also found that much of this laughter was problematic. It was a nervous, emotionally laden response to talk that had increased in intensity. I noticed that laughter was used as comic relief most often when Phyllis, Lisa, or I had told one of our painful race stories. Just for a few seconds book club members were allowed to feel some discomfort before Lloyd would interject a joke or humorous comment.

I am not the first to deal with this issue of laughter in the midst of race talk. In a faculty meeting, Williams (1991), a black professor, once raised the issue of her difficulty in dealing with racism with her white college students and asked her colleagues for their support. The advice she received from two white colleagues was two-fold: Break the anxiety by laughing about it. Don't take the subject so seriously. Williams found these pieces of advice unsettling.

Laughter is the way to disempower the forces of evil, I am told. But is it the racism I am disempowering if I laugh? Wouldn't this betray the deadly seriousness of it all? Laughing purposefully at what is hurtful seems somehow

related to a first lesson in the skill of staged humiliation. Racism will thus be reduced to fantasy, a slapstick vaunting of good over evil – except that it is real (p. 167).

Conceivably, my colleagues, particularly Lloyd, who felt the need to laugh and joke during those tense moments in our book club meetings, were in the same boat as Kasey. Kasey sought refuge in his silence. He found *Down These Mean Streets* so overwhelming and objectionable that he refused to attend the meeting. I think the book was so powerful that Kasey felt he could no longer hide behind his silence. He wanted to speak but dared not risk breaking his silence.

I think the same was true of Lloyd, who was responsible in initiating much of the laughter, and to those of us who laughed at his comments. In some cases, we laughed at Lloyd's comments because they were funny. Other times I think teachers laughed as an act of refuge from their feelings of discomfort. When talk became too overwhelming, Lloyd would immediately turn up his comedic antics, we would all laugh, and then the topic would change. Williams (1991) elaborates on how laughter is used as a force of resistance in the following quote:

Resistance to seeing the full reality is played out in the heaving of blame and, most cowardly of all, in disempowering others and ourselves by making fun of serious issues. The alternative (and infinitely more difficult) course is to face the interconnectedness, the enmeshed pattern of public dismissiveness and private humiliation, of private crimes and publicly righteous wrongs, of individual disappointments and national tragedies (p. 168).

The laughter exhibited by the members of this book club may have just as many causes as the teachers cited for silence. Kasey and Lloyd served as foils for each other. When experiencing discomfort in the book club discussions, Kasey's defense mechanism was to shut down. He was so overwhelmed by one book that he refused to attend the meeting to verbalize his objections. He attended the other four meetings but remained

with his arms folded and mouth closed. Others members interpreted his body language as defensive. Silence was a response that everyone discussed in their interviews.

No one, including this researcher, picked up on the laughter as a response that they found noticeable. On the flip side of Kasey was Lloyd with his jokes. He was our resident comedian in the department and the book club. We were used to his jokes – sometimes very crass comments -- in department meetings. Not one participant chose to mention Lloyd's antics as a diversionary tactic. I think we were all fooled into thinking that we were just having a good time during our laughter. We suspected nothing more was happening below the surface.

The silence and laughter exhibited by members of this book club have important implications for teachers to consider when they are facilitating discussions with their own students. Again, teachers need to be aware of the selections of literature they present their students. We need to always question: Whose voices are being silenced? Which voices are welcomed? In our classroom discussions, we need to be aware of the participators as well as the non-participators. We no longer need to take the silence and laughter of our students at face value but investigate and examine the root causes. With that information, teachers should enact positive changes to welcome more honest, authentic responses to literature and to discussions surrounding race.

I will end this section on white privilege with this data poem on the subject.

I have conditioned myself, you know?

I am white woman.

I am a white man.

I have never really thought about it.

It had never occurred to me.

RACE.

[Silence.]

On a daily basis, I don't have to think about things like that.

Though it is not an issue with me,

I would imagine for people of color,

it would definitely be an issue.

[Laughter.]

I'm not a racist! I'm not a racist!

American culture, white culture, or some combination
 All white men
 A static culture of life.
 White culture... whatever branch that is.
 I am such a mutt!
[Laughter.]
 Prejudice comes from the white community.
[Silence.]
 The allure of coming to America –
 Having a new life,
 a better life.
 The expectations are pretty much on the table.
 It's intrinsically American.
 It's hard for me – at least for my culture removed – to emotionally get it!
[Silence.]
 My heritage? I mean there is no heritage!
[Laughter.]
 I don't have to change my attitude!
[Laughter.]
 Racism today is subtle, but it's still there.
[Silence.]
 Duh? Ya think so?
[Laughter.]

Theme 4: Institutional racism

Several of the topics related to the themes I have discussed thus far in this chapter – stories, stereotypes, and white privilege – demonstrate one level of race talk that occurred in the first four book club meetings. Several of my colleagues believed we were making a steady progression in our race talk until the fifth and final book club meeting in



Figure 7.2. Data cartoon⁵⁰

which we discussed Julie Landsman's *White Teacher*⁵¹. Initially, I was very pleased with our discussion and was excited that the book club experience ended on such a positive note. Days later, the last book club discussion was the hot topic of conversation in the

⁵⁰The idea for this data cartoon was entirely mine. I gave sketches of my idea to high school art student Faatimah Stevens who drew it for me.

⁵¹From this point on I will refer to Julie Landsman memoir *A White Teacher Talks about Race* to the shortened title *White Teacher*.

department. According to some, we did not address the issues Landsman presented in the book. This meeting was different. Some even used the word “disappointed” to describe the last meeting.

How does a group of high school teachers go from talking about race in the first four book club meetings to a fifth meeting where they see themselves as merely venting about the problems they face at Lakeside High School? Some teachers theorized that five factors were responsible. First, the time of day was different. The first four book club meetings had been held on a planning day during the early morning or lunchtime. The last meeting was held late afternoon after a full day of school. Second, the conversation was unique because three major talkers – Al, Rico, and Lloyd – were unable to attend. Third, this meeting was the last one. People expressed their excitement about the impending discussion and sadness that this would be the final meeting. Fourth, some thought it was the type of book. Although all five books dealt with race issues, the first four books included three multicultural novels and a memoir; the final book was a high school teacher’s memoir about how she dealt with race in her diverse classroom. Finally, some thought it was the weather. It was sunny during the first four meetings. It was a dark, cold, and rainy evening for the last meeting.

There were four teachers who had their own personal theories. In the following quote, Lisa expresses her belief that teachers were not ready to deal with the issues in *A White Teacher Talks about Race*.

I will say the last book that we did by Julie Landsman -- excuse me -- was the most uncomfortable book that I did, simple because I had such high expectations for that discussion. I thought it was going to be phenomenal and it left me very disappointed and people were voicing their reasons for why they thought it was not what it was supposed to be; but in my heart I think that people didn’t want to go there and it was a lot easier for us to get off on other topics than it was to address the disparity that we have as, in our department.

At the time of this study, Lisa was one of the two youngest members of our department and had the least amount of teaching experience. She was also one of three African American teachers in the department. With these factors aside, Lisa proved to be one of the sharpest, conscientious members in this book club. One of Lisa's personality characteristics was that she was outspoken and direct. I was not surprised to learn that she was partly responsible for initiating the department's discussion over the "difference" in the last book discussion. Over the past year, I had come to know that Lisa was not a gossip. If she wanted to know something, she simply asked. She did allow her lack of teaching experience to silence her. She was bold; she let members of the department know how she felt about issues. The fact that she was one of the first book club members to zero in on what she thought was our lack of race talk in the last book club lined up with her personality and her characteristic participation in the other meetings. Phyllis and Kasey both agreed with Lisa. They believed that the fact that Landsman wrote the book from her perspective as a white high school English teacher made the book all too real for the white English teachers in this book club to deal with. In the excerpt from her interview, Phyllis explains how the issues in *White Teacher* may have hit too close to home for her colleagues to face them head-on with a group of their peers.

... I think that Julie was such a profound teacher until perhaps it could have been a little bit intimidating, especially for people, perhaps who have not had the amount of experience that she has had. She obviously has been a very successful educator and has learned a lot from her many years of experience. I think it's very obvious in the book where she is coming [from] and I think perhaps there were some areas that made some people feel a little bit uncomfortable and once you are forced out of your comfort zone, sometimes you tend to just shut down and perhaps that's a little of what I saw in the last session that we had, even though we had a very good discussion of some other issues.

Like Lisa, Phyllis, the other African American female, shared the characteristics of being outspoken and direct. Considered our resident storyteller in our book club meetings, Phyllis risked sharing intimate, painful stories from her past as she made numerous connections to our readings. When the books *American Knees* and *Down These Mean Streets* pushed her out of comfort zone, Phyllis chose to confront her discomfort in an indirect way: She chose not to finish the books, but came prepared to discuss her objections with everyone. As she pointed out in the earlier excerpt, she theorized that some of her colleagues chose to express their discomfort with some of the topics raised in *White Teacher* by remaining quiet and diverting the discussion to other areas. I agree with Phyllis. I also think the topics we raised amounted to a very productive conversation even though many of the teachers viewed our discussion as mere venting. The issues that we talked about were topics related to institutional racism. (I will elaborate on those topics later on in this section.)

White Guilt

Paul and Rico felt that perhaps Landsman's white guilt perspective may have played a factor in silencing book club members. A number of studies have discussed the feelings of guilt, hostility, and resentment whites feel when they confront racism or their own whiteness (Arminio, 2001; Howard, 1993; Marx & Pennington, 2002; Tatum, 1994). Personally, Rico found Landsman's book one of the most appealing of the five we read, because he learned a lot from Landsman's real life situations and how she dealt with her kids. Here he describes his personal reactions to what he called her "northern Yankee white guilt."

I thought she was a little too hard on herself in some ways. That here you can only be what you are, and then you can stretch your limits, but you can't change who you are and how you grew up and I think recognizing that and just letting it rest is probably the best way to go.... I felt like she kind of agonized a little bit too much about things that can't be changed, you know, and that she would -- it would make

her feel bad that she wasn't there, when she was here emotionally or mentally. I just ... I didn't get quite as much out of that.

Paul did not buy into the five factors teachers cited as reasons the final book club discussion was not on par with the others. His theory was that teachers were not ready to deal with their own white guilt, which he believed was Landsman's perspective in the book. Paul elaborates in the quote below.

I think many white teachers have a lot of white guilt and that is honestly what I think ... [happened in] the last book we read. I mean that teacher [Landsman] has a lot of white guilt. I mean she wants to be a good person. She wants to be a good teacher. She wants to relate to the kids. She's – and she feels bad when she locks her door in a bad neighborhood, you know? That's white guilt because it's not the fact that she does it, it's the fact that she feels bad about doing it.

I was very surprised by Rico and Paul's reactions to Landsman's book. Of all of the white teachers in the book club, I thought Rico and Paul would have been Landsman's greatest fans. After all, both of these white males had always presented themselves as advocates for minority students. Paul was the ally for African American students; the activist for the Latino students was Rico, our ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) colleague.

In *White Teacher*, Landsman openly talks about the issues facing today's minority students, including bigotry, poverty, institutional racism, racial identity, cultural conflict, and white privilege. She suggests that schools need to do a better job of recruiting more teachers of color – African Americans, Asian Americans, Latino/a Americans, and Native Americans – to teach in the suburbs, including the predominantly white schools. She urges white teachers to ask for support in their effort to teach students of color – i.e., family and community members who are willing to act as advocates in pushing for smaller class sizes in public schools, decent technology, etc. She also argues that if white

teachers are serious about teaching students of color that they have a willingness to confront their own racism.

I thought these issues would be near and dear to the hearts of Rico and Paul; instead, they were very critical of her perspective which they attributed to her “white guilt.” I was puzzled. Phyllis, Lisa, and I had brief conversations about the book a few days leading up to the last book club meeting. We loved this book! This white teacher finally got it! It was as if she had eavesdropped on the conversations I had had with Phyllis, Lisa, and other African American educators throughout my career. Landsman’s message was totally lost. These teachers automatically chalked up her observations to white guilt, so her entire message was lost on them.

I took my colleagues’ concerns about white guilt to the author herself, who was a guest speaker at the National Council of Teachers of English’s Assembly for Research Midwinter Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Feb. 21-23, 2003. I met and interviewed Julie Landsman about *White Teacher* and told her that several of my colleagues dismissed the merits of her book on the basis that she was writing from a white guilt perspective. She said this was the typical response she received from white educators, who read her book and quickly wanted to avoid the issues she raises for discussion and debate. Below Landsman elaborates.

I find that very frustrating because sometimes I can’t get them beyond that. That’s the toughest thing and, you know, and I also don’t like ... I don’t think I wrote this book to make people feel guilty at all. I think that guilt can really stymie and paralyze you from you doing some action, but I also think that people have to take into account what they do each day and look at it and decide to make changes. And yes, you’ll have a twinge of guilt. I had a teacher come up to me in New York and say, “Now that I have heard you, I know I just blew it! I just blew it yesterday with a kid” [I advised her to] Go on next time and figure out a way to get it going again and change what happened. It’s not fixed in concrete everyday. I

think the hard thing is I don't want the book to stop people from looking at the issues. I want them to be able to do that and that's frustrating because I think I can't be there to talk about it with people, but I kind of want to be able to be at all these discussions and say, "No, no, no. This isn't about the guilt." As a matter of fact, I feel very liberated as a white person having done the reading that I've done and the work I've done, because it's on the table.

I applaud Landsman's courage in putting her whiteness on the table. As a critical race theorist, I have a particular interest in examining whiteness, what it means to be white, and the automatic privileges that come with membership in the dominant race. I think more white teachers need to take this risk. Put your whiteness on the table. I think teachers might first need to take this risk within a group of their colleagues like we did in this book club before doing this with their students.

Studies reveal that the reason white teachers do not confront race issues head-on has to do with the inadequacy they feel due to what they feel are their own deficiencies, including personal experience with diversity, understanding the inequality diverse groups experience, and the experiential tools or informational knowledge needed to relate to people of color (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Hyland, 1998; King, 1991; Landsman, 2001; Paley, 1979/2000; Tatum, 1999). Because racism is so rarely discussed in school, few teachers know how to handle this issue in classroom discussions. Many prefer to remain in their comfort zones. Daring to explicitly discuss issues of race can be painful and potentially explosive in the classroom, but the rewards can be bountiful for students when teachers choose to face the issues head on (Grayson & Martin, 1990; Nieto, 1999).

Why Are All the Black Teachers Sitting Together?

There is no way that the readers of this dissertation could truly understand the impact of the last book. Landsman's (2001) book had a rippling effect. It made teachers think – even about something as simple as how we were sitting during the last meeting. For Jane, the last book club discussion stirred up so much within her that she kept

thinking about the issues Landsman raised days later. In the excerpt of her interview below, she talks about how Landsman's book was instrumental in her making an observation about the way we were sitting. The conversation below helped me understand the reason she moved from her seat at the table.

Jane: Now here's an experience that happened in the very last meeting that I don't even know if you were aware of. Okay. We noticed as we were sitting down, at the last one. First of all, it was different cause it was the workday, you know all of that. Um, but I came in and sat at the end [**Victoria:** Mmm, huh.] and then Kasey came [**Victoria:** Mmm, huh.] and Daphne came. And down here we had you, [**Victoria:** Mmm, huh.] Phyllis, and Lisa. [**Victoria:** Mmm, huh.] And so I moved, [**Victoria:** Mmm, huh.] I moved and Kasey started making jokes about, you know, his breath or, you know, [**Victoria:** Mmm, huh.] something.... I just said well, you know ,this is not, what-what, what in the world? This is how our kids sit. [**Victoria:** Mmm, huh.] I mean this is not ...I don't think any of us, maybe I don't know, did it, but it happened.

Victoria: I hadn't even thought about that.

Jane: But then ... Kasey noticed a second later, and he said, "Well, in light of the book, I am glad you moved."

Jane's interview gave me revelation about the reason she got up from her seat and moved during that last book club meeting. I was so busy setting up the tape recorder and making sure everyone had their food and drinks that I could barely hear the conversation going on between Jane and Kasey. All I knew as it was happening was she made a comment, he made a funny remark, and then she got up and moved. Nothing seemed to be out of the ordinary. I had no idea that she was trying to racially mix up the table until the interview. There is one confession I would like to make: I did not respond to her observation accurately when I said I had not thought about the way we were sitting. I had noticed that Phyllis, Lisa, and I had always sat together in the same vicinity. With only

three African American teachers in the English teachers, it was a natural instinct for us to gravitate toward each other every chance we got, including the five book club meetings. It just became such a common occurrence that I did not see anything abnormal about it until she pointed it out (see tables *****).

Tables 7.1-7.5. Teachers' Seating During the Book Club Meetings

Table 7.1 Book Club Meeting: *American Knees*

Place: Teacher's lounge (also known as the break room) of the media center

*****COUCH*****				
Sharon & Al				
Daphne	Paul	Lisa	Phyllis	Kasey
Roberto	Victoria	Lloyd	Jane	

Absent: Rico

Table 7.2. Book Club Meeting:: *Indian Killer*

Place: Conference room of the media center

Lloyd	Jane	Paul	Roberto
Daphne			Phyllis
Kasey	Lisa	Victoria	Rico

Absent: Al

Table 7.3. Book Club Meeting: *Down These Mean Streets*

Place: Conference room of the media center

Lloyd	Al	Roberto	Lisa
Rico			Paul
Daphne	Jane	Victoria	Phyllis

Absent: Kasey

Table 7.4 Book Club Meeting: *Native Son*

Place: Conference room of the media center

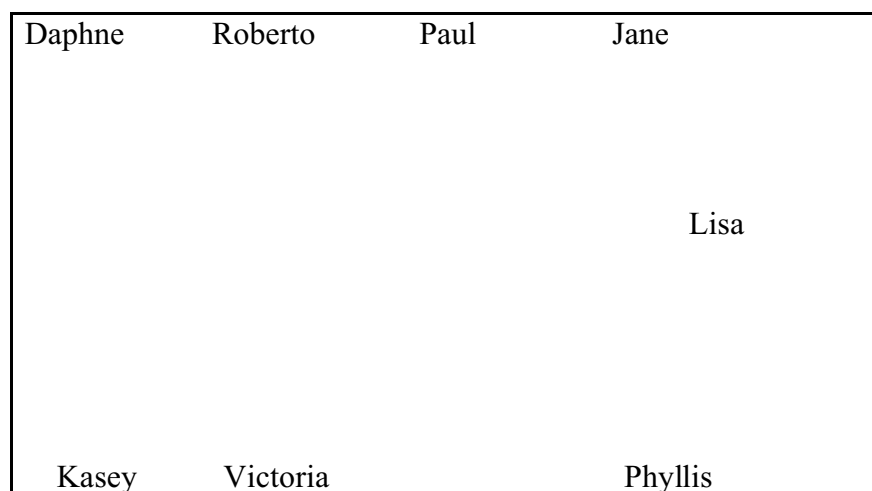
Jane	Lloyd	Al	Lisa
Kasey			
Rico	Daphne	Victoria	Phyllis

Absent: Paul

Roberto

Table 7.5 Book Club Meeting: *White Teacher*⁵²

Place: Conference room of the media center



Absent: Lloyd

Rico

Al

The diagrams show that we not only sat in the same general area but that at least two of us sat adjacent to each other during all five meeting. When Jane pointed this fact out to Kasey during our last meeting, he commented that he was glad that she moved. Kasey himself may not have been the first to make this observation of all the black teachers sitting together at the table, but in his interview he observed, “I think that, for the most part, in this department we get along well, but we still end up segregating ourselves, not necessarily in department meetings, but at faculty meetings we segregate ourselves.”

Why did we black teachers feel the need to sit strategically near each other during every book club meeting? In her book “*Why are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?: And Other Conversations about Race*, Tatum (1997) writes about the phenomenon of people – particularly principals, teachers, and both black and white

⁵²The full title of this book is *A White Teacher Talks about Race*.

students – wanting to know the reason clusters of black students sit together in racially mixed high school cafeterias across the country. Adds author Julie Landsman (2001), “We speak about how black students all eat at the same lunch table, ignoring the tables made up of white students” (p. xii). Tatum says racial grouping begins at about sixth or seventh grade when teenagers are trying to establish their identities. One way that black students think about themselves is race. Why? “Because that is the way the rest of the world thinks of them” (Tatum, 1997, p. 53). When black teens sit together, it is their way of identifying and adopting an oppositional identity, which some educators find intimidating – so intimidating that they want to know why these students are sitting together and ways they can prevent it. Tatum believes racial grouping during the teenage years is a developmental response to racism. “Joining with one’s peers for support in the face of stress is a positive coping strategy” (p. 62).

Jane and Kasey’s observations that black teachers engaged in the same type of racial grouping in mixed-race settings such as this book club meeting and faculty meetings were right on target. Tatum (1997) says black men and women naturally gravitate toward each other in racially mixed settings for the same reason teenagers do: They want to connect with others who look like them and share their experiences. Tatum, who is an African American professor, psychologist, and author, was able to eloquently explain why I have often passed by my white English department colleagues to sit with Lisa and Phyllis or my black colleagues from another department during faculty meetings. I think also that Phyllis, Lisa, and I subconsciously may have also sat together to form a “wall of support” for each other because of the potential for the type of talk (race) we would be engaging in with our white colleagues.

Did We Really Talk About Race?

Daphne was of the opinion that the type of discussion of the last book club meeting was a natural response for the teachers. Teachers connected issues in Landsman’s book to identical problems (i.e., tracking, lack of diversity in the literary

canon, and low teacher expectations) at Lakeside High School. In defensive mode, Daphne asked, “But see, this is my thing, what did they want to...talk about? If-if we weren’t applying what she [Landsman] -- I mean it wasn’t like it was a novel! You know you can’t talk about books like that, like you can talk about a novel. So what did they want to talk about?” She then explained, “Maybe we didn’t talk about specific quotes, passages from the book, but I think we talked about the issues that were there.” To the teachers who insisted we skirted the issues in Landsman’s book, she thought they wanted to “dig up bones that aren’t there.” She said she is not opposed to exposing old issues, but her desire was “let’s not just dig in one hole. Let’s continue -- let’s-let’s dig lots of holes.”

Daphne’s comments came from the interview I conducted with her. When I asked Daphne if she really thought that we talked about race in the book, she became extremely defensive. She kept saying “they” when she was actually referring to Lisa, who had initiated the whole debate over how teachers were not “ready to go there” in terms of discussing the issues Landsman raises in the book. I do agree in part with Daphne. I do think that our way of addressing issues raised by Landsman was to talk about the same issues at Lakeside High School, such as discipline, teacher expectations, and lack of diversity in the curriculum. The major difference here was that we did not discuss these issues in terms of how they related to race and white privilege. We talked about these issues in terms of problems Lakeside needed to improve. We even talked about our students’ socioeconomic status or the types of education offered to the students in the three tracks, but we did name what was at the heart of the matter. Race was the pink elephant in the room that we refused to acknowledge.

During the exit interviews, I decided to address the issue with the other participants. The interviews revealed a consensus: Using Roberto’s words, the last meeting was “off kilter.” My enthusiasm turned quickly to doubts once I finished the interviews. How could I have been so wrong? I was actually there! I took my concerns to

Peg, my major professor. To alleviate my apprehension, she invited me to her home where we went through pages of several transcripts. As she listened to me describe the topics we discussed in all the meetings, she suggested I investigate another level of racism --*institutional racism*.

Scheurich and Young's (1997) categories of racism provided me with a framework in which to make sense of the race talk that occurred in the teacher book club (see Figure 7.3 on page 299). The categories consisted of these levels of racism: individual (overt and covert), institutional, societal, and civilizational. There are two types of individual racism: 1) overt racism (racism that is an intentional, conscious act); and 2) covert racism (racism that is not public yet it is regarded as acceptable by society). Institutional racism is confined to institutions or organizations (i.e., schools) where operating procedures privilege one race over others. Societal racism exists on broader, society-wide scale and receives lesser attention than institutional racism. Finally, civilizational racism covers the assumptions society carries about its ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (ways of knowing reality), and axiology (morality and values). For the purpose of this section, I will discuss the connections teachers made to institutional racism.

The term "institutional racism" was first coined in Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton's book *Black Power* (Knowles & Prewitt, 1969; Blum, 2002). Institutional racism "exists when institutions or organizations, including educational ones, have standard operating procedures (intended or unintended) that hurt members of one or more races in relations to members of the dominant race" (Schuerich & Young, 1997, p. 5). Institutional racism is so subtle and deeply ingrained in American society that its effects on educational institutions are pervasive and profound (Blum, 2002; Dent, 1974; Knowles & Prewitt, 1969; Pine & Hilliard, 1990). Public schools serve as an example of institutional racism because they allow a cycle of inferiority to come into effect: The

institution says you are inferior, the individual is judged to be inferior, and then the individual becomes inferior (Brodbelt, 1972).

Institutional racism manifests itself in schools when an institution's procedures or culture favor white educators for promotion or privilege white students over students of color (Schuerich & Young, 1997). Examples of institutional racism in schools include: the underrepresentation of black authors in the curriculum; the lack of faculty diversity or exclusionary hiring procedures; a persistently white school ethos [the guiding beliefs of an institution]; biased curricula; incorrect classification of students as mentally retarded; inequitable school financing; unfair discipline measures; poor teacher expectations and attitudes; not providing minorities with the training needed to compete effectively in the job market; ability grouping or tracking; and culturally-biased IQ tests (Dent, 1974; Hanssen, 1998; Knowles & Prewitt, 1969; Council on Interracial Books for Children, 1977; Williams, 2000).

Using Schuerich and Young's (1997) framework, I was able to identify the reason my colleagues' perceptions about the last book club were so different than mine. The progression of race talk from the first through the fourth book club meetings could be categorized as individual racism because we discussed topics such as stereotyping,

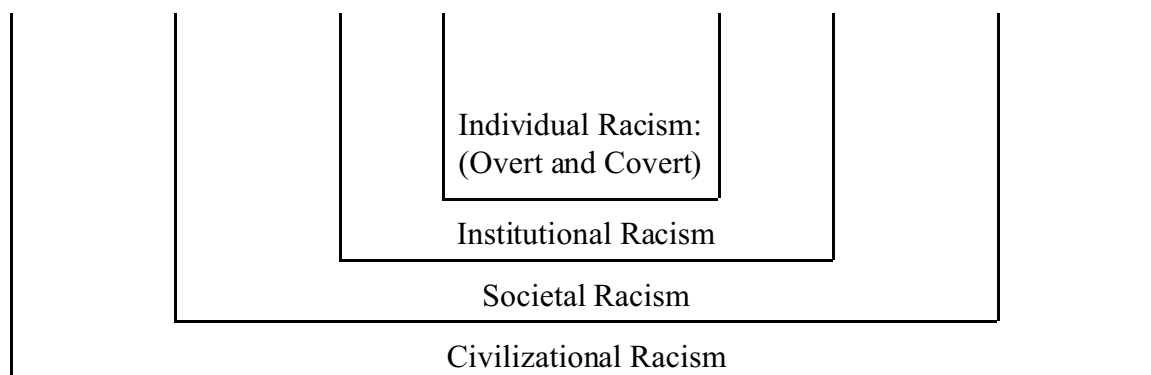


Figure 7.3

Schuerich and Young's (1997) four levels of racism helped me understand the race talk that took place in the five teacher book club meetings. According to Schuerich and Young, each level represents a broader, deeper perspective than the one above it.

white privilege, colorblindness, and prejudice. During the final book club meeting, we discussed inequities at Lakeside, such as tracking, the lack of diversity of the high school/college literary canon, Lakeside's white school ethos, low teacher expectations, and lack of preparation for students of color to be successful after high school. Topics such as these fall under institutional racism.

My colleagues acknowledged the individual racism as "race talk" in the first four book club meetings; yet, they expressed disappointment over the last book club discussion because in their words, "we just talked about school stuff and did not touch upon the issues in the book." In fact, analysis of the transcripts revealed that we touched upon issues of institutional racism in all of the book club meetings. The "difference" was that the fifth book club meeting was dominated by talk about institutional racism, which the teachers did not recognize as a level of racism. In some ways they did make the connection that these inequities ran along racial lines, but they did not connect this to the kind of internal racism that is automatically built into our educational institutions in this country. This is the type of insidious racism that serves to privilege or favor white students over students of color. That is institutional racism.

Lack of Diversity in the High School/College Literary Canon

One example of a school-related issue that we discussed in several book club meetings was the lack of diversity in the high school/college literary canon. In our second book club discussion on *Indian Killer*, we discussed a main character, a white professor who teaches a Native American literature class at the local university in the city of Seattle. Jane began the conversation by interjecting that she did not think the professor deserved our total hatred just because his reading list contained Native American books written by white men.

Jane: Do you have to be poor to write about poor children? Jonathan Kozel hasn't grown up --

Lloyd: Wasn't Marie pissed off though because there were so few actual native authors on his list. It was like white male, white male, white male?

Jane: Yes! And I think that he should have and I mean you know -- *Educational Little Tree*, please! Give me a break, but, uh, that's just one thing that I was thinking of as I read it, I mean, aren't there room for all of us to, if you are going to do it in a research way, or if I am going to go out and do interviews and I am going to transcribe those and -- is that okay? I don't know.

Daphne: Is it okay for you to teach African American literature? Is it okay for a White person to teach Native American literature?

Rico: If your heart's in the right place. [**Victoria:** Mmm, huh.]

Lisa: Yeah, but that was where my question was. What is the right place?

Roberto: Well his wasn't.

Lisa: See that is what I saying, [**Daphne:** Some people --] that was my question with him. I didn't feel like his heart was necessarily in the right place. [**Daphne:** Yeah --] I thought his heart was more [Someone: Patronizing] – exactly.

Daphne: But -- and for some students --

Lisa: Self-aggrandizing.

Daphne: For some students, the fact that Victoria Pettis teaches African American literature is going to lend more authenticity to the course than if I were to teach African American literature.

Rico or Roberto: I agree

Jane: And I think it is also where you are. If we're in Hartford, Connecticut, and there's not anybody who steps up to take that role, then I think it might be okay [**Daphne:** Exactly!] for me to do it, but I think, you know, I'd be laughed out of the building today. [**Daphne:** But I think that's where Marie was coming from --] which is fine.

Daphne: You know, she was like, you know, you have women professors teaching women's literature.

Jane: Right.

Daphne: Why don't you have a Native American professor teaching Native American literature?

Phyllis: Well, see I don't necessarily agree with that, simply because as an African American teaching British lit[erature]....

Several book club members laugh.

Daphne: Good point!

I know that my colleagues made the connection that the underrepresentation of authors of color was ethically wrong, but I do not think they saw it as a form of institutional racism. In her book *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Toni Morrison (1992) talks about her experiences as a black writer "struggling with and through a language that can powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony, and dismissive 'othering' of people and language" (p. x). Institutional racism is responsible for supporting a high school canon composed of a select group of authors in American literature – predominantly white, middle class males – whose works are judged to possess exceptional literary value (Bennett, 1992). Institutional racism has supported a certain set of assumptions -- based on white male views -- about what constitutes knowledge which has been conventionally accepted and circulated among literary historians and critics (Morrison, 1992).

Although curriculum is usually thought of as "a course of study or a plan for what is taught within an educational institution" (p. 223), deMarrais and LeCompte (1999) give an alternative definition: It is what happens to students in schools – both planned or unplanned by educators. It consists of "implicit messages given to students about socially legitimated or 'proper' behavior, differential power, social evaluation, what kinds of knowledge exist, which kinds are valued by whom, and how students are valued in their

own right” (p. 242). Students come in contact with these messages through their normal business of school life. For example, the underrepresentation of authors of color at Lakeside High that students are exposed to over the course of a school semester give students clear, implicit messages about what knowledge schools – and ultimately society – considers valuable.

The Selective Tradition

This issue of omissions and inclusions in the curriculum did not go unnoticed by Williams (1977), who coined the phrase “selective tradition” to describe the “intentional selective version of a shaping past and a pre-shaped present, which is then powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification” (p. 115). Most examples of what is passed off as “tradition” in a particular hegemony, he points out, is based on certain meanings and practices that are selected, neglected, or excluded. Based on inclusions and exclusions selectively encouraged and discouraged, this “living tradition” is so effective that “the deliberate selection is made to verify itself in practice” (p. 117). Apple (1990) adds that the selective tradition works to create common culture. Because of this, he says American educational institutions function in two capacities: to distribute ideological values and knowledge; and to help produce the type of knowledge that is needed to maintain dominant economic, political, and cultural arrangements. Stable social structures are created through individual actions that are shared, routinized, and then passed down from one generation to another. MacCann (1998) and Sims (1982) maintain that students are socialized through literature, which is just one of society’s methods of legitimizing itself; it is how society’s values and preoccupations are transmitted.

Since schools act as agents of cultural and ideological hegemony and selective tradition, this makes the concepts of ideology, hegemony, and selective tradition critical elements in the analytic and political underpinnings of American society (Apple, 1990). The selective tradition is so powerful because it shapes our beliefs, how we see the world,

and how we perceive ourselves. One cannot understand education by separating it from the larger society. They are inextricably interwoven. “The hard facts are that most parents and citizens do not believe in or want much alteration in their schools’ educational structures. They want grade levels, letter grades, ability grouping, single classrooms, and textbooks. They want today’s school to look like the schools they attended” (Glickman, 1998, p. 39). Schools continue to look and operate the way they do simply because parents and citizens see schools as institutions for maintaining the status quo -- “to prepare students for work and life as they have experienced it” (Glickman, 1998, p. 39). Knowledge, a form of cultural capital, is very much a part of our schools. It reflects the perspectives and beliefs of the most powerful segments of our society. Social and economic values are so embedded into the design “of the institutions we work in, in the ‘formal corps of school knowledge’ we preserve in our curricula, in our modes of teaching, and in our principles, standards, and forms of evaluation,” (Apple, 1990, p. 9) that it is hard to see them. They are like ticks - so deeply embedded that it is hard to detect that they were not part of skin to begin with. Below Apple (1990) elaborates.

Without an understanding of these aspects of school life, one that connects them seriously to the distribution, quality, and control of work, power, ideology, cultural knowledge outside of our educational institutions, educational theory and policy making may have less of an impact than we might hope (p. 14).

The implication is that English teachers should think seriously about the selections of literature they present to their students. It is important that all students be represented in the literature we teach and that students have multiple opportunities to read about the cultures of others. I think making multicultural literature an integral part of high school canon can accomplish these tasks.

School Ethos

In our discussion of *Down These Mean Streets*, we talked about several issues related to institutional racism, including school ethos and tracking. Roberto started the

conversation by talking about how the ethos of Lakeside is only successful for some of the student population. “This every kid must pass. School as an institution in America is not fun,” Roberto explained. “I don’t think it’s necessarily designed to be fun, you know, but it’s not built around America right now. It is built around middle class 50s America or not that anymore. And to impose that on this population, that’s a mother.”

I think Roberto’s comment accurately describes the reason so many students (especially those of color) across the country drop out as soon as they reach the age of 16. We have designed school to be places with no real connections to their lives. These students are set up to fail on the premise that “every student must pass.” This phrase is a code for “we will pass these students without the skills they need to be successful.” Why would well-intentioned educators do this to children? Would they, in all good conscience, want this same favor bestowed on their own children? Of course not. But thousands of educators do this to students at all levels thinking that they are helping them. I think the only way we can truly help “other people’s children” is find out where these children are and teach them the skills they need to be successful. To grab the attention of today’s Nintendo-playing, movie-watching, cell phone-talking students, teachers must change their attitudes. They can no longer afford to exclusively use the traditional canon. They must draw upon literature that provides a vast array of experiences from people of all ethnicities so that their students will learn more about themselves by expanding their knowledge of others who are unlike them.

As a critical race theorist, I am concerned with school ethos since it represents how our schools are constructed to give white students an unfair advantage over students of color. According to Apple (1990), schools originally started out as groups of middle class people looking out for their own middle class interests. “Education was the way in which the community life, values, norms, and economic advantages of the powerful were to be protected” (p. 66). Many of the structures and practices of schools are just a natural output of the economic and political system. “Schooling transmits and reinforces those

ideologies that reflect the prevailing values and ethos of a male-dominated, hierarchical, middle-class social structure” (McLaren, 1998, p. 206). deMarrais and LeCompte (1999) argue that institutional racism is so deeply embedded in the curriculum, policies, and practices in schools that it often goes unrecognized. One can see the effects of institutional racism in the effects of ability grouping and tracking, differential disciplinary practices, standardized testing, uneven representation in special education programs, etc. “This institutional racism perpetuates the differential educational and economic achievement of many minority people” (p. 265).

There are several areas that I think we can enact change, which will result in a school ethos that supports all of our children. First, as educators we must do a better job at conveying that success in school is a path achievable by all groups. We have got to change the concept of “school” in the minds of our young people. African American students should no longer consider getting good grades something that white students do. We have to hook them, by providing them with education that is relevant to their everyday lives. Teachers should hold high expectations and hard work as the standard for everyone, not just the college bound students. Social promotion only sets children up for failure later in life. For students who are working below their potential, schools should offer support and provide them with the skills necessary to put them on even footing with other students. Schools should sponsor a curriculum that provides diversity across the curriculum. Educators should identify institutional racism for what it is and how it continues to play a role in school curriculum, policies, and practices. We need people of color – teachers, community members, and parents -- placed strategically in positions of power where policies can be revised and dismantled that deal with ability grouping and tracking, differential disciplinary practices, standardized testing, and the uneven representation in special education and gifted programs.

Tracking

During our discussion of *White Teacher*, Phyllis and Al told the rest of us how years ago Lakeside used to offer the “general” track that catered to the kids who were not going to college, but this track was rescinded after complaints by black Lakeside parents and the Sethan community called this practice racist. The system offered three tracks: college prep, advanced college prep, and gifted. What has happened throughout the years is that the college prep track has become the general track, composed of mostly black and Hispanic kids, who usually take “vocational classes.” The white kids, regardless of class, dominate the college prep courses. Below is an excerpt of that conversation.

Jane: Are we having white kids doing Shakespeare and the-the Black kids doing hair?

Lisa: I think that is what a lot of people are scared of

Jane: I don’t think that is what would happen today, I don’t know. My ACP [advanced college prep] kids --

Phyllis: Well, see, in applied [English], you can do both!

Al: Exactly.

Phyllis: You can do both! You-you combine. You teach those occupational skills through Shakespeare and the *Canterbury Tales* and all those other studies. That’s how you set it up! [**Al:** I mean it --] That’s why it so wonderful to me.

For me, this was an interesting part of the conversation. I believed that the tracking that was currently in place at Lakeside only served the upper-level student better. Students in the lower tracks were dropping out in masses; those few who stayed in order to graduate were being released out into the world with very few skills to be successful. (Once again, Phyllis and Al were acting as our resident storytellers and historians. They were providing us with little-known information about our department and school.)

Because the lowest track is college preparatory, some teachers felt that they are forced to water down the curriculum. This was the track disproportionately dominated by

black and Hispanic students. The effect was that college prep courses felt more like the “general courses” that were offered at Lakeside just before I arrived. Teachers assumed that students in the college preparatory classes were not going to college. For some students, this meant the type of work offered to them was unchallenging and boring. Phyllis proposed a type of curriculum which fused traditional work with relevant, practical applications. The idea certainly was provocative, because the white school ethos at Lakeside assumed everyone in the advanced college preparatory classes was going to college. The work in those courses was rigorous and challenging. Students were held to high standards and expectations. Each year, the winners of the tracking system at Lakeside High School continued to be our white, middle class students.

Low Teacher Expectations

Institutional racism continued to permeate our conversation during our extended discussion of tracking, an issue raised by the author of *White Teacher*. Al’s comments in below excerpt made me feel very uncomfortable. I was seething on inside, but I kept my feelings masked in order to hear Al’s argument all the way through.

Al: We are – We’re still perpetrating the huge myth.

Phyllis: Right!

Al: And the reality of it is if you give these kids an alternative, a true alternative -- okay, if the majority of kids who choose that alternative are African American, so what?

Daphne: Yeah!

Al: I mean if it’s a choice they make -- I tell the kids: I need a plumber, an electrician, and a car mechanic a helluva lot more than I need a doctor and a lawyer.

Rico: Or an English major that can’t get a job.

Phyllis: Right!

Al: Or -- I mean, you know, but what I am saying is, we have got to understand we are dealing with an entirely different population and everything you read, every research says, right now, 70% of the jobs out there are service-related, [Several: That's right.]

I think he had these talks with his black and Hispanic students, not his white students. He had a daughter coming from the middle school to Lakeside High next year. I would bet my last dollar that he would have a different conversation with her (if he had not done so already). He held high expectations for his white daughter, yet a different set of expectations for his students of color. This conflicting set of expectations (according to whether you were white or black) constitutes institutional racism. I was horrified by his comments, but my other colleagues were agreeing with him! I did not think Al's comments could go any lower, until he caught me off guard with this comment about his low expectations.

Well, at some point, everything splits anyway -- whether we like it or not. It's gonna -- it does split. And why wait to that point? Why push them through four years of stuff they don't need? I mean, to a lot of these kids, the only connection they are going to have to *Romeo and Juliet* [is] they may name their children that. But I mean, I have said this for years, I am teaching *Romeo and Juliet* to kids, I mean, and I am thinking: I am wasting my time and I am wasting their time.

Although all schools claim to hold high expectations for all their students, the reality is that what is professed is not always practiced (Lumsden, 1997). What school would openly boast: Please bring your children here even though we will not hold them to high expectations? Although some schools and teachers maintain uniformly high expectations for all students, others hold "great expectations" for particular segments of the student population but minimal expectations for others like Al. The expectations teachers have for their students and the assumptions they make about their potential tends to have a self-fulfilling prophecy where student achievement and behavior is concerned

(Merton, 1948; Paredes and Frazer, 1992; Smey-Richman, 1989; Tauber, 1998). Al is not alone in his philosophy. The implication is teachers should examine the expectations they carry for different groups of students. After all, carrying low expectations for students of color (i.e., persuading them to follow the lower, vocational tracks) and high expectations for white students (i.e., expecting them to go to college and become your doctors and lawyers) is racist.

Though institutional racism threaded itself (unbeknownst to us) throughout the first four book club meetings, it dominated the final book club discussion. In the first few minutes of the meeting, Jane pointed out a major issue of Landsman's *White Teacher*: White teachers tend to have low expectations. We got off the issue quickly but then it resurfaced about twenty minutes later.

Roberto: And, uh, I mean that's a book we need to have period, but [**Phyllis:** Yeah, but --] it seems like there's a lot of wiggle room, [**Phyllis:** Yeah, yeah.] where you can just --

Phyllis: But I -- What I don't want is for people to feel that this is an easy route, cause some kids perceive it that way. It's easier for me to do this, do this, and I think perhaps some teachers feel that it is easier to teach this kind of work [**Victoria:** Mmm, huh] and that's insulting to me. [**Victoria:** Mmm, huh]

Jane: Easier to teach what kind of work?

Phyllis: Some of the African-American novels that-that come out. They're valid; they're wonderful, but if you notice how they're written, even the earlier ones, because of our language difficulties that-that we have had over the years, our language is very truncated and therefore it is easier to read and understand the-the plots are more simple. [**Jane:** Mmm, huh.] They're-they're more spiritual to me. Deep. Hurtful The many experiences that -- and you have to keep in mind to get published in this country has been a very hard thing for -- it has been a wonderful array of race things that have not been published, because we haven't had the

resources to get out there and publish things on our own. So again, that's my situation. Again, whatever I am teaching, if it is *The Heart of Darkness* set in Africa, I'm gonna do what I need to do to be well-rounded, but I don't feel guilty about keeping my, to me, it is keeping the standards where they need to be for the QCC objectives and what I am supposed to do [**Victoria:** Mmm, huh.] as a senior English teacher. [**Victoria:** Mmm, huh.] I want my kids to be prepared to go anywhere! Stanford. I've got kids --- Stanford, Harvard -- I've got kids a lot of different places, you know. It's wherever you choose to go; I just want you to be ready. I want later on after all this is over, to be willing to go into an environment and appreciate the diversity.

Lisa: You know I think it's important that we're really clear that we're not lowering our standards. We're raising our kids up to be able to understand what we have set for them because my favorite year in school, and that's just me, was British literature. And I didn't have a teacher that tried to bring in outside, you know, people. We used that textbook! And that was all we used, but it opened up a world to me. So I get a little nervous when we start talking about let's change things around, because in a way, that's a -- to me, my person opinion, that is a defeatist attitude. We're saying that our kids cannot get it! [**Phyllis:** Mmm, huh.] And I don't think [**Phyllis:** They can't.] that's the case.

In this exchange, Roberto is suggesting that the department purchase a particular paperback novel written by an African American writer. Taken out of context, this comment seems harmless. For years, the contention among members of the English department has been the use of the literature textbook with the students in the college preparatory English classes (the lowest track). There is one camp -- Phyllis, Lisa, and I -- that believed we should use the high school literature text as a basis (and provide them with any additional assistance) with these kids and expose them to the same works as the kids in the advanced classes. Teachers like Roberto and Paul rarely use the textbook and

rely heavily on paperback novels because they believe the kids cannot handle the reading. Lisa questions whether this is a defeatist attitude when teachers automatically assume that expectations should be lowered when they think, “Kids cannot get it.” Again, the implication is teachers need to examine the expectations they hold for all of their students. These expectations translate to how they treat their students, who internalize them. Chances are increased that a teacher's treatment of the student will help the negative prophecies or expectations come true. Self-fulfilling prophesy research shows that teachers form expectations of and assign labels to students based upon such characteristics as body build, gender, race, ethnicity, given name and/or surname, attractiveness, dialect, and socioeconomic level, among others (Good, 1987).

I stated earlier that none of us in this book club were able to recognize the inequities at Lakeside as institutional racism. We saw them as just school problems that we felt powerless to do anything about except complain. For about twenty minutes, book club members began suggesting changes that could be made within the department to improve conditions. For the first time, we felt empowered to do something. Our department chair, Al, quickly squashed that talk. He reminded us that he had one more year in the position before retirement. After he retired, we could do whatever we wanted. For about three seconds, there was dead silence. Then several people nervously laughed.

Tatum (1997) claims that silence comes with it a costly price tag. “Unchallenged personal, cultural, and institutional racism results in the loss of human potential, lowered productivity, and a rising tide of fear and violence in our society” (p. 200). Research on institutional racism conclude that educators who wish to battle racism, prejudice, and discrimination must first acknowledge the complexities of institutional racism and then commit to do the following: increase the pool of minority teachers; develop a multicultural curriculum; improve pedagogical practice; decline or redistribute white privilege; seek help from ethnic communities; teach character development; open debates over multicultural education, ethnocentrism, political correctness, and racism; cease

focusing on the student as a source of failure; and focus on educational institutions and the role that they play in institutional racism (Bowser, 1979; Dent, 1974; Hanssen, 1998; Newman & Layfield, 1995; Pine & Hilliard, 1990).

In her work with white teachers, McIntyre (1997) argued that cross-racial dialogue that we experienced in this book club was necessary for “dismantling institutional racism, and addressing needs and issues that most people share” (p. x). Hyland (1998) and Hooks (1994) suggest that teachers of all races and levels engage in a collective examination of racial ideologies and knowledge construction. “To engage in dialogue is one of the simplest ways we can begin as teachers, scholars, and critical thinkers to cross boundaries, the barriers that may or may not be erected by race ... and a host of other differences” (Hooks, 1994, p. 130). McIntyre (1997) believes that such a dialogue requires that people be able to articulate some analysis of racism and their own position in a racist structure, one’s own feelings and experiences, and the choices one has for acting differently. The fact that we engaged in this cross-racial dialogue was a start, but the tragedy is you cannot dismantle racism if you fail to see it.

CHAPTER 8

THEMES RELATED TO THE TBC EXPERIENCE

The participants in this study were interviewed about their experience as members in this book club. This chapter presents the two themes related to the participants' overall experience in the teacher book club (TBC). The themes -- roles and benefits -- match the third question which asks: In what ways has being a member of a book discussion club been meaningful in the lives of these secondary English teachers? (Readers may find Table 12 on page 311 a useful guide containing information about the participants.)

Theme 1: Roles

“My methodology for going through the world was to be as invisible as possible ... making the fewest number of ripples in the pond.”

--Cynthia, an Asian American participant
in an Unlearning Racism Workshop⁵³

In the Lakeside English Department, Al, Phyllis, and Kasey have worked together the longest. They have known each other for more than 20 years. Five years ago I came into the fold when I transferred from Haley Middle School. In my five years in the department, I have witnessed the other members of the department either transfer from other middle schools within the district or come with years of experiences teaching at other high schools within the state. Within the past few years, the department had undergone several changes in leadership after Peter had been the head of the department

⁵³Taken from the video *Facing Racism*. See appendix K for the citation.

for twenty-seven years. Members describe Peter's leadership skills as "easy-going" and "laid back." He held very few department meetings. His leadership consisted of making sure his English teachers had enough textbooks, supplies, and materials. Last year, Phyllis and Kasey co-chaired the department before Al took over the position for the current school year. Despite the changes in leadership, one characteristic remained constant: There were few opportunities for English teachers to socialize with each other.

The five months between October 2002 to February 2003 were the first time teachers gathered together regularly as a department to do something to help themselves personally and professionally. Of the 11 participants (including the researcher), five teachers were present at all five meetings⁵⁴. Fascinatingly, the teachers with the perfect attendance were the women. Four teachers were present at four meetings; only two teachers attended three of the five meetings⁵⁵.

In chapter five, I provided readers with a portrait of each participant, which was constructed from pilot study data as well as personal and professional observations I had made about each individual. In this section, I would like to focus on how the teachers situated themselves into certain roles over the course of five book club discussions. First, I have identified five teachers – Kasey, Lloyd, Phyllis, Jane, and Lisa -- who stood out because of the major roles they played in the discussions. These roles do not necessarily represent the teachers who dominated the discussions, but the teachers whose participation (or lack of) most impacted the discussions on a consistent basis. The second part of this discussion will include a section on the roles played by the other teachers. Placing these teachers in the section labeled "The Other Participants" in no way denotes their lack of importance to this book club.

⁵⁴Besides the researcher, Phyllis, Jane, Daphne, and Lisa attended all five book club meetings.

⁵⁵Lloyd, Kasey, Roberto, and Paul attended four book meetings. Rico and Al only attended three of five book club meetings.

In an effort to describe the roles played by each of the participants, I have named them based on a major identifying characteristic, i.e., Kasey's silence. In my comments on the major talkers (i.e., Lloyd), I have kept in mind Kasey's advice that I should explore the reasons that these teachers chose to dominate these conversations.

Silence

Kasey's presence and absence caused the most talk among the book club members. Kasey, like Phyllis, struggled with the profanity and graphic sex detailed in *American Knees* and *Down These Mean Streets*. Their way of expressing disapproval of the books took different actions. Phyllis was outspoken. She came to every book club meeting, including the discussions on *American Knees* and *Down These Mean Streets*. At those meetings, she was up front and honest with her colleagues about her reasons for resistance.

Kasey chose the passive resistance path. He came to four of the five meetings and sat silently with his arms folded the majority of the time. My field notes contain several notations concerning teachers making comments to me between book club meetings – several of these are conversations about Kasey's reluctance to participate. Two such conversations involved Daphne and Jane informing me that Kasey was telling everyone in department that we rarely discussed race in the book club discussions. I did not feel it was appropriate for me in the role as the researcher and facilitator to confront Kasey directly about this until his interview.

The fourth book caused Kasey much anxiety. Several days leading up to the *Down These Mean Streets* discussion, Kasey peeked through the glass pane of my classroom door and beckoned for me to come into the hallway. Very briefly, he told me he would not be coming to the book club meeting because he found one sex scene in the novel too offensive. I gave him the option of skipping the section he found offensive (or briefing scanning it), finishing the book, and sharing his objections with the book to the members. He told me he vehemently objected to this alternative and flatly told me he would

absolutely not be in attendance during that meeting. His empty chair spoke volumes the day of the meeting. No one mentioned his name during the meeting, but his absence could not be denied. We carried on the discussion without him, but the feeling was like a family deciding to move forward in their lives with discussing the dirty little secret. The pink elephant was not in the room, but we still felt its presence.

Although no one talked about his absence during that meeting, just about everyone mentioned the effect of his absence during the interviews. Several of the newcomers expressed their disappointment that this veteran teacher did not take more of an active role. During her interview, Daphne argued that Kasey's choice to be present yet remain silent at the meetings spoke volumes about his views on race. "And you know I really respect Kasey for coming even though he, I-I, my perception is... I-I think he has a whole lot of issues with a whole lot of this stuff!" Instead of getting to know the veteran teachers as he expected, the book club experience offered Roberto the same "consistent voices, who would always speak and then you also had consistent silence...." He believes several factors were responsible.

It-it's a brand new experience for all of us. Two, I don't know if all of us know each other that well. Uh, three, I think some people are just reticent to talk in public, you know, while they may be a high school teacher, I don't know that they are always comfortable talking to other adults. You know, you hold court all day long to a bunch of kids, who have your rapt attention. Maybe you're not comfortable speaking to adults, just a theory, I don't know. I can ask or I can inquire among them, but I don't know. Just some people didn't talk. And these are the people who I'd-I'd hoped would -- due to their experience and just my respect for these people.

During his interview, I talked to Kasey about silence. He agreed with his colleagues' summation of his participation. When asked to rate his participation on a scale of 1-10, he gave himself between a two and three. He provided this explanation,

“Well, I’ll tell you why I’m quiet is: There are some folks in there that love to hear themselves talk and when people -- when I’m in a group like that, where somebody likes to dominate the conversation and loves to hear themselves talk, I just kind of shut down.” He added, “I make my living speaking, but put me with a group of adults and I’m not near as loquacious I would be.... Sometimes I just like to listen ... I spend all my time talking to kids, and I just want to hear what adults say.” He elaborated further with this explanation.

...I read everything but *Down These Mean Streets* and enjoyed it. I do think that, if they had, if all of these books had been more teachable to the children, I think that I would have probably participated more as far as.... I guess when I read *American Knees*, I went, “Whoa! I mean what’s up with this?” and then I realized what you were doing, so I think that, the pragmatic use of books, probably would have brought me out a little bit.

In chapter seven, I provided readers with Kasey’s elaborated feedback to the book club’s observation of his silence. He argued that his silence was not a defensive mechanism. He also explained that in any meeting he could be observed in the same characteristic pose: Sitting with his arms folded. For several months after that, I began observing Kasey at department and faculty meetings. He was right. He sat with his arms folded.

My observation of Kasey during meetings proved the veracity of his explanation for his posture, but I continued to have suspicions about Kasey’s explanation for his silence for two reasons. First, I think from his own words in his interview he expressed his belief that it was impossible for whites and blacks to ever engage in face-to-face race dialogue without worrying about insulting or hurting the others’ feelings. For the first time, I asked him directly if he thought we had addressed the issue of race in the meetings. It was then I heard directly from him his opinion that he had been sharing with other members of the department: According to him, we had managed to skirt the issue of

race in our book club meetings. I, like my colleagues, wondered if he felt so strongly about this why he did not take the initiative to push the issue himself.

During one morning in May 2004, my question was answered. Kasey came to my room during second period and asked to speak with me privately.⁵⁶ (We both shared the same 90-minute planning period, but on this day we had students working in our rooms.) This was *deja vu*. I experienced the same butterflies in my stomach the time he announced to me in the hallway that he found *Down These Mean Streets* so offensive that he would not be attending the upcoming book club discussion. Here we go again, I thought. We ended up in the vacant English workroom where he offered me a seat. The conversation that ensued involved him describing his daughter's discomfort (along with some of the other white students in the class) with a discussion we had had in my gifted American literature class the day before. A brief synopsis of that class discussion is below.

Synopsis of that class discussion

Yesterday, my gifted American literature class, composed of 14 white students, four African American students, one Asian American student, and one Latino student, were discussing the threat of physical violence faced by the Younger family (a black family of protagonists) in Lorraine Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun* when they put down a portion of a life insurance check on a house in an all-white neighborhood. At a certain point in the conversation I was relating what happened to the Youngers in the 1950s to the "white flight" that still occurs in 2004 when blacks move into all-white neighborhoods. Kasey's daughter Janet argued this did not happen because she lived in a racially mixed neighborhood. The black students in the class jumped into the conversation and offered their support for my argument. The white students gave each other funny looks, but remained silent. Then the bell rang.

⁵⁶Kasey gave me permission to write about our private conversation.

Kasey said his concern was that this race discussion only served to make his daughter and the other white students in the class feel guilty. He shared that his wife was so concerned that she wanted to schedule a conference with me. (He convinced her that it would be better to let him handle this situation since we were friends.) He added that his daughter had had similar experiences throughout her school years when she had other black teachers, who also pushed students to have such discussions. I told him I would welcome a conference with his wife and that as an educator of color I chose to confront race issues with my students head-on. There was no way, I added, for me to teach *A Raisin in the Sun* adequately if I chose to ignore the race issues. He nodded his head and said, "I only want students to be comfortable."

I told him it was not my intention to make students feel guilty or uncomfortable but that my objective was to have students deal with real issues. If that meant stewing in their discomfort, then so be it. I added that I had encountered resistance from this clique of white students throughout the semester in class discussions. This clique, that included his daughter as one of its ringleaders, held very narrow-minded views about world issues, particularly when it came to issues concerning race and class. They were very intolerant and downright disrespectful of opinions that opposed theirs. I had worked very hard at breaking this clique's power over the entire class who had traveled together in the same gifted English courses since elementary school. Students (the minority students as well as some of the white students), who had begun the semester hiding behind a collective wall of silence, now felt empowered to speak their opinions with conviction. That was progress I could feel good about, I told him.

We were at a crossroad where compromise was impossible. I refused to be intimidated into changing the way I confronted race in class discussions to pacify Kasey or his daughter. Kasey's response to my argument was that he had advised his daughter that she only had a few more days left in my class. She could grin and bear it, he assured her, until then. I told him, "That's certainly the way I'm looking at it." (The inference was

that the race discussions would continue.) This conversation about Kasey's daughter served as a validation for my suspicions for Kasey's silence in the book club discussions: He believed a dialogue between whites and blacks about race was a taboo topic that should be left alone. That way, nobody would feel uncomfortable.⁵⁷

Rothenberg (2002) argues that talking about whiteness and white privilege are topics that make some people (like Kasey, his daughter, and some of the white students in my class) feel uncomfortable because it pushes them out their comfort zones by taking them to task for privileges they never noticed they had before. She says the fact that some whites feel the need to provide reasons to avoid talking about whiteness underscores the importance of having such discussions. "If education is about learning to see the world in new ways, it is bound, at times, to leave us feeling confused or angry or challenged. Instead of seeking to avoid such feelings, we should probably welcome some degree of discomfort in our lives and feel short-changed if it is not present" (p. 1). Because white privilege is the flip side of racism, Rothenberg (2002) urges people to empower themselves to identify it or know that if they do not, the consequences will be that they will wallow so deep in guilt and moral outrage that they will be powerless to move beyond them. Understanding white privilege is the first step, she says, in dismantling racism on both the personal and institutional levels. In the next chapter, I will discuss the important implications this conversation with Kasey holds for teachers.

The Comedienne

Book club members unanimously cited Lloyd as the most vocal member of the group. Lloyd was our resident comedienne – our department clown. He was often responsible for initiating much of the laughter during the book club meetings. Sometimes

⁵⁷Although Kasey gave me permission to write about this conversation, deadlines for the final draft of this dissertation prohibited me from requesting his feedback on this section.

Lloyd cracked a joke or made a pun. At times, his jokes were directed at book club members; quite a few were directed at Al. One listener might have interpreted these jokes as good natured; another might have said they bordered on being mean-spirited. Al seemed to take all of the jokes in stride as he does in this excerpt below. In this excerpt of the discussion on *Down These Mean Streets*, Lloyd talks about the protagonist's use of drugs, and Al joins the discussion as he makes a connection to his own life.

Lloyd: Well, one thing that freaked me out was, was and I mean I guess it is just because I am naïve I guess, but it is talking about the heroin use and take you back to the 30s and the 40s.

Al: Oh yeah!

Lloyd: And I have this, like, because I wasn't alive and so I have this heroin. People were shooting up this smack and ****. [Commotion from several book club members.] Yeah, you know?

Al: Oh listen it was there because when I ****.

[Commotion from several book club members.]

Jane: I didn't teach that element of it, but you know --

Rico: Right, the literati and the music world and so it wasn't just the lowest strata of society.

Al: No, it was, it was there when I grew up, because I was involved in it --

Lloyd: I use to have a heroin habit. [Several people laugh.]

Al: No, I didn't have heroin, but we-we use to smoke what was known back in those days, by the colloquial terms of "rabbit tobacco." [**Victoria:** Mmm.] And you found it out in the fields.

Jane: And where are these fields exactly? [Several people laugh.]

Al: Well, they're not there anymore. [Someone: Draw us a map to these fields.] [Several people laugh.] They're not there because I grew

[**Jane: *****] part of my growing up on Southview Drive, as a matter of fact, uh, the house on the ~⁵⁸ lives in now was the house I originally grew up in [Several: Mmm! Oh!] And, uh, behind that was a huge field. And you had the rabbit tobacco was, uh, just, uh, it was literally a wild weed and you would go out there and take it and crush it up and roll it up and, uh, in the blue horse notebook paper. [Several book club members laugh.] Now let me tell ya'll a little secret –

Lloyd: Al!

Al: Let me – Now let me tell ya'll a little secret. [Several book club members laugh.]

Lisa: Wild life!

[Laughter continues.]

Notice Al struggles to make a serious point about the connections he made from the character's drug use to his own smoking habit he developed as a young man. Lloyd's humor undercuts the seriousness of Al's story and all of us in the book club buy into that idea. We laugh. Like Phyllis, Al was our resident storyteller plus he was able to provide us with historical context to some of the books when we talked about issues occurring before the 1960s. When Phyllis spoke, we took her seriously. This was not so with Al. Lloyd led us to laugh at so many different points during Al's narration that he never got to finish telling us his "little secret."

Another example of Lloyd's use of his comedic skills occurred during our second book club discussion. Making a connection to *Indian Killer*, Paul argued that America was such a divided nation before September 11, 2001⁵⁹. The event -- as horrific as it was -- served to unify the nation, Paul believed. For just a few seconds, tension hung in the air

⁵⁸Refers to name of the school committee.

⁵⁹On that day, terrorists attacked the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. People refer to the terrorism attack on Nine Eleven (9-11).

after Jane added her opinion to the conversation. Lloyd sang in order to illustrate the point but also to release some of that tension. That excerpt is below.

Paul: Probably after the Nine Eleven, that was the first time that I can remember that our country seemed like it was unified [Someone: Mmm, huh.] – white, black, [**Victoria** (softly): I agree.] Asian, Hispanic. [**Victoria:** Mmm, huh.] It didn't matter – I mean [Victoria clears her throat.] people coming together like that and you know, of course –

Jane: Unless you're Middle Eastern looking.

Paul: Uh, yeah, I'll give you that. Um –

Jane: Yeah, you have to give it to me – I had a thing like that in my class, which is the only reason I said that.

Paul: Yeah! Um, but this seem to as much we differentiate ourselves by, you know, like – I don't know if we were saying this last time but if you – when you go out of the country – it's like, well, we're all Americans. You-you know Americans high-five at the place in Paris or whatever and then if you're in, you know California – “Oh, you're from Georgia, too!” And then if you're in Georgia, “Oh you're from Jessup, too!” or whatever. We all have pockets [**Jane:** *] but then [Clears his throat.] as something unites us it seems like we're all say we're all Americans. So throughout the book they try to differentiate. Well, you know, you, uh, when they were in the bar they were fighting the guys [**Jane:** ***] **** [Lots of commotion by book club members.] Yeah! And then it seemed like at the end that they sort of unified because if what was going on and they were all being categorized as just Indian killers. And so, you know maybe something terrible brought them all together in a sense. [Someone: Mmm, huh.]

Lloyd (in a sing-song fashion): U-N-I-T-Y! Oh! Sorry!

It is interesting to note that at the end of Lloyd's song, the tension of the conversation was quickly deflated and another member used the opportunity to put forth

another topic for discussion. This scenario for Lloyd repeated itself consistently in the first four book club meetings, which he attended religiously. In the first three book discussions, he was the first member to respond to my beginning prompt, “So what did you think of the book?” Characteristically, Lloyd’s talking was frequent and long-winded. He often interjected comments and opinions as other people were talking. No one openly objected to Lloyd’s intrusions; we all came to expect them as part of the lively conversation. His wife Jane said that when they left the meetings, she often chastised him about his chattiness. Jane once admonished Lloyd like one would a child for cutting her off as she was talking. For a few seconds, we were all startled watching this happen as Jane continued her remark. I was too embarrassed to look directly at Lloyd to see how he was reacting. If he was smarting from his wife’s reprimand, you could never tell. Lloyd jumped back into the conversation as soon as his wife finished making her point.

After watching and listening to Lloyd’s views, several teachers described Lloyd as a liberal. Rico said he found Lloyd’s comments inspiring because he had a unique way of spinning an idea or concept on its head and making the members look at it differently.

And, you know, I can’t really remember a specific comment, but he’d just say, “Well, we also need to think about it in terms of, you know this, you know, kids who are just different.” You know. They’re-they’re a nerd, or they’re gay, or they’re, you know, they-they stand apart maybe not just because of their color of skin. I can’t remember how he said it, but he said something like that one time and I was like, “Yeah.”

Labeling himself as “Mr. Talky Guy,” Lloyd agreed with his colleagues’ assessment that he was a major talker during the meetings. He gave himself a ten and a half for participation. He said his mother once advised him: It is possible to have a thought and not verbally articulate it. “I never found that to be true!” he commented with a hearty laugh. Describing himself as energetic, Lloyd explained his loquaciousness.

I'll piggyback a lot, and I have a lot of "aha" moments, you know. Someone'll say something and I'm like, oh, yeah, that makes me think of blah. And I -- and I have to be careful of that because ... I will step on other people's toes and stuff and I want to be really careful. But, what you know, what feels like a long silence to me is not necessarily a long silence in an objective sense, you know, cause it can be like: Somebody better talk! Start talking, you know, that kind of thing, you know, so I mean as a participant I think I was a good participant. I was always prepared. I read those suckers.

Considering this was my first book club, I was most appreciative of Lloyd's energy and loquaciousness. As a participant, I found his comments insightful and provocative. Unlike some of the members, he did not need much prodding to offer a comment. At times, he became so excited about a point he was making that his speech seemed to be going a mile a minute. One characteristic of Lloyd's participation that I personally found bothersome was his habit of interrupting others in mid-sentence. He never made any apologies nor did he receive any reprimands by me or the other members.

My critical race sense tells me he was acting out of his white male privilege, which made him think his own comments took precedence over others. I also question Lloyd's listening. If he was always so ready to make a comment, how could he really be listening to what his colleagues had to say? Many of the points made by other members of the book club were totally lost on Lloyd because his energy was spent more on talking or preparing to talk rather than attentively listening to the opinions of his colleagues. I can see why Kasey felt oppressed by people like Lloyd who dominated the discussions.

I think part of Lloyd's humorous antics during the book club meetings was certainly in line with his personality. No matter where Lloyd could be found -- in the hallway, English workroom, department or faculty meeting -- he would have those around him in stitches. Only on rare occasions was Lloyd ever serious. I think part of Lloyd's consistent tendency to make jokes during the book club discussions was to make us

laugh, but my second analysis of the book club discussion transcripts reveal that not all of the laughter he initiated was humorous. Some of it was nervous. I think Lloyd used his comedic talents to manipulate tension during the book club discussions – to divert attention away from potentially explosive issues at the center of our discussions. His white male privilege wanted to be in control.

The Storyteller

Of the three African American females in this book club, Phyllis was the eldest. Among the veteran teachers, she was the second oldest and had taught the longest. Present at all five meetings, she consistently positioned herself as the storyteller in the group. In evaluating her own participation, Phyllis gave herself a rating of seven and offered a rationale for her tendency to tell stories. “And I know that some of my stories were probably kind of long, but that is what happens when you get old, you know? You tell the stories and you just go on and on. That is just a part ... especially southern people who love to tell stories and I am one of those people.”

Phyllis’s tendency to tell stories during the book club discussions was very much in line with her personality. I loved hearing her stories about her own family and teaching career in our conversations together. She was a gifted storyteller; she could hold you mesmerized beyond your normal attention span without you ever yawning or losing interest. I learned so much about life by listening to her. Having known Phyllis for at least two decades, Al described Phyllis as a “typical southern lady,” a black woman from the “old school” culture who appreciated the oral tradition and lived by a strict, moral code dictated by her Christian beliefs.

The intimate stories Phyllis told in the book club opened the doorway to reveal a life filled with painful events. These stories revealed aspects of Phyllis’s life that we had no idea existed. For example, in the first book club discussion on *American Knees*, she revealed that she was involved in an interracial relationship in college. Paul recalls how Phyllis’s story affected his participation.

I think the one thing that I remembered was in the discussion -- I believe it was the first book *American Knees*. And she said that she had dated a white guy in college and ...she didn't really apologize for it. She just said when it came down to it, it just wasn't worth the trouble. And I thought that took a lot of courage to-to say that. That actually empowered me to speak about some things that people probably didn't know about me. I mean the fact that my background is as a Jew is not something I'm ashamed of ... I don't, you know, I don't... throw it around a whole lot. And-and I don't know if that is from moving to the south, but anyway, it made me feel if she can say that and be honest with people and say yeah, you know, that might not be the politically correct thing to say, but I'm gonna say it. I respected that and ...that was the one thing that stuck in my mind.

I also saw a different side of my mentor that I did not know. I knew she belonged to the "old school" generation, which meant she would not be as liberal a thinker as Lisa or me. I would not have guessed in a million years that my mother figure and unofficial mentor had once dated a white guy. Her candid revelation stunned me because it was so out of sync with my conception of her. The race stories she told were both riveting and painful for me (and others as well) to hear.

Phyllis attended all of the book club meetings and was outspoken about her disapproval of the book selections. Days before two different book club meetings -- *American Knees* and *Down These Mean Streets* -- Phyllis pulled me aside for a tête-à-tête. Both times she explained her reasons for her disapproval and steadfast refusal to finish the books. She attributed her resistance to her age and the type of reading material ("the classics") that she had grown accustomed to reading over the years. In her interview, she explained her reaction.

Since I am 50 years old, you know some of the novels I was just not accustomed to the-the language and the, uh, some of the sexual stuff in them -- just was not real comfortable along that line. And, uh, it bothered me, I guess a

little bit that you know, some of us, I guess because...uh, we...pro-probably had our – had in our head a certain type of novel that we would be looking at. It made me a little uncomfortable perhaps when some faculty members would say things like, “Well, um, you know why are we reading something like this?” And, um, you know I had no-no answers at that time but then after the first meeting of the book club, then it was very clear I think, to everybody that was present the real purpose was to analyze race. So what we were supposed to have done is sort of mentally stripped the sexual part, or-or that was not supposed to be our focus anyway, but to look at the relationships that were going on with the characters themselves and to look at how we, as educators, and readers, how we’re looking at race and understanding it, hopefully, uh, better. So I think once we realized what our goal was, then you know that was no longer a real issue. So, you know, but that again the easiness of, you know ... that’s not some, some of the books were not the kind of literature that I would normally choose to read on my own. But, you know, you have to push yourself to the limit sometimes or expose yourself to something a little different!

At the end of both conversations with me, Phyllis apologized for her feelings and vowed to come to the meetings in order to support me. I think her willingness to come to the meetings and openly state how these books made her feel as a reader garnered her more respect than criticism from fellow members. I can certainly say this was true with me.

White Privilege

Jane may not have been as vocal as her husband Lloyd in the book club meetings, but she was the type of participant who offered her viewpoint or debated an issue whenever she felt necessary. When pitted against her husband Lloyd, she was not the quiet, submissive type who deferred to her spouse. She seemed to welcome every opportunity to argue heartily against him. In his interview, Al made this observation,

“I’ve known Lloyd and Jane enough to know that a lot of times they had very differing opinions on the same book, which was interesting.”

When asked how she viewed her own participation on a scale of 1-10, Jane rated herself a seven and a half. She attributed her talkativeness to her issues with control. “I-I felt like that our time was too valuable to let silence go by and nobody say anything. So, like Lloyd, I feel that tension of needing to jump in.” Plus, she said reading each book cover to cover meant she was brimming over with things to say. “It-it’s hard for me to see how you could read those books and then go with this interesting diverse group of people and not say, ‘Well, what did you think? And I thought this was weird, and what did you think?’ And plus it was such an opportunity, you know?”

Besides her willingness to talk during discussions and debate any topic with her spouse, Jane’s participation was characterized by her multiple admissions of her whiteness. When posing questions or provocative statements, she would always pepper them with statements like “as a white woman,” “you know, white girl sitting here,” and “white suburban girl.” As a critical race theorist, I honestly thought my colleagues would have to be carefully prodded into discussing white privilege. After all, I thought since we had never had intimate, serious discussions on this scale as a group before I should not expect too much. If I could get my colleagues to discuss white privilege by the last book club meeting, it would be great. Imagine my surprise when Jane acknowledged her whiteness during the first two minutes of our discussion of the first book *American Knees*. That excerpt is below.

Jane: One thing we had to do, of course, is separate the sexuality from the cultural and racial aspects of the book.

Lloyd: I simply *****. [Laughter from several members.] That’s true though. You know I think first of all you have to get past the “Oh! There’s a lot sex happening here!” You know. I-I-I really dug how, like, early on in the book though when – it was early when they were back to back-to-back on the bench and

they were realizing they there were only Asians and they were just sort of like, by, almost like, magnetic or gravitational forces they had been put together there? But I was intending to do that. [Another book club member says something incomprehensible.] Yeah, yeah. And I thought it was foreshadowing too how of all wrapped up, you always had that sense of inevitability that they would be together, you know, and the way they got together was, I thought, a little pat, you know, but at the same time, I mean, it had a nice sort of structure – a circular structure. That worked for me.

Daphne: I was frustrated! With his ... I could never tell. It's almost like I would like to read it again, you know. I mean there are very few books that I read over and over. But I was frustrated trying to determine did... what he really wanted in a woman! I mean...did he want [emphasis on the word "want"] somebody who was – I mean it seemed to me sometimes he wanted that hundred percent Asian woman. And then at other times it seemed that he wanted something very different from that. And I, I just, I don't know *****.

Jane: Well, that just makes me wonder if that's a typical thing. I mean it's-it's not typical or just a characteristic, because as a white woman... [4-second pause] I mean I'm very.... [Another book club member says something incomprehensible.][Laughter from book club members.] In terms of what I have conditioned myself, you know? And I never really thought about, um, I mean, I, yeah, it-it was going to be a man. It never occurred to me what race, you know, that was not really much of an issue with me but I would imagine for most people it would be a definite issue.

I applaud Jane's willingness to place her whiteness and white privilege on the table. Whiteness often goes unnamed and unexamined because it has been held up as an invisible norm or standard by which other people and things are judged; white privilege is often invisible to the very ones who benefit from it (Rothenberg, 2002). I wonder: What

degree of discomfort had she experienced in her effort to openly acknowledge the importance these factors played in her life in front of her other white colleagues? What anxiety did it cause her admitting this in front of her black teacher colleagues? I also wonder: How did she come to this realization?

Although I applaud Jane's risk-taking during this book club session, my critical race theory lens also made me suspicious of her motives. Was she making this admission to pacify the black members of this book club? With the realization in hand, what did she plan to do? Wise (2002) asks an even tougher question: When whites like Jane recognize they benefit from white privilege and fail to challenge it, what good does that insight do? Wise argues that whites must be willing to leave their comfort zones and put forth the time, money, and courage needed to "challenge and change the perpetrators of and the collaborators with the system of racial privilege" (p.110). Because being white in this society means whites rarely have to think about it, Feagan and Vera (2002) assert that whites can no longer remain in the dark about their whiteness. They must have a willingness to think deeply about their own and others' racism and be open to risking their own privilege or resources as an act of protest. One of the most important things whites can do to end racism is to become allies of people of color (Kivel, 2002). There is not a quick, one-size-fits-all prescription for being an ally. "Being an ally to people of color is an ongoing strategic process in which we look at our personal and social resources, evaluate the environment we have helped to create and decide what needs to be done" (Kivel, 2002, p. 127).

The Devil's Advocate

Lisa, one of three African American females in the book club, was one of the youngest members of the group. She often played the free-spirited, devil's advocate in the meetings, providing members with provocative, alternative ways of thinking, questioning, and looking at a topic, character, or issue. Many times her contributions to the conversation centered on asking us to question motives for the decisions we made in our

effort to educate “other people’s children” – particularly those decisions affecting students of color. She often caused us to pause and think: What factors influenced our decisions? She also echoed similar race stories told by Phyllis and me. She often stated she identified with the characters of color in the novels or said the characters reminded her of former students she had taught.

In evaluating her own participation, Lisa gave herself a rating of five for participation because she said she made a conscious choice to do more listening than talking. “I think I participated in every discussion. I think that I participated more as a listener in some of the discussions. I spoke when I felt like I had something that I really just couldn’t hold back on, but I wanted to hear more what other people thought....” She admitted that she intentionally silenced herself because she felt her colleagues would not be receptive to her opinions because of her lack of teaching experiences. I was quite surprised by her view of her own participation. As the facilitator, I would have given her participation a higher score, because I did not sense in any of the book discussions that she felt inhibited. In her interview, she described herself as an outspoken and direct person who prefers to tell people how she feels. People can accept her opinions or reject them, but she said, “[But] if you tell me I am wrong, then we are going to have a little disagreement.”

Interviews with Lloyd and Daphne confirmed Lisa’s suspicions. Lisa’s outspoken nature had caused some book club members discomfort. Lisa felt like a hostile, unwelcoming atmosphere was being fostered by her more experienced colleagues. This wall of hostility is what kept Lisa guarded about choosing when to talk. Being one of the youngest and least experienced in the department, she felt the veteran teachers did not value her opinions. Why did she feel this way?

Body language. One or two times when I would say something, someone would immediately -- instead of trying to listen to what I said -- put their own spin on it and that wasn’t what I said or that wasn’t what I meant.... And so when people

jump in like that, it makes me realize that they are more interested in saying what they feel than they are in listening to me, so I tend to just not say anything at all. Plus, being the youngest person in our department that plays a key role in things like that, that people wouldn't realize.

I did not observe the hostility that Lisa talked about, because it happened, as she pointed out, just as I was setting up the meetings and teachers were coming in and getting seated. According to Lisa, several of the veteran teachers would use the "intimidation tactic" of mentioning about how long they had been teaching at Lakeside High School and the fact that the English department had all these new people. "Although I don't buy into that, it makes you just kind of not even want to venture out," she added.

From comments made to me during his interview, Lloyd may have been one of those teachers. He felt the department's youngest colleagues, who were Lisa and Roberto, had positioned themselves as teachers with both more teaching expertise and life experience than they actually had. Their contributions, at times, irritated him. He elaborates below.

I think we have a couple of young teachers -- though I've been teaching six years. You've [young teachers] been teaching a year or two years, and maybe you don't quite know everything you are talking about. And I mean, I'm not trying to be a snob like that, but you know when you hear people make comments like, 'Well, in all the time I've been' And I always kick back to, 'Well, it hasn't been that much time!' You know? I mean they're my colleagues, and I like both of these young folks we've got here and I respect them both and, you know, [I] have lot of affection for both of them. So I-I just always kind of feel like, "You know, you aren't quite really there yet." But if you want to feel like you're there, okay, that's fine.

Here is just another example of Lloyd's way of handling sensitive conversations. He initiated laughter with the purpose of defusing potentially volatile conversations.

Sometimes we changed the subject. Other times, we may have continued on the subject but our momentum had been lost in the process. Unbeknownst to me, Lloyd had created an atmosphere of intimidation so that young colleagues like Lisa would stay in their place (that is, remain quiet and defer to their wiser, more experienced colleagues). He found Lisa's participation especially threatening because she was forcing us to think about what our educational decisions were doing to students. Lloyd considered Lisa's identification with the struggles of the protagonists of color in each of the books maddening. He questioned how she could say these protagonists reminded her of students she had taught. She had only taught for two years. How could she know all this? He argued. Essentially, these new teachers – particularly Lisa -- should not have been so vocal. Lloyd's attitude seethed: "What can these young bucks tell me?"

As a critical race theorist, my number one priority is to fight racism, but I find it hard to ignore other forms of oppression or injustice. I think Lloyd's attempts to downplay the importance of Al's contributions was due to Al's advanced age. In the TV drama *Boston Public*, Harvey Lipchitz, the oldest member of the Winslow High School teaching staff, is treated with disdain and ridicule because both the teachers and students regard him as an eccentric, an ancient relic left over from some forgotten era. Lloyd's attitude and behavior toward Al in the meetings – i.e., making Al the butt of jokes and constantly interrupting Al's stories -- suggests he regarded him as this "old fart with nothing valid to add to our discussions."⁶⁰ Lloyd's jokes and interjections were veiled attempts at silencing Al. I think this behavior was what Kasey was alluding to in his interview. With Lisa, I think Lloyd's white male privilege is at work again. He has to feel like he is control of the conversation. He is irritated that these young teachers – particularly Lisa – are making him feel uncomfortable about race. When his white male privilege is

⁶⁰The quotation marks I use here are not to denote that these crude words were said by Lloyd but a general attitude he emitted by his behavior.

threatened, he resorts to manipulation. I think members of the book club quickly picked up on Kasey's oppressive nature, but we all (except for Lisa) failed to identify that same characteristic in Lloyd. The veil of laughter completely fooled us.

The Other Participants

This section includes a discussion of the roles played by the other teachers in the book club. The participants are not listed in this section to denote their lack of importance, but because their participation was more subtle. Consequently, the discussion here will be briefer than those covering Kasey, Lloyd, Phyllis, Jane and Lisa and will rely more heavily on description than analysis of their participation.

Mr. Master's Degree

Roberto and Lisa shared two factors in common: They were both the youngest members of the English department and had about the same amount of teaching experience. At the time of the study, Roberto was taking two courses at Bellson University. One course focused on race in children's literature; the other one was a book club course. Quite often, Roberto's contributions came from what he had learned in his teacher education classes. He talked about the philosophies of professors and quoted work by educational researchers. For example, he initiated several discussions over the right of white authors to write about minority cultures (see theme two of chapter six). Except for Lloyd, the teachers did not find this neophyte's contributions from the local university threatening. They respectfully listened to his points and were generally supportive of his comments. Sometimes people would agree to whatever point he was making; other times they would make a few comments as if they were processing what he was saying.

His participation in the book club also had direct impact on his master's coursework: He revealed in book club discussions and his interview that he had written two academic papers based on two of the novels. Like Rico and Paul, he was able to give members a unique perspective considering his liberal upbringing and growing up in New

York. Topics like graphic sex and profanity did not seem to faze him. He credits his youth, education, and his culture for his liberal outlook.

I have been immersed in this culture since I was a kid, you know? I am from New York, lived in Florida, [and I] went to high school in Georgia. You know this doesn't shock me, and then two, you know, these books, like this⁶¹ and Delpit. I've got Delpit over there. These have been so immersed in the curriculum of the college of education at Bellson, you know. It's integrative at this point; it's not shocking. Now if I had gone through 15, 20 years ago, oh my God, you know. But no, I mean I don't purport to have all the answers, you know, but I do – I'm a people person, and I'm fairly intuitive, and some things you pick up on, whether it's in discussion, whether it's in the academic work....

Looking back on his participation, he gave himself varying scores. "I would say the first two *American Knees* and *Indian Killer*, I was fairly vocal. I'd say an eight -- give or take. I missed *Native Son* -- that was my fault," he explained. What score would he give *Down These Mean Streets*, the book some of colleagues found so offensive? "Oh man, you know that was my book! That was my book. I talked too much on that one. That was probably a 10. I loved that book!"

Anecdotes

Al, the current department chairman and oldest member of the book club, provided historical accuracy and local anecdotes to the discussions. His contributions were generally stories about what race relations were like growing up in Sethan. When we would talk about events that happened before the 1960s, Al was always ready to provide the historical context we needed. In judging his own participation, Al said with a laugh, "Oh, I'd probably put myself at about 6 or 7 sometimes. Well, I like to talk." He said

⁶¹He is referring to Julie Landsman's *A White Teacher Talks about Race*.

unless he had something to say he tried his best not to talk. “Now, that doesn’t always happen.” Book club members watched a master storyteller recalling stories from his youth – a time when strict boundaries ruled the behavior of whites and blacks and how they interacted socially together. He says although people generally view him as knowledgeable and wise for his years, he sees himself as just “a southern boy.”

Transcribing conversations involving Al was often difficult. He often strayed from the topic and his conversation was often incoherent as he repeated the same ideas or concepts. His contributions followed a typical pattern: The group would discuss a particular a topic or issue without Al’s input, move on to another topic, and then minutes later Al would reintroduce the old topic by offering his opinion.. Usually that opinion echoed what had been the consensus of the group. Some regarded his way of contributing – a good sense of humor coupled with historical context and repeating the same words, phrases, and ideas – as rambling but this has always been a characteristic of Al’s communication style. He conducted our department meetings in much the same way. Sometimes his points following an argument would conflict. One such example occurred during our discussion of *Down These Mean Streets*. In the excerpt below, we are discussing authors, who choose to provide their readers with graphic descriptions of sex or drug use taking place.

Jane: Sex or drugs, or I mean it’s, it’s like this-this is part of your brain? This is part of your thinking? I mean it’s just interesting to me, so that makes it part of the world and never occurred to me, you know, that -- I mean I read a short story once that, you know, had bestiality in it and I was like what?

Al: I think there’s --

Jane: What? But I was just like really?

Al: I think there’s -- there is that sense of curiosity up to a point.

Jane: I am not a --

Al: I am not so sure --

Jane: Don't call professional standards commission on me, I am not like, you know. [Laughter from book club members.] I'm more like –

Lloyd: Jane's ***

[Commotion by book club members Daphne and Rico. Conversation is unintelligible.]

Jane: What's influencing us to do these things? And people, other people are influenced, I mean I am totally influenced by guilt, and so, you know? It's just --

Al: I think we all have -- I don't know I can think for myself – I think up to a certain point, yes. Now I do draw the line. I mean there, there -- when you get into a certain situation, beyond a certain point, um, no. But I mean, you know, I don't think I have ever, uh, I would not be a good druggie.

Lisa laughs.

Jane: I wouldn't either.

Al: I mean, you know, um.

Rico: I think you would be a great druggie. [Several book club members laugh.]

Al: I would be a -- I would be a -- Listen.

Jane: You are not applying yourself!

Daphne: You're an underachiever! [Lots of commotion from book club members.]

In my analysis of the book club transcripts, I noticed that each time Al began telling a story or making a point, his speech was interrupted with laughter and jokes. This type of behavior spoke volumes: It said some teachers merely “tolerated” Al's participation but did not take his contribution seriously. During his interview, Lloyd described Al's participation in this way, “We have one older teacher -- the department chair -- who likes to maybe share the same story a few times, but that's okay, he's a sweetheart, we love him, so we'll take it.”

The Intellectual

Rico did not become a participant until after the first book club meeting. During the year of this study, it was his first year at Lakeside High. I did not know Rico well because he was a new faculty member plus he divided his time between the English and foreign language departments. With no classroom of his own, he was forced to “float” from classroom to classroom. He must have heard about the first book club meeting, because he approached me about joining. I welcomed him in.

I am glad I made that decision. Rico was quiet, but I could tell he was listening and processing what was being said. With furrowed eyebrows, he would sit in his chair, leaning in the direction of the speaker. At times he would pose stimulating questions to the speaker or shed light on a different perspective that we had not thought about. In our discussion of *Indian Killer*, members began discussing the Native American protagonist’s fetish with the female breast and Rico made an interesting metaphor, which showed how deeply he was thinking about the conversation. That excerpt is below.

Lloyd: He was dealing with some issues with the breast, which is fine with me, but you know --

Jane: But that’s a maternal -- [Tape stops.]

Lloyd: ****John **Both felt outside of their culture.

Jane: Security!

Lloyd: Right! They both felt conflicted about what their cultural was.

Roberto: True!

Rico: They never drank of the cultural milk or whatever, you know.

[Everyone chimes: Oooh!]

Daphne: What a metaphor! [Lots of laughter from book club members.]

Someone: Yeah!

Someone (speaking to Victoria): Put that in your paper!

Kasey: Lactose!

Lloyd: They were culturally lactose intolerant.

Like the excerpt above illustrates, Rico's comments were always insightful and provocative. He was the book club's "intellectual," who always provided a serene presence in the meetings. When contributing, he was never arrogant as he added interesting tidbits to the conversations. To the contrary, he seemed quite humble, yet comfortable linking significant information from our readings to other books he had read or actual historical events in the world. Rico may not have been as vocal as Lloyd, says Jane, but his comments certainly impacted the group. Roberto agreed. Rico was our E.F. Hutton. "Whenever he brings something to the table, everyone listens and it's usually important. And he has humor."

As the ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teacher, he was the constant voice of the disenfranchised group. Al explained his fascination with Rico's comments, "Now I don't know Rico that well. I know he was in my room last fall, but I think that not having known him, I thought the comments that he made, he was ...very succinct and it was very interesting because he came into it from a totally different point of view and perspective."

The Movie Guy

Paul's participation was unique because of the context and experiences he brought to the discussions. He lived and grew up in Bronx, New York. Like Rico, Paul was a quiet presence in the book club. His posture during the book club meeting was also of a man in deep thought. Most times he sat listening and nodding -- his hands clasped together either on top of the table or on his knee. Sometimes one hand covered his mouth.

There were three observations I made about Paul's participation. First, he made numerous references to movies. These references generally dealt with knowledge he had gained about people of color from watching movies on the big screen. Noticeably, Paul did not share any information he had acquired as a result of the relationships he had with people of color. A second observation was the way Paul positioned himself when he

contributed. Giving himself a rating between a seven and eight for participation, Paul thought his listening was equally important. If someone else was making a point, he listened intently and only when the person was completely finished making the point would Paul make a point.

I try to listen to what other people say and I think that's a tribute to when people are actually listening to you is that they don't just talk about what they want to say -- as if they are sitting in their seat waiting to say what they want to say, and they don't listen. But I try to comment on what other people have said ... to show them that I'm listening to what you say, or I'm questioning how you phrase that and so, I guess my thought is that when I felt like there was something for me to contribute, I did.

There were times when he said he felt like he wanted to say something, but he thought that commenting on everything would be a little bit overbearing and the words would not have held meaning. For him, choosing to speak meant picking and choosing the right moment to speak and thus give "more credence to the times that you do talk."

A third observation I made about Paul was his reaction to our conversations when we strayed too far from the book or the topic of race. He was like an alley cat ready to pounce. If we stayed too far from the book for too long, he would attempt to quickly steer the conversation back on track with questions or statements that linked us back to the book. Paul said he noticed that my role as facilitator did not entail reminding the group of our focus in the discussions. "You know if the discussion went a certain way, we just kept going with it..."

The Southern Belle

During the year of this study, Daphne was new to the English department. Her participation enabled book club members to get to know her through her views and opinions. She often contributed teacher stories from Jetson County, where she worked at the middle and high schools part time. She attended all of the book club meetings, and

told stories involving her dad, who was prejudiced and had very strict ideas about how blacks and whites should interact. Like Phyllis, she expressed her disapproval of the third book *Down These Mean Streets*. She said she wished we could have examined the books more in depth as far as the author's agenda for writing about the particular culture represented in the books.

I guess maybe the thing that I wish we could have talked about a little bit, in a little more depth was why some of these, and-and there may not have been an answer, but it would have taken not just reading the novel, it would have taken some, some more research into why the-these authors needed to write these books, you know, what-what were they trying, what was their purpose? Was their purpose just to entertain? Was their purpose to give a glimpse into their culture?

Was there, you know, that kind of thing?

In describing how she chose to participate, she gave herself a seven because she spoke whenever she felt she had something pertinent to say. When she remained quiet, it was out of deference to a colleague who had the floor. She admitted that at times she remained silent because she was struggling with how she felt on an issue.

Daphne illustrates that silence does not always have to mean someone is either defensive or is hiding behind an issue. She admits that in her silence she was struggling with how she was feeling. It took a lot of courage on her part to open herself up to a group of people she barely knew. She outright admitted that she was raised by a very racist father – a father she loved dearly – in the excerpt from *Native Son* below.

Daphne: Well, it was, uh, 15 years ago.[**Victoria: *****] And even-even, and this is not something that I am proud of, just because my family, but I, you know but you come to accept the way your family is and there comes a point when you realize that you're not going to change 'em, no matter what. And I-I'm not quite sure how I ended up with my views. Well, I do know, because my parents taught me that, you know, you treat everybody equally. And, but my, I mean my father

grew up in a time when, you know, you were friendly to black people, but you didn't associate with them. I mean that's just how he grew up. He was never ugly to anybody, but there was definitely [**Phyllis:** Mmm, huh.] a line there.

Lloyd: But it's interesting he passed on like more progressive values to you [**Daphne:** Yeah!] than he [**Daphne:** Yeah!] expected of himself.

Daphne: Yeah, and I -- and again I'm not quite sure how that -- but I knew whenever Russell⁶² would call my house to talk, you know, it was very uncomfortable, you know, to the point where I-I would not want to tell my dad that he called just because I didn't want to deal with him, [**Lloyd:** To deal with ***. Yeah.] you know? And I can remember Russell asking me out one time. He was, hey, not necessarily in a romantic way, but hey let's go to a movie. And you know Russell, I would love to, but this is really going to cause a problem with my dad and I said I'm just not willing to go there right now. I mean I was like 17 years old and I was scared of my father! [Laughs.]

As she told those stories, it was almost like she had transformed herself back into that powerless, fearful little daddy's girl. I could feel her pain each time she told a story involving her father and his views on race. He was a very strong force in her life, and she had very little power growing up to change the way he viewed the world. Daphne's stories were very compelling to me as a person of color because they gave me an inside view of how a racist thinks and deals with race and how that attitude sends ripple effects through families for generations.

⁶²Pseudonym for the name of an actual person.

“I found myself sort of unraveling a little bit ... feeling insecure and starting to question. Do I have a right to be able to speak in jest? What’s permitted? What’s okay? What’s considered friendly? What’s considered not friendly? What’s considered racism?”

--Allan, a white participant in
an Unlearning Racism Workshop⁶³

The Listener

In evaluating my own participation, I gave myself a score of five. I was careful not to communicate that I was in charge, because I wanted my colleagues to feel the book club was an equal partnership. I was even particular about where I chose to sit; I purposely chose not to sit at the head of the table. Looking back on the experience, I think I should have taken a more active role as the facilitator by redirecting the conversations. In his interview, Paul expressed his frustration when we got off the topic. “...and as the leader, I don’t think you ever said to us, let’s continually remember that we are focusing on the different cultures or the different – You know if the discussion went a certain way, we just kept going with it and talked about the characters,” he said. His assessment is right on target. By nature, I do more listening, processing, and learning than I do talking so that is what I did.

I have always found the role of listening fascinating; you learn so much about people when you just sit and listen. Sometimes I got so caught up in listening and processing what my colleagues were saying that I had to remind myself to contribute. At the beginning of each book club meeting, I would draw a diagram of the table and where everyone was sitting. The first book club I learned so much -- like not trying to take field notes during the meetings. It was too distracting for me and intimidating to my colleagues so I quit after 30 minutes.

⁶³Taken from the video *Facing Racism*. See Appendix K for the citation.

When Phyllis, Kasey, and Daphne expressed their disapproval of the books I chose, I did not want to appear defensive so I remained quiet. Lisa and Phyllis kept me apprised of the private conversations taking place in the teacher's lounge, the hallway, and in individual classrooms. So many conversations were taking place between the book club meetings that I began recording these happenings as field notes in a newly purchased notebook I kept locked in my classroom desk drawer. I provided explanations to my colleagues who came to me and personally inquired about my reasons for selecting the books. Phyllis and Kasey were the only ones who did so. I listened and watched what was happening. My choice to act as a listener was purposeful: I was collecting data.



Figure 7.4 Data cartoon⁶⁴

⁶⁴The idea for this data cartoon was entirely mine. I gave sketches of my idea to high school art student Faatimah Stevens who drew it for me.

Theme 2: Benefits

Of the 11 teachers who participated in this book club, half report the experience was not their first. Phyllis had her first book club experience when she was in college. “We had this sort of book club for some of the English majors in college, so I’d had a little bit of that in terms of you know discussing things and then on panel groups with certain novels that we just sit around and talk,” she explained. “So I had done that in college, but you know since that time I had not had the time for that kind of experience, so it was just absolutely such a valuable thing for me to-to be involved, especially at the end of my career.”

Before moving to Sethan, Daphne was a member of a book club in Jetson for several years. Husband and wife team Lloyd and Jane participated in “dinner dialogues” while they were teachers at Clay Middle School. When I asked Jane to compare both experiences, she said the book discussions at her former school focused on books about education. The atmosphere was totally different. Club members did ice breakers and cultural activities to get to know each other. “We normally got to know each other as teachers. And it wasn’t as much of as a reader, as a person living in the world, as a colleague, it was more, um ... just as teachers ...” she explained. She said she and her husband gained appreciation for their colleagues in both book club experiences but a major difference in the Lakeside book club was the type of books selected. The discussions at her former school were based on more academic education books. “Even though those were some good ones ... some of those books were really good. Um, it -- there wasn’t the depth, I didn’t think.” During his participation in the book club, Roberto also took part in a book club experience as part of a graduate course he was taking.

I have lauded this book club among friends. I have lauded it among academic peers and in my classes at the university. It’s been a great experience. It’s an uncommon thing for a lot of people to share a book with someone outside of the classroom and in that extent, that context rather, usually you have to please

someone, please a teacher with your interpretation of what they have already told you what they want to hear. Here we can interpret these books through our own frame of reference, through our own experiences, worldview, [and] biases, whatever they may be. I enjoyed it.

One difference in the two book clubs was the atmosphere. His professor created an atmosphere in the book club where people did not feel confined to being politically correct.

It's very, you know, typically you don't curse in a class, typically not dirty jokes or, uh, you-you don't "go there" as our principal says. But we do go there in that group and we don't go there in our group [Lakeside]. Some people are very devout in their faith and that is just not appropriate for them. Some of us are probably more crude, I guess, you know, but we-we respected that, where as in the academic setting, gloves are thrown down, you know.

Between the two book clubs, Lakeside was more diverse in its membership. His professor bragged that that semester's class had the most diversity since the first year he started teaching the course. Dominated by young, white females, its diversity consisted of one African American male and two white males. "However, we have, at Lakeside, three African American females, different faiths, different ages," Roberto concluded. "He says there is a lot of diversity in it, but to me it is lily white, you know, and again, they're afraid to go there [talk about race] , you know."

The fact that half of the membership had prior experiences participating in book clubs with friends or peers in a college course made this book club unique. Practicing teachers "rarely have the opportunity to experience sustained exploration of a complex idea, let alone through dialogic practices" (Raphael, Florio-Ruane, Kehus, George, Hasty, & Highfield, 2001, p. 3). Raphael et al. elaborate in the following quote.

The contexts in which teachers work today tend to be isolated from other professionals. They are embedded within a hierarchical system in which the

teachers' day-to-day activities are governed by external forces: administrative mandates, parental requests, and, somewhat unique to today's climate, legislative directives. Missing from the lives of teachers is the opportunity to articulate and investigate with others the means for improving our practice and learning of those with whom we work. Study groups provide an activity setting in which these voices and views can be expressed as part of learning (p. 9).

Whether participating in the Lakeside teacher book club was their first experience or not, teachers reported it was a positive experience that united the department in an opportunity that allowed them for the first time to get together to socialize and get to know each other in a more relaxing context instead of the usual faculty or department meeting. Phyllis said the everyday demands of high school teaching leaves educators with little time to read literature deeply – let alone time to meet together as peers to discuss ideas and opinions. The book club experience allowed her time to do those things plus she was able to get to know her colleagues. “You know, some of these people I have been with 14, 13 years and never got to really know them and it has been a way to understand them better -- the new people and the old people better ... very quickly with the sessions that we have had, so it has been just very revealing to me. And to me, we have grown closer as a department as a result of the book club, so that's the up side of it for me.” Phyllis and Al both commented that the experience enabled them as veterans to hear their colleagues' unique opinions, different perspectives, and various living experiences that they did not know. They even learned intimate information about each other that they did not know.

Lloyd described the discussions as some of the most substantive, meaningful talks we had had as a group. Other teachers used words like “enlightening,” “fascinating,” “interesting,” “liberating,” and “powerful” to describe the experience. In the quote below, Jane explains how the book club experience held meaning for her.

It was possibly the most powerful thing that I've done. I was going to say at Lakeside High School, but then I'm thinking ...maybe the whole time, maybe in my ten years. Simple because it's the kind of thing that we want our students to do -- to appreciate and talk about it, but we don't ever make time to do.... I think it let us be scholars without too much stress... and then the fact that we were connecting as a department and then the topic of the books I think transcends all of that because we all see things a little differently.

The African American teachers said they found the book club experience a unique opportunity to see how their White colleagues discussed their knowledge of racism and their inadequacies in dealing with racism with their students. Although the book discussions were not always about the books, the experience did allow the teachers to explore their views on race. Except for the poll I had taken of my colleagues (which initiated this study) several years earlier, I had not had any other such "race dialogues" with my colleagues. I knew where both Lisa and my mentor Phyllis stood on the issue. As people of color, we were forced to deal with race on a daily basis so it was natural that all three of us would confront race issues head-on with our students. I did not possess this same knowledge of Kasey and Al, who I had worked with for the past five years. Until the book club, I had no idea their views about race and racism.

Teachers cited other effects and benefits of participating in this book club. First, the format provided them with an environment that fostered sharing among colleagues – sharing of themselves, including their own ideas, opinions, and the issues raised in the books. For the first time in many years, this group of people connected as a department in their effort to share new ideas, see and hear fresh perspectives, and connect with the books, characters, and the experiences of each other. The books so significantly impacted several teachers' reading that they recommended the titles to their students, spouses, and student teachers. Teachers talked about the effects these books had on our students after they had read the books. For example, I shared the poem below with my colleagues

during the last book club discussion, which was written by Shayla Harry, one of my female students. She wrote the poem from the perspective of a Native American character John Smith in Sherman Alexis' *Indian Killer*, which I had recommended she read to satisfy the requirement for reading a Native American novel as an outside reading assignment.

Who I am?

Who I am is unclear to me.
 All that I am is not what I pretend to be,
 I was stolen from my birth mother you see
 And given to the whitest of a white family.
 My name is John Smith, but who is he?
 Nothing but a little white lie I struggle to be,
 The history of my brown skin,
 The song of my native spirit wants to be free.
 I can't find a place in this white man's world,
 I don't know my place in the native world.
 Who am I is the question.
 Who am I?
 Anywhere I go I don't belong.
 Deep down I feel someone has done me wrong.
 A white man -- a white man is whom I shall blame,
 Even though I am his name,
 This is the name that has caused me pain.
 Who am I?
 I don't know who I am.
 Can't anybody tell me who?
 Tell me why.
 Who I am, or who am I?

Roberto even wrote academic papers on two of the books for one of his graduate literature courses. Therefore, he was empowered to influence the thinking of one professor and a group of teachers at Bellson University.

Many of the teachers agreed that their participation exposed them to books they would not have read on their own. For Daphne in particular, the experience forced her to set aside time to read books like *Native Son* that she had always wanted to read. Book club participation enlightened them about how they lump racial groups together based on

stereotypical thinking. In the quote below, Kasey hypothesizes reasons he believes people segregate themselves.

I think we often are with the people we have the most in common with. And if that's the same sex or color.... I think when we start forcing kids, then it becomes-becomes superficial. It becomes artificial. Um, like what the teacher observes the kids in the lunchroom are all segregated. Well, go to a faculty meeting! We're all segregated there! Does it change and is there hope? I would like to think that there's hope. I would like to think that we'd all be able to sit together and ... but guys are going to sit with guys, women are going to sit with women. If you go to the same church, you might sit with someone from your church. I think that's just the way it is.

For others, the book club experience prompted them to question and examine their own teaching practices and expectations. For Al, the experience empowered him to be more open to teaching controversial books like *Down These Mean Streets* with older, mature students. By reading multicultural novels, teachers reported learning more about cultures they had very little knowledge about. Here Lisa talks about how the book club experience changed how she dealt with multicultural novels.

Well, it's already made me open to the multicultural novels. I'm doing my whole - - I was already doing novel projects, but I am doing them in a whole different light this time, already, you know, making sure that I pull in authors that I had not taught before. So that is a big, big thing for me and I'm really enjoying it. They had their first novel projects due in and I had some girls who, probably in their lifetime, would never have read *The Color Purple*, that read it and have now talked to me and told me how great it was and how much they enjoyed it and so I- I'm really, and they rented the movie this past weekend, so I'm really thankful for that.

Some teachers said the discussions prompted them to think about how they view certain racial groups and the tendency for them to group students by race. Kasey said the discussions opened his eyes to the extent that people stereotype others and how those stereotypes are used as a basis to catalog people into groups.

Well, I-I know that just like many other folks, I stereotype people. Reading *American Knees* I mentioned one student who she and I had the same conversation. Boom: Exactly as what's going on. Where does she fit in? She's – Now she's totally Chinese, but nonetheless, she is in a foreign country. And she'll always be in a foreign country, and people have tried to set her up with another Asian student, you know, which is offensive to her. And this student has actually shared a lot more with me since I talked to her about it, which I thought was great. I think that, uh, [Exhales.] I-I don't know that it enlightened me to anything other than, um... that there are ways in which we clump students together.

As a result of the discussions, Daphne began doing a lot of soul-searching. She discovered she had race issues related to students that she needed to deal with.

Oh, it opened my eyes to a lot of things ... particularly things that I had to see about myself. I think I am a pretty open-minded person, and a pretty tolerant person in most respects, but it made me realize that in some ways, you know, I may have to rethink how I view groups of people and individuals too, but, so it opened my eyes to, you know. I don't think I'm a prejudiced person, but we all have prejudices and it opened my eyes to some of those I things. You know, stereotyping ... that-that sort of thing. So, I think it was good.

The book club experience empowered some teachers to incorporate multicultural literature into the high school canon. For those who were already using multicultural literature in their classes, the experience was reaffirming: They were on the right track. Finally, several white teachers reported their willingness to risk talking about race – even with their students. Jane said at times she left the book club meetings feeling

“discombobulated and kind of like oooh, oh antsy about things, which I always tell my students that’s a good thing. You’re supposed to be a little uncomfortable if you’re learning something; it’s not supposed to be just easy coming to you.”

As a testament of the positive effect this book club experience had on its members, several days after the last meeting, Paul initiated an email dialogue on the department list serve about continuing the book club beyond the scope of this study. As I interviewed each teacher about the experience, I found that all ten teachers were very receptive to the idea. Some wanted to continue along the same vein – focusing on race -- I had started. Other suggestions for change included the genre of the novels, the facilitator (i.e., each person responsible for a month), and the location.

Table 8.1. A Guide to the Participants

Teacher s	Describe self as a reader	Favorite genres	# books read/year	Favorite book or book discussion	Most uncomfor table book	Rate self on particip ation (1-10) ⁶⁵
Lisa	voracious	Murder mysteries, drama, & African American novels	Over 100	<i>A White Teacher Talks About Race</i>	<i>A White Teacher Talks About Race</i>	5
Roberto	voracious , open- minded	American literature	30 or more	<i>Down These Mean Streets</i>	NONE	8
Al	open- minded	autobiographi es & biographies	10-12	<i>Down These Mean Streets</i>	American Knees	-7
Kasey	voracious	literature for students, Christian literature, autobiographi es, & biographies.	30	Indian Killer	American Knees & Down These Mean Streets	2-3
Paul	instinctiv e & open- minded	young adult African American novels	25	<i>Down These Mean Streets</i>	NONE	7-8
Jane	adventuro us	contemporary short stories	100 or more	Native Son	<i>A White Teacher Talks About Race</i>	7 1/2
Phyllis	avid	self-help and psychology books and the	20	<i>A White Teacher Talks About</i>	<i>American Knees & Down</i>	7

		<i>Bible</i>		<i>Race</i>	<i>These Mean Streets</i>	
Lloyd	wide-ranging & voracious	Anthologies of short fiction	4	<i>Down These Mean Streets</i>	NONE	10 1/2
Daphne	active	historical fiction	10-12	<i>Down These Mean Streets</i>	<i>Down These Mean Streets</i>	7
Rico	hungry	young adult novels & mysteries	100	<i>Indian Killer</i>	<i>Down These Mean Streets</i>	5
Victoria	voracious & open-minded	young adult, multicultural and African American novels	10-12	Native Son	NONE	5

⁶⁵ On this imaginary scale, a number one means the participant rarely talked; a ten means extremely vocal.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Conclusions

The participants in this study characterize themselves as lifelong readers, who were exposed to reading in their homes at an early age. These teachers would use adjectives such as “voracious,” “open-minded,” “avid,” “active,” “wide-ranging,” “instinctive,” and even “hungry” to describe themselves as readers.

The six white males, two white females, and two African American females were selected to participate in this research because they were my colleagues. Our ages ranged from 25 to 60, and we represented teaching experience from one to 26 years. From October 2002 to February 2003, Al, Daphne, Jane, Kasey, Lisa, Lloyd, Paul, Phyllis, Rico, Roberto, and I experienced an opportunity together that the department had never undertaken as a professional endeavor. Lisa explained, “...it forced us to do [to come together socially as a department], and we have never done that before. And I think it was definitely needed this year considering we have not had any of the staff get together that we had last year -- like the bring your own cake, and all that. We didn’t have any of that. So this was the only time we had to be a department together was to sit in that little room and talk about these books.” That little room was the conference room in the media center. For once a month for five months, we met as a department for about 75 minutes to eat, drink, and discuss books.

The Uniqueness of this Teacher Book Club

During his interview, Al stressed the importance of book club members having a common bond. “There has to be a commonality among the people in the club. Our

commonality is that we're all English teachers and we are looking at a situation of teaching multicultural literature." According to Lester (2001), most, if not all, book clubs are established around shared factors, i.e., gender, profession, geography, history, nationality, race, age, sensibilities, and interests. Although it is hard to estimate the number of book clubs (also referred to as reading groups, study groups, literature circles, or book discussion groups) in the United States and abroad, estimates run as high as 50,000 in Britain and 500,000 in the United States (Hartley, 2002).

According to a survey conducted of reading groups by Hartley, our teacher book club shared several of the characteristics of reading groups, including: reading groups serve food and drink; reading groups generally purchase paperback copies; and the group meets monthly. Our book club was uncharacteristic in two ways. First, reading groups usually are composed of mostly women. All-female groups comprised 69% of the groups who responded to Hartley's survey; only 4% were all male. Research on teacher book clubs echoes this same statistic. Our book club was unusual in that we had a majority male membership. Mixed groups such as our teacher book club, Hartley explains, can usually be traced to workplace and school faculties. Studies of teacher book clubs reveal that they have become increasingly popular among educators since the 1990s because they provide an intellectual social forum where educators can share ideas, thoughts, feelings and reactions to a piece of literature (Florio-Ruane, 2001; Flood and Lapp, 1994; Goldberg and Pesko, 2000). Another way our book club was unique was in the way members obtained the books. Generally, book club members purchase their own copies (Hartley, 2002). In the case of the Lakeside High School English Department, a \$1,000 Teaching Tolerance grant⁶⁶ enabled me to purchase novels for every member.

⁶⁶Teaching Tolerance is a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center. For those interesting in applying, the address is 400 Washington Avenue, Montgomery, AL 36104. The telephone number is 334-956-8200; the web address is www.teachingtolerance.org.

Ask any book club member to choose his or her favorite book club discussion, one might be hard pressed to find a unanimous decision. Hartley (2002) cites four factors that contribute to good discussion about books: the books themselves; the range of opinion in the group; the background of context or information in which people bring to the book (i.e., personal knowledge and historical connections); and the congenial atmosphere of the group. We certainly saw one or more of these factors at work in every book club meeting.

The range of opinion in the group was reflective of the diversity already present in the membership. Some members like Lloyd were consistently vocal, while others like Kasey remained mostly silent. The oldest members, Phyllis and Al, were characterized by their stories or anecdotes. Members like Lisa, Phyllis, and Paul revealed intimate information about their lives that very few of us knew. Al, Daphne, and I revealed that we grew up in families that held very strict ideas about how we were to relate to people outside of our race. If someone other than the researcher had examined the book club discussion transcripts, he or she might think Lloyd and Jane were opponents instead of a married couple because they often debated against each other on issues.

For the most part, my colleagues were not timid about expressing their opinions. During the first book club meeting, a majority of my colleagues immediately voiced their collective dislike of the book, particularly the author's underdevelopment of characters. Talk about a punch to your gut. In my head, I kept thinking, "They hate this book! This is not good! This is not good! My first time at facilitating a book club, and the first meeting is a total flop!" I thought their dislike translated to a "bad discussion." To the contrary, that first book club discussion was quite lively and interesting as the teachers posed provocative arguments on the merits of the book as well other issues author Shawn Wong brings to surface, including: stereotyping, interracial dating and marriage, insider/outsider perspective, and the merit of writing to represent one's race.

As Hartley (2002) suggests, the background information that people bring to the book (i.e., personal knowledge and historical connections) is crucial to a good book club discussion. Because of their background and where they grew up, Roberto, Rico, and Paul provided critical perspectives to the discussion on *Down These Mean Streets*. “It was very enlightening to find out that some of them could relate directly to the books or to the incidents because they knew people or had experienced it themselves,” Al noted. Because of his age, Al was able to add a historical context to the events happening in the books. The group found very helpful the perspectives of the three African American females, Phyllis, Lisa, and me. Our stories revealed personal, lived, and intimate knowledge of racism that our white colleagues did not possess. “It opened my eyes to a lot of things ... particularly things that I had to see about myself. I think I am a pretty open-minded person, and a pretty tolerant person in most respects, but it made me realize ... I may have to rethink how I view groups of people,” suggested Daphne.

Like the book clubs in Hartley’s study, this teacher book club fostered a non-competitive, non-threatening, and welcoming atmosphere. Trust is a must if members are to feel comfortable in sharing. “I have lauded this book club among friends. I have lauded it among academic peers and in my classes at the university. It’s been a great experience. It’s an uncommon thing for a lot of people to share a book with someone outside of the classroom and in that context you usually have to please someone. Please a teacher with your interpretation of what they have already told you what they want to hear. Here we can interpret these books through our own frame of reference, through our own experiences, worldview, [and] biases, whatever they may be. I enjoyed it,” Roberto added. Participating in a reading group is about reading in a context fostered by the group. According to Hartley, it is this context that affects the whole experience of reading. “I think we have a very warm and friendly group of people here, who really like each other, so I imagine that everybody was being careful not to step on anybody’s toes or

say anything vocal, too inflammatory or anything like that. It's hard --I mean race is such a volatile issue in this country, I mean it just is. You know?" Lloyd concluded.

The Use of Critical Race Theory in this Study

In this study, I followed the advice of educational researcher Patti Lather. I viewed the interpretation of my data as two different activities: description and analysis. The first step, description, involved me coding, categorizing, and looking for themes and patterns in the data, including the negative cases. The second step was analysis, or theory building. It was during this step that I began to answering the question: What is happening here? And then more importantly: Why is such-and-such happening? Critical race theory, or CRT, was the macro-level theoretical framework I used in my effort to address the "why" question of this study.

My interest in conducting a study in which race was the essential core – from the problem, researcher questions, and theoretical framework to the researcher herself -- stemmed from research which supported the notion that Americans consider the issue of race a prominent yet taboo topic – even within our educational institutions (Bell, 1992; DuBois, 1996; King, 1996; West, 1994; Woodson, 1990). My study was based on the belief that schools should be the perfect place to initiate such volatile, thought-provoking conversations. Peterson (1999) argues that since whites and people of color cannot share an experience of 'race,' the difference must be mediated through education, which "becomes relevant when it creates an opportunity for us to better understand and appreciate one another" (p. 91). Customarily, certain voices are often muted and marginalized when discussions of race and racism occur; CRT is a theoretical framework that gives voice to these marginalized and muted voices and rekindles the desire to end racism (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Peterson, 1999; Romany, 2002). For this study, CRT served as an indispensable social and intellectual tool for the "deconstruction of oppressive structures, reconstruction of human agency, and construction of equitable and socially just relations of power" (Ladson-Billings, 1999, p. 10). This theoretical

framework helped me make sense of all of the race issues taking place within this diverse book club.

The stories told by the three African American teachers (including myself) demonstrated a core thesis of CRT: The insistence that racism is an ordinary and not exceptional happening in the day-to-day lives of people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, 2001; Solorzano, 1997; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Race is not based on isolated, one-on-one instances that can be named and understood because it is so deeply ingrained in the American landscape. CRT looks beyond the popular belief that simple ignorance of racism will eliminate it (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Valdes, Culp, & Harris, 2002) and challenges three mainstream beliefs about racial injustice: blindness to racism will eliminate racism; racism is a matter of individuals, not systems; and an individual can fight racism while ignoring other forms of oppression or injustice such as sexism, homophobia, and economic exploitation (Valdes, Culp, & Harris, 2002).

My selection of texts for this book club supported what CRTs term “the call to context” – that is, the use of new forms of writing and thought, such as biography, autobiography, stories and counterstories, humor, satire, parables, chronicles, poetry, fiction, revisionist histories, and narrative analysis to reveal the self-serving nature of legal doctrines or rules and to illustrate the realities of the oppressed (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). The stories that the three African American participants -- Lisa, Phyllis, and I – told were examples of a main theme of CRT called “voice,” or “naming one’s own reality,” which is a form of storytelling (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Historically, storytelling has acted as a medicine to heal the wounds caused by racial oppression. It involves analyzing “myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms that make up a common culture about race and that invariably renders blacks and other minorities one-downs” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2000, p. xvii). The “voice” component of CRT provided an opportunity for the African American members of this book club to communicate their experience and realities as people of color, which is the first step on

the road to justice and understanding the complexities of racism (Ladson-Billings, 1999). What made our stories as people of color so empowering for us (and powerful for our white colleagues to hear) was that we were allowed to speak for ourselves (Parker & Stovall, 2003). We were motivated to challenge racist assumptions in research and take an active part in the design of the research so that we were represented as part of the solution, not part of the problem. Unlike some traditional research, which locates the problem with people of color, CRT seeks to connect *with* the experiences and the ways of thinking, believing, and knowing of racial communities as they struggle for equity in education. I sought to link critical race theory to education in this study so the voice of people of color was paramount since my objective was a complete analysis of the educational system (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Ladson-Billings (1999) argues that if researchers are truly interested in solving issues of race, racism, and social injustice in schools and in classrooms, they have to be serious about undertaking an “intense study and careful thinking of race and education” (p. 2).

In this study, CRT was used to challenge the discourse on race and racism as it related to education by examining how educational theory and practice were used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups. Some of the themes of CRT of education discussed in this study include: 1) Since race is an ordinary, natural part of American life, it recognizes the central role that racism has played in the structuring of schools and schooling practices; 2) It expresses skepticism toward the dominant culture’s claim of neutrality, objectivity, color blindness, and meritocracy and examines the system of education as part of a critique of societal inequality; and 3) CRT recognizes that the experiential knowledge of women and men of color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, practicing, and teaching about racial subordination (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Solorzano, 1997; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso, 2002).

Some of the ideas that support CRT helped me understand the discussion of the final book discussion and gave me the language to describe the progression of “race talk”

that took place over the course of five months. The book club format empowered us, not only to tell our own painful, personal race stories and relate how our families taught us how to think about race, but it also challenged us to identify and transform concepts of race, racism, and racial stereotypes (Solorzano, 1997; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Many of my colleagues expressed that they thought we had made steady progression in our ability to talk about race until the last meeting. We spent this last meeting, according to them, venting about problems of Lakeside High School. What CRT recognizes as “institutional racism” – the type of racism that “exists when institutions or organizations, including educational ones, have standard operating procedures (intended or unintended) that hurt members of one or more races in relations to members of the dominant race” (Schuerich & Young, 1997, p. 5) -- threaded itself unbeknownst to us throughout the first four book club meetings, but it dominated the final book club discussion. CRT enabled me to see that our school problems – i.e., racist policies and practices (i.e., tracking), school ethos, low teacher expectations, and a traditional curricula supported by white privilege (i.e., the selective tradition and the lack of diversity in the high school literary canon) – constituted institutional racism. CRT helped me to better understand how experiences of race can impact both teachers and students (Peterson, 1999).

My Evaluation of the Teacher Book Club

At the beginning of my study, I wanted answers to several questions: What would happen if I formed a teacher book club within my own department? What would it mean for my peers and me? Would it give us a less threatening environment in which to read and grapple with race issues? What would that book club talk sound like? What would it look like? I had a dream.

My dream became a reality. For five months of the 2002-2003 school year, ten of my colleagues from the Lakeside High School English Department and I sat comfortably in the media center conference room and really *talked*. This talk was unlike the discussions we had in faculty and department meetings. This talk was more revealing,

personal, and intimate. For the first time, we were actually getting to know each other as people, not just professionals.

The scene was just as I had imagined: The tables littered with books, drinks, and food. Conversations were so schizophrenic, one would be forced to jump into the conversation rather than wait for a lull in the conversation. I lost track of the number of times we laughed as we discussed books and related personal stories. Just as quickly, these discussions became serious and intense as we unearthed our hidden attitudes, biases, and perceptions about race. On a small scale, I hoped my peers left this experience with transformed ways of seeing race, viewing students of color, and using multicultural literature. On a larger scale, I hoped they gained a greater perspective of their positions in an inherently racist society called America.

I witnessed both veteran and new teachers struggling as the discussions pushed them out of their comfort zones to examine how issues of whiteness and white privilege have influenced and continued to influence life in this country. Sometimes we found ourselves in various states of discomfort because these race issues touched too near to home or because we found the topics in some of the books too offensive or hurtful to read. As a response to this discomfort, we reacted in different ways. Several teachers stopped reading and voiced objections in the meetings. One member became known for his silence. He also refused to attend a meeting in his protest over subject matter he deemed objectionable. One member used jokes and laughter to defuse the tension in the meetings. This same member also used intimidation tactics to control the amount of participation by the two neophyte teachers in the department.

The white teachers -- two women and six males -- demonstrated both their willingness and resistance to being pushed out of their comfort zones. Some actively listened and learned as the two teachers of color and I related painful stories of racism and the life we lived on a daily basis. Repeatedly, several white teachers commented that they never had to think about race as much as we did. It became obvious to them that they had

taken their whiteness for granted. The color of their skin and white privilege had shielded them from thinking about race. At the end of their participation, members of the book club found themselves still conflicted: Were people *really* being honest or were they being pretentious? Could the book club have talked about race on a deeper level? By the final book club meeting, I think these teachers collectively realized: Race *does* matter whether you choose to deal with it or not. It is the pink elephant in the room that will not continue to be ignored.

Themes Related To Teacher Response

In chapter six, the three themes of teacher response – making connections, offering resistance, and expressing approval/support – were discussed. They matched the first research question, which asked: How do various teachers respond to texts that include themes about stereotypes and racism? Teachers made connections to the following: to characters and situations in literature and the media, to family influences, and to issues in books. They felt empowered to question: the authors' intent/agenda for writing the books; the selection of book club texts; the development of characters; the lack of literature to represent diverse cultures accurately; the researcher's selection of books for the meetings; the right of an author to write outside his/her culture; whether an author can truly represent his/her race in a work of literature; and their own responses to novels they had already read. Not all of their responses were negative; teachers expressed approval or support of the book club format and the texts read by the group.

I found the first theme of teacher responses especially interesting considering its relation to CRT. Teachers often bonded with these diverse works and their characters of color by connecting and relating them to other movies, books, people, and other experiences. We need to do more of this in our English classes. Pop culture is something our kids are naturally drawn to. Why not make works of literature come alive for students by asking them to make these connections? Model what you want kids to do. Make reading literature relevant to students, not just an abstract thing kids do while sitting in

English class. The more connections they make, the more likely they will remember the work. The power of multicultural literature is that readers can use it as wealth of connections to other pieces of literature, to the media, and even to other people. If it is made an integral part of the high school literary canon, teachers may not feel the need to pressure students of color to speak on behalf of their race. The works will speak for themselves.

However, Paul's tendency to offer information about people of color solely from movies illustrated his awareness that he lacked first-hand knowledge of people of color even though he grew up with them in his neighborhood and attended the same school. Paul's willingness to seek out these experiences of race in movies may be evidence that he is willing to engage with race, but it is an effort that does not cause him any discomfort in the process. He lives this experience in the darkness of a movie theater. Educators must be willing to go the distance by getting to know students of color on a personal level. This means connecting with their families, communities, and other support systems.

Before we can engage students in authentic dialogue surrounding multicultural literature and/or race, this CRT researcher sees that there are four factors that should be considered. First, we should create a community-like environment where students feel comfortable talking about volatile issues like race. Second, discussions about racial stereotypes should have a place in conversations about diverse cultures and/or race. Third, we must be prepared to examine how our own views and attitudes of race were developed, including how our parents taught us how to think about race. We can then empower our students to do the same. Fourth, teachers should be prepared to deal with possible student resistance (i.e., guilt, discomfort, anger, confusion, etc.) when discussing multicultural literature and/or race.

A second theme of teacher response was that of resistance. When teachers deemed material in the books as offensive, they responded by refusing to read a work in its entirety. One teacher was so incensed by the material in one book that he refused to attend

the meeting to discuss that work. These actions by the teachers made me think about banned and challenged books I have our English classes study like Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. They certainly contain topics such as racism, rape, incest, bisexuality, murder, and profanity, which students and parents might find potentially offensive. This critical race theorist asks: What would we do if students refused to read these works in their entirety because they could not get beyond the language (the word "nigger," for example) or they found a scene too offensive? At this writing, the Lakeside High School English Department did not have a department policy on how to handle such cases. I have never heard of any policy regarding challenged books by the Annox County Board of Education. In my fifteen years as an educator in the Annox County School District, I have never heard of any book being banned. Unlike other neighboring counties, we have the freedom to teach any book we want. In the few cases where a book has been challenged at Lakeside High School, the individual teacher usually responds by offering the student another book to read.

Watching these teachers resist works because of offensive material has made me think that teachers need to examine their own reading. How can we offer students a variety of experiences in reading if we refuse to expose ourselves? We need to critically examine our reading lists. What factors determined the works of literature we select for our students to read? From a CRT perspective, I ask even more importantly: What cultures are we missing or are under-representing? Before taking part in this study, quite a few of the teachers said they taught works that were safe. Why? Schools should be places where we educators take risks and push the envelope with our students regarding taboo topics. "If we can barely engage with these topics ourselves as teachers, it is no wonder that we would not choose to have our students engage with them" (Glazier, McVee, Wallace-Cornwall, Shellhorn, Florio-Ruane, & Rapahel, 2000, p. 298). It would be

beneficial for teachers to explore “hot lava” topics within a group of their peers as we did in this book club before initiating such topics for classroom conversations.

This book club provided teachers with a non-threatening environment in which they felt empowered to question the books we read. We questioned the authors of the books we read. What agenda did they have writing these books? What was their message? Were they trying to speak for their entire race? If so, is that really possible for an author to do successfully? Ketter and Lewis (2001) argue that “teachers [themselves] have not been taught to read literature in culturally critical ways that challenge white assumptions about texts” (p. 182). As teachers, my CRT sense tells me it is critical that we should teach our students to be critical of texts and their authors and not just accept the written word as truth because it is read in the context of a high school classroom. This is especially true of texts written about diverse cultures. We should not assume that one piece of multicultural literature accurately portrays a culture or that it can present a broad spectrum of any one ethnic group. We should have our student read multiple perspectives. Students should question the structure of the books they read, the development of characters and storylines, and their own responses to texts. These are skills that teachers should teach their students. After reading texts, we should discuss with our students their initial responses and ask them: Why did you respond that way? What factors contribute to a reader’s response? What makes a good story? Who are the protagonists and antagonists? What makes these characters believable? Which characters were interesting to you but underdeveloped by the author? Do bits and pieces of these characters remind you of people you know?

My colleagues and I often try to avoid teaching the same novels that kids were taught at the middle school. The rationale is that kids will be bored and that there is so much literature out there that we should not have to duplicate novels. This study taught me that there is something to be gained by reading a novel at a different (meaning mature) point in our lives. This point was certainly made in the book club as teachers compared

their responses to *Native Son* and *Down These Mean Streets*, which some had read in high school or college classrooms. Students often tell me that they read a work like Mildred Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* in seventh grade but did not understand it. What would happen if we studied, discussed, and interpreted that novel in my eleventh grade English classes? How much richer would the discussions be?

The lack of literature representing diverse cultures accurately and authors writing outside of their culture continued to be a source of debate in our book club discussions. Teachers must seriously consider the selections of literature that they have their students read in English classes. Presenting a literary canon that is dominated by dead, white, male authors along with a few token works representing authors of color communicates volumes about whose representation and voice matters. Ketter and Lewis (2001) urge teachers to examine the assumptions they hold about what counts as knowledge and who controls it as well as the social and political implications for selecting, interpreting, and teaching multicultural literature. For those of us who have made multicultural literature an integral part of our classroom, the book club experience confirmed that we were doing the right thing. We also came to the realization that we had overlooked one population of students in our literature selections: those of mixed raced or biracial heritage. It is important that teachers know their students, including the communities they represent. Relationships must be established between teachers and communities of color for this to happen. Teachers must themselves read widely so they can make literature selections that are truly accurate in their representations of diverse cultures. This means teachers must offer their students multiple opportunities to study multicultural literature – from anthologies to novels. Students should be encouraged to read literature of diverse cultures that is written by authors of the culture as well as outsiders and debate the question: What difference does the perspective have on the writing?

Finally, teacher response included teacher support or approval of the book club format and of the texts themselves. All of the questions that we struggled to answer in

this book club were asked in the context of a caring environment where risk-taking was nurtured. High school teaching can be a very stressful, lonesome job. Very seldom do teachers gather together as colleagues to read and discuss literature. It allowed us to get to know each other on a personal level. As we grew more comfortable with each other, the level of complexity of our race talk increased. We should foster such an atmosphere in our high school classrooms, where students are encouraged to get to know each other and regard each other as part of a community where everyone's opinion is validated. It is possible that if teachers adopted the book club format in their classrooms, they would see an increase in reading, provocative conversations, and critical thinking. Teachers should courageously look inside their own classrooms and see who is at the center. Is it the teacher, the students, or both? They should ask themselves: What type of environment am I fostering in my classroom? Do I position myself as the final authority when we discuss or interpret literature? Do I encourage students to offer alternative responses that do not match with my own interpretations or the answers in the annotated teacher's edition? Imagine the level of conversations that would be possible in the high school English classroom where the teacher created opportunities for students to both explain and explore their many and varied responses to texts as they work together to make meaning. The possibilities would be endless.

Teachers found that reading these five texts supported their belief that students should read works from a high school canon that includes works by authors of color. They also saw the need to teach books like *Down These Mean Streets*, which contains potentially offensive topics, because students are often dealing with these issues in real life. As educators we need to put our own comfort zones to the test by choosing literature that our students will be drawn to reading.

Themes Related to Connections to Race

In chapter 7, I talked about the themes related to the second research question: What connections do teachers make about race in the texts to their own lives? The four

themes related to teachers making those connections to race, included stories, stereotypes, white privilege, and institutional racism. Transcripts of the book club discussions revealed teachers did make connections between the race/racism found in the texts to their own lives.

Teachers of both races loved to tell stories in this book club, but interestingly, the type of stories told ran along racial lines. Black teachers tended to tell stories of racism that happened to them personally. White teachers related stories of racism that involved people of color that they knew. They were never the object of racism; they (or members of their families) were usually in the position of the oppressor. The stories in this book club held a consistent theme of difference. These divergent stories often pointed out conflicting experiences and values between the races. Teachers need to foster the types of “voice,” or storytelling that CRT advocates in their classrooms. If teachers do this, they should expect and celebrate the diversity that will inevitably result. However, teachers need to be cognizant of the stories that are missing or remain untold as well as those stories that are not allowed space in the conversation (Glazier et al., 2000). Teachers must make a conscious effort to invite and validate these additional stories to classroom conversations.

Several white teachers admitted that “white privilege” allowed them the luxury of never having to think about race or culture. They reported that the pervasiveness of whiteness in American society may be the reason they do not naturally see race in the same way as their African American counterparts. Teachers need to educate themselves and their students about whiteness and how it benefits and privileges certain groups of people in the United States. As Tatum (1997) suggests, educators have a role in fighting and dismantling racism. Kivel (1996) contends that as long as we continue to look at racism as an individual action and ignore its impact and influence in communities and organizations, racism will remain intact. Uprooting the system of racism involves re-examining our own individual beliefs and actions.

This book club experience enabled us to start that process of uprooting racism by empowering teachers to discuss how they learned about racism through their families, what effect race had on their lives, and how society perpetuated racial stereotypes we identified in the novels as well those they held themselves. Teachers were able to connect both personally and professionally to issues raised in the book, including mixed/biracial children, interracial marriage/dating, conflict with racial identity. We learned through experience that confronting race is emotionally exhausting. In this CRT effort, I saw teachers struggle with a range of emotions, including guilt, defensiveness, competitiveness, and confusion. Similarly, we can help our students with these feelings whenever we discuss race issues in the classroom. Kivel (1996) suggests that whites should not allow themselves to be paralyzed by these feelings but should acknowledge these feelings, talk about them with others, and gather support. We should be equipped to do the same with our white students.

Finally, teachers acknowledged and identified unjust policies and practices (known as “institutional racism” found at Lakeside High School (i.e., tracking, lack of diversity in curriculum, low expectations, not preparing/training all students to be successful). I noticed they were able to identify racism that constituted individual actions. Problems of Lakeside High School such as tracking were not identified as institutional racism. They did not use this term (nor did I). They did not see these practices as institutional racism. I think our inability to identify institutional racism at work within our school points to the need for linking CRT to education. Teacher education and professional development programs should take the lead in educating teachers about institutional racism and what we can do to dismantle it from the inside of America’s public schools.

Themes Related to the TBC Experience

In chapter eight, the two themes related to the participants’ overall experience in the TBC were discussed. The themes – roles and effects/benefits – matched the third

research question that asked: In what ways has being a member of a book discussion club been meaningful in the lives of these secondary English teachers?

One thing that I learned as a CRT researcher and facilitator of this teacher book club is that just because you create a safe space inside an inclusive community does not mean that all of your members will be committed to learn, grow, and participate (Cavazos, 2001). It is imperative that teacher education and professional development programs examine how they foster conversations about race among pre-service and in-service teachers. These courses should not be seen as a one-semester “obligation” leading to the fulfillment of a multicultural education or staff development requirement but an integral theme throughout teacher training. Selecting texts should be regarded as critical when teachers consider how literature can influence how students talk and the topics they will talk about. Teachers need to realize readers respond to texts differently and they should be willing to discuss such responses in a student-friendly environment.

Our discussions brought out the differences in ourselves as well as the differences between ourselves and the authors. Working with diverse people, ideas, and ways of communicating is rarely a nice and neat affair. It can be a messy business. Our participation in this book club enabled us to gain personal insights (both good and bad) about our colleagues and fostered team building among the members of the department that we had not experienced before. Deeper bonds were established because the open discussions motivated us to share personal experiences we had that related to the texts.

Teachers gave positive comments concerning their overall impressions and evaluations of the entire book club experience. These impressions and evaluations are directly related to the benefits of CRT. First, teachers talked about the knowledge they gained about various cultures and how this knowledge motivated them to examine how they treated and grouped students by race. Second, we often talked about how characters in the books reminded us of students we had taught. I think making that link allowed us to see that our students have lives outside of school that we know so little about. At times,

we felt a disconnection in our conversation when we compared the lives of our students in today's world to the lives we lived at their age. The race issues are basically the same, but other problems that today's students have to face – drugs, sex, crime, peer pressure – involve complexities we did not have to think about. It is imperative that we reach out to communities of color and provide students with the support they need to be successful.

Book club members reached conflicting conclusions on the question: Did we talk about race? A majority felt book club members were open and honest in the book club meetings, but felt the talk could have developed on a deeper level. Others argued the book club did a fine job of talking about race considering the time constraints. At least three members believed the members spent more time talking about other topics than addressing race. In hindsight, I could have taken a more assertive role as the facilitator in making sure our talk stayed focused. At the same time, I learned as a CRT researcher in doing this study that race talk must be cultivated. It takes both work and time. The book club format encouraged us to discuss compelling literature, which maintained the interest of the participants as some of us took on the challenge of learning tough stuff about ourselves and others. Teachers need to explore ways of encouraging students to share their stories in multiple forms over extended periods of time (Gazier et al., 2000). We also need to provide our students with multiple opportunities to connect with each other as a community in our classrooms.

Finally, teachers valued the book club experience. Personally and professionally, I observed teachers growing and changing. Teachers talked to other students, student teachers, and spouses about issues mentioned in the books. For example, Kasey mentioned in our first book club meeting that he was so fascinated with the topic of interracial dating in *American Knees* that he discussed the issue with one of his Asian American female student who was dating outside her race. Not only were these teachers enacting change in their own classrooms, but their influence was reaching out to a larger professional community – namely Bellson University. Phyllis and Paul both commented

that they found issues in Julie Landsman's *A White Teacher Talks about Race* so provocative that they had had conversations with their student teachers from Bellson University. (They also recommended the book to them.) Roberto said he bragged about our book club to a Bellson University professor. (Roberto was taking a book club course under the direction of this professor at the time of his participation.) These discussions with others inside Lakeside High School and at Bellson University made for rich conversations when teachers then brought the responses back to the group. Some teachers said the experience empowered them to introduce more multicultural works than they had done previously; others reported imitating the book club format in their classrooms.

Limitations of this Study

One time I presented a "mock job talk" of this work at an American Research Association Pre-Dissertation Fellowship seminar to an audience of two professors and five other fellows. Once I finished, one of the professors gave me a piece of advice that stuck with me: Anytime you present your work, you must always show them your warts. That is, point out the things that make your work fall short and explain the reasons that guided the choices you made. In this section I intend to do just that.

Whether you determine this study to be one of excellence or mediocrity, the work is all mine. I admit I have committed mistakes that any novice researcher would make. I did make an honest attempt to keep these mistakes down to a minimum. Hopefully, they do not strike you as blaring. In hindsight, if I could replicate this study, there are seven areas I might consider worth changing or at the very least I would like to pose them as interesting "what ifs": my role in the study, the length of time for this study, the process I used in taking field notes, videotaping the book club discussions, the factors surrounding the last book club meeting, requiring the participants to keep a journal, and hiring a research assistant.

First, I acknowledge that my multiple roles as the researcher, facilitator, and full participant among my colleagues had to have a direct impact on their participation,

actions, and responses in the book club. Thinking about my roles and my own race has given me pause to wonder: How differently would my colleagues have responded if I had paid someone else to facilitate this book club or interview them? How different would my results be if I had been white? How many teachers would have participated in a teacher book club if it had not been organized by one of their own? How honest and open would participants have been if I had been white?

Second, I am very thankful that I listened to my committee about adding one more book. Originally, I had proposed that this teacher book club would meet monthly only for four months. One committee member urged me to consider extending the number of meetings. I added one more book, which is how I arrived at five months. When I asked book club members if we had really discussed race, their answer was yes, considering the time restraints. Several teachers agreed we could have talked more deeply about the topic. Now I wonder if we would have been empowered to go “the depth” if we had had more time. What would have happened if we had met for seven months? Nine months? A year? Perhaps a longer time frame would have worked in my favor, but might have worked against me in terms of getting as many teachers to participate initially and keeping them once the study started.

Third, readers may find my method of taking field notes questionable. At the end of each book club meeting, I was always rushing to go to another meeting so typing my field notes immediately following each meeting was impractical. Whenever I found time during that day, I would talk what I could remember about the meeting into a tape recorder. Field notes, created for the researcher’s use, are sometimes questioned, Lederman (1990) admits, even though they are regarded as a “reconsultable record of field experiences” (p. 74), “an anchor for the crafty frames of memory” (p. 75), and a possible source for other researchers. The use of head notes -- the notes or memories in a researcher’s head about her field research – is another set of field notes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Ottenberg, 1990)). In looking back, I realize the drawback to head notes is

that there were many more impressions, events, interactions, scenes, experiences that I could have possibly recorded (Ottenberg, 1990). How much richer would this study have been if circumstances had not dictated relying on head notes?

Fourth, in my original research proposal for this study, I proposed that the book club discussion would be videotaped, audiotaped, and transcribed after I received permission to do so. I had every intention of carrying this part of data collection out until I discovered how problematic videotaping was. Being a novice to video equipment, I had no inkling how to set up the cameras to capture the participants accurately. At the end of the first book club meeting, I checked the video. The dismal quality of the videos was not worth all the time and energy I used in setting up the video equipment. Plus, the teachers seemed ill at ease surrounded by equipment. Consequently, I decided to scrap videotaping after that first meeting.

Imagine what this study could have gained if I had either learned how to set up the equipment accurately or had paid someone professionally to do it? Linguistic anthropologists make extensive use of both audio and video recording of normal, everyday encounters. They are complemented by participant-observation and field techniques such as ethnographic notes, drawings, maps, interviews, and still photography (Duranti, 1997). Macintyre (2000) maintains that videotaping helps in analyzing body postures and facial expressions. Whole body movements can be recorded, as well as friendship patterns and group interactions. An extra advantage to videotaping is that it can be analyzed later by several people; therefore, reducing bias in a study's results.

Fifth, I did not require teachers to keep a journal although initially, my research proposal called for teachers keeping a response journal, or "diary." In these journals or diaries, I anticipated participants would record their observations, feelings, reactions, interpretations, reflections, hunches, hypotheses, explanations, attitudes, and motives on a continuous basis (Elliot, 1991). Although they were encouraged to keep a journal, I purposely did not make this a requirement of their participation, because I did want them

to view this experience “as work” like one does in a graduate or professional development course. I also thought making the response journal a requirement might lower my number of participants. What I did was to “encourage them” to journal by providing them with a folder and a diskette and friendly reminders to do so. I did not want to pressure them. At the end of the book club experience, I provided reminders that I would be accepting their journals by a certain date. No one chose to journal. I was not surprised. Teaching high school English is very stressful and time-consuming. Many of them told me they looked forward to our book club meetings each month because the time together allowed us to relax with each other and just talk. Looking back, I ask myself if I could have gotten more data on the teachers who were conflicted over the book club selections through their writing. Maybe they would have felt more comfortable expressing their feelings on paper. May be not (considering they would know that this black woman would be reading their journals).

Sixth, a huge mistake I did not account for were the factors contributing to the difference in the last book club meeting. It was out of my control that the first four book club meetings were scheduled on less stressful planning days. There were no planning days scheduled for the month of February. I had no choice. I chose a teacher memoir instead of another multicultural novel as the last book because I thought it would help us all transition into the exit interviews. I had no control over three critical participants being unable to attend. They had other obligations that needed their attention. Of course, you can guess who had complete control over the weather that day. How differently might that last book club discussion have been if I could have controlled these factors?

Finally, in my original research proposal, I had proposed the use of a research assistant. The research assistant would help me set up (food, drinks, and equipment) each meeting, take field notes during each meeting, act as a key informant for the meetings, assist me in viewing the video and audio tapes, and consult with me concerning shared observations. Sharon, a fellow doctoral student and friend, had agreed to serve in that

capacity in this research study, but I had to make so many last minute changes dealing with the time of the meetings (due to my principal) that it made it impossible for Sharon to make it to all the meetings. She only made it to two meetings. I did not fault her for that. I really could not place the blame on me either. I had gone through the correct channels in requesting permission early from both my principal and the media specialist to have my book club meetings on specified dates, times, and places. Several times my principal's last minute decisions caused me to have to change the time or location of the book club meetings. Like the weather, this was out of my control.

Implications for Further Study

The most significant contribution of this study is that it provides documentation of a diverse teacher book club whose primary focus was examining issues of race within five books. This study was unique in that its membership did not mirror what one usually finds typical of teacher research and teacher book club: Predominantly white, middle class females. The majority of the teachers in this study were white males. Another aspect of diversity in membership this teacher book club boasted was the participation of three African American females. Delpit (1995) talks about the silenced dialogue that occurs often in education – discussions where the voices of black teachers and parents are conspicuously absent. I think the white teachers in this study benefited from a dialogue involving the teachers of color (Phyllis, Lisa, and me) in the department because we literally brought to the table our own life experiences and viewpoints. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do teachers respond to texts that include themes about multiculturalism, stereotypes, cultural diversity, and racism?
2. What connections do teachers make about race in the texts to their own lives?
3. In what ways has being a member of a book discussion club been meaningful in the lives of these secondary English teachers?

If I were to decide to continue this study myself, I would keep the same research questions yet consider changing the genre of books. For example, I might have the book club read young adult novels that address race that could be taught in the high school classroom, such as Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, or Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. Kasey stated that he might have participated more if the books could have been used in the high school classroom. I think making this practical change would have been an attractive incentive for others to remain in the book club as well. Colleagues in my department have always expressed an interest learning new ways of teaching and talking about books with their students.

Another consideration would be for the teachers to read more academic-type books like Beverly Tatum's "*Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*" and *Other Conversations about Race*, Vivian Paley's *White Teacher*, or Lisa Delpit's *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*. I think the use of academic-type books might have motivated us to make more connections to our teaching, how we view race, and how we view our students. I think this change would be the easiest to implement because half of the department is working on advanced degrees and have either read these books in graduate courses or will be required to at a later point. The books I have listed are all popular readings in teacher education across the country.

Perhaps I might even want to direct our attention to adult books that address race from Oprah's book club list (i.e., *The Poisonwood Bible*, *Cry the Beloved Country*, and *Cane River*). It might be interesting to do a comparison study between how the teachers and I negotiate the race issues in the books to Oprah's audience. I might also show the video of the show and use it as a prompt for our book club discussion. I find the idea of reading and discussing adult books with my colleagues especially attractive because we are reading for ourselves, not for our students. Teachers have little time to read for pleasure unless it is the summertime.

Using my study as a basis, future teacher book club studies might include more diversity in terms of inviting more people of color. This study was the first of its kind to have three African American participants. What would the race talk have looked and sounded like if the teacher book club membership had also included the voices of Asian American, Native American, and Hispanic?

This study has implications for teachers and their practice. Teachers who take part in book clubs are often complimentary of how the experience changed their outlook on their own reading habits, the way they approached reading books with their own students, and genre of books they read. It would be interesting to interview participating teachers about their practice a year later to see what, if any, impact participation had on their teaching practices.

This study also has implications for possible connections between teachers and their own reading and the selections they make for their own students. Studies need to be conducted on how teachers' level of comfort (or discomfort) in their own reading is related to the selections of literature they choose for their students. How do teachers approach and carry out discussions on race in the classroom? Does it vary by subject area, the age of the students, or the race of the teacher? Are these discussions prompted by the literature, the writing, or other prompts provided by the teacher?

I would also suggest that much work has to be done in connecting critical race theory to education as I did in this study with teachers. It would be interesting to see a study that begins with the participants being interviewed about their ideas about race before book club participation begins. I would suggest using the *Hungry Mind* Race questionnaire (see Appendix I) along with the Questions and Actions activity for Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latino/as in Kivel's (1996) *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice*.

Finally, this study has implications for the importance of race dialogue taking place in schools. It would be interesting to research "race talk" taking place among

racially diverse groups of students at the high school and college levels. For readers who are interested in resources on race beyond the scope of this study, please see Appendix K.

REFERENCES

- Adler, L., & Chong, T. (Directors). (1978). *Up in smoke* [Motion picture]. United States: Paramount Studios.
- Agnes, G., & Gillespie, L. (1992). Using literature by American Indians and Alaska Natives in Secondary schools. Eric Digest (Report No. EDORC926). Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED348201)
- Alexie, S. (1996). *Indian killer*. New York: Warner Books Edition.
- Allport, G. W. (1979). *The nature of prejudice: Unabridged*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.
- Almeida, D. A. (1996). Countering prejudice against American Indians and Alaska Natives through antibias curriculum and instruction (Report No. RC020742). Charleston, WV, ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED400146)
- Altheide, D. L., & Johnson, J.M. (1994). Criteria for assessing interpretive validity in qualitative research. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 485-499). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Altmann, A., Johnston, I., & Mackey, M. (1998). Curriculum decisions about literature in contemporary classrooms: A preliminary analysis of a survey of materials used in Edmonton grade 10 English courses. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research* 44(2): 208-220.

- Anderson, R., Brinnin, J.M., Leggett, J., Arpin, G.Q., & Toth, S.A. (1989). American language. *Elements of literature (Fifth course)*. Austin, TX, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.: 59-62.
- Apple, M. (1990). *Ideology and curriculum* (2nd ed.) New York: Routledge.
- Applebee, A. N. (1993). *Literature in the secondary school: Studies of curriculum and instruction in the United States*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Applebee, A. N. (1996). *Curriculum as conversation: Transforming traditions of teaching and learning*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Armendariz, A. L. (2000). The impact of racial prejudice on the socialization of Mexican American students in public schools. *Equity and Excellence in Education* 33(3): 59-63.
- Arminio, J. (2001). Exploring the nature of race-related guilt. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development* 29(4): 239-252.
- Armstrong, E. (2003). Meeting on the same page. *The Christian Science Monitor* (Retrieved March 24, 2003, from <http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/0318/p13s01-lepr.html>).
- Arts Based Educational Research. (2002, Summer). [Special issue]. *Curriculum Inquiry* 32(2): 126-176.
- Asante, M. (1991). The afrocetric idea in education. *Journal of Negro Education* 60(2): 170-180.
- Babb, V. (1998). *Whiteness visible: The meaning of whiteness in American literature and culture*. New York: New York University Press.
- Bank, S. (1994, November). *Into the mainstream without drowning*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English, Orlando, FL.

- Barone, T., & Eisner, E. (1997). Arts-based educational research. In R. Jaeger (Ed.), *Complementary methods for research in education* (pp. 73-99). Washington, DC: American Educational Association.
- Bealor, S. (1992). Minority literature book groups for teachers. *Reading in Virginia* 17: 17-21.
- Bean, T. W., Valerio, P.C., Mallette, M.H., & Readence, J.E. (1999). Preservice teachers' discussion of a multicultural young adult novel. *Reading Research and Instruction* 38(3): 197-210.
- Bell, D. (1987). *And we are not saved: The elusive quest for racial justice*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bell, D. (1992). *Faces at the bottom of the well: The permanence of racism*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bell, L. A. (2003). "Telling tales: What stories can teach us about racism." *Race Ethnicity and Education* 6(1): 3-28.
- Bennett, P. (1992). Canons to the right of them. In P. Aufderheide (Ed.), *Beyond pc: Toward a politics of understanding* (pp. 165-174). Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf Press.
- Bernal, D. D., & Villalpando, O. (2002). An partheid of knowledge in aedemia: The struggle over the "legitimate" knowledge of faculty of color. *Equity and Excellence in Education* 35(2): 169-180.
- Bhattacharyya, G. (2000). Black skin/white boards: Learning to be the "race" lady in British higher education. In L. Back, and J. Solomos (Eds.), *Theories of race and racism* (pp. 478-489). London: Routledge.
- Birchak, B., Connor, C., Crawford, K.M., Kahn, L.H., Kaser, S., Turner, S., & Short, K.G. (1998). *Teacher study groups: Building community through dialogue and reflection*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

- Bishop, R. S. (1997). Selecting literature for a multicultural curriculum. In V. J. Harris (Ed.), *Using multicultural literature in the k-8 classroom* (pp. 1-19). Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers.
- Bisplinghoff, B., & Allen, J. (Eds.). (1998). *Engaging teachers: Creating teaching/researching relationships*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Blum, L. (2002). *"I'm not a racist, but ...:" The moral quandary of race*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Bochner, A. P., & Ellis, C. (Eds.). (2002). *Ethnographically speaking: Autoethnography, literature, and aesthetics*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S.K. (1982). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S.K. (1998). Foundations of qualitative research in education. In R. C. Bogdan & S.K. Biklen (Eds.), *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods* (pp. 1-48). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Bonetati, D. (1994, April). *The effect of teachers' expectations on Mexican-American students (Report No. SP035611)*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA. (ERIC Document Service No. ED376171)
- The Book Club Plus Group. (1999). What counts as teacher research? An essay from the Book Club Plus Group. *Language Arts* 77(1): 48-53.
- Bowser, B. P. (September, 1979). *Toward a critical reassessment of American institutions (Report No. UD019976)*. Paper presented at the American Psychological Association Meeting, New York (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED179645)
- Brodbelt, S. (1972). Disguised racism in public schools. *Educational Leadership* 29(8): 699-702.

- Burns, A. (1999). *Collaborative action research for English language teachers*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Cain, W. E. (2001). Opening the American mind: Reflections on the "canon" controversy. In J. Gorak (Ed.), *Canon vs. culture: Reflections on the current debate* (pp. 3-16). New York: Garland.
- Cantrell, S. C. (2002). Promoting talk: A framework for reading discussions in teacher education courses. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 45(7): 642-651.
- Carbado, D. W. (2002). Afterword: (E)rasing education. *Equity and Excellence in Education* 35(2): 181-194.
- Cardoso, P. (Director). (2002). *Real women have curves* [Motion picture]. United States: HBO Home Video.
- Cavazos, L., & the members of WEST (2001). Connected conversations: Forms and functions of teacher talk. In C.M. Clarke (Ed.), *Talking shop: Authentic conversation and teacher learning*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Charmaz, K. (2000). Grounded theory: Objectivist and constructivist methods. In N. K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 509-535). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Charmaz, K. (2002). Qualitative interviewing and grounded analysis. In J. Gubrium & J.A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research* (pp. 675-694). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Christians, C. G. (2000). Ethics and politics in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 133-155). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Christiansen, H., Goulet, L., Krentz, C., & Maeers, M. (1997). *Recreating relationships: Collaboration and education reform*. New York: State University of New York.
- Clark, C. M. (Ed.). (2001). *Talking shop: Authentic conversation and teacher learning*. New York: Teachers College Press.

- Clegg, R. (2000). "A contrasting view: The problem with racial and ethnic preferences." *Trusteeship* 8(5): 12-13.
- Cochran-Smith, M. (1995). Uncertain allies: Understanding the boundaries of race and teaching. *Harvard Educational Review* 65(4): 541-570.
- Coffey, A., & Atkinson, P. (1996). *Making sense of qualitative data: Complementary research strategies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cohen, C. (2001/2002). "About personal consequences in the academy when a professor opposes racial preferences." *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 34(1): 96-99.
- Coles, R. (1989). *The call of stories: Teaching and the moral imagination*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Comer, J. P., & Poussaint, A.F. (1979/2000). Foreword. In V. G. Paley, *White teacher* _____(pp. vii-xi). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Commeyras, M., & Montsi, M. (2000). What if I woke up as the other sex? Botswana youth perspective on gender. *Gender and Education* 12(3): 327-346.
- Cook, L. (1996). Real voices: Action and involvement in secondary English classrooms. In L. Cook, & H.C. Lodge (Eds.), *Voices in English Classrooms: Honoring diversity and change (Classroom practices in teaching English)* Vol. 28 (pp. 167-176). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Cook-Sather, A., & Reisinger, O. (2001). Seeing the students behind the stereotypes: The perspectives of three preservice teachers. *The Teacher Educator* 37(1): 16-26.
- Cox, M. G. (1982, August). Regularities in the content of statements "Said with a laugh". Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association, Washington, DC. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED222963)
- Crenshaw, K. (2002). The first decade: Critical reflections, or 'A foot in the closing door'. In F. Valdes, J.M. Culp, & A.P. Harris (Eds.), *Crossroads, directions, and a new critical race theory* (pp. 9-31). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

- Crenshaw, K., Gotada, N., Peller, G., & Thomas, K. (Eds.). (1995). *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement*. New York: The New Press.
- Cross, T. (1994). What if there was no affirmative action in college admissions? A further refinement of our earlier calculation. *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (5): 52-55.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. London: Sage.
- Dalton, H. L. (1995). *Racial healing: Confronting the fear between blacks and whites*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J., (Eds.) (2000). *Critical race theory: The cutting edge*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2001). *Critical race theory: An introduction*. New York: New York University Press.
- Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York: The New Press.
- deMarrais, K., & LeCompte, M.D. (1999). *The ways schools work* (3rd ed.). New York: Addison Wesley Longman.
- Dent, H. E. (July, 1974). *Institutional Racism: A barrier to educational change (Report No. UD020012)*. Paper presented at the Conference on Democratic Education for American Society, Berkeley, CA (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. Ed181114).
- Denzen, N. K. (1997). *Interpretive ethnography: Ethnographic practices for the 21st century*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Denzen, N. K., & Lincoln, Y.S. (2000). The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzen & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 1-28). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Dewalt, K. M., & Dewalt, B.R. (2002). *Participant observation: A guide for fieldworkers*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.
- DuBois, W. E. B. (1996). *The souls of black folk*. London: Penguin Books USA.
- DuBois, W. E. B. (2000). The conservation of races. In L. Back & J. Solomos (Eds.), *Theories of race and racism: A reader* (pp. 79-86). London: Routledge.
- Dudziak, M. L. (2000). Desegregation as a Cold War imperative. In R. Delgado & J. Stefancic (Eds.), *Critical race theory: The cutting edge* (pp. 106-115). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Duncan, G. A. (2002). Beyond love: A critical race ethnography of the schooling of adolescent black males. *Equity and Excellence in Education* 35(2): 131-143.
- Duranti, A. (1997). *Linguistic anthropology*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Early, G. (1997). The almost last essay on race in America. In B. Schneider (Ed.), *Race: _____An anthology in the first person* (187-197). New York: Three Rivers Press.
- Easton, K. L., McComish, J.F., & Greenberg, R. (2000). "Avoiding common pitfalls in qualitative data collection and transcription." *Qualitative Health Research* 10(5): 703-707.
- Edwards, J. A. (1993). Principles and contrasting systems of discourse transcription. In J.A. Edwards, & M.D. Lampert (Eds.), *Talking data: Transcription and coding in discourse research* (pp. 3-31). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Eisner, E. W. (1997). The promise and perils of alternative forms of data representation. *Educational Researcher* 26(6): 4-10.
- Elliot, J. (1991). *Action research for educational change*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Ellis, C., & Bochner, A.P., Ed. (1996). *Composing ethnography: Alternative forms of qualitative writing*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
- Ellison, R. (1995). *The invisible man*. New York: Random House.

- Emerson, R. W. (1997). from Self-Reliance. In *Elements of literature (5th course teacher's edition)* (pp. 224-225). Austin, TX: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- Emerson, R. W., Fretz, R.I., & Shaw, L.L. (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Espinoza, L., & Harris, A.P. (2000). Embracing the Tar-Baby: Latcrit theory and the sticky mess of race. In R. Delgado & J. Stefancic (Eds.), *Critical race theory: The cutting edge* (pp. 440-447). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Farrell, E. J., & Squire, J.R., Ed. (1990). *Transactions with literature*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Feagan, J., & Hernan, V. (2002). Confronting one's own racism. In P. S. Rothenberg (Ed.), *White privilege: Essential readings on the other side of racism* (pp. 121-125). New York, Worth.
- Fecho, B., & Allen, J. (2001). "Teachers researching communities of practice." *The School Field* 12(3/4): 119-141.
- Fecho, B., & Allen, J. (in press). Teacher inquiry into literacy, social justice, and power. In J. Flood, D. Lapp, J. Jensen, & J. Squire (Eds.), *The handbook of research on teaching English language arts*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Fecho, B., Commeyras, M., Bauer, E. B., & Font, G. (2000). "In rehearsal: Complicating authority in undergraduate critical inquiry classrooms." *Journal of Literacy Research* 32(4): 471-504.
- Feller, B. (2003, August 28). U.S. teachers lacking diversity. *The Athens Banner-Herald*: p. A2.
- Fisher, P., & Shapiro, S. (1991). Teachers' exploration of historical fiction in literature discussion groups (Report No. CS213674). Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Association, Las Vegas, NV: International Reading Association. (ERIC Document Service No. ED353599).

- Flood, J., & Lapp, D. (1994). "Teacher book clubs: Establishing literature discussion groups for teachers." *The Reading Teacher* 47(7): 574-576.
- Flood, J., Lapp, D., Alvarez, D., Romero, A., Ranck-Buhr, W., Moore, J., Jones, M.A., Kabildis, C., & Lungren, L. (1994). Teacher book clubs: A study of teachers' and student teachers' participation in contemporary multicultural fiction literature discussion groups (Report No. CS011994). Athens, GA: National Reading Research Center. (ERIC Document Service No. ED379597)
- Flood, J., Lapp, D., Ranck-Buhr, W., & Moore, J. (1995). What happens when teachers get together to talk about books? Gaining a multicultural perspective from literature. *The Reading Teacher* 48(8): 720-726.
- Florio-Ruane, S. (1994). "The Future Teachers' Autobiography Club: Preparing educators to support literacy learning in culturally diverse classrooms." *English Education* 26(1): 52-66.
- Florio-Ruane, S., & Raphael, T., with Glazier, J., McVee, M., Shellhorn, B., & Wallace, S. (1999). Culture, autobiography, and the education of literacy teachers (CIERA Report No. 3-003). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan.
- Florio-Ruane, S., & Raphael, T.E., with the assistance of the Teachers Learning Collaborative (2001). Reading lives: Learning about culture and literacy in teacher study groups. In C. M. Clark (Ed.), *Talking shop: Authentic conversation and teacher learning* (pp. 64-81). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Florio-Ruane, S., Raphael, T.E., Glazier, J., McVee, M., & Wallace, S. (1997). Discovering culture in discussion of autobiographical literature: Transforming the education of literacy teachers. In C. K. Kinzer, K.A. Hinchman & D.J. Leu (Eds.), *Inquiries into literacy theory and practice (Forty-sixth handbook of the National Reading Conference* (pp. 452-464). Chicago: The National Reading Conference.

- Florio-Ruane, S., with deTar, J. (2001). *Teacher education and the cultural imagination: Autobiography, conversation, and narrative*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Fordon, A. E. (2000). "Arts-based educational studies: An "adventurous" option to arts-based research." *Educational Foundations* 14(3): 51-62.
- Freedman, S. W., Simons, E.R., Kalnin, J.S., & Casareno, A. (Eds.). (1999). *Inside city schools: Investigating literacy in multicultural classrooms*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Fuhr, E. (1996). Promoting tolerance through multicultural education. *Teaching and Leadership*. Rockford, IL: St. Xavier University and IRI/Skylight.
- Gates Jr, H. (1992). *Loose Canons: Notes on the culture wars*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Geertz, C. (1973). Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture. In C. Geertz (Ed.), *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays* (pp. 3-30). New York: Basic Books.
- Giarelli, E., & Tulman, L. (2003). "Methodological issues in the use of published cartoons as data." *Qualitative Health Research* 13(7): 945-956.
- Gibson, R. (1986). *Critical theory and education*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Glazier, J. (2003). "Moving closer to speaking the unspeakable: White teachers talking about race." *Teacher Education Quarterly* 30(1): 73-94.
- Glazier, J., McVee, M., Wallace-Cowell, S., Shellhorn, B., Florio-Ruane, S., & Raphael, T.E. (2000). Teacher learning in response to autobiographical literature. In N. J. Karolides (Ed.), *Reader response in secondary and college classrooms* (pp. 287-310). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Glesne, C. (1999). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. New York: Addison Wesley Longman.

- Glickman, C. D. (1998). *Revolutionizing America's schools*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Goebel, B. (1995). "Expanding the literary canon and reading the rhetoric of "race"." *English Journal* 84(4): 42-48.
- Goldberg, S. M., & Pesko, E. (2000). "The teacher book club." *Educational Leadership* 57(8): 39-41.
- Good, T. L. (1987). "Two decades of research on teacher expectations: Findings and future directions." *Journal of Teacher Education* 38(4): 32-47.
- Goodson, F. T. (1994). "Culture wars and the rules of the English classroom." *English Journal* 83(1): 21-24.
- Goto, S. T. (1995). Nerds, normal people, and homeboys: Asian American students and the language of school success (Report No. 214928). Berkeley, CA: National Center for the Study of Writing, University of California (ERIC Document Service No. ED384070)
- Graff, G. (1994). "Expanding the canon: Shaping inclusive reading lists." *English Journal* 83(8): 36-39.
- Graham, P., Hudson-Ross, S., Adkins, C., McWhorter, P., & Stewart, J. (Eds.). (1999). *Teacher/mentor: A dialogue for collaborative learning*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Grant, C. A., & Sleeter, C.E. (1987). "Who determines teacher work? The debate continues." *Teaching & Teacher Education* 3(1): 61-64.
- Grayson, D. A., & Martin, M.D. (1990). *Gender/ethnic expectations and student achievement (GESA). Teacher handbook*. Earlham, IA: GrayMill.
- Greenbaum, V. (1994). "Expanding the canon: Shaping inclusive reading lists." *English Journal* 83(8): 36-39.
- Griffin, J. H. (1960). *Black like me*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

- Grillo, T., & Wildman, S.M. (2000). Obscuring the importance of race: The implication of making comparisons between racism and sexism (or other -isms). In R. Delgado & J. Stefancic, *Critical race theory: The cutting edge* (pp. 648-656). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y.S. (1989). Judging the quality of fourth generation evaluation. In E.G. Guba & Y Lincoln (Eds.), *Fourth generation evaluation* (pp. 228-251). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Guinier, L., & Torres, G. (2002). *The miner's canary: Enlisting race, resisting power, transforming democracy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gutierrez-Jones, C. (2001). *A study of race, rhetoric, and injury*. New York: New York University Press.
- Hale, J. (1980). A matter of culture: The educative styles of Afro-American children (Report No. PS01030). Connecticut: ERIC Clearinghouse (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED197856).
- Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (1995). *Ethnography: Principles in practice* (2nd edition). London: Routledge.
- Hanssen, E. (1998). "A white teacher reflects on institutional racism." *Phi Delta Kappan* 79(9): 694-698.
- Harris, C. I. (1995). Whiteness as property. In K. Crenshaw, N. Gotada, G. Peller, & K. Thomas (Eds.), *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement* _____ (pp. 276-291). New York: The New Press.
- Harris, V. J. (1993). African American children's literature: The first one hundred years. In T. Perry, & Frager, J. (Eds.), *Freedom's plow: Teaching in the multicultural classroom* (pp. 167-181). New York: Routledge.
- Hartley, J. (2002). *The reading groups books*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Hayes, D. W. (1995). Teaching teachers. *Black Issues in Higher Education* 12: 22-23.

- Hayn, J., & Sherrill, D. (1996). "Female protagonists in multicultural young adult literature: Sources and strategies." *The Alan Review* 24(1): 1-6. Retrieved April 4, 2000, from <http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournal/ALAN/fall96/f96-09-Hayn.html>
- Heckard, M. (1993). A matter of respect: An interview with Pam Martell, coordinator of Indian education, Michigan Department of Education (Report No. RIEAPR1995). Michigan (ERIC Document Reproduction No. ED377003).
- Hesse, D. (1989). Canon and critical thinking: An inductive teaching strategy. *English Journal* 78(16): 16-22.
- Hooks, B. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York: Routledge.
- Hoonaard, W. C. (Ed.). (2002). *Walking the tightrope: Ethical issues for qualitative researchers*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.
- Howard, G. R. (1993). "Whites in multicultural education: Rethinking our role." *Phi Delta Kappan* 75(1): 36-41.
- Howe, M. (1991). Collaboration on topic change in conversation (in Kansas Working Papers in Linguistics, 1991, v16). Kansas: Author (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED335914).
- Howland, J. (1995). "Attentive reading in the age of canon clamor." *English Journal* 84(3): 35-38.
- Hyland, N. E. (1998, April). *One high school teacher's unexamined pedagogy of race* (Report No. UD032442). Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED421590)
- Johannessen, L. R. (1992, March). Enhancing student response to literature: A matter of changing old habits (Keynote speech). Paper presented at the National Council of Teachers of English Spring Institutes, Orlando, FL.

- Karolides, N. J., (Ed.) (2000). *Reader response in secondary and college classrooms*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Kennedy, J. E. P., Zavala, V. (Producers), & Muir, A. (Director) (1991). *Skin deep* [Video]. Los Angeles, CA: Community Television of Southern California.
- Kent, P. (2003, January 22). Race-based college admissions are bad, despite good intentions. *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. Atlanta: A13.
- Ketter, J., & Lewis, C. (2001). "Already reading texts and contexts: Multicultural literature in a predominantly white rural community." *Theory into Practice* 40(3): 175-183.
- King, B. A. (1996). *Hard questions, heart answers: Speeches and sermons*. New York: Broadway Books.
- King, J. E. (1991). "Dysconscious racism: Ideology, identity, and the miseducation of teachers." *Journal of Negro Education* 60(2): 133-146.
- King, S. (1994). "Winning the race against racism." *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance* 65: 69-74.
- Kivel, P. (1996). *Uprooting racism: How white people can work for racial justice*. Philadelphia: New Society.
- Kivel, P. (2002). How white people can serve as allies to people of color in the struggle to end racism. In P. S. Rothenberg (Ed.), *White privilege: Essential readings on the other side of racism* (pp. 127-135). New York: Worth.
- Klassen, T. R., & Carr, P.D. (1997). "Different perceptions of race in education: Racial minority and white teachers." *Canadian Journal of Education* 22(1): 67-81.
- Knowles, L. L., & Prewitt, K., (Ed.) (1969). *Institutional racism in America*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Kotlowitz, A. (1998). *The other side of the river: A story of two towns, a death, and America's dilemma*. New York: Anchor Books.

- Kozol, J. (1991). *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*. New York: Crown Publishers.
- Kumashiro, K. K. (1999). "Supplementary normalcy and otherness: Queer Asian American men reflect on stereotypes, identity, and oppression." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 12(5): 491-508.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An Introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1999). Just what is critical race theory, and what's it doing in a nice field like education? In L. Parker, D. Deyle & S. Villenas (Eds.), *Race is ... race isn't: Critical race theory and qualitative studies in education* (pp. 7-30). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2001). *Crossing over to Jordan: The journey of new teachers in diverse classrooms*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W.F. (1995). "Toward a critical race theory of education." *Teachers College Record* 97(1): 47-68.
- Landsman, J. (2001). *A white teacher talks about race*. Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press.
- Lapadat, J. C. (2000). "Problematizing transcription: Purpose, paradigm and quality." *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 3(3): 203-219.
- Lapp, D., Flood, J., Kibildis, C., Jones, M.A., & Moore, J. (1995). Teacher book clubs: Making multicultural connections. In N.L. Roser & M.G. Martinez (Eds.), *Book talk and beyond* (pp. 42-49). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Lash, S. (2003, March 30). Court to consider racial preference Michigan case sets up landmark decision. *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. Atlanta: B1.

- Lather, P. (1986). Issues of validity in openly ideological research: Between a rock and soft place. *Interchange* 17(4): 63-84.
- Lather, P. (1993). Fertile obsession: Validity after poststructuralism. *Sociological Quarterly* 34(4): 673-693.
- Lave, J., & Kvale, S. (1995). What is anthropological research? An interview with Jean Lave by Steinar Kvale. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 8(3): 219-228.
- LeCompte, M. D., & Preissle, J. (1993). *Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Lederman, R. (1990). Pretexts for ethnography: On reading fieldnotes. In R. Sanjek_(Ed.), *Fieldnotes: The makings of anthropology* (pp. 71-91). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Lee, C. K. Y. (2000). Race and self-defense: Toward a normative conception of reasonableness. In R. Delgado & J. Stefancic (Eds.), *Critical race theory: The cutting edge* (pp. 204-210). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Lenzo, K. (1995). "Validity and self-reflexivity meet poststructuralism: Scientific ethos and the transgressive self." *Educational Researcher* 24(4): 17-23.
- Lerner, R., & Nagai, A. K. (2001). Pervasive Preferences: Racial and ethnic discrimination in undergraduate admissions across the nation (Report No. RIEDEC2001). Washington, D.C., Center for Equal Opportunity (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED454804)
- Lester, M. (2001). "Literary Cavemen: How a reading group taps into the heart of education." *Independent School* 60(4): 60-68.
- Levine, L. W. (1996). *The opening of the American mind: Canons, culture, and history*. Boston: Beacon Press.

- Lewis, C., & Ketter, J. (2003). Resituating the self: Interdiscursivity in a teacher and researcher study group. Roundtable at the National Council of Teachers of English Assembly for Research Mid-Winter Conference, Minneapolis, MN.
- Lewis, C., & Ketter, J. (in press). Learning as social interaction: Interdiscursivity in a teacher and researcher study group. In R. Rogers, *New directions in critical discourse analysis: The role of language and learning in social transformation*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E.G. (2001). Ethics: The failure of positivist science. In N. K. Denizen & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The American tradition in qualitative research (pp. 91-107)*. London: Sage.
- Lopez, I. F. H. (2000). White by law. In R. Delgado & J. Stefancic (Eds.), *Critical race theory: The cutting edge* (2nd ed.) (pp. 626-634). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Lopez, G. R., & Parker, L. (Eds.) (2003). *Interrogating racism in qualitative research methodology*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Lowe, L. (1996). *Immigrant acts: On Asian American cultural politics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Lumsden, L. (1997). Expectations for students: ERIC Digest, Number 116 (Report No. EDOEA978). Eugene, OR: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED409609).
- Lynn, M. (2002). Critical race theory and the perspectives of black men teachers in the Los Angeles Public Schools. *Equity and Excellence in Education* 35(2): 119-130.
- Lynn, M., & Adams, M., (Eds.). (2002). Critical race theory and education: Recent developments in the field [Special Issue]. *Equity and Excellence in Education*, 35 (2).

- Lynn, M., Yosso, T., Solorzano, D.G., & Parker, L. (Eds.) (2002). Critical Race Theory and Qualitative Research [Special Issue]. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8 (1).
- MacCann, D. (1998). *White supremacy in children's literature: Characterizations of African Americans, 1830-1900*. New York: Garland Publishing.
- Macintyre, C. (2000). *The art of action research in the classroom*. London: David Fulton.
- Marshall, J. W., Smagorinsky, P., & Smith, M. W. (1995). *The language of interpretation: Patterns of discourse in discussions of literature*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Marx, S., & Pennington, J. (2002). Experimentations with critical race theory and teacher education students (Report No. SP040920). Texas: Author. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED469941)
- Markman, R. (2004, March 19). Faculty leaders make proposal to admissions. *Athens Banner-Herald*. Athens: A7.
- Mathis, J. B. (2001). "Respond to stories with stories: Teachers discuss multicultural children's literature." *The Social Studies* 92(4): 155-160.
- Matlin, M. L., & Short, K. G. (1991). "How our teacher study group sparks change." *Educational Leadership* 49(3): 68.
- McCarthy, C., & Crichlow, W., (1993). *Theories of identity, theories of representation: Theories of race*. New York: Routledge.
- McIntosh, P. (1997). White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. In B. Schneider (Ed.), *Race: An anthology in the first person* (pp. 120-126). New York: Three Rivers Press.
- McIntosh, P. (2002). White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. In P.S. Rothenburg (Ed.), *White privilege: Essential readings on the other side of racism* (pp. 97-101). New York: Worth.
- McIntyre, A. (1997). *Making meaning of whiteness: Exploring racial identity with white teachers*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

- McLaren, P. (1998). *Life in Schools: An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in Foundations of Education*. New York: Addison Wesley Longman.
- McVee, M. B. (1999). *Narrative and the exploration of culture, self, and other in teachers' book club discussion groups* (Doctoral dissertation, Michigan State University, 1999). Dissertation Abstracts International, 60 (1), 3634 (UMI No. AAT 9948140).
- Merton, R. K. (1948). The self-fulfilling prophecy. *Antioch Review* 8: 193-210.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A.M. (1984). Drawing valid meaning from qualitative data: Toward a shared craft. *Educational Researcher* 13(5): 20-30.
- Moll, L. (in press). Inspired by Vygotsky: Ethnographic experiments in education. In C. D. Lee & P. Smagorinsky (Eds.), *Vygotskian perspectives on literacy research: Constructing meaning through collaborative inquiry*. Cambridge, Australia: Cambridge University Press.
- Morrison, T. (1992). *Playing in the dark: Whiteness and the literary imagination*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Native American literature. (n.d.). Retrieved April 15, 2004, from http://www.usc.edu/isd/archives/ethnicstudies/indian_lit.html
- NEA. (n.d.). NEA and teacher recruitment: An overview. Retrieved June 23, 2003, from <http://www.nea.org/recruit/minority/overview.html>.
- Newman, G., & Layfield, E.N. (1995). *Racism: Divided by color. Multicultural issues*. Springfield, NJ: Enslow.
- Nieto, S. (1999). Foreword. In S. W. Freedman, E.R. Simons, J.S. Kalnin, & A. Casareno (Eds.), *Inside city schools: Investigating literacy in multicultural classrooms* (pp. _____xi-xiii). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Nodelman, P. (1992). *The pleasures of children's literature*. New York: Longman Publishing Group.

- Oakes, J. (1985). *Keeping track: How schools structure inequality*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Obidah, J. E., & Teel, K.M. (2001). *Because of the kids*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- O'Donnell-Allen, C., & Hunt, B. (2001). Reading adolescents: Book clubs for YA readers. *English Journal* 90(3): 82-89.
- Ogbu, J. U. (1992). Understanding cultural diversity and learning. *Educational Researcher* 21(8): 5-14.
- Okihiro, G. Y. (1994). *Margins and mainstreams: Asians in American history and culture*. Seattle, WA: University of Seattle Press.
- Oliver, E. I. (1999). The power of the word: Centrality of diverse literature in the American canon. *Alan Review* 24(3): 48-50.
- Otoya-Knapp, K. (2001, April). "More than I bargained for": Confronting biases in teacher preparation (Report No. SP040065). Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Seattle WA. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED454191).
- Ottenberg, S. (1990). Thirty years of fieldnotes: Changing relationships to the text. In R. Sanjek (Ed.), *Fieldnotes: The makings of anthropology* (pp. 139-160). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Paley, V. G. (1979/2000). *White teacher*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Pang, V. O. (1994). "Why do we need this class? Multicultural education for teachers." *Phi Delta Kappan* 76(4): 289-292.
- Paredes, V., & Frazer, L. (1992). School climate in AISD (Report No. AISD-91-38). Austin, TX, Austin: Independent School District, Office of Research and Evaluation. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED353677)

- Parker, L., & Stovall, D.O. (2003, April). Actions following words: Critical race theory connects to critical pedagogy. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL.
- Parker, L., Deyle, D., Villenas, S., & Nebeker, K. C. (Eds.) (1998). Critical race theory in education [Special Issue]. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 11(1).
- Pelletier, C. M. (1993, April). Professional development through a teacher book club (Report No. CS011127). Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Research Association, Atlanta, GA. (ERIC Document Service No. ED352629)
- Peshkin, A. (1988). In search of subjectivity -- One's own. *Educational Researcher* 17(7): 17-22.
- Peterson, E. A. (1999). Creating a culturally relevant dialogue for African American adult educators. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, (82): 79-91.
- Pigott, R. L., & Cowen, E.L. (2000). Teacher race, child race, racial congruence, and teacher ratings of children's school adjustment. *Journal of School Psychology* 38(2): 177-195.
- Pillow, W. (2003). Race-based methodologies: Multicultural methods or epistemological shifts. *Interrogating racism in qualitative research methodology*. G. R. Lopez, & Parker, L. New York, Peter Lang: 181-202.
- Pinar, W. F. (1993). Notes on understanding curriculum as a racial text. In C. McCarthy & W. Crichlow (Eds.), *Race identity and representation in education* (pp. 60-70). New York, Routledge.
- Pine, G. J., & Hilliard, A.G., III. (1990). Rx for racism: Imperative for America's schools. *Phi Delta Kappan* 71(8): 593-600.
- Poland, B. D. (1995). Transcription quality as an aspect of rigor in qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry* 1(3): 290-310.

- Powell, T. B. (2000). *Ruthless democracy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Probst, R., Anderson, R., Brinnin, J.M., Leggett, J., & Irvin, J.L. (1997). *Elements of literature (Fifth course): Literature of the United States with literature of the Americas*. Austin, TX: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Purves, A. C. (1993). The ideology of canons and cultural concerns in the literature curriculum. In S. M. Miller & B. McCaskill (Eds.), *Multicultural literature and literacies: Making space for difference* (pp. 105-127). Albany, NY: State University of New York.
- Raboy, M. D. (Director). (2002). *Friday after next* [Motion picture]. United States: Warner Home Video.
- Racism and Sexism Resource Center for Educators. (1977). Checklist: Rate your school for racism and sexism (Report No. RIEDEC1978). New York: Council on Interracial Books for Children, Inc. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED157179)
- Raphael, T. E., Goatly, V., McMahon, S.I., & Woodman, D.A. (1995). Promoting meaningful conversations in student book clubs. In N.L. Roser & M.G. Martinez (Eds.), *Book talk and beyond: Children and teachers respond to literature* (pp. 66-79). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Raphael, T. E., Florio-Ruane, S., Kehus, M. J., George, M., Hasty, N.L., & Highfield, K. (2001). Thinking of ourselves: Literacy learning in a diverse teacher inquiry network. *The Reading Teacher* 54(6): 3-11.
- Raphael, T. E., Damphouse, K., Highfield, K., & Florio-Ruane, S. (2001). Understanding culture in our lives and work: Teachers' literature study in the book club program. In P. R. Schmidt & P.B. Mosenthal (Eds.), *Reconceptualizing literacy in the new age of multiculturalism and pluralism* (pp. 367-387). Lexington, MA: Information Age Publishing.

- Raphael, T. E., Florio-Ruane, S. & George, M. (2001). "Book Club Plus: A conceptual framework to organize literacy instruction." *Language Arts* 79(2): 159-168.
- Ratner, B. (Director). (2001). *Rush hour 2* [Motion picture]. United States: New Line Studios.
- Revilla, A. T., & Asato, J. (2002). "The implementation of Proposition 227 in California schools: A critical analysis of the effect on teacher beliefs and classroom practices." *Equity and Excellence in Education* 35(2): 108-118.
- Richardson, L. (1993). "Poetics, dramatics, and transgressive validity." *The Sociological Quarterly* 34(4): 695-710.
- Richardson, L. (1997). *Fields of play: Constructing an academic life*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Richardson, L. (2001, July 15). Facilitators take book clubs beyond coffee talk. Athens Banner-Herald. Athens: E5.
- Richardson, L. (2002). Poetic representation of interviews. In J. Gubrium, & J.A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context and method* (pp. 877-892). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Robinson, L. S. (1997). *In the canon's mouth: Dispatches from the culture wars*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Rogers, T., & Soter, A.O. (Eds.) (1997). *Reading across cultures: Teaching literature in a diverse society*. New York: Teachers College Press and the National Council of Teachers of English.
- Romany, C. (2002). Critical race theory in global context. In F. Valdes, J.M. Culp & A.P. Harris (Eds.), *Crossroads, directions, and a new critical race theory* (pp. 303-309). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Ross, T. (2002). The unbearable whiteness of being. In F. Valdes, J. M.Culp, & A.P. Harris (Eds.), *Crossroads, directions, and a new critical race theory* (pp. 251-257). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

- Rothenberg, P. S. (Ed.) (2002). *White privilege: Essential readings on the other side of racism*. New York: Worth.
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I.S. (1995). *Qualitative interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ryan, G. W., & Bernard, H.R. (2000). Data management and analysis methods. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (769-802). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rymes, B. (2001). *Conversational borderlands: Language and identity in an alternative urban high school*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Sanacore, J. (1993). Continuing to grow as language arts educators: Focusing on the importance of study groups (Report No. CS011127). New York: Author. (ERIC Document Service No. ED352629)
- Sanjek, R. (Ed.) (1990). *Fieldnotes: The makings of anthropology*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Scheurich, J. J. (1993). "The masks of validity: A deconstructive investigation." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 9(11): 49-60.
- Scheurich, J. J., & Young, M.D. (1997). "Coloring epistemologies: Are our research epistemologies racially biased?" *Educational Researcher* 26(4): 4-16.
- Schneider, B. (Ed.). (1997). *Race: An anthology in the first person*. New York: Three Rivers Press.
- Scollon, R. (1981). Teachers' questions about Alaska Native education. Alaska: Alaska University. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED238661)
- Seidman, I. (1991). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Seidman, I. (1998). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Shaw, M. (2003, March). Alarm at results of black students. *The Times Educational Supplement* (4522): 9.

- Sims, R. (1982). *Shadow and substance: Afro-American experience in contemporary children's books*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Sizer, T. R. (1992). *Horace's compromise: The dilemma of the American high school*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Sleeter, C. E. (1993). How white teachers construct race. In C. McCarthy & W. Crichlow (Eds.), *Race identity and representation in education* (pp. 157-171). New York: Routledge.
- Sleeter, C. E. (1997). Foreword. In A. McIntyre (Ed.), *Making meaning of whiteness: Exploring racial identity with white teachers* (pp. ix-xii). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Smey-Richman, B. (1989). Teacher expectations and low-achieving students (Report No. UD027744). Philadelphia, Research for Better Schools, Inc. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED328627)
- Smith, M. W., & Strickland, D.S. (2001). Complements or conflicts: Conceptions of discussion and multicultural literature in a teachers-as-readers discussion group. *Journal of Literacy Research* 33(1): 137-167.
- Solomon, R. (1992). *Black resistance in high school: Forging a separatist culture*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Solorzano, D. G. (1997). Images and words that wound: Critical race theory, racial stereotyping, and teacher education. *Teacher Education Quarterly* 24: 5-19.
- Solorzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. (2001). From racial stereotyping and deficit discourse toward a critical race theory in teacher education. *Multicultural Education* 9(1): 2-8.
- Solorzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. (2002). A critical race counterstory of race, racism, and affirmative action. *Equity and Excellence in Education* 35(2): 155-168.
- Sparks, S. (2000). Classroom and curriculum accommodations for Native American students. *Intervention in School and Clinic* 35(5): 259-263.

- Spradley, J. P. (1979). *The ethnographic interview*. New York: Harcourt Brace.
- Spradley, J. P. (1980). *Participant observation*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Springgay, S. (2002). Arts-based research as an unknowable text. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research* 48 (3).
- Stallworth, B. J. (1999). Diversity in the English curriculum: Challenges and successes. *Multicultural Education* 6(3): 19-21.
- Steele, C. M. (2003). Thin ice: "Stereotype threat" and black college students [Electronic version], The Atlantic Online. Retrieved April 17, 2003, from <http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/99aug/9908stereotype.htm>.
- Stewart, S. (1997, February). The many faces of conversational laughter (Report No. FL024420) Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on Linguistics and Literature, Denton, TX. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service Service No. ED404859)
- Straub, D. G. (Ed.). (1997). *Asian American voices*. Detroit: UXL Publisher.
- Straub, D. G. (Ed.). (1997). *Hispanic American voices*. Detroit: UXL Publisher.
- Straub, D. G. (Ed.). (1997). *Native North American Voices*. Detroit: UXL Publisher.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Sunstein, B. S. (1994). Attempting a graceful waltz on a teeter-totter: The canon and English methods courses. *English Journal* 83(8): 47-54.
- Tatum, B. D. (1994). Teaching white students about racism: The search for white allies and the restoration of hope. *Teachers College Record* 95(4): 462-476.
- Tatum, B. D. (1997). *"Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?" and other conversations about race*. New York: Basic Books.
- Tatum, B. D. (1999). It's not so black & white: An educator's wisdom on teaching about slavery and other race-related issues (that make us comfortable). *Instructor (Primary edition)* 108(5): 29-31.

- Tauber, R. T. (1998). Good or bad, what teachers expect from students they generally get! ERIC Digest. (Report No. EDOSP977). Washington, DC, ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED426985).
- Teranishi, R. T. (2002). Asian Pacific Americans and critical race theory: An examination of school racial climate. *Equity and Excellence in Education* 35(2): 144-154.
- Thernstrom, A. (2000). "Diversity yes, preferences no." *Academe* 86(5): 30-33.
- Thernstrom, S. (1998). "Farewell to preferences?" *Public Interest* (130): 34-49.
- Thomas, P. (1997). *Down these mean streets*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Thomas, P. L. (1996). When Wordsworth is too tame: Merging minority literature with the classics in the secondary language arts curriculum. In L. Cook & H.C. Lodge (Eds.), *Voice in English classrooms: Honoring diversity and change (Classroom practices in teaching English Vol. 28)* (pp. 177-185). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Tuft, C. (2001). Changing the high school core literature. Published master's thesis. (Report No. CS217511). San Rafael, CA: Dominican University of California. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 451540)
- Valdes, F., Culp, J. M., & Harris, A.P. (2002). Introduction: Battles waged, won, and lost: Critical Race Theory at the turn of the millennium. In F. Valdes, J.M. Culp & A.P. Harris (Eds.), *Crossroads, directions, and a new critical race theory* (pp. 1-6). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Valdes, G. (1996). *Con respecto: Bridging the distance between culturally diverse families and schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Vargas, S. R. L. (2003). Critical race theory in education: Theory, praxis, and recommendations. In G. R. Lopez & L. Parker (Eds.), *Interrogating racism in qualitative research methodology* (pp. 1-18). New York: Peter Lang.

- Villenas, S., & Deyle, D. (1999). Critical race theory and ethnographies challenging the stereotypes: Latino families, schooling, resilience and resistance. *Curriculum Inquiry* 29(4): 413-445.
- Wang, W. (Director). (1993). *The joy luck club* [Motion picture]. United States: Walt Disney Home Video.
- Ward, H. (2003). *A study of Black women's experiences related to racism and sexism in school*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The University of Georgia, Athens, GA.
- Warren, R. (2002). *The purpose driven life: What on earth am I here for?* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Weidauer, F. (1996, November). Reforming the literary canon by teaching it (Report No. CS215794). Paper presented at the meeting of the Annual Meeting of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, Philadelphia, PA. (ERIC Document Service No. ED405603)
- West, C. (1994). *Race matters*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Wildman, S., & Davis, A.D. (2000). Language and silence: Making systems of privilege visible. In R. Delgado & J. Stefancic (Eds.), *Critical race theory: The cutting edge* (pp. 657-663). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Wildman, S. M., with Davis, A.D. (2002). Making systems of privilege visible. In P.S. Rothenburg (Ed.), *White privilege: Essential readings on the other side of racism*. _____ (pp. 89-95). New York: Worth.
- Williams, L. (2000). *It's the little things: Everyday interactions that anger, annoy, and divide the races*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt, Inc.
- Williams, P. J. (1991). *The alchemy of race and rights*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Williams, R. (1977). *Marxism and literature*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

- Willis, A. I. (1997). Exploring multicultural literature as cultural production. In T. Rogers & A.O. Soter (Eds.), *Reading across cultures: Teaching literature in a diverse society* (pp. 135-160). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Wise, T. (2002). Membership has its privileges: Thoughts on acknowledging and challenging whiteness. In P. S. Rothenberg (Ed.), *White privilege: Essential readings on the other side of racism* (pp. 107-111). New York: Worth.
- Wolf, S. A., Ballentine, D., & Hill, L. (1999). "The right to write: Preservice teachers' evolving understandings of authenticity and aesthetic heat in multicultural literature." *Research in the Teaching of English* 34: 130-184.
- Wong, S. (1995). *American knees*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Woodson, C. G. (1990). *The mis-education of the negro*. Trenton, NY: African World Press.
- Wright, R. (1940). *Native son*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Writer, J. H. (2001). "Identifying the identified: The need for critical exploration of Native American identity within educational contexts." *Action in Teacher Education* 22(4): 40-47.
- Yao, E. L. (1988). "Working effectively with Asian immigrant parents." *Phi Delta Kappan* 70 (November): 223-225.
- Yosso, T. J. (2002). Toward a critical race curriculum. *Equity and Excellence in Education* 35(2): 93-107.
- Zaleski, J. (1999). Parents and teachers as readers: The book club as meeting place. *Language Arts* 77(2): 118-124.
- Zaleski, J. M. (1997). *Teachers in transition: The experience of teachers in a teachers as readers group* (Doctoral dissertation, New York University, 1997). *Dissertation Abstracts International* 58 (09), 3448 (UMI No. AAT 9810504)

Zuniga-Hill, C., & Barnes, C., (1995). Effective teacher preparation for diverse student populations: What works best? In S. Rothstein (Ed.), *Class, culture, and race in American schools: A handbook* (pp. 163-197). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

APPENDIX A
LETTER OF AUTHORIZATION
(SCHOOL DISTRICT)

Letter of authorization (School District)

Christine Joseph
Institutional Review Board
Office of the Vice President for Research
606 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center
The University of Georgia
Athens, Georgia 30602-7411

Dear Dr. Joseph:

I am granting authorization for Victoria Pettis, a Clarke Central High School English teacher and doctoral student from the Department of Language Education at the University of Georgia, to collect data for her research project entitled "How High School Teachers Use Literature to Talk about Race" at Clarke Central High School in Athens, Georgia.

I understand Mrs. Pettis will be collecting data from Clarke Central English teachers in the form of a teacher survey and will choose to interview three to five teachers from the English department as part of a class assignment for ERSH 8410, Qualitative Data Collection in Education, taught by Dr. Kathleen deMarrais.

Mrs. Pettis is approved for data collection from September 25, 2001 to September 25, 2002.

Sincerely,

Sue Harbuck
Curriculum Director, Clarke County School District

APPENDIX B

LETTER OF AUTHORIZATION (PRINCIPAL)

Letter of Authorization (Principal)

Christine Joseph
Institutional Review Board
Office of the Vice President for Research
606 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center
The University of Georgia
Athens, Georgia 30602-7411

Dear Dr. Joseph:

I am granting authorization for Victoria Pettis, a Clarke Central High School English teacher and doctoral student from the Department of Language Education at the University of Georgia, to collect data for her research project entitled "How High School Teachers Use Literature to Talk about Race" at Clarke Central High School in Athens, Georgia.

I understand Mrs. Pettis will be collecting data from Clarke Central English teachers in the form of a teacher survey and will choose to interview three to five teachers from the English department as part of a class assignment for ERSB 8410, Qualitative Data Collection in Education, taught by Dr. Kathleen deMarrais.

Mrs. Pettis is approved for data collection from September 25, 2001 to September 25, 2002.

Sincerely,

Maxine Easom, Principal
Clarke Central High School

APPENDIX C

TEACHER BOOK CLUB CONSENT FORM

TEACHER BOOK CLUB CONSENT FORM

I, _____ agree to participate in the research titled "Race Talk in a Teacher Book Club" conducted by Victoria Pettis, a teacher at Clarke Central High School and a Ph.D. student from the Department of Language Education at the University of Georgia. I understand that I do not have to take part if I do not want to. I can stop taking part without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The purpose of this study is to provide a group of high school English teachers time to collaboratively read and discuss multicultural novels and the racial issues they present. The research study will be guided by the following questions:

1. How do teachers respond to texts that include themes about multiculturalism, stereotypes, cultural diversity, and racism?
2. What connections do teachers make about race in the texts to their own lives?
3. In what ways has being a member of a book discussion club been meaningful in the lives of these secondary English teachers?

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

- 1) Read four multicultural novels (representing African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic/Latino, and Native American) and one novel on multicultural education
- 2) Attend five monthly book club meetings scheduled during the first four teacher planning days -- Oct. 14, Nov. 5, Dec. 20, 2002 and Jan. 3, 2003 -- either during breakfast or lunchtime. The final meeting date, which will be determined by book club participants, will be held in February beginning immediately at 3:45. All meetings will be held in the school media center and will last no longer than 90 minutes.
- 3) Keep a response journal in which I will record my thoughts about the novels and/or discussions. (This is optional, not a required part of my dissertation.) The researcher will provide me with one folder and a diskette. After each book club meeting, I will be asked to turn the diskette over to the researcher for analysis. My entire response journal (the folder) will be turned over to the researcher at the end of the last book club meeting.
- 4) Agree to participate in five book club discussions, which are taped for both video and audio recordings in their entirety
- 5) Take part in an individual interview (approximately one hour in length) at the conclusion of the book club experience
- 6) Take part in several "member checks," in which the researcher will present me with a written copy of transcripts of book club meetings and my interview so that I may have an opportunity to clarify and expand any information

I understand that the taping for video and audio purposes will be used for analysis only. The researcher and her research assistant will only see the video recordings. If the possibility arises for the video and audio recordings and transcripts to be used in either

teaching or conference presentations, it would be subject to my permission. All information collected during this study will be treated confidentially (unless required by law), and any publications from the project will use pseudonyms. I have requested the researcher to use _____ as my pseudonym.

The benefits for participation include receiving new copies of the five novels (plus one extra to add to my professional collection), one (1) staff development credit, a \$300 allowance to purchase a class set of multicultural novels, and lunch. The book club experience will provide me with an opportunity to work collaboratively with colleagues in my department.

No risks are expected as a result of my participation in this study.

Because of the nature of the discussions, I may experience some discomfort or stress during book club discussions. If I feel the need to discontinue my participation in the study at any time, I may do so without penalty.

No information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others without my written permission, except if it is necessary to protect my welfare (for example, if I were injured and need physician care) or if required by law. Response journals, videotapes, audiotapes, and transcriptions will remain with the researcher and will be destroyed no later than January 1, 2013. (These materials would be kept in the event the researcher decides to use them – with my permission – in another future research project.)

There is a possibility that audio/video tapes with my voice/image could be used in either teaching or conference presentations. This is subject to my permission. See and initial below:

1. Audio/Video records may be can be used for academic publications.

(Please use initials.)

2. Audio/Video records may be shown at meetings of researchers.

(Please use initials.)

3. Audio/Video records can be shown in classrooms to students.

(Please use initials.)

I have read the above description and give my consent for use of records as indicated above.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached: in person (Clarke Central High School, 350 South Milledge Avenue, Athens, Georgia 30606); by email: Victoriapettis@aol.com; and by telephone: 549-3389. This research is being conducted under the direction of the researcher's major professor, Peg Graham. Dr. Graham may be contacted by calling (706) 542-5674 or writing to this address: The University of Georgia, College of Education, The Department of Language Education, 125 Aderhold Hall, Athens, GA 30602.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Signature of Researcher

Date

Signature of Participant

Date

The Institutional Review Board oversees any research-type activity conducted at the University of Georgia that involves human participants. For additional questions regarding your rights as a participant, please contact: Dr. Christina Joseph, Institutional review Board, Office of the Vice President for Research for Research, 606 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, The University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411. Telephone: (706) 542-6514. Email: IRB@uga.edu.

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide

1. Describe yourself as a reader, including your likes and dislikes, what makes you feel uncomfortable, etc.
2. Tell me about your experience in this book club, including what you noticed about yourself and your colleagues.
3. Describe how you would rate yourself as a participant. Pretend there was this imaginary scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “I never spoke or talked” to 10 being the other end of the spectrum (“I talked all the time”). How would rate yourself and why?
4. Was there anything discussed that served as enlightenment about race/racism to you or about your students? Or did the book club experience serve as more of a reaffirmation of what you already knew?
5. Talk about each book and your reaction to it. Which was the most useful (impacting) book to you? Why
6. What, if anything, will the book club experience cause you to do differently in your teaching? With your students?
7. Tell me about the multicultural texts that you plan to purchase (or are still thinking about) with your \$300.
8. Paul started an email exchange and several book club members agreed that the book club be continued because they felt it was intellectually stimulating and it provided a time for teachers to come together and talk. If Paul or someone else decided to continue this book club in the English department, would you participate? If so, how would you like the book club experience to stay the same? What would you like to see different?

APPENDIX E

IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

Implementation Schedule

<p style="text-align: center;">Phase 1: Five months</p> <p>Pre-implementation (March 2002 to September 2002)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recruit participants 2. Gain entrée to site 3. Obtain proposal/prospectus approval 4. Obtain IRB approval 5. Distribute novels and reading deadlines to participants
<p style="text-align: center;">Phase 2: Five months</p> <p>Data collection (October 2002 to February 2003)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. begin monthly audio and videotaping of book club meetings 2. begin transcribing and analyzing audiotapes 3. using videotapes, begin and analyze field notes from participant observations 4. begin researcher's journal 5. conduct teacher interviews <p>Note: Data analysis and interpretation will begin as soon as data collection starts and will continue throughout the writing process.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Phase 3: Five months</p> <p>Data Analysis (February 2003 to June 2003)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ongoing analysis of researcher's log with videotapes ongoing transcriptions of audio tapes continue analysis of audio tapes attend one-week writing retreat with JoBeth Allen (ELAN 8550) in May
<p style="text-align: center;">Phase 4: Five Months</p> <p>Writing Up the Results: June 2003 to October 2003</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> .ongoing analysis of audiotapes and teacher response journals .triangulation across data sources .begin dissemination of findings: .preparation of dissertation .potential preparation of proposals for presentation at national and state conferences .potential preparation of manuscripts for submission to refereed journals

APPENDIX F
FINDINGS LETTER

Findings Letter

278 Cavalier Road
Athens, GA 30606
January 13, 2004

Colleagues,

Well, I finally finished my analysis our teacher book club! Below is a summary of my findings:

The participants in this study are lifelong readers, who remember being exposed to reading within their homes at an early age. These teachers would use adjectives such as “voracious,” “open-minded,” “avid,” “wide-ranging,” and “instinctive” to describe themselves as readers. An analysis of responses in five book club discussion transcripts and ten interview transcripts revealed the following categories and themes below.

Conceptual category #1: Teacher response:

- .Theme 1: Participants questioned
- .Theme 2: Participants resisted
- .Theme 3: Participants referenced/related/connected

The responses of teachers to the five texts can be divided into three types, or themes. First, teachers felt empowered to question the following: the intent/agenda of the author; the development or underdevelopment of characters; lack of literature to represent diverse cultures accurately; the researcher’s selection of books for the meetings; the right of an author to write outside his/her culture; whether an author can truly represent his/her race in a work of literature; and their own responses to novels they had already read. Second, teachers resisted/rejected novels that they found offensive (due to language and graphic sex) by either refusing to read a work in its entirety or not attending a meeting to voice their disapproval. Finally, teachers often connected with a work or character by relating/referencing movies, other books, students, and events.

Conceptual category #2: Connections to race

- .Theme 1: Stories
- .Theme 2: White privilege
- .Theme 3: Acknowledgement of stereotypes
- .Theme 4: Family influences
- .Theme 5: Issues in books
- .Theme 6: Institutional racism in schools

Transcripts of the book club discussions revealed teachers did make connections between race/racism found in the texts to their own lives. Teachers of both races loved to tell stories in this book club, but interestingly, the type of stories told ran along racial lines. Black teachers tended to tell stories of racism that happened to them personally.

White teachers related stories of racism that involved people of color that they knew. Several white teachers admitted that “white privilege” allowed them the luxury of never having to think about race or culture. They reported that the pervasiveness of whiteness in American society maybe the reason they do not naturally see race in the same way as their African American counterparts. This book club experience empowered teachers to identify racial stereotypes in the novels as well those they held themselves. Teachers reported how their families influenced their views on race and/or established boundaries surrounding their interactions with people of other races. Teachers were able to connect personally and/or professionally with issues raised in the book (i.e., mixed/biracial children, interracial marriage/dating, conflict with racial identity). Finally, teachers acknowledged and identified racist policies and practices (institutional racism) found at Lakeside High School (i.e., tracking, lack of diversity in curriculum, low expectations, not preparing/training all students to be successful).

Conceptual category #3: The book club experience

.Theme 1: Roles

.Theme 2: Tensions

.Theme 3: Evaluations/Impressions

.Theme 4: Effects/Benefits

The participants in this study were interviewed about their experience participating in this book club. Half of the book club members report this was their first book club experience. The other half report they participated in one previous book club. Book club and interview transcripts reveal teachers positioned themselves into certain roles by their participation or silence during the meetings. Teachers reported certain tensions within the book club, including: the researcher’s selection of novels for the book club; teachers failing to completely read a novel or fully participate; and colleagues’ reactions to the books they deemed offensive.

Teachers gave their overall impressions and evaluations of the entire book club experience, including explaining the “difference” of the final book club meeting. The majority of teachers believed the book club continued to make steady progress in its race talk until the fifth and final meeting. This meeting seemed too dull in comparison due to these factors: the time/type of day (after school after a full day of work), three major participants were absent (Rico, Al, and Lloyd); it was the last meeting; and the type of book. Several book club members expressed their disappointment in the discussion and argued that the real reason this discussion was so different was because people felt more comfortable talking about school issues rather than addressing issues raised in Julie Landsman’s *A White Teacher Talks about Race*.

Book club members reached conflicting conclusions on the question: Did we talk about race? A majority felt book club members were open and honest in the book club meetings, but felt the talk could have developed on a deeper level. Others argued the book club did a fine job of talking about race considering the time constraints. At least three members believed the members spent more time talking about other topics than addressing race.

Finally, teachers valued the book club experience. They reported that their

participation resulted in the following positive outcomes: they talked to others (other students, wife) about issues raised in the books; the environment fostered sharing; members recommended books to others (students, student teachers, spouse); it forced members to set aside time to read books; teachers learned or were enlightened about: how they stereotype and group races of students; how they view groups of people; and how little they knew about diverse cultures and groups of people; teachers were exposed to some controversial books; the experience reaffirmed what some teachers were already doing with multicultural literature; the experience caused teachers to examine/re-examine their teaching practices; the English department connected as members got to know each other intimately; teachers reported their willingness to examine/discuss race issues as a result of their participation; one teacher wrote academic papers for his master's course based on two of the books; and several teachers said they planned to adopt the book club format with students.

I hope this week you will take the opportunity to think about the findings and then disagree, question, agree, or make comments about these findings that came collectively from the book club discussions, individual interviews, and my own notes. Feel free to communicate in writing (a brief note, letter, or email) or you may call me at home at 549-3389. If you would prefer I call you, let me know. I will be working at home on the final two chapters Thursday and Friday of this week. I hope to hear from each you by this Friday. These comments will assist me in making any necessary adjustments to the research findings as I complete the dissertation for a January 19 deadline.

I appreciate all that you have done to make this study possible. Your actual participation allowed me to start this project. Your feedback, kind words, encouragement, and prayers have enabled me to write these final two chapters.

God bless each of you.

Your colleague and friend,

Victoria Pettis

APPENDIX G

EMAIL REMINDER ABOUT FINDINGS

Email Reminder about Findings

-----Original Message-----

From: Pettis, Victoria

Sent: Friday, January 30, 2004 9:55 AM

To: CEN Language Arts Teachers

Subject: I need your feedback!

Monday I turned in the last chapters (chapters 5-9) of my dissertation. (Hallelujah!) I will meet with my major professor tomorrow afternoon to discuss revisions.

While I am revising this weekend, I would LOVE to include the reaction of my colleagues to the findings of the teacher book club that I gave you last week. I have it attached if you have misplaced your copy. If everything is fine, just reply FINE.

Comment only if you feel the need to do so. (Comments do not have to be long. A couple of sentences will suffice.) If you decide to make comments, I can easily use the response to this email. You do not have to write me a formal letter.

Victoria

APPENDIX H
RESPONSES TO FINDINGS

Responses to Findings

-----Original Message-----

From: Roberto

Sent: Monday, February 02, 2004 12:18 PM

To: Pettis, Victoria

Subject: RE: I need your feedback!

Victoria,

I apologize for my tardy reply. I remember reading the hard copy that you'd given me and the one in the book room. I am inclined to agree with most of your findings. I was pretty sure that emerging themes would be pretty apparent and you addressed all that I could think of and then some more which I'd not considered. Again, I applaud your diligence and contribution to the department.

Roberto

David

-----Original Message-----

From: Paul

Sent: Friday, January 30, 2004 3:12 PM

To: Pettis, Victoria

Subject: RE: I need your feedback!

Hi Ms. Pettis,

The only thing I stumbled on was this part:

Second, teachers resisted/rejected novels that they found offensive (due to language and graphic sex) by either refusing to read a work in its entirety or not attending a meeting to voice their disapproval.

This seems to insinuate that we all either refused to read or skipped a meeting based on offensive material. Personally, I read some things that were offensive to me, but it never stopped me from taking part in the discussion on the meeting date.

Otherwise, I think your synopsis reads true and well.

Thanks,
Paul

P.S. I have candy for the girls :)

-----Original Message-----

From: Kasey

Sent: Friday, January 30, 2004 12:22 PM

To: Victoria

Subject: RE: I need your feedback!

FINE.

On a side-note:

As I told you, maybe one reason we didn't speak too much about WHITE TEACHER was it addressed too real issues in our classroom and mind-set. Also, the author lost some credibility with many of us because of her lack of judgment about things like profanity, sexual promiscuity and drug use. While I know it's not popular in this politically-correct culture to "judge," nonetheless I believe this is an important point as we read about other teachers & their responses to children—especially children of color. It was as if she was saying, "I'll cut these people slack because they are black, or Latino, or low-income, or unwed mothers, or dopers, or whatever." Oftentimes, no "judgment" = condoning behaviors which are, if not immoral (another politically-incorrect word), at the least illegal. I believe there are absolutes in this world, whether other people believe so or not.

Subj: Re: Questions
Date: 1/26/2004 7:38:46 PM Eastern Standard Time
From: Pnyllis@yahoo.com
To: Victoriapettis@aol.com

Sent from the Internet ([Details](#))

Victoria,

I need to reread your findings Victoria because I came away with the idea that just because some of us did not respond well to Down These Mean Streets we were categorized in a certain rather negative light. Since I know you better than this, I must have misinterpreted what I was looking at. Again, I was in a great hurry when I looked at it and have not had time to revisit the findings. Surely one negative response would/should not merit such a categorization. Again, I promise to look more closely at your findings.

Phyllis

Subj: Re: Questions
Date: 1/29/2004 11:21:21 AM Eastern Standard Time
From: Pnyllis@yahoo.com
To: Victoriapettis@aol.com

Sent from the Internet ([Details](#))

Victoria,

I will keep my promise and look more carefully at the findings. I suppose my memory has so much positive stuff about the group until I refused to see much negative in the study. Remember you're the researcher and you are more objective. (Smile)

Phyllis

APPENDIX I

PERMISSION TO USE EDITORIAL CARTOON IN CHAPTER 5

Permission to use editorial cartoon in Chapter 5

JAN-15-04 09:46 PM ERKKI ALANEN / FUNDESIGN 915 581 6556

P.01

Jan 13 04 04:57p

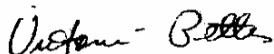
clarke central high sch

706 357 5269

P.2

Please fax me the information at 706-357-5269 (Clarke Central High School in Athens, GA) or email me at VictoriaPettis@aol.com. Again, I appreciate your generosity. Once my dissertation is published, I will fax you the citation so you may pick up the dissertation at your local library and see how your work was used.

Sincerely,



Victoria Pettis
English teacher and Ph.D. student

ATTN: VICTORIA PETTIS

1. CARTOON WAS ONE OF MANY EDITORIAL CARTOONS UNDER NAME: BORDERLINE
2. COPYRIGHT: ©ERKKI ALANEN 9/27/91
3. FIRST PUBLISHED IN EL PASO TIMES 9/27/91
4. YOUR VERSION WAS TAKEN FROM MY WEB SITE: WWW.ALANEN.COM

Good Luck,



APPENDIX J

THE HUNGRY MIND RACE QUESTIONNAIRE

The Hungry Mind Race Questionnaire

1. How was race explained to you as a child? Was it explained to you at all?
2. What messages did your parents communicate to you about race issues?
3. How does this differ from the way you communicate with your children about race?
4. What are your most basic fears about race?
5. What is your race?
6. How important is race to your sense of self?
7. In what ways do you organize your identity and resources around race? How consciously does race affect your choice of where to live, shop, or send your children to school?
8. What would be the ideal percentage breakdown for you between people of your race and of others in a neighborhood in which you lived? What is the actual percentage breakdown in your neighborhood? What would be the “tipping point,” the point at which the racial balance became uncomfortable enough to make you want to leave the neighborhood?
9. How do you account for the fact that the distribution of wealth among whites, blacks, and Native Americans is nearly the same now as it was in 1866, as slavery formally came to an end?
10. Is affirmative action an appropriate way of redressing racial inequities in this country?
11. Should whites in America think of themselves as a race?
12. How have your views about race and your own position in the racial scheme of things changed in the last ten years?
13. How did the O.J. Simpson case affect your sense of the American racial landscape?
14. What do you see as the dangers or positive effects of ethnocentricity, such as Eurocentricity or Afrocentricity?
15. What does the old concept of America as a melting pot mean to you?
16. What considerations should affect our immigration policies? Do you think we should place an equal quota on the immigration of Croats, Haitians, Canadians, Mexicans, Russians, Chinese, Somalians, Swedes, and Palestinians?
17. What are your hopes and fears for a multiracial America?
18. What questions would you add to this list?

APPENDIX K

RACE: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Race: Where do we go from here?

The reference list contains a list of resources I used to write this dissertation. This appendix lists resources, including some that have not been cited anywhere in this document, that readers may find valuable starting points if they wish to continue their study of multiculturalism/multicultural literature, institutional racism in schools, race/racism/race talk, and stereotypes. This list may be particularly helpful to educators who wish to educate themselves as well as their students on these topics. A short summary is provided for resources listed under audiovisual media.

Multiculturalism/Multicultural literature

Books

Anzaldua, G. (1999). *Borderlands: The new mestiza = La frontera* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.

Lowe, L. (1996). *Immigrant acts: On Asian American cultural politics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Powell, T.B. (2000). *Ruthless democracy: A multicultural interpretation of the American renaissance*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Shohat, E., & Stam, R. (1994). *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the media*. London: Routledge.

Spring, J. (2001). *Deculturalization and the struggle for equality: A brief history of the education of dominated cultures in the United States* (3rd ed.). Boston: McGraw Hill.

Takaki, R. (1993). *A different mirror: A history of multicultural America*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

Valdes, G. (1996). *Con respeto: Bridging the distances between culturally diverse families and schools: An ethnographic portrait*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Weaver, J. (1997). *That the people might live: Native American literatures and Native American community*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Institutional Racism in Schools

Books

Fine, M. (1991). *Framing dropouts: Notes on the politics of an urban public high school*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

The Freedom Writers with Erin Gruwell. (1999). *The Freedom Writers Diary: How a teacher and 150 teens used writing to change themselves and the world around them*. New York: Main Street Books.

Glickman, C. (1998). *Revolutionizing America's schools*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Kozol, J. (1991). *Savage inequalities: Children in America's schools*. New York: Harper Perennial.

McLaren, P. (1998). *Life in schools: An introduction to critical pedagogy in the foundation of education* (3rd ed.). New York: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc.

Oakes, J. (1985). *Keeping track: How schools structure inequality*. New Haven, NY: Yale University Press.

Ravitch, D. (2000). *Left back: A century of failed school reforms*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Wells, A.S., & Crain, R.L. (1997). *Stepping over the color line: African-American students in white suburban schools*. New Haven, NY: Yale University.

Audiovisual Media

Avildsen, J.G. (Director). (1989). *Lean on me* [Video]. Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video.

Based on a true story of high school principal Joe Clark, a tough, harsh educator and administrator who in 1987 was given a nearly impossible task: Reform inner city Eastside High School in Paterson, NJ, a hotbed of delinquent kids and drug dealers. Clark's tyrannical approach, hard-line policies, and high expectations alienate many members of the staff and the community, but they are credited with raising the school's basic-skills test scores and turning the school's reputation around.

Brooks, R. (Director). (1996). *Blackboard jungle* [Video]. Santa Monica, CA: MGM/UA Home Video Inc.

In this gritty urban drama, a war veteran turned teacher wants to bring order to his classroom at an all-male high school in inner-city New York. Because the school is

overrun by delinquents, most of the faculty have given up and meekly let the delinquents do what they want, including steal, destroy property, refuse to respect authority and threaten the female teachers with rape.

Law, L., (Executive Producer), Musca, T. (Producer), & Menendez, R. (Director). (1998). *Stand and deliver* [Video]. Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video.

Based on a true story, this movie tells the story of Jaime Escalante, a math teacher at East Los Angeles' Garfield High School, who refuses to accept the low expectations placed upon 18 inner-city, Mexican American students in his basic math class. Despite the odds stacked against them, Escalante pushes and inspires his students to pass the AP test in math.

Levin, P. (Director). (1981). *The Marva Collins story* [Video]. New York: Hallmark Entertainment.

Based on a true story, Marva Collins, an African American teacher with 14 years of teaching experience in Chicago's dead-end public school system, uses her own retirement money to open her own school. Collins managed not only to teach her "incorrigible" kids to read, write and reason, but also to gain an appreciation for such literary giants such as Chaucer and Shakespeare.

Smith, J.N. (Director). (1995). *Dangerous minds* [Video]. Hollywood, CA: Hollywood Pictures.

Based on Lou Anne Johnson's memoir *My Posse Don't Do Homework*, a former Marine is called upon to teach the "rejects from Hell" at an inner-city school in California. While at first her African-American and Latino students scoff at Lou Anne, she ultimately gets them to open up to learning and literature.

Race/Racism

Bettag, T. (Executive Producer), Harris, R. (Senior Producer), & Siegel, E. (Director). (1996, May 22). *ABC News Nightline: America in black and white: The color line and the bus line* [Video]. Washington, DC: Nightline, ABC News.

Part of a five-part *America in Black and White*, this episode is about the traffic accident which killed Cynthia Wiggins, an Afro-American teenage single mother in Buffalo, New York. It presents the idea that placing the bus stop for this route on a 7-lane major thoroughfare with no sidewalks contributed to Cynthia's death. It also includes local news clips and interviews with people, who talk about the politics involved in the routing of the bus line from the predominantly black area of the city to the new shopping area where Cynthia worked.

Brady, S., Northup, B. (Executive Producers), & Reeder, P. (Producer/Director/ Writer). (1988). *Racism: A matter of hate* [Video]. Los Angeles: RKO Television.

This program examines racist attitudes and racism against Afro-Americans, Hispanic Americans, Japanese Americans and Jews in the Los Angeles area and offers some possible solutions to help combat racism. It includes stories of racism and discrimination (i.e., renting and housing, the workplace, law enforcement, and hiring) and discussions on gangs and gang violence, the KKK, neo-nazis and other white supremacist groups, hate crimes, ethnic humor and its contribution to racism, and views for and against bilingual education.

Clavell, J. (Director). (1967). *To Sir With Love* [Video]. Culver City, CA: Columbia TriStar Home Video.

This movie tells the story of an educator who accepts a teaching position in London's East End slums. To reach his rebellious students, he treats them with the respect they deserve by human beings and as the adults they are to become. Race plays a small part in this movie; the emphasis is more on teacher expectations.

Fanning, D. (Executive Producer), & Lennon, T. (Writer/Producer). (1988, May 10). *Frontline: Racism 101* [Video]. Boston: WGBH Educational Foundation.

Frontline examines the disturbing increase in racial incidents and violence on America's college campuses by focusing on the University of Michigan and Dartmouth College, which both experienced a series of racial tensions involving blacks and whites.

Singleton, J. (Writer/Director/Producer), & Hall, P. (Producer). (1995). *Higher learning* [Video]. Culver City, CA: Columbia TriStar Home Video.

This drama examines the personal, political, and racial dilemmas facing a group of college freshmen as they begin their first semester at Columbus University.

Moore, M. (Writer/Director/Producer), Glynn, K., Czarnecki, J., Bishop, C., & Donovan, M. (Producers). (2003). *Bowling for Columbine* [Video]. Santa Monica, CA: MGM Home Entertainment.

This documentary analyzes how America's preoccupation with guns and tendency toward violence led to the massacre at Columbine High School. Of particular interest, the documentary explores how the demonization of the black community – the black male in particular -- has contributed to America's culture of fear.

Neukum, C. (Producer/Director). 1991. *Racism : Points of view* [Video]. New York: MTV Networks, Inc.

This MTV News special report examines the causes and effects of racism through original interviews, news footage, and celebrity commentary. It traces the roots of racism and its effect on both pop culture and everyday life, including recent racist events, racial stereotyping, segregation, interracial romance, racism in the music business, and extremist movements like the White Aryan. In addition, the program looks at how blacks are portrayed in movies and discusses Afrocentrism, the movement of African-Americans back to their cultural roots.

Terkuhle, A. (Executive Producer) & Thomas, P.J. (Director). (1991). *Racism PSA's* [Video]. New York: MTV Networks.

Taped Public Service Announcements (PSAs) are part of a campaign to encourage viewers to put an end to racism.

Turman, L., Tisch, S. Peak, K., Carraro, B. (Executive Producers), Kaye, T. (Director), & John Morrissey (Producer). (1998). *American history x* [Video]. Tampa, FL: Warner Home Video.

A dramatic exploration into the roots of race hatred in America, this movie tells the story of how a White Supremacist sees the errors of his ways while jailed for murder. Released from prison, he realizes he is too late to save his younger brother who is heading down the same path.

Race Dialogue/Talk

Bettag, T. (Executive Producer), Harris, R. (Senior Producer), & Siegel, E. (Director). (1996, May 23). *ABC News Nightline: America in black and white: What about black racism?* [Video]. Washington, DC: Nightline, ABC News.

Part of a five-part *America in Black and White* series, this episode features Jane Elliott, a former Iowa elementary school teacher and the subject of a documentary titled *Blue Eyed*, who uses a controversial presentation to demonstrate learned discriminatory behaviors. After watching excerpts of the documentary, Nightline Anchor Ted Koppel interviews Bob Woodson, an Afro-American conservative, about his perspective.

Bettag, T. (Executive Producer), Harris, R. (Senior Producer), & Siegel, E. (Director). (1996, May 24). *ABC News Nightline: America in black and white: The search for common ground* [Video]. Washington, DC: Nightline, ABC News.

Part of a five-part *America in Black and White* series, this episode brings together a group of prominent African Americans and a group of other prominent Americans in a town-meeting style discussion. Each group is in a separate studio, but views the other group's discussion on monitors. Nightline Anchor Ted Koppel leads the groups through topics of "lynching" stories, differences and similarities

in experiences, crime experiences, impact of immigrants on the black community, other minorities' race-related experiences, and achieving racial healing.

Fisher, H., Bartlow, L., (Producers) & Singer, B. (Director). (1963). *Feedback: The race dialogue: Stage one* [Video]. Chicago: WBBM-TV.

Viewer-voters cast their ballots on important community issues, including race and related issues of jobs, housing, schools and public aid. Questions concern feelings about integration, civil rights protests, legislation to integrate jobs, housing and schools, current and preferred racial makeup of one's school and neighborhood, and whether blacks and whites have different standards of morality. It also includes footage of protest marches and sit-ins, middle-income neighborhoods, slums, and schools.

Hewitt, D. (Executive Producer), & Hartman, R. (Producer). (1993, April 4). *60 Minutes: Equal but separate* [Video]. New York: CBS News.

60 Minutes examined what has been called the "re-segregation of college campuses." In its observation of students at Duke University, *60 Minutes* found black students chose to operate in largely separate circles than their white counterparts in an effort to achieve empowerment. One observer believes university officials have contributed to the problem by allowing separate minority dorms, student unions, etc., as a means to recruit more minorities. White students, who were interviewed, reported feeling intimidated and confused by black separatism and believed such separatism was counter-productive in achieving racial harmony. The program includes footage of student life at Duke University.

Miller, N., & Randall, G.A. (Executive Producers). (1999, 2000). *Any day now* [Television series]. New York: Lifetime Television.

This television series is about the friendship of two women in their mid-30s, one black and the other white, in Birmingham, Alabama. Issues of race and racism are often a topic of discussion for these two friends.

Reid, F. (Producer/Director). (1991). *Skin deep* [Video]. Los Angeles, CA: Community Television of Southern California.

This program shows a group of Southern California teenagers of various ethnic groups participating in the Brotherhood-Sisterhood Project, a summer camp run by the National Conference of Christians and Jews. The camp is designed to have teenagers face their own prejudicial attitudes and stereotypical behaviors.

Strigel, C., & Verhaag, B. (Producers). (1996). *The essential blue-eyed* [Video]. San Francisco, CA: California Newsreel.

In this 87-minute video, former teacher Jane Elliot conducts her famous blue-eyed/brown-eyed experiment with a group of multiracial, Midwestern adults. Using humiliation, she exposes the blue-eyed group to the world African Americans experience face on a daily basis. Elliot challenges viewers to confront racism in the workplace, within their communities, and within themselves.

Wah, L.M. (Producer/Director). (1994). *The color of fear* [Video]. Oakland, CA: Stir Fry Productions.

This explosive, provocative film depicts the pain and anguish of eight men of Asian, European, Latino, and African descent as they struggle and confront the issue of what race and racism means in their daily lives.

Winfrey, O. (Executive Producer). (1992, July 14). *An exercise in prejudice* [Talk show episode]. In Harpo, Inc. (Producer), *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. Chicago, IL: Harpo, Inc.

Weidlinger, T. (Producer). (1997). *Facing racism* [Video]. Princeton, NJ: Films for the Humanities & Sciences.

This program follows five participants of different ethnic and racial backgrounds through a three-day Unlearning Racism workshop. Later, the participants meet and reflect on the complex issues surrounding racism and the difficulties involved in resolving them.

Racial Stereotyping

Books

MacCann, D., & Woodard, G. (1985). *The black American in books for children: Readings in racism* (2nd ed.). Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc.

Audiovisual Media

Cardillo, L. F. (Producer/Writer). (2004, January 3). *Casting calls* [Television broadcast]. New York: Discovery Times Channel.

This television documentary examines how and why Hollywood continues to embrace some ethnic and racial stereotypes and how the motion picture has changed and remained the same.

Chessler, M., Alberghini, C. (Writers) & Hughes, T. (Director). (2003). *Sticky fingers* [Television series episode]. In Goldberg, W., Wilmore, L. Turner, K., Hughes, T., (Executive Producers) & Nodella, M. (Producer), *Whoopi*. New York: American Broadcasting Company.

Griffith, D.W. (Producer/Director). (1991). *The birth of a nation* [Video]. Los, Angeles, CA: Republic Pictures Home Video.

One of the first full-length silent films ever made, it depicts the Ku Klux Klan's rise in the South following the Civil War as they do battle against vicious and recently freed

African American slaves. Directed by D.W. Griffith, this three-hour epic has been credited with birthing racist stereotypes in Hollywood.

Lee, S. (Producer/Director), & Kilik, J. (Producer). (2000). *Bamboozled* [Video]. USA: New Line Home Entertainment.

This satirical comedy focuses on stereotypes and racism in American television and how America's racist past still impacts the present.

Riggs, M. (Producer/Director). (1987). *Ethnic Notions: Black People in White Minds* [Video]. San Francisco: California Newsreel.

This award-winning documentary traces the evolution of stereotypes – the Uncle Tom, Sambo, the savage brute, and the Pickaninnies – found in cartoons, feature films, popular songs, advertisements, household artifacts, and children's rhymes since the 1820s.

Riggs, M. (Producer/Director) & Kleiman, V. (Producer). (1991). *Color adjustment* [Video]. San Francisco: California Newsreel.

This documentary traces over forty years of turbulent race relations in prime entertainment, including how racial conflict was absorbed into non-threatening formats for popular prime series. Interviews with black actors and Hollywood producers reveal the behind-the-scenes story of how prime time was integrated.

White Privilege

Books

Kivel, P. (1996). *Uprooting racism: How white people can work for racial justice*. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers.

Rothenberg, P.S. (Ed.). (2002). *White privilege: Essential readings on the other side of racism*. New York: Worth Publishers.

Audio Visual Materials

Lukasiewicz, M., & Harvey, E. (Producers). (1991). *True colors* [Video]. Northbrook, IL: MTI Film & Video, 1991.

In this 20/20 special, ABC news correspondent Diane Sawyer follows two college educated men in their mid-thirties, one black, one white, as they involve themselves in a variety of everyday situations – shop at a mall and at a car dealership and look for employment and housing -- to test levels of prejudice based on skin colors. This video illustrates the racism that supports white privilege in this country.

Mirell, L. (Executive Producer), Bennett, J.B. (Producer), & Peebles, M.V. (Director). (1987). *Watermelon man* [Video]. Burbank, CA: Columbia TriStar Home Video.

In this outrageous comedy, a white bigot's privilege come under attack after he wakes up one morning to find that fate has played a cruel trick on him: His sunlight has turned him permanently into a black man. For the first time in his life, he gets to experience life minus the benefits of white privilege.