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Getting the News from Poems:

Critical Civic Pedagogy in Urban High School English Classrooms

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Education

by

Nicole Mirra

2012

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Getting the News from Poems:

Critical Civic Pedagogy in Urban High School English Classrooms

by

Nicole Mirra

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor John S. Rogers, Chair

American poet William Carlos Williams once wrote, "It is difficult to get the news from poems, but men die miserably every day from lack of what is found there." This line speaks to the crucial but often unacknowledged importance of literature in helping citizens to understand and analyze the major challenges that our society faces. Indeed, despite the relationship between literacy and democracy in practice, the fields of literacy and civic education have operated largely in isolation and privileged standardized test preparation and economic competitiveness over meaningful preparation for collective public life. As a result, two interrelated challenges inform my dissertation research: the lack of meaningful civic learning opportunities and the lack of high-quality literacy instruction, specifically with regard to low-income students of color in urban schools.

This study seeks to re-envision literacy instruction as a critical civic activity that helps students and teachers create new ways of understanding and transforming a complex, often unequal society. My mixed-methods study utilizes a nationwide survey of over 300 high school English teachers and ethnographic case studies of three high school English classrooms in Los Angeles to answer the following questions: How do high school English teachers conceptualize 'good' citizenship and the purposes of literacy instruction? How do the civic experiences and attitudes of teachers relate to the practices they introduce to their classrooms? How do students and teachers negotiate civic identities through shared engagement in literacy practices?

This study puts critical theories of democracy, literacy, and classroom practice that have traditionally stood alone into productive conversation with each other in order to frame new critical classroom research. The use of critical ethnographic observation provided insight into the micro-processes through which students and teachers construct meanings about literacy and democracy, while survey research targeting a larger, purposeful sample of English teachers from across the country also provided valuable information about the ways that educators think about the purposes of their discipline.

Major findings from my work indicate that teachers nationwide rank preparation for civic and political life as an important purpose of English education and conceptualize literary texts as powerful tools of civic learning that spur discussion and analysis of complex and controversial social issues. Teachers from low-income and high-minority schools are more likely to connect literacy to civic empowerment and develop curriculum that pushes students to use literacy to improve society. Indeed, the teachers in my study encouraged students to use reading and writing skills in conjunction with digital literacy tools to interact with civic leaders and develop community action projects about local issues. Nevertheless, teachers continually negotiate

barriers to connecting literacy development to civic learning that must be addressed, particularly the pressures of standardized testing and high-stakes accountability systems.

My research offers insight into innovative classroom practices that can transform the way we prepare teachers, educate students, and conceptualize the purpose of literacy and civic education in public education policy. It provides strategies that aim to create a more robust, diverse democracy through empowering urban youth of color academically and civically.

The dissertation of Nicole Mirra is approved.

Ernest D. Morrell

Pedro A. Noguera

Thomas M. Philip

John S. Rogers, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2012

Dedication

To my students - past, present, and future. All of my work is for you.

And to Scott, who constantly reminds me of Frederick Douglass' timeless words: if there is no struggle, there is no progress. We've made it through this one, my dear – now on to the next chapter!

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Acknowledgements

I find it surreal to see my name printed all alone on the first page of this massive document, especially considering the sheer number of people who helped me get here and who deserve so much of the credit for the ideas contained in these pages. I am so grateful for the opportunity to share my heartfelt thanks with them.

First, to my family. Mom, Dad, Chris, and the whole gang, I know how difficult it has been for you to watch me move across the country to pursue my dream, but thank you for continuing to support me and telling everyone that story about how I must have had some smarts knocked into me when I tripped and hit my head in the backyard at the age of 10. Thanks for always taking me to the library and helping to foster the love of reading that started me on this journey. I never forget what time it is on the east coast and I couldn't have gotten here without you.

I have to thank my high school teachers, particularly Mr. Barnshaw and Mr. Valerio, who saw potential in me as a writer and modeled for me the kind of teacher I'm always striving to become – one who is passionate about sharing a love of knowledge and who makes all students feel like they can change the world.

Becoming a teacher has been the defining experience of my life. Teaching is not only my profession, but also my passion; it has forever changed the way I see myself and how I define my purpose in this world. My students at ACORN Community High School taught me far more than I'm sure I ever taught them, and memories of my days with them – the successes, the heartbreaks, and the laughter - have been the driving force that has guided me through this dissertation. I love and thank all of you – I do this work to help strive for a world that will be more worthy of you.

The academy can be an overwhelming and alienating place, far from schools and classrooms, and I am grateful every day to have been guided through my doctoral work by an amazing committee of scholars who supported my desire to stay close to students and teachers. Dr. John Rogers, I could not have asked for a better advisor – you always demanded intellectual rigor from me in such a supportive and constructive way. The thoughtfulness and care that you took in reading my multiple drafts and providing meaningful feedback has served as a model that I hope to emulate one day. Your tireless work on behalf of communities and in support of grassroots organizing inspires me.

Dr. Ernest Morrell, I always laugh when I think about how you did not trust me as an unknown, incoming student to work with the Council of Youth Research students in the summer of 2008; I hope that I have earned your trust over these years and taken good care of this amazing program you created. You have provided me with opportunities during these four years that I only could have dreamed of as a developing scholar – to continue working with students and teachers, to present our work across the country, to publish together, and to just listen to you teach/preach about the work that needs to be done. Thank you for constantly pushing me to go past the limits I thought I had; I model my career path on your example.

Dr. Thomas Philip, thank you for your ability to listen closely to my ramblings and distill the ideas that I clumsily try to express! I hope to emulate your teaching style because you are a true facilitator, drawing ideas out of students and forcing us to think deeply about what they mean in classrooms for teachers and students. Your support for my love of teaching means a lot. And Dr. Pedro Noguera, thank you for your reminders to clarify my work so that my message is expressed in the clearest terms possible. Your attention to detail and your willingness to challenge my ideas has helped me grow immensely.

The most meaningful learning that I experienced at GSEIS was with the students and teachers of the Council of Youth Research. Fred, LT, Katie, Eddie, Maria, and all of the students – this community reminds me of what all young people can accomplish when they are loved and given opportunities to engage with issues that matter to them. Your presentations kept me going when I began to forget what I was doing in graduate school, and your passion to uplift your schools and communities reminds me of why I became a teacher. Keep being the change you want to see in the world. You led me to the teachers and students I worked with on this study – thank you to Ms. Nieto, Ms. Brown, and Mr. Prado, along with all of your students, for welcoming me into your classrooms and trusting me to write about your amazing work.

I am convinced that the Urban Schooling program attracts the most amazing educators in the world, and I want to thank all of my Moore Hall buddies – we will always share a bond that no one else will fully understand because we went through this together. Thank you to the best cohort ever – Rhoda, Arlene, Antero, Cliff, Karla, Jonathan, Elizabeth, Karisa, and Monique – your perspectives helped shape my research and always kept me grounded. And to the extended Urban Schooling family – Mel, Danny, Dart, Mark, Antonio, Ebony, Mollie, Cueponca, Ursula, Wendy . . . I could go on and on – I'm honored to call you my friends and colleagues. A special shout-out to Dr. Rema – I don't think I could have made it through this dissertation process without your guidance. And a big thanks to my IDEA family - Jessie, Jared, Jerchel, Carolyn, Nickie, and Nery – for providing me with a home in Moore Hall.

I don't have nearly enough space to sufficiently thank all of the friends who somehow stuck with me even when I spent hours talking about exciting subjects like methodology. But thank you to Joe and Steph for reminding me where I come from; Kristen for being the best roommate ever and watching over me as I paced the floors; Mark for talking baseball with me

and joining me in the doctoral student club; Rich and Joel for reminding me to laugh about it all; Byron, Rodolfo, Alex, and Thomas for helping me take breaks (and drinks); and Alicia and Greg for helping me to fall in love with California.

And, of course, I don't have the words to thank you, Scott. I remember telling you about how scared and excited I was about embarking on my dream of earning my Ph.D. when you took me to dinner in Boston all those years ago. You believed in me then and somehow that faith has never wavered through all the ups and downs that followed. You've lived through every new idea, every false start, every long-distance phone call, and every insecurity, and you never let me forget what my goals were when it was so easy for me to get lost along the way. You believed in me when I didn't believe in myself. You've been my sounding board and my rock, and I do not exaggerate when I say that this dissertation would never have gotten written without your love and support. I hope that this makes you proud. I love you so much.

Nicole Mirra

Education

- **Ph.D. in Urban Schooling**, University of California, Los Angeles, Graduate School of Education & Information Studies, June 2012.

- **Ed.M. in Education Policy & Management**, Harvard University, Graduate School of Education, 2008

- **M.S.T. in Secondary English Education**, Pace University, 2005

- **B.A. in English & American Literature**, New York University, 2003

Professional Experience

- **Program Coordinator – Council of Youth Research**, UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access, Los Angeles, CA, July 2008 – present
  - Coordinating all logistics and development for the Council of Youth Research, a youth participatory action research program that mentors high school students from Los Angeles public high schools to become critical researchers of their own schools and communities. Running weekly meetings at high school sites. Developing and implementing curriculum for summer and year-long programs. Managing participating IDEA staff and teacher leaders. Writing grants.

- **Adjunct Professor,** University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA, March 2012 – May 2012
  - Developed and taught an online course for pre-service English teachers in their credentialing program entitled 'Guided Practice.' Used Adobe Connect software to conduct a discussion-based, interactive seminar. Mentored students as they completed student-teaching demonstrations and offered critiques aimed at improving their pedagogy and curriculum development skills. Fostered a classroom environment geared toward social justice for urban students.

- **Teaching Assistant**, UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, Los Angeles, CA, September 2011 – December 2011 & September 2010 – December 2010
  - Assisted Professor Gary Orfield and Professor Patricia Gándara with their course in 'Equal Rights and Unequal Education' for undergraduate students. Held office hours and mentored students. Evaluated student work. Taught class sessions.
  - Assisted Professor Ernest Morrell with his course in Critical Literacy Methods for TEP students pursuing credentials in Secondary English Education. Held office hours and mentored students. Evaluated student work. Led class sessions. Conducted student teaching evaluations at school sites.

- **Book Review Editor**, InterActions, The Journal of the UCLA Graduate School of

Education and Information Studies, Los Angeles, CA, May 2009 – June 2011
- o Solicited and edited book review submissions that furthered the social justice mission of this scholarly journal. Recruited graduate students and early-career scholars to submit reviews in order to further their academic careers.

- **Fellow Advisor**, New York City Teaching Fellows, New York, NY, June 2005 – September 2005
    - o Facilitated summer seminar for pre-service secondary English teachers. Wrote and delivered curriculum about critical literacy education. Mentored pre-service teachers.

- **Teacher/AP English Program Coordinator/Debate Coach**, ACORN Community High School, Brooklyn, NY, September 2003 – June 2007
    - o Taught English classes in grades 9-12, including: Freshman Literacy, Debate, SAT Preparation, College-Prep English, and AP English. Organized Advanced Placement testing and attended College Board retreats.

- **MetLife Fellow**, Teachers Network Leadership Institute, New York, NY, September 2005 – September 2006
    - o Researched, wrote, and published a qualitative teacher action research study on innovative classroom practice. Participated in monthly meetings with teacher leaders influencing city-wide educational reform.

Academic Honors/Awards

- UCLA Chancellor's Prize
- Harvard Urban Scholars Fellowship

Publications

- Mirra, N. & Morrell, E. (2011). Teachers as civic agents: Toward a critical democratic theory of urban teacher development. *Journal of Teacher Education, 62*(4), 408-420.

Professional Certification

- California State Preliminary Single Subject Teaching Credential – Secondary English

- New York State Permanent Teacher Certification – Secondary English Education

Professional Societies
- American Educational Research Association
- National Council of Teachers of English

CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The trouble...is that we have taken our democracy for granted; we have thought and acted as if our forefathers had founded it once and for all. We have forgotten that it has to be enacted anew in every generation, in every year and day, in the living relations of person to person in all social forms and institutions.

- John Dewey (1937)

John Dewey's quote calls to mind the inherent fragility of democracy as a way of life and reminds us of the vigilance that we, its beneficiaries, must maintain to ensure its continued survival. When the current generation of researchers, politicians, and policy-makers sound the alarm about the most pressing threats facing American democracy in the 21st century, they often focus on two intertwined issues: an increasingly polarized public sphere and a civically disengaged and disillusioned citizenry. Characterizations of our national political climate are quite bleak. Harry Boyte (2003) laments the prevalent "distributive politics of left and right" (p. 3) in which groups of citizens "demonize their opponents and proclaim their own virtues and blamelessness for society's troubles" (p. 4). Cornel West (1998) warns of the danger our society faces when "we do not even respect each other enough to listen to each other" (p. 10). And Henry Giroux (2009) explains that in our increasingly consumerist society, genuine democratic dialogue is discouraged and "the only kind of speech that is acceptable is that of the fast-paced shopper" (p. 12).

In turn, recent decades have seen a decline in the level of trust that American citizens have in their government (ANES, 2010), as well as in their active participation in public life. In his best-seller, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, political scientist Robert Putnam (2000) warns of the "treacherous rip current" of disengagement from

political and civic life in the United States that has been "pulling [us] apart from each other" over the past several decades (p. 21). In addition to the overall decline in civic engagement, an extensive and growing body of scholarly literature documents declining participation among young people in activities ranging from voting (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Levine & Lopez, 2002) and voluntary group membership (Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999) to reading the newspaper and discussing politics (Galston, 2003; HERI, 2004). Even more troubling, this research has revealed persistent disparities between the civic and political engagement of low-income youth and youth of color and their more affluent, white counterparts (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Foster-Bey, 2008).

While the decline in youth civic engagement has been attributed to a variety of factors, a consensus has emerged that schools have an important role to play in reversing this trend (Kahne & Sporte, 2008); indeed, research indicates that levels of virtually every measure of civic involvement are correlated to formal educational attainment (Nie, Junn, & Stehlik-Barry, 1996). These findings have spurred an increased interest in the role that public schools can and should play in preparing students to take on the responsibilities of democratic citizenship, as well as renewed scrutiny of the impact of educational inequalities that put many low-income students and students of color at a disadvantage in public life and threaten the continued renewal of democracy.

A long history exists that connects schools to the maintenance of democracy; indeed, the architects of our republic saw citizenship education as the primary rationale for the founding of a system of public education (Pangle & Pangle, 2000). Literacy has historically been viewed as a particularly crucial academic component of citizenship education that schools are responsible for instilling in the public; as Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1818, "To instruct the mass of our citizens

in these, their rights, interests and duties . . . in [primary schools] should be taught reading [and] writing." This connection between literacy and democracy has persisted in the wording of current academic and civic standards. In the introduction to their ELA standards, the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English (1996) stress that failure to prepare students with advanced reading, writing, listening and speaking skills undermines "not only our nation's vision of public education, but our democratic ideal" (p. 6). And in the newly released ELA 'common core standards,' being adopted by school districts across the country, the National Governors Association (2010) stresses that the skills gained in English classes are "essential to both private deliberation and responsible citizenship in a democratic republic" (p. 3). In turn, a landmark report from the Carnegie Corporation (2003) situates the best practices of civic education, including analysis of political documents, debates, and discussions of current events, as deeply related to literacy.

Despite these promising intentions, the results of national civics and literacy assessments reveal discouraging patterns in achievement in both areas. Less than 30% of students at all tested grade levels (4th, 8th, and 12th grade) scored 'proficient' on the 2006 NAEP assessment of civic knowledge (Lutkus & Weiss, 2007). In addition, data from national standardized assessments documents the declining number of students who possess the literacy skills needed to succeed in college, careers and civic life; only 30% of eighth graders performed above the basic level in reading comprehension on the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress, while only 24% of twelfth graders were judged proficient in writing (NAEP, 2008; Lee, Grigg, & Donahue, 2007).

Furthermore, data shows that race and class-based disparities in civic engagement and literacy achievement persist at all levels of the educational system. Data from the National

Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) civics test shows that at all tested grade levels (4th, 8th & 12th), low-income, African-American, and Hispanic students receive lower scores than middle-class, white and Asian students (Lutkus et al, 1999). The International Education Association (IEA) Civic Education study showed similar gaps among American 9th graders (Baldi et al, 2001). In terms of literacy, the American College Testing (ACT) program reveals that African American students, Hispanic students, Native American students, and students from families whose yearly income is less than $30,000 are up to two and a half times less likely to be prepared for college-level reading than white, Asian, and middle-class students (ACT, 2005). NAEP scores over the past decade reveal similar gaps in reading comprehension and writing, especially among students who are English language learners (Snow & Biancarosa, 2003). The exhaustively documented inequalities in academic success based on race and class in the public education system, from standardized test scores to graduation rates, have prompted some in the field to declare that our country is facing not only an academic achievement gap, but a "civic achievement gap" as well (Levinson, 2007).

Disparities in civic and literacy skills, as well as lack of civic participation, lead to important consequences at the collective community level, particularly in terms of political disenfranchisement. In our society, it is increasingly those on the privileged side of entrenched inequities of race and class who speak in powerful monologue to elected officials in order to promote and protect their interests (Bartels, 2008). As the American Political Science Association Task Force on American Inequality notes in a 2004 report, "Citizens with lower or moderate incomes speak with a whisper that is lost on the ears of inattentive government officials, while the advantaged roar with a clarity and consistency that policy-makers readily hear and routinely follow" (p. 1).

Some interpret the academic data and political trends and conclude that civic inequality is narrowly a cognitive problem of insufficient knowledge and skills on the part of low-income communities of color; as a result, much of the discourse that has emerged in response to this state of affairs has focused on how to "improve" or "fix" students from these communities. I argue in my dissertation, however, that disparities in civic 'achievement' are instead manifestations of systemic inequality, and that the civic knowledge, skills and attitudes of low-income students of color are routinely ignored or criticized in mainstream civic and literacy education.

It is crucial to acknowledge the social and educational context in which inequalities of literacy achievement and civic engagement are occurring; such analysis enables a shift from criticizing the presumed deficits of individual schools and specific racial groups to analyzing the problematic assumptions in curriculum, pedagogy, and policy that structure success and failure. A grasp of this context starts with recognition that even while media reports in the wake of President Obama's election speculated about a "post-racial" society, race-based inequalities continue to manifest themselves within a social context characterized by systemic racism - one that allocates disproportionate economic, political, social, and academic rewards to a dominant white majority while structurally and culturally marginalizing communities of color (Bonilla-Silva, 2001). The maintenance of this racialized social system is achieved not necessarily through overt racism, but instead through the transmission of normative ideologies within institutions such as schools that serve to reproduce dominant power relations (Omi & Winant, 1986). American society is guided by several normative ideologies that make systemic racism difficult to see, including the ideas of meritocracy and the "American Dream," which promise that success is predicated on hard work and that all citizens have an equal chance to achieve their dreams if they put forth enough effort (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2004). In addition, changing

ideas over the past several decades about what a democratic society looks like are highlighting individual responsibility and challenging the government's efforts to create a social safety net.

More and more, democracy is being conceptualized in our public institutions through the lens of neoliberal ideology. Neoliberalism has become the dominant political discourse in America over the past several decades, bringing with it a focus on deregulation, economic competitiveness and globalization; as a result, the free market has supplanted social democratic policies as a driving force in many areas of public life (Hursh, 2007). Neoliberalism operates on the principle that citizens are best served economically and socially through limited government intervention in their lives and defines freedom and democracy in economic terms as the right of individuals to make entrepreneurial decisions within markets, including the market of education (Foucault, 1979; Hursh, 2007).

David Hursh (2007) argues that neoliberal ideas have manifested themselves in education policy from the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) through *No Child Left Behind* (2001) as a result of discourse connecting schooling to economic success (or failure) and using globalization as a rationale for implementing reforms focusing on job skills and the basics. He explains, "High stakes testing and accountability requirements are promoted as necessary under globalization to increase efficiency, accountability, fairness and equality" (p. 499). He adds that standardized testing is also presented as "a quality indicator to the consumer" in ways that contribute to the "de-professionalization of teachers" (p. 500). Hursh argues that while neoliberal reforms are often touted for their potential to close the racial achievement gap through a stated focus on providing rigorous curriculum to all students across the board, they have instead increased educational disparities, contributed to a narrowing of the curriculum, and sought to privatize education by focusing on charter schools and voucher programs (p. 502). This ideology largely

ignores the structures of inequality that prevent individuals from marginalized communities from participating in markets on an even playing field and attributes disparities in outcomes to individual failures rather than the result of systemic oppression.

This ideological context has huge ramifications for how civics and literacy are conceptualized in school and classroom practices. In terms of civics, the focus on 'basic skills' in a test-driven atmosphere eliminates opportunities for any explicit instruction about democracy; indeed, focus on democracy is frowned upon in a neoliberal context focused narrowly on individuals and markets (Harvey, 2005). An analysis of the current landscape of civic education across most states reveals that citizenship is not being treated as a priority in our schools. Responsibility for civics instruction, when it is addressed at all, is usually delegated to social studies teachers alone, and civic standards are vague, overly reliant on factual knowledge, and impossible to achieve in the given time frames (Gagnon, 2003). Current standards too often offer "encyclopedic" coverage of details about government structures and focus on patriotic, triumphalist rhetoric that ignore the experiences of low-income communities and communities of color. As such, many current civic education interventions have "little meaning to students" and "do not connect to their own identities as citizens" (Torney-Purta & Vermeer, 2004, p. 14). Additionally, the disproportionate amount of pressure faced by urban schools to increase standardized test scores leaves many students in these schools with far fewer civic learning opportunities than students in suburban schools (Kahne & Middagh, 2008).

In terms of literacy, report after report describe interventions that situate reading and writing as events that occur in a social vacuum, without any context besides that of the standardized test and any goal except the acquisition of college acceptance and employment. In their exhaustive review of eleven recent adolescent literacy reports, Faggella-Luby, Ware, and

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Capozzoli (2009) found that policymakers consistently operate from a narrow definition of adolescent literacy focused on academic reading skills that prepare students for postsecondary school and work (p. 469-470). In her critique of federal literacy policy, Kris Gutierrez (2009) notes that the current "fragmented" literacy reforms fail to promote a more substantial vision of literacy in which "thinking, reading, and writing critically are fundamental to developing globally competent citizens who can access new information and technologies across a wide range of content domains" (p. 477). A great deal of literature also points to the denigration of the out-of-school literacy practices of urban students of color within English classrooms (New London Group, 1996).

The general dearth of meaningful civic and literacy learning opportunities combined with the specific marginalization of the civic attitudes and literacy practices of students of color suggests that the civic disengagement of communities of color is being socially structured and facilitated within public schools. Such disengagement is being accomplished through a neoliberal logic of schooling that suppresses dialogue about democracy through a focus on standardization and economic competitiveness. Literacy, the skill that has the strongest conceptual links with democracy, has been cut off from its explicitly civic rationale, and as a result, civic education and English education have operated in isolation and have failed to speak to the experiences of urban students. Nevertheless, literacy remains one of the most powerful tools available to promote civic consciousness and speak back to dominant schooling ideology. It has historically sustained struggles for civil rights for marginalized groups of citizens, and continues to do so; as Teresa Perry (2004) explains in "Freedom for Literacy and Literacy for Freedom: The African-American Philosophy of Education":

> You pursued learning because this is how you asserted yourself as a free person, how you claimed your humanity. You pursued learning so you could work for the

racial uplift, for the liberation of your people. You pursued education so you could prepare yourself to lead your people. (p. 11)

English classes possess a unique potential to tap into the voices and experiences of students of color in ways that increase their identification with reading, writing, and speaking for civic action. In addition, nationwide professional organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of English are poised to engage in productive dialogue and professional development with English teachers across the country about the unique role that their discipline plays in providing students with the critical language and literacy skills needed to sustain an equitable democracy.

In light of these possibilities, my dissertation seeks to make sense of how dominant perceptions of literacy instruction and civic education have impoverished both subjects, and then to speak back to the status quo by exploring the potential of English classes as spaces in which students can develop identities as critical citizens and challenge social and political inequality.

Explanation of the Study

I set out to address the following research questions in my dissertation:

- How do English teachers conceptualize the relationship between literacy and citizenship?

- How do the civic experiences and attitudes of urban high school English teachers relate to the literacy practices that they introduce to their classrooms?

- How do students and teachers negotiate civic identities through shared engagement in literacy practices in urban high school English classrooms?

This study explores the unique role that urban high school English classrooms play as sites of civic learning. I sought to explore these classrooms from a variety of angles in ways that complemented each other and provided a nuanced view of trends in the discipline; as a result, I

utilized methods that provided me with three interconnected data sets. I first conducted an online survey of a national subset of high school English teachers in order to explore how teachers in different school contexts conceptualized the purposes of literacy and citizenship in the 21st century, as well as the practices they introduced to their classrooms. As I discuss further in Chapter 4, my analysis revealed that teachers in high-minority and low-income schools were more likely than their counterparts in low-minority and high-income schools to espouse views of literacy and citizenship that emphasized empowerment and critical consciousness. I also found that classroom discussions were popular forms of learning in many English classrooms.

These survey findings guided my inquiry as I engaged in ethnographic research in three high school English classrooms in Los Angeles, all of which were located in high-minority and low-income schools. I was particularly interested in studying the work of teachers who saw connections between literacy and civic education and demonstrated a commitment to student empowerment so that I could expand upon my previous findings and gain specific insight into how these teachers manifested their beliefs in their classroom practice. My survey results also led me to focus on the ways that discussions in these classrooms spurred civic dialogue and learning (see Chapter 6). My ethnographic data complemented my survey data by providing the "how" and the "why" related to the "what" of my quantitative results. The final piece of the puzzle involved exploration of teacher communities that explored the benefits and challenges of speaking back to dominant ideas about literacy and citizenship and engaging in critical civic literacy pedagogy in urban classrooms. I engaged in reflection groups with the three teachers featured in my ethnographic classroom case studies in order to learn more about the process involved in translating beliefs about literacy and citizenship into classroom learning, as well as the institutional and social barriers that teachers often face to realizing their pedagogical visions.

Taken together, findings from these three data sets offer a complex portrait of the civic potential of high school English classrooms from both the macro and micro levels and provide the basis for meaningful changes in policy, practice and theory that I believe can improve the literacy and civic learning of students of color in urban contexts.

I will now tease apart each of the three data collection strategies that I employed in order to provide more specifics about their design and implementation.

Online Survey: Before I began my ethnographic work in three Los Angeles classrooms, I felt that it was important to get a more nuanced sense of how a slightly larger subset of English teachers around the country conceptualized the relationship between literacy and democracy. As a result, my first phase of data collection involved the creation and distribution of an online survey to a purposive sample of high school English teachers that sought to understand how their beliefs about democracy related to the literacy practices that they introduced to their classrooms. While several surveys exist that measure *student* civic engagement and civic identity, none specifically investigate the civic knowledge, beliefs and attitudes of *teachers*; as a result, I developed an original questionnaire that borrowed items from existing surveys[1] and added new questions based on my analysis of state and national literacy content standards. The survey investigated how teachers conceptualize citizenship and the purposes of literacy in the 21st century, in addition documenting the types of civic activity that they engaged in and the literacy practices that they incorporated most often into their classes. This data allowed me to gauge how and to what extent teachers' ideas about democracy and citizenship influenced the their views about literacy instruction as they chose instructional materials and planned lessons for their

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[1] I borrowed items from the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) Civic Education Survey, the California Civic Education Survey, the 2004 National Election Study and the UCLA Higher Education Research Institute Faculty Survey.

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students.

The purposive sample for the survey consisted of high school English teachers nationwide who belonged to the English Companion Ning, a popular online community of over 23,000 members geared toward professional development and social networking among English teachers. The members of this site represented a particular slice of the national high school English teacher population that is tech-savvy, proficient in social networking, and presumably interested in professional growth through either the sharing or pursuit of online resources. Over 300 English teachers from 46 states responded to this survey, providing me with a wealth of data that offered an evocative portrait of English teaching in the 21st century. Major findings that will be discussed in future chapters indicate that teachers nationwide ranked preparation for civic and political life as an important purpose of English education and conceptualized literary texts as powerful tools of civic learning that spur discussion and analysis of complex and controversial social issues. I also found that teachers from low-income and high-minority schools were more likely to connect literacy to civic empowerment and develop curriculum that pushes students to use literacy to improve society.

Ethnographic Classroom Case Studies: The second part of my study relied upon critical classroom ethnography. Critical ethnography was the most appropriate methodology for my examination of how shared engagement in classroom literacy practices influenced student identity because of its focus on in-depth description of how communities continuously make sense of their situated experiences in the world (Heath & Street, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). I specifically drew upon literature from the ethnography of communication (Hymes, 1974) and from critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1989) in order to analyze situated literacy practices (Barton & Hamilton, 2005) that took place in public high school English classrooms within the

greater Los Angeles metropolitan area. Public schools were crucial to my analysis because of their relationship to the state and, in turn, their historically articulated purpose to prepare students for citizenship in American democracy. I focused my research at the high school level because of the child development literature that points to adolescence as a crucial time for the exploration of social and political ideology and the formation of civic identity (Erikson, 1968). English classrooms were particularly central to my work due to their explicit focus on texts and literacy as a discipline. Finally, I focused on Los Angeles schools serving low-income students of color because of my interest in the ways that institutions in urban areas have the potential to both re-inscribe and challenge systemic racism and the unequal distribution of resources.

I was specifically interested in exploring exemplary classroom environments in which teachers consciously sought to dismantle barriers between literacy and civic education and analyzing how civic and political issues were addressed in those classroom communities. In order to identify the teachers in whose classrooms and schools I would be conducting my ethnographic fieldwork, I used a process of community nomination with a purposeful sample of students and teachers (Foster, 1991). I have been the coordinator of a youth civic engagement initiative called The Council of Youth Research for the past three and a half years, which has given me the opportunity to develop relationships with students and teachers from five high schools across Los Angeles, including the three in which I eventually decided to conduct my research. The program draws explicit connections between critical literacy and critical citizenship education for the students who are involved, and because I was interested in working with English teachers who were wrestling with these same issues, I asked students and teachers to name English instructors at their schools who they felt embodied 'powerful' literacy teaching as we understood it in our community of practice. While the definition is still evolving and is

expressed differently among individual teachers, we defined powerful English teachers through our previous discussions as those who took seriously the connection between literacy and freedom and viewed the study of texts as a civic act. These discussions guided the students' nomination process. For my study, I chose to work with teachers who had been deemed 'powerful' by both teachers and students, and eventually decided to work with one teacher in each of the three neighborhoods in which our students lived – South Los Angeles, East Los Angeles, and Watts.

My three focus teachers, while all committed to the ideas of critical literacy and critical pedagogy in some form, manifested differences across many dimensions - including gender, race, years of teaching experience, and school environments - that became important in my data collection and analysis. Ms. Nieto, who identified as Chicana, had ten years of teaching experience in both San Francisco and Los Angeles and as I started working with her was teaching 10th grade at Southeast High School in Watts, which had recently transitioned from a district school to a collection of charter schools. Ms. Brown identified as white and was in her sixth year of teaching 10th grade at Eastside High School in East Los Angeles, one of the largest schools in Los Angeles that had recently been re-organized into several small learning academies in a partnership with the mayor's educational partnership. And Mr. Prado, who identified as Filipino-American, was in his third year of teaching 12th grade at Southwest High School, a traditional high school transforming into a collection of themed academies with the assistance of community partners.

I was specifically interested in the micro-level analysis of classrooms because I see them as local spaces in which macro-level discourses about citizenship and literacy are introduced, negotiated, and transformed. This micro-level analysis involved close examination of the

dialogue in which students and teachers engaged around literacy content and social issues, as well as study of the norms of classroom practice and the types of pedagogy and curriculum that teachers employed.

Because I was most interested in the daily interactions between teachers, students, and content within urban schooling contexts, my primary unit of analysis was the classroom; however, considering the ways that schools manifest organizational structures and normative ways of doing things that impact teacher and student practice in classrooms, it became important for me to choose school sites for my research that differed on several important dimensions, including size, school governance structure, and student body demographics.

From February to June 2011, I observed these teachers' classrooms three days per week during a particular class period that worked best logistically for each of us. In addition to writing field notes and videotaping particular lessons, I worked to gradually become a participant in each community of practice. I worked with students in class and shared thoughts and questions with teachers about what I was seeing and hearing, in the process developing a collaborative, grounded theory about civic pedagogy in English classrooms. I created transcriptions of classroom conversations and analyzed student work looking for evidence of civic learning related to literacy. I also interviewed teachers to learn more about their personal civic identities and the influences upon their classroom practice.

Reflection Groups: Based on the conversations that arose during this 5-month period, I brought the teachers together during the summer and fall of 2011 for three 90-minute reflection group sessions to develop research questions, share student work, and collectively analyze our ideas about what constituted civic pedagogy in the English classroom. I was interested in the knowledge that could be produced about civics and literacy through dialogue among teachers.

The links between teacher beliefs, classroom practice, and student learning are complex, particularly as they relate to literacy and citizenship. I strove to articulate these links in my dissertation by engaging in sustained analysis of classrooms and observing how those within them constructed and negotiated understandings about these topics. I accomplished this by constructing in-depth portraits of three classrooms and exploring how my three focus teachers and their students made sense of themselves as literate individuals and civic agents through engaging in literacy activities ranging from classroom discussion to letter-writing to poetry performance. I aimed to demonstrate the various roles that English classes can play as crucibles of civic learning and highlight the necessity for teachers to define and clearly articulate purposes for literacy instruction that challenge dominant, narrow discourses of economic competitiveness.

The primary unit of analysis that I was interested in was classroom practice. The interaction between teachers, students, and content within specific school contexts required an investigation at multiple levels, from the macro level of the social structure in which schools operate (influenced by systemic racism and neoliberal ideology) to the micro level of individual teacher and student identity development. The classroom community acted as a mediating space in which macro and micro discourses interacted in novel, socially situated ways, and my dissertation explored the new meanings that were created about literacy and citizenship as participants engaged in literacy activities in those spaces. The concepts that aided in my analysis of how critical literacy practices were developed and understood were those of critical literacy, socio-cultural understandings of learning, and civic identity.

Critical literacy offers an alternative to neo-liberal ideology and provided me with a theoretical framework that acknowledged the connection between citizenship, literacy, and a context of systemic inequality. Theorists in the field argue that in order for literacy to become

meaningful, it must be conceived as a form of cultural production and a crucial way in which people create and transform meanings about our world (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Street, 1984). This perspective takes seriously the necessity for literacy to relate to the promotion of democracy and social justice and focuses on literacy as a means of political empowerment for oppressed populations, linking the reading of the word to a reading of the world (Morrell, 2008; Freire, 1970; Barton, Hamilton & Ivancic, 2000). This connection between literacy and citizenship is rooted in American philosopher John Dewey's definition of democracy as a form of "associated living" that is constantly being re-invented through dialogue and social inquiry (Dewey, 1916/1927). Literature is especially important in this view because it creatively represents issues and ideas that are occupying the popular imagination (Morrison, 1992).

My classroom research was grounded in socio-cultural perspectives of learning and identity (Rogoff, 2003). Most important for my work was the idea that learning is ontological as well as epistemological – it does not simply involve a change in what students know, but in who they are as well (Wortham, 2004). Identity is seen as a constantly evolving and fluid entity that is made up of stories that we tell of ourselves and stories that others tell about us (Gee, 2000; Sfard & Prusak, 2005), and these identities are implicated in the learning process as students become integrated into communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) committed to democratic dialogue.

I was particularly interested in the civic aspects of identity, which involve how individuals understand and relate to a particular community or polity, as well as their sense of agency to act within it (Youniss, McLelland, & Yates, 1997). While some argue that low-income students of color fail to achieve civic identities (Atkins & Hart, 2003), a growing number of scholars argue that students from marginalized communities simply conceptualize civic identities

in unique ways based on the collective experience of systemic racism and disenfranchisement in American society (Watts & Flanagan, 2007; Rubin, 2007; Nasir & Kirshner, 2003). A number of scholars of color have theorized the conflicted experience of citizenship among those who have endured racial injustice (Glaude, 2007; DuBois, 1903; Baldwin, 1963). My analysis of literacy classroom practices focused on the ideas and experiences that students and teachers were drawing upon to develop their civic identities, as well as how these identities shifted as a consequence of engaging in shared dialogue.

Major Themes

In the chapters that follow, I will analyze the findings that emerged from my three data sets in light of the theory and literature that informed my research questions and study design. While the online survey, ethnography, and reflection group data will each merit their own in-depth analysis, the triangulation of the data has helped me to tease out overlapping major themes that give coherence and unity to the entire study.

First, my data indicates that teachers across contexts view preparation for political and civic life as an important purpose for literacy instruction. While this may not seem a revolutionary idea, it is crucially important because it indicates that while teachers certainly understand the necessity of preparing students for college and careers, they maintain a more complex view of their discipline that pushes back on the dominant, neoliberal-inspired ideas that are narrowing literacy and civic education policy, practice, and theory. My findings chapters will explore how individual teachers understand this relationship between literacy and citizenship and translate it into their classroom practices.

While the teachers in my study voiced a common commitment to civic learning in high

school English classes, they expressed an entire continuum of complex views about the kinds of citizens they wanted to prepare their students to become. Respondents to the online survey, along with my three focus teachers, defied any categorization when it came to defining the "good" citizen, consistently stretching the boundaries of existing typologies of civic beliefs. I strive in the following chapters to analyze how teachers' beliefs led to the adoption of different classroom literacy practices, and how these practices suggested various civic identities for students.

High school English teachers bear a large portion of their schools' responsibility for providing students with the knowledge and skills they need in reading, writing, listening, and speaking to lead productive and personally fulfilling lives. Adding a responsibility for civic education may seem overwhelming for already frazzled teachers. My data indicates that this fear can be mitigated by the fact that discipline-specific ELA activities can simultaneously provide literacy and civic skills. Traditional literacy practices, from vocabulary and grammar instruction to persuasive essay writing, can offer civic learning when teachers frame them in ways that include discussions of current social issues and engage with students' developing civic identities. My findings chapters offer in-depth exploration of how particular literacy practices play out in various classroom contexts in order to provide options for practitioners.

While the beliefs about literacy and citizenship that teachers bring in to their classrooms have an impact on classroom practices, my data indicates that institutional and social forces complicate the extent to which teachers are able to fulfill their instructional visions. The teachers who responded to my survey shared a concern with my focus teachers about the negative impact that high-stakes testing, grading, and institutional policies related to accountability had on their ability to enact the civic-oriented pedagogies. These challenges are explored to highlight the way that neoliberal ideology presents barriers to the realization of critical civic literacy pedagogy in

urban high school English classrooms; however, my data also indicates that teachers working in collaboration can develop strategies to mitigate these barriers.

Finally, my data suggests that collaborative teacher learning represents a democratic form of professional development that gives educators the opportunity to develop identities as public intellectuals and contribute new knowledge to the discipline. When teachers have the opportunity to ask questions about their practice and share strategies and resources aimed at improving student learning, they experience identity development that encourages them to reflect on their teaching philosophies and grow as professionals.

The next section indicates how these themes will be explored chapter-by-chapter.

Chapter Overviews

The chapters that follow expand upon the ideas introduced in this introduction, detailing the theoretical and empirical frameworks for my research, the methods that I used to explore my research questions, and the findings that emerged from this study.

Chapter two explores the bodies of literature that informed my work, focusing specifically on socio-cultural understandings of learning and identity, theories of democracy and civic identity, and the traditions of critical pedagogy and critical literacy. I focus specifically on the role of practice in structuring learning opportunities and the ways in which identity development occurs in the context of historically and culturally-situated practice; these ideas serve as the basis for my exploration of classrooms as burgeoning civic communities in which students try on various identities as citizens. I further analyze the conceptions of citizenship offered by democratic theories in order to illustrate the competing discourses available to teachers and students as they discuss social issues in their classrooms. Indeed, discussion and

dialogue are central to this chapter, and I call upon the writing of John Dewey to explore its role in the creation of knowledge and democratic communities. Finally, I demonstrate how critical literacy incorporates these ideas about learning, identity, democracy, and dialogue into a coherent pedagogy with the potential to empower students of color in urban classrooms (as well as their teachers).

Chapter three provides a description of my positionality as a researcher along with explanations of the three major methods that I employed to tackle my research questions – survey research, critical classroom ethnography, and reflection groups. I systematically explore the rationale behind my methodological choices and offer detailed descriptions of my data collection and analysis procedures. Survey research allowed me to take a wide view of the variety of perspectives about literacy and citizenship that a national cross-section of high school English teachers brought to their teaching, in the process raising questions that would inform my work with my focus teachers and provoke further study. I explore the diversity that my sample exhibited on a variety of demographic indicators, as well as the process in which I engaged to construct an original survey questionnaire. For the ethnographic portion of my study, I detail the procedures I used to recruit teachers who were all considered exemplary by their students and colleagues, but who also differed on a variety of dimensions, from years teaching and racial backgrounds to teaching philosophies and school environments. I explore the steps I took to become a participant observer in these settings and gather data from the perspectives of the teachers and their students. Finally, I explain how the practitioner inquiry literature contributed to my development and implementation of teacher reflection groups, in which my study participants engaged in focused dialogue about the possibilities and challenges of engaging in critical literacy pedagogy aimed at encouraging civic learning and engagement.

Chapter four presents findings from the online survey that I conducted that elicited the responses of over 300 high school English teachers from across the country belonging to an online professional networking site. I explore the views that teachers hold about citizenship and the purposes of literacy instruction in the 21st century and then attempt to draw connections between these beliefs and the literacy practices and instructional techniques that they introduce to their classrooms. I use teachers' open-ended responses to illustrate the range of social issues that they discuss with their students and the role that literary texts play in fostering civic dialogue. I also analyze the extent to which teachers participate in civic and political activities themselves outside of the classroom.

Chapters five and six delve into the findings from my classroom ethnographies with my three focus teachers in public high school classrooms in Los Angeles. Chapter five provides portraits of each of the three teachers in turn, detailing their personal educational and civic histories and demonstrating how these experiences influenced their developing philosophies about teaching literacy. This chapter also explores the ways that their teaching philosophies manifested themselves in their classrooms through vignettes focused on the literacy practices and civic learning opportunities that the teachers engaged in with their students. My analysis demonstrates the similarities and differences between the teachers in terms of the types of civic communities that they envisioned through their pedagogy, the forms of civic engagement in which they encouraged their students to participate, and the literacy activities that they designed.

Chapter six concentrates on the discussions that took place in my focus teachers' classrooms by analyzing the controversial social issues that were raised, the ways in which the teachers and students positioned themselves as citizens in these discussions, and the visions of democracy that were constructed through their dialogue. My analysis of this classroom dialogue

focuses on the ways that students' race and class backgrounds, as well as their experiences with public institutions, shaped the way that they constructed opinions about complex issues of social concern and conceptualized their own abilities to exert agency in public life. I also focus on the role that literary texts play in fostering classroom discussion, largely through providing an outlet through which students and teachers can experiment with different visions of society and imagine more just futures.

Chapter seven explores the findings that emerged from the reflection groups that I facilitated with my three focus teachers. I discuss the ways that the teacher inquiry literature influenced the creation of these groups and how these meetings functioned as both a form of data collection for my study and as a site of teacher learning about the possibilities and challenges of engaging in critical literacy instruction within local and national educational contexts that often erected barriers to doing so. These meetings shed light on the ways that grading procedures, standardized testing, and school governance structures presented dilemmas for teachers attempting to develop authentic civic learning opportunities for their students. They also demonstrated how teachers negotiated these barriers by continuing to interrogate their practice and developing shared strategies to provide empowering instruction to their students. I analyze these teacher groups as uniquely democratic spaces of teacher growth and development.

Finally, Chapter eight offers concluding remarks about the contributions and implications of this research, recommendations for practice and policy, and questions for further research. I discuss the lessons learned that can contribute to teacher professional development, teacher education programs, and school leadership in ways that encourage strengthened connections between literacy and civic education. I also present suggestions for additional studies that would further contribute to building a knowledge base about what critical literacy instruction looks like

in practice with young people and how to create literacy activities that possess authentic civic

purpose.

Significance and Rationale

      In, "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower," the American poet, William Carlos Williams
(1955), writes,

"It is difficult to get the news from poems, but men die miserably every day from lack of what is
found there."

      It can be difficult indeed to connect the study of literacy and literature to the enactment of

citizenship and 'get the news' from poems, especially in a political and educational context in

which the two disciplines are isolated from each other and driven by the neoliberal ideology of

the market; however, Williams poignantly illustrates the devastating and dehumanizing effects

that come from ignoring the immediacy of literacy to our daily lives as citizens. Failure to

recognize the power of literacy deprives us of crucial ingredients that make up our identities, for

the stories that we tell of ourselves and of our nation are inextricably wound up in the stories

composed by our fellow citizens. Without a critical civic pedagogy in English classrooms,

literacy will remain isolated from our civic life, and civic life will, in turn, remain unimaginative

and restricted to dominant forms of engagement. My dissertation aims to reinvigorate these

disciplines by demonstrating the power of critical civic literacy practices and jump-starting a

conversation for teachers and teacher educators about the power of reading the world through the

word. I am particularly interested in demonstrating the ways that the disciplinary practices at the

very core of English Language Arts, including close reading and textual analysis, lend

themselves in crucial ways to preparing students to become critical citizens. This research seeks

to contribute to increased levels of civic engagement and critical literacy among students of color

so that their generation can enact a more equitable, just, and imaginative form of democracy.

CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

As introduced in the first chapter, the primary aim of my research was to analyze how students and teachers negotiated identities as citizens through shared engagement in classroom literacy practices. My research questions, as well as my methodology, were based upon epistemological assumptions about learning, identity, citizenship and literacy that I explore here in order to justify the course of action that I decided to take in my data collection and analysis. For instance, my assumption that shared classroom learning influences student identity, including the civic aspects of identity, is grounded in particular understandings of learning and identity that are quite different from those guiding current mainstream education policy; as such, my literature review begins with an introduction of socio-cultural learning theory and its implications for how identity is conceptualized within communities of practice.

I then apply these understandings of learning and identity to the way that the specifically 'civic' aspects of identity have been conceptualized in education. I explore the universal and differentiated views of civic identity and analyze the different ways in which they respond to the tensions of democratic theory and the social, historical and cultural contexts of inequality navigated by communities of color in this country. This exploration stresses the importance of the concept of dialogue to both the development of citizenship and the maintenance of communities of practice. I then discuss the importance of dialogue to an understanding of critical pedagogy, specifically in the area of critical literacy; within this discussion, I stress the crucial importance of literary texts as cultural tools in the classroom. My review concludes with an analysis of current attempts to integrate literacy and citizenship in research and practice in order to situate the unique contributions that I hope to provide through my work.

Socio-cultural Learning Theory

One of the most common refrains of the current, market-based education discourse is that "all children can learn." The power of this statement, as with much neoliberal-influenced rhetoric, is its appeal to logic and common sense – it seems to counter deficit thinking about the academic abilities of students from marginalized communities and encourage schools to take responsibility for educating all students to high levels of achievement. The problem, however, is the way that this proclamation masks a color-blind, individualized, and standardized perspective on learning; it assumes that since we all agree on the basic premise that children *can* learn, we need not consider differences in *how* students learn or the unequal *contexts* in which they are learning.

Instead, this perspective proposes that educators simply need to expose all students to an identical set of knowledge and skills. As Kris Gutierrez (2008) explains, this "sameness as fairness principle" leads to the adoption of "English-only, one-size-fits-all curricula and policies and practices driven by high stakes assessment . . . that make it easier to roll back small gains in educational equity" by ignoring the inequitable social structures in which learning is situated (p. 148). These policies present a reductive view of teaching and learning as mere transmission of information, as well as a limited conception of curriculum as a body of objective knowledge. Both projects mask the fact that what is presented in schools as 'objective' often reflects the interests of only a small slice of the population, which in turn excludes and devalues the knowledge and experiences of many others - specifically those from low-income communities of color.

Socio-cultural learning theorists, led by Lev Vygotsky, present an alternative view of learning that seeks to re-contextualize student experiences in schools by examining "the role of

social and cultural processes as mediators of human activity and thought" (Nasir & Hand, 2006, p. 458). They stress that learning is not something that occurs at the level of the individual, but in the context of social interaction with others within a particular cultural and historical milieu; as Vygotsky (1978) states, "Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level . . . All the higher functions originate as actual relationships among individuals" (p. 57). Theorists argue that within all local social interactions, learning is occurring at multiple, mutually constitutive levels - the personal, interpersonal, and institutional – and that this learning can best be analyzed through the concept of cultural practice (Rogoff, 1995). Cultural practices capture both the situated nature of learning within particular cultural contexts and its connection to shared activity, both of which mediate each other (Cole, 1996; Saxe, 1999). Researchers who apply this learning theory to school contexts argue that student academic learning cannot be separated from the unequal nature of the school and classroom contexts in which it takes place and the larger discourses that frame public education (Lee, 1993; Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003).

Another crucial tenet of socio-cultural learning theory is that learning is mediated through the use of tools or artifacts that are culturally produced (Wertsch, 1998). Language is presented as the major cultural mediator of thought and action that bridges the individual and the social by "reflecting the location of our views within particular social, historical and power structures" (Nasir & Hand, 2006, p. 461). As such, everything that we express through language, either to ourselves or to others, is always in actual or 'imagined' dialogue with the discourses available in a particular cultural community (Bakhtin, 1981). The inherent relationship of language to dialogue will be especially crucial for my research because the learning of the students and teachers in my study will not only be mediated by their own language use, but by the language

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used in artifacts such as literary texts as well; this will add layers of complexity to the dialogue that takes place in the classroom.

Socio-cultural learning theory, through its focus on the social nature of learning and the dialogue that we are constantly engaged in with larger discourses of power, pays special attention to the role of social 'others' in facilitating individual learning. Much of the literature on the role that other people play in this process focuses on their roles in communities of cultural practice. This is also the concept that much of the educational research that employs socio-cultural learning theory latches onto as a unit of analysis. An exploration of its conceptual power is the next crucial part of my research epistemology.

Communities of Practice

The concept of a community of practice takes all of the components of socio-cultural learning theory described above – the social nature of learning, the multiple levels of development, and the importance of mediating tools and practices – and applies them to the study of organizations to describe the processes through which learning takes place in specific cultural spaces. This concept originated in the work of Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991), who define a community of practice as a group of people mutually engaged in a common enterprise through a shared repertoire of tools and stories. They explain how new members of socially established groups learn the practices of those groups by slowly increasing their levels of participation in shared cultural practices, with help from scaffolding provided by more experienced members, until they themselves become core participants. Importantly, Lave and Wenger argue that this engagement in "legitimate peripheral participation" can take place in any setting in which a joint need and common practices have been established among a group; indeed,

they stress that this learning can take place "no matter whether there is any intentional educational form at all" (p. 40). In fact, they largely confine their analysis of communities of practice to informal learning spaces because of their belief that schools do not provide the conditions in which authentic learning can take place; this belief stems largely from the aforementioned de-contextualization and standardization of knowledge (p. 97).

Nevertheless, education researchers have argued that schools can indeed become places where communities of practice are formed, and a growing body of literature has attempted to empirically document the ways that mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and repertoires of practice can be developed despite the institutional constraints of the current educational system (Hogan, 2002; Linehan & McCarthy, 2001). In his more recent work, Wenger (1998) has discussed the implications of his learning theory for school-based learning communities, stressing the need for students and teachers to negotiate meanings about the goals of their learning within their local social contexts rather than accept meanings imposed upon them by larger institutional forces (p. 54). He acknowledges that communities of practice, such as schools, are influenced by broader social discourses of power, but maintains that they still possess the agency to create their own meanings in local settings (p. 131). Importantly, this implies that the purpose of school-based communities of practice cannot be to develop mastery of knowledge simply for the school-related purposes of taking standardized tests or earning high grades – they must be geared toward authentic outcomes and connected to "communities outside their settings" (p. 275).

In the case of my research, while I did not directly utilize the concept of communities of practice in my data analysis, I was interested in the extent to which classrooms could connect with the authentic community of democratic citizens. I explored how teaching and learning in

classrooms provided students with authentic knowledge, skills, and attitudes that they would need in order to participate civically in both the local and national context. I also explored how teachers integrated the knowledge that students brought with them from the communities to which they belonged. Finally, the concept of communities of practice was of interest to me because it helped me to explore the extent to which teachers can structure classes around norms of community respect and dialogue rather than appeals to arbitrary school rules.

When individuals become core members of communities of practice, they do not simply come to possess a body of knowledge; instead, according to Lave and Wenger, they develop "identities of mastery" (p. 41). This reference to identity speaks to the idea that learning is not only about changing what we know, but also, because of its social and contextual nature, about changing who we are – an idea that is crucial to the framing of my research. It is to the relationship of socio-cultural learning theories to the development of identity that we now turn.

Learning and Identity

Wenger provides an explicit statement of the connection between learning, communities of practice and identity development; as he puts it, "Because learning transforms who we are and what we can do, it is an experience of identity" (p. 215). From this perspective, identity is not an 'essence' that remains static and stable in individuals across time and space; instead, it is a collection of constantly shifting possible ways of being that are manifested in different ways within different contexts. Importantly, identity is not simply an individual characteristic; as James Gee (2000) explains, identity involves "being recognized as a certain 'kind' of person" by others" just as much, if not more, as it involves characterizing ourselves (p. 99). Just as learning is inherently social from this perspective, so is identity development. Gee provides a typology

that identifies the different interpretive systems that can be invoked in defining individuals as certain 'kinds' of people; these include the historical and cultural discourses around nature (N-Identities), the norms and traditions of institutions (I-Identities), the discourse and dialogue of others (D-Identities), and the workings of affinity groupings (A-Identities) (p. 108). Individuals have the agency to negotiate these various discourses, but are also constrained by the fact that, despite their own chosen identities, others will situate them in particular, socially significant ways. Gee reminds us that in analyzing identity we must always recognize the institutions or groups of people who are invested in sustaining certain discourses, as well as the ways that these discourses are replicated or challenged in local contexts.

While Gee's definition of identity focuses primarily on the identities imposed upon us by others, other scholars put more emphasis on the ways that we construct our own visions of ourselves; for example, Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (2001) define identity as the self-understandings created by individuals that possess particular emotional resonance for them (p. 3). Both definitions are heavily invested in the idea that identity is something brought into being through communication and deeply embedded in "cultural worlds" (Holland et al, 1998). In fact, researchers Sfard and Prusak reject the idea that identities exist as "extra-discursive entities" at all; instead, they claim that they are purely language-based, defined as "narratives about individuals that are reifying, endorsable, and significant" (p. 16). Despite the slight differences in emphasis, all of these theorists support the assumption that student and teacher identity develops in the context of shared engagement in classroom communities of practice.

For the purposes of my research, I was specifically interested in the ways that broad discourses around citizenship and democracy interacted with individual experiences in the classroom to influence the civic aspects of student and teacher identity; however, before

analyzing this concept of civic identity and its relationship to socio-cultural, practice-based

perspectives on learning, it is useful for my purposes to lay out the broad social context in which

people of color in this country have experienced citizenship. An understanding of how systemic

racism has structured civic experiences is crucial to establishing a framework for the fostering of

civic identity in schools that validates and builds upon the experiences of marginalized

communities.

Race, Inequality and Citizenship

> *So will my page be colored that I write?*
> *Being me, it will not be white.*
> *But it will be*
> *a part of you, instructor.*
> *You are white---*
> *yet a part of me, as I am a part of you.*
> *That's American.*
> *Sometimes perhaps you don't want to be a part of me.*
> *Nor do I often want to be a part of you.*
> *But we are, that's true!*

> - Excerpt from "Theme for English B" by
>   Langston Hughes (1951)

In this classic Langston Hughes poem, the young, African-American narrator responds to

his white English professor who has asked him to write a page about himself for homework, with

the specific instruction to "let that page come out of you" so that it will be "true." As the young

man walks from Columbia University to the Harlem YMCA, he produces a complex meditation

on the connection between race and citizenship that reflects both the attraction and repulsion, the

belonging and alienation that has complicated the relationship between white citizens and

citizens of color for centuries and produced very different perceptions regarding what it means to

be American.   While the narrator implies that American-ness includes a partial intermingling of

whiteness and 'colored-ness', he also acknowledges the separation and tension that springs from this strained relationship so weighed down by the history of racism; in effect, he seems to argue that there remains something distinctive about the experience of citizenship for those who do not belong to the dominant racial group in this country and who have seen a different, more hypocritical side of America.

In her article, "A Movement Against and Beyond Boundaries: 'Politically Relevant Teaching' Among African-American Teachers," Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant (1999) gives a succinct summation of the paradoxical experience of being black in America; as she puts it, "African-Americans have long lived a disturbing contradiction – the experiences of systemic racial oppression in the first modern democracy, and exploitation in a country founded on the ideals of justice and liberty" (p. 707). The atrocities of slavery ran counter to what America purported to stand for, and as the victims of this oppression, some African-Americans like W.E.B. DuBois (1903) documented a struggle to live in the tension between being an undeniable part of this country, and yet a group apart. As he reflects in *The Souls of Black Folk*, "One ever feels his twoness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (p. 5). James Baldwin (1963), in *The Fire Next Time*, echoes DuBois' expressed duality by characterizing African-Americans as being qualitatively different from white Americans because they possess "the great advantage of having never believed that collection of myths to which white Americans cling: that they were born in the greatest country the world has ever seen . . ." (p. 101). Both authors express identification with democracy that is tinged with an ambivalence stemming from the unfulfilled status of its rhetoric around freedom, liberty and equality as far as African-Americans are concerned.

Baldwin, DuBois, and Beauboeuf-Lafontant name institutionalized racism as the uniquely American foundational tragedy that shapes citizenship. In his book, *In a Shade of Blue: Pragmatism and the Politics of Black America*, Frankie Glaude argues that "our reflections on democracy in the United States must begin by engaging the historical legacies of racism that threaten democracy's realization" (p. 40). Glaude argues that these reflections will inevitably bring us face-to-face with the very contradictions that the other authors cited here have recognized about America – that its ideals do not match up with the race-based experiences of its citizens of color. Baldwin lays out the civic context that black Americans find themselves in using the starkest terms: "At the center of this dreadful storm, this vast confusion, stand the black people of this nation, who must now share the fate of a nation that has never accepted them, to which they were brought in chains" (p. 104).

Just as institutionalized racism has irrevocably influenced the way that people of color experience citizenship, it has also impacted their experiences in almost every other facet of social life, from housing and employment to health care and the criminal justice system. In terms of education, an extensive body of literature has documented the disparities in physical resources, qualified teachers, and college-preparatory curriculum between schools serving white communities and communities of color. It is within this social and historical context that students and teachers are forging understandings about democracy in schools. While socio-cultural learning theory reminds us that identity development occurs through engagement in practices at the local level, it also acknowledges the larger historical and institutional forces with students and teachers are struggling. It is within the context of a stratified and unequal America that we now zero in on the different ways that local educational practices specifically seek to influence young people's identities as citizens.

Civic Identity

While many sociologists and political scientists point to broad, macro-social changes in the social fabric, from suburban sprawl to the women's movement to television, as influences on civic behavior (Putnam, 2000), attention in the field of education has been shifting recently to the micro-processes through which individuals develop identities that encourage (or discourage) civic behavior. While scholars have developed different terms to capture this aspect of identity related to public engagement - including socio-historical identity, socio-political identity, and political-moral identity, to name a few - the umbrella term, 'civic identity,' generally refers to one's understanding of and relation to a particular community or polity, as well as one's sense of agency to act within it (Youniss, McLelland, & Yates, 1997).

Many theorists of civic identity build upon Erik Erikson's (1994/1968) work in adolescent identity development, which focuses on the ways in which identity is influenced by social context. In *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, Erikson argues that adolescence is the period in which young people attempt to figure out where they fit within the social structures of their particular communities and countries by engaging with the different available ideologies that offer options for what society should look like. Erikson defines these ideologies as, "systems of ideas that provide convincing world images" (p. 31). As adolescents choose to accept or reject different ideologies and carve out social positions for themselves, Erikson argues that their identities transcend the individual and become part of a collective political body – they figure out what it means to them to be, for example, an 'American citizen.' As such, adolescence is considered a crucial time in which civic identity is consolidated and commitments to civic participation form.

As Erikson acknowledges, there are choices in terms of the visions of democratic society with which young people can identify; indeed, democracy is a contested concept that is constantly being re-articulated and reformulated in response to changes in local, national and global contexts, as well as the interests of various stakeholders. Importantly, young people are not forging civic identities independently in a social vacuum; schools play a huge role in mediating discourses about democracy and influencing how students think about themselves as civic agents. In their seminal piece, "What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy," Joel Westheimer & Joe Kahne (2004) argue that there are indeed different visions of citizenship and democracy, and that each vision calls for the development of specific knowledge, skills and attitudes demanding different curricular practices in pursuit of different learning goals (p. 241). They contend that the choices made by educators about the civic learning opportunities they offer students have political implications about the kinds of citizens (and by extension, the kind of democracy) that they are trying to create (p. 240). As a result, it is crucial to analyze the assumptions about democracy and good citizenship that undergird the civic learning opportunities offered in the current educational context in order to determine the civic identities that schools are trying to instill in students.

Universal Civic Identity

National standardized civic assessments (such as the NAEP) conceptualize citizenship as a cohesive body of knowledge, skills and dispositions that can be measurably 'achieved' by all citizens across all contexts; James Banks (2008) dubs this a "universal" vision of civic identity (p. 137). This model emphasizes consensus, assimilation, and individual responsibility as the foundations of citizenship. I examine each of these characteristics in turn in the next few

paragraphs, drawing upon the work of civic theorists and the NAEP civics framework to explain

the ideas about democracy from which they emerge and how they position students of color as

'failed' or 'deficient' in terms of their civic identities.

Consensus: Much civic education today operates under the assumption that all citizens

should acquire a shared understanding of and appreciation for the exceptionalism of American

democracy, focusing on its greatest accomplishments and highest ideals while downplaying

shortcomings and conflict. This is especially evident when analyzing the objectives of the

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test in civics and government, the most

influential assessment of civic education in the nation. In the Civics Assessment Framework for

the 2010 exam, the governing board lays out a specific vision for how students should be taught

to see their nation:

> Citizens should thus be encouraged to consider that while the history of the
> United States has been marked by continuing attempts to narrow the gap between
> the nation's ideals and reality, it has also achieved a wide degree of consensus as
> to what those ideals are and what that reality ought to be. It is on the basis of these
> ideals that Americans have united in political movements to abolish slavery,
> extend the voting franchise, remove legal support for segregation, and provide
> equality of opportunity. Citizens should be familiar with historical and
> contemporary efforts in which Americans have joined forces to work toward the
> achievement of their shared ideals. (p. 19)

This document takes a clear ideological stance on the way that schools should frame citizenship

for students - one focused on sharing values, working together, and making progress. And it is a

stance that seems to be reflected in some civic instructional practices; when, in a recent study, a

random sample of young Americans (ages 15 to 25) were surveyed about the themes that their

teachers emphasized most in their social studies classes, the most common response, after the

workings of the Constitution, was "great American heroes and the virtues of the American

system of government" (Levine & Lopez, 2004).

This focus on triumphalism reflects a powerful current in democratic theory that equates citizenship to patriotism. In *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth Century America*, philosopher Richard Rorty (1998) criticizes intellectuals of what he calls the "critical Left" for presenting an overly pessimistic outlook on public life and the nation, arguing instead for a greater patriotic focus on America's forward progress; as he puts it, "Insufficient national pride makes energetic and effective debate about national policy unlikely. Emotional involvement with one's country - feelings of intense shame or of glowing pride aroused by various parts of its history and by various present-day national policies - is necessary if political deliberation is to be imaginative and productive" (p. 3). Similarly, William Damon (2001) argues that young people need to develop a shared sense of pride and patriotism in the best traditions of their country in order to realize a "civil" identity, a term that he uses in order to stress the traits of honesty, fairness and common decency that he sees as crucial to good citizenship (p. 130, 137).

Importantly, this vision of patriotism and progress is often used to justify a form of democratic deliberation that is studiously committed to avoiding conflict and promoting social stability at all costs. John Rawls (1985) warns of the danger inherent in a pluralistic society in which people have drastically different interpretations of the public good; in turn, he urges that the concepts of reason and fairness should serve to structure deliberation so that agreement reigns and everyone lives peaceably with outcomes. Eamonn Callan (1997) makes a similar appeal to "patriotic solidarity" as a binding force that fosters unity and loyalty in the face of possibly divisive, private interests.

Assimilation: Just as mainstream civic education aimed at fostering a universal civic identity encourages consensus about American ideals based in patriotic rhetoric, so does it encourage standardization of what students learn about our country. The NAEP civics

assessment lacks opportunities for students to express the individual ways that they interpret

citizenship (or enact it); instead, it makes clear that, "the test exercises will deal strictly with

student knowledge of dispositions and explanation of their importance" (p. vi). Citizenship is

conceptualized as the accumulation of knowledge that can be demonstrated on a standardized

exam, as opposed to something experienced uniquely by individuals. Similarly, the International

Education Association's Civic Education Study found that civics teachers in the United States

base their instruction upon standards and "very infrequently negotiate with students about what

is to be learned" (Torney-Purta, Barber & Richardson, 2005). The study also found that the most

common methods of civic instruction encountered by U.S. students were reading from textbooks

and filling out worksheets (Baldi et al, 2001).

In "The Civic Mission of Schools," a major policy report released by the Carnegie

Corporation and CIRCLE in 2003, a panel of prominent researchers argue for the

implementation of common civic standards across states, the establishment of a federal entity

responsible for civic education, and more standardized national civics assessments like the one

developed by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (p. 7). Each of these

recommendations speak to the idea that civic identity development should move in a common

trajectory for all students toward a defined end in which young people become citizens with a

pre-determined body of political knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

This concern with standardization and the concurrent downplaying of any deviation into

personal or group experiences of citizenship draws upon the tradition of political and social

assimilation. From this perspective, which was dominant before the civil rights movements of

the 1960s and 1970s, citizenship transcends group differences (of, for example, race, ethnicity, or

social class) by emphasizing what citizens hold in common rather than what divides them and

arguing that all of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship should be enjoyed equally

(Gordon, 1964). It also proposes that citizenship is experienced individually and that the

experiences and beliefs of identity groups should be minimized in the political process because

of their potential to divide the citizenry into private factions (Schlesinger, 1991). This

perspective is supported in the field of education by scholars like William Galston (2003), who

attributes current low levels of youth civic involvement to the failure of schools to specify a

required core of civic knowledge, align their civics courses with standards, and provide common,

standardized civics assessments (p. 264).

Individual Responsibility: A final quality of civic education today is its characterization

of citizenship as something experienced at the individual level rather than at the level of a

political collective. According to a recent study in which teachers were asked about how they

talk about citizenship with their students, the great majority said that they encouraged students to

help others and follow laws (Martin, 2008). Westheimer and Kahne (2004) describe personally

responsible citizens as those who engage in non-political and non-collective forms of civic

engagement, such as performing community service or donating blood. There is little focus in

this model on incorporating current electoral politics into lessons or the development of

knowledge, skills or dispositions needed for effective participation in the political sphere; instead,

the emphasis is on the fostering of good character.

At its most basic level, this view of citizenship draws from the tradition of pure

representative democracy, in which the majority of citizens are limited in political participation

to the vote while the tasks of governance are entrusted to an elite few. Both Alexander Hamilton

and James Madison exhibited little faith in the ability of common citizens to participate wisely in

the political process; as Madison argued in Federalist Paper X, representatives were needed as

filters to "refine and enlarge the public views, by passing them through the medium of a chosen body of citizens, whose wisdom may discern the true interests of their country" (p. 409). In this view of democracy, which ran counter to the more participatory vision of Thomas Jefferson, citizens would learn enough about politics to vote for their representatives and then concern themselves largely with private life. This distrust in large-scale citizen participation has stretched into the twentieth century, with periodic calls for voting tests to weed out "ignorant" or "undesirable" voices (Lippmann, 1925). More recently, this focus on apolitical forms of civic engagement has been influenced by neoliberal thought, which conflates democracy and global capitalism, defining freedom as the right of individuals to make entrepreneurial decisions within markets, including in the arena of education (Foucault, 1979; Hursh, 2007).

Implications for Students of Color: From the universal view of citizenship, it is possible to fail to gain a civic identity if the appropriate criteria are not met, which consist of the specific behaviors, skills and attitudes that foster consensus, assimilation and individual responsibility. If one's identity deviates from the shared normative vision, good citizenship has not been realized. In most political socialization research and policy, the groups who are characterized as failing to acquire civic identity or as deficient citizens are almost always individuals from low-income communities and communities of color.

Levinson (2007) goes so far as to declare the existence of a "civic achievement gap" between non-white, poor and immigrant youth and adults on one hand and white, wealthier, and native-born citizens on the other. Defining a good citizen as someone who is informed, thoughtful, participatory and moral in terms of traditional civic constructs, she details the lack of knowledge and engagement among low-income and minority group members and attributes these deficits to lack of education, failure to join voluntary organizations, and low-status

employment opportunities (p. 5). She also attributes attitudes of civic alienation, distrust, and lack of efficacy to experiences of race or class-based inequality that leave minority groups with distinct identities that keep them from "achieving" civically (p. 7-8). Similarly, Atkins and Hart (2003) argue that low-income youth living in urban areas fail to "acquire" civic identities because of the effects of poverty, including lower densities of adults, adults with fewer civic resources due to lack of income and education, and adults who fail to model civic behaviors like voting (p. 159).

Levinson, Atkins and Hart all point to the necessity of social institutions, particularly schools, to provide low-income minority students with the civic identities they need in order to realize universal citizenship; indeed, Atkins & Hart claim, "There are too many obstacles and too few resources in central city neighborhoods to expect that these vulnerable communities would be able to improve civic development opportunities for youth without broad societal support (p. 163). In essence, they argue that schools must provide civic education that can inspire a proper civic identity based on predetermined notions of 'good' citizenship because students and their communities fail to provide an adequate basis for engagement in public life.

Differentiated Civic Identity

James Banks (2008) proposes that any attempts at imposing a universal conception of civic identity upon all citizens through school-based civic education will always end up marginalizing minority group members because we live in a stratified society in which citizenship is being defined by those in power to support their own interests; as a result, the principle of equality implied by universalism serves only to mask structural inequalities as "groups with power and influence equate their own interests with the public interest" (p. 132).

Iris Marion Young (1989) also argues that citizenship is "impeded rather than furthered" by a universal view that asks people to "leave behind the perceptions they derive from their particular experience and social position" (p. 274). They call instead for a "differentiated" idea of citizenship that allows for different identity or interest groups to conceptualize a relationship with America in unique ways. In this view, experiences of race or class-based inequality do not hinder someone from 'acquiring' a proper civic identity, but simply contribute to a different, but still valid, understanding of 'good' citizenship that can be more critical. Instead of focusing on consensus, assimilation and individual responsibility, proponents of differentiated civic identity turn to conflict, pluralism, and collective action.

Conflict: Critical democratic theorists question the applicability of consensus-based models of deliberation in a social context in which citizens occupy positions on opposite sides of huge chasms of race or class-based inequality. In her critique of liberal democratic theory, Nancy Fraser (1990) rejects the notion that reasoned dialogue has the power to break down barriers of class or race that separate citizens. She explains that even as formal barriers to inclusive deliberation on the basis of race, class and gender have fallen away, "informal impediments to participatory parity," (p. 81) such as political protocols, remain that, if not addressed directly, become re-entrenched and continue to marginalize the voices of those who suffer from the effects of structural inequality. As long as societal inequality exists, she concludes, "deliberative processes in public spheres will tend to operate to the advantage of dominant groups and to the disadvantage of subordinates" (p. 84). For Fraser, deliberative democracy contributes to the perpetuation of inequality by adhering to the illusion of a single cohesive citizenry that shares equal voice despite inequalities in other aspects of life. Instead, she takes a more radical stance that within this stratified society, democratic goals would best be served by the proliferation of

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multiple interest groups that engage in conflict to advocate for the interests of more specific

subordinated social constituencies (p. 85).

Political theorist, Chantal Mouffe, shares Fraser's argument that liberal deliberative

models of public life often seek to eliminate conflict and group differences in ways that privilege

those in power and continue to oppress subordinate groups; instead, she calls for a "need for

collective identifications" in which strategic alliances are formed between groups on the basis of

common political objectives (p. 152). Mouffe (2005) stresses the need for citizens to belong to

political collectivities and advocate for their interests in the public sphere in ways that make

inequalities transparent and open up the floor for conflict between "political adversaries" (p. 101-

102). She asserts that our current state of political dialogue often renders adversaries "moral

enemies" engaged in competitive rhetoric simply for the sake of winning, but that the kind of

debate that she endorses is a confrontation of arguments for "clearly differentiated democratic

positions" (p. 32). This type of debate has the potential to lead to the "transformation of existing

power relations and the establishment of a new hegemony" (p. 52).

Pluralism: A growing number of scholars are rejecting the idea that citizenship is a static,

standardized entity that everyone experiences in the same way and seeking to recast civic

identity in a way that privileges the experiences of low-income students and students of color.

These theorists draw directly from socio-cultural theories of learning and identity to highlight the

shifting, practice-based nature of civic identity. Lawy & Biesta (2007) argue that the mainstream

civic education policies and practices explored by the researchers described above operate under

the assumption that young people need to develop, act and behave in certain ways in order to

gain citizenship – an idea that they term "citizenship-as-achievement" (p. 37). They counter that

"citizenry is not a status or possession, nor is it the outcome of a developmental or educational

trajectory that can be socially engineered" (p. 47). Instead, they introduce an alternative, "citizenship-as-practice," that sees young people as enacting their civic identity through their "participation in the actual practices that make up their daily lives" (p. 45). As such, Lawy & Biesta separate civic identity from the normative ideology to which it has been attached and open it up to individual meaning making on the part of young people in order to empower all students to civic action.

Nasir & Kirshner (2003) echo this conceptualization of 'good' citizenship as something that is constantly negotiated through everyday practice as opposed to a static pre-determined entity by introducing a socio-cultural perspective on moral and civic identity development (p.139). Drawing on socio-cultural learning theory, they argue that civic identity development must be analyzed through three overlapping lenses – the social interactions that occur between individuals, the cultural practices that structure these interactions, and the institutions in which these interactions occur (p. 141). From this perspective, different ideologies about the nature of citizenship emanate from each of these areas that the individual must engage with in order to forge a complex, constantly shifting civic identity. In this case, the ideas about citizenship that low-income youth or youth of color develop as a result of their lived experience in the structurally unequal urban context do not signal failed civic identities, but socially and culturally influenced ones that are just as valid as those promoted as 'ideal' by universalists. From this viewpoint, there need not be (and cannot be) one model of civic identity because of the multiplicity of contexts in which people forge their beliefs and ideas; furthermore, all of the shifting civic identities that students may take on can be the foundation for productive civic action.

Watts & Flanagan (2007) specifically focus on the psychological effects that universalist conceptions of civic identity have on youth of color and offer a new model of sociopolitical identity development that emphasizes their liberation and empowerment. Like Banks, they argue that traditional notions of political socialization "implicitly encourage investment in or identification with the prevailing social order and replication of it" and ask, "Are young members of marginalized groups as likely as more socially integrated youth to replicate or buy into a system where they feel excluded?" (p. 781). Their model of civic (what they call socio-political) identity development centers on a critical rather than normative understanding of the systemic forces shaping society that validates the experiences of young people of color and offers them avenues for developing liberating political efficacy. Like Nasir & Kirshner, Watts & Flanagan include analysis of worldview, opportunity structures, and social interactions in their developmental model.

Collective Action: John Dewey (1916) rejected the idea that democracy is simply a form of representative government; instead, he stressed that it is a "form of associated living" defined by collective participation in social life and social inquiry (p. 16). Theorists concerned with participatory models of democracy argue that differentiated forms of civic education must provide students with the skills and opportunities to work with other citizens in authentic situations to solve problems and create change; as Richard Battistoni (1985) argues, the goal of civics should be to "develop in students skills and attitudes necessary to direct participation in political affairs, as well as a set of substantive values which underlie our political institutions and procedures" (p. 187). Importantly, civic engagement in this model is explicitly political - not necessarily in the sense of formal politics, but in terms of what Harry Boyte (2003) terms a "different" kind of politics that is "productive and generative, not simply a bitter distributive

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struggle over scarce resources" (p. 9). Boyte sees this form of politics as the way in which people from different backgrounds come together to "build the commonwealth" and stresses the need to adopt this more inclusive view "if we are to have any hope of reversing the enormous momentum of the marketplace and technology, and their anti-political ways of thinking" (p. 9). Civic identity, in this view, develops through the local, face-to-face interactions between citizens in communities of practice geared toward creating emancipatory change (Fung & Wright, 2003).

Implications for Students of Color: The work of translating these theories of emancipating practice-based civic identity into tools for engaging young people of color in civic learning experiences is just beginning to be explored. Instead of assuming that there is 'good' civic identity and 'bad' or 'alienated' civic identity, Rubin (2007) engages in discussions with youth attending schools in different racial and socioeconomic contexts around key civic texts like the Declaration of Independence and the Pledge of Allegiance in order to learn more about how young people themselves understand their country and their place within it. Starting from the thesis that understandings of citizenship are inextricably linked to the racial and socioeconomic inequalities of society, Rubin argues that urban youth of color often experience disjuncture between their daily experiences and the learned ideals of society that can either inspire or discourage them from civic action, while their white, wealthy counterparts often experience a congruence that leaves them complacent (p. 477-478). Importantly, all identities have the potential to lead to civic action when nurtured appropriately.

Importantly, Rubin and other researchers in the field are beginning to offer ideas for civic learning opportunities that can encourage students to engage in a wider variety of civic actions than are traditionally promoted based on varying forms of civic identity. In addition to critical discussions of civic texts, Rubin offers Morrell's (2004) work in critical youth action research as

an avenue that can validate different civic identities and inspire more empowering forms of civic

engagement (p. 476). Kirshner (2009) also turns to youth organizing as a practice that can

encourage students to move from atomistic views of citizenship to ones that highlight collective

agency (p. 425). Spoken-word poetry, critical media literacy, and antiracist organizing have also

been proposed as forms of civic education that build upon the experiences of students from

marginalized backgrounds in order to spur sociopolitical development and activism (Jocson,

2006; Duncan-Andrade, 2006; Aguilar-San Juan, 2006).

In my study, I add literacy practices in urban high school English classrooms to the list of

critical civic learning opportunities that empower students of color. I make this claim by

exploring the ideas about citizenship that teachers and students bring with them into the

classroom from their social, historical and cultural experiences and examining the ways that

shared practice around literary texts and other cultural artifacts influenced the emergence of new

ideas and new identities. Through this process, I drew upon the insights of theorists in civic

identity and traced their ideas back to their foundations in democratic theory. I hypothesized that

new understandings of citizenship and democracy would emerge largely through dialogue

between students and teachers as they engaged in these literacy practices; as a result, it became

important to theorize the connections between dialogue, democracy, pedagogy and literacy. And

it is impossible to make those connections without an exploration of the ideas of John Dewey.

Dialogue and Democracy

Despite the perilous state of dialogue in our country, considering the highly charged

partisan rhetoric and media-driven sound bites that characterize most political discussions,

scholars and educators alike maintain its necessity in the project of reinvigorating democracy

based on the tenets of equal voice and equal participation in shared decision-making; Cornel West (1998) maintains that, "dialogue is the lifeblood of democracy" (p. 10). What makes John Dewey's views on dialogue so unique and crucial to this project is that he does not view communication as the means to an end (such as achieving democracy), but the end in itself – as he describes, "Society not only continues to exist *by* transmission, *by* communication, but it may fairly be said to exist *in* transmission, *in* communication" (p. 5). In other words, communication is not a precondition for democracy – the process embodies democracy itself. Dewey confirms that "democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" (p. 101). Dialogue defines democracy for Dewey because he sees the communicative process as the source of all knowledge, meaning and identity, the essence of shared collective life; for him, knowledge does not exist independently, but is created through dialogue between individuals.

In *Experience and Education*, Dewey (1938) cements the centrality of dialogue to his ideas about both individual and social life by claiming that, "communication is a condition of consciousness" (p. 187). In Dewey's view, communication between two people does not involve the sharing of ideas or observations that have already been made independently; instead, he argues that ideas and meanings are created through the joint activity of communicating. And since meaning exists comes into existence through communication, intelligence is created through the same dialogic process.

Importantly, it is not only meanings and ideas that are created through dialogue, but individual identity and subjectivity as well. Back in *Democracy and Education,* Dewey argues that individuals need social interaction to achieve self-actualization - that others are "the indispensable conditions of the realization of [our] tendencies" (p. 14). He describes

communication as a practice that "modifies the disposition of both the parties who partake in it" (p. 11) because participants need to see their experiences through the eyes of the others involved in order to make themselves intelligible. In essence, he claims that, "to be a recipient of a communication is to have an enlarged and changed experience" (p. 6). We exist as individuals only insofar as we recognize that we exist through our interactions with others.

According to Dewey's logic, if we understand our own identities as being constructed through social interaction, and also understand that democracy is embodied in social interaction, then we come to the conclusion that democratic interaction is an inherent part of our identities and daily life. And, insofar that we are changed through communication and action, we are learning – hence the connection between dialogue, public life and education. As Dewey explains, "Not only is social life identical with communication, but all communication (and hence all genuine social life) is educative" (p. 6). This puts dialogue at the very center of the educational endeavor that prepares citizens for democratic participation, and renders intelligence a socially constructed entity.

If knowledge only exists through social interaction within a given environment, then it follows in Dewey's thought that the communication of knowledge, both inside and outside of schools, must occur through dialogue. Considering that democracy is inherently about involvement in associated life, education becomes focused on increasing participation in conversation and action with others to find shared interests and solve common problems. As Dewey explains, "knowledge is a mode of participation, valuable in the degree in which it is effective" (p. 393). As a result, education is not about the idle gathering of knowledge, but about discovery and action through an "experimental method" (p. 393) of inquiry about the world.

The kind of dialogue that Dewey finds educative is that which is committed to shared inquiry and discovery and which builds knowledge. This inquiry is aimed at constantly evaluating and reconstructing society in ways that work for all citizens; as such, it is inherently deliberative and directed toward achieving common conclusions. This desire to forge shared understandings about pressing real-world issues through dialogue has significant implications for its use in formal classroom settings as an educative tool, as well as its potential to address the entrenched inequities that have silenced political dialogue between members of different race and class groups at the present political moment.

In my study, I explored how and the extent to which urban high school literacy classrooms manifested the qualities of civic communities dedicated to embodying democracy through dialogue in its Deweyan sense. In order to complete this analysis, I needed to analyze dialogue on the levels of both pedagogy and of curriculum. I was interested in how dialogue manifested itself in the pedagogical relationship between teachers and students and in the curricular relationship between students, teachers and texts. As such, I drew from literature in critical pedagogy and critical literacy.

Dialogue and Pedagogy

Dewey's argument that knowledge is created in the social interactions between individuals in cultural contexts implies the need for pedagogy grounded in dialogue and shared inquiry; however, in today's educational climate, knowledge and pedagogy are treated in drastically different ways. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2006) explain, current policy conceptualizes knowledge as discrete chunks of information to be recalled on demand for the purpose of high-stakes testing; this leads to a conceptualization of 'good' teaching' as simply the

ability to raise test scores through the use of materials geared toward that narrow purpose. In addition to contributing to a narrowing of the purpose of schooling, this also contributes to a simplified conceptualization of teaching preparation, practice and professional development (p. 680). Teacher learning is replaced by training in the techniques believed to transmit nuggets of content and raise test scores, just as student learning is replaced by the accumulation of content knowledge and test preparation.

According to much recent critical social theory, schools reflect the larger neoliberal project aimed at reproducing oppressive race and class structures. In the 1970s, just as neoliberal ideology was gaining a foothold in the national discourse, Bowles and Gintis (1976) clarified the connection between the economy and schooling through their concept of the correspondence principal; they argued for the need to understand the connections between social relations in the workplace and social relations in schools. Generally the correspondence principle has been used to explain why working class students are often taught in a more authoritarian manner that focuses on obedience and getting the right answer (Anyon, 1981) while middle and wealthy kids are encouraged to have more autonomy and debate; however, the same logic applies to the mechanistic ways that the teachers of working class students are educated themselves and taught to educate their students. When following the market logic, teachers of the working class are charged with preparing a population that, according to many reproduction theorists, are being prepared to take working class jobs (MacLeod, 1987). In this view, the high-stakes accountability movement is just the latest in a series of educational reforms aimed at stigmatizing urban schools, students and teachers and reinforcing unequal social structures (Apple, 2006).

Critical pedagogy has emerged as an alternative vision of teaching and learning that challenges social reproduction by using dialogue to effect individual and collective social

transformation. Largely considered the father of critical pedagogy, Paulo Freire (1970) stresses the importance of praxis - the dialectical cycle of action and reflection - as the source of critical consciousness for marginalized students. He argues that when teachers and students engage in critical dialogue together, the traditional power structures of authority that divide them fall away, and "teacher-students" and "student-teachers" are created who are co-intent on unveiling oppression and re-creating knowledge (p. 80). He argues that only through praxis can the traditional, 'banking' model of education, in which students are seen as passive depositories of isolated chunks of knowledge, be replaced by a problem-posing model of education that focuses on collective inquiry for shared empowerment. In a particularly Deweyan passage, Freire stresses that, "Apart from inquiry, apart from praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (p. 72). Teachers, in this model, do not teach students; instead, teachers and students educate each other in a dialogic relationship aimed at understanding the world and then acting upon it to humanize both the oppressors and the oppressed.

Theorists who have extended Freire's ideas about critical pedagogy have focused on how to apply its tenets to classroom practice in ways that disrupt the process of social reproduction and re-define the relationship between teachers and students. Henry Giroux (1988) introduces the concept of "liberating memory" as one that can bring teachers and students together in solidarity through the shared remembrance of suffering (p. xxxiv). Peter McLaren (1995) stresses the need for students and teachers to analyze schools as political sites characterized by asymmetrical power relations as a starting point for revolutionary action. And Ira Shor (1992) introduces the concept of critical-democratic pedagogy for self and social change by presenting case studies of

classrooms grounded in eight values of "empowering education": participatory, affective, situated, problem-posing, multicultural, dialogic, desocializing, and democratic learning. All make reference to Dewey's work and stress the importance of genuine, critical dialogue to the enactment of democratic relationships in schools.

Considering the importance of the written and spoken word to the creation of humanizing, democratic relationships, literacy occupies a special position in the fields of both critical pedagogy and democratic theory. Critical literacy provides the necessary link in my research between democracy, critical pedagogy, and high school English classrooms.

Critical Literacy

As mentioned in first chapter, English education at our current social and historical moment has narrowed to involve acquisition of the dominant standard language and for the purposes of high stakes testing and economic competitiveness. Donaldo Macedo (2003) argues that this "mechanistic" approach to English "leads to literacy for cultural reproduction where collective experiences function in the interest of the dominant ruling elites rather than in the interest of the oppressed groups that are the object of policies of cultural reproduction" (p. 12). In *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*, Freire and Macedo (1987) define the purposes of reading and writing in direct opposition to these purposes; they argue that in order for literacy to be meaningful, "it has to be situated within a theory of cultural production and viewed as an integral part of the way in which people produce, transform, and reproduce meaning" (p. 142). They explain that literacy must be judged according to whether it serves to "reproduce existing social formations" or to "promote democratic and emancipatory change" (p. 141).

Theorists of critical literacy stress that texts do not exist in a vacuum but are 'situated'

products of the world that transmit cultural and political messages; in turn, the act of reading

these texts must be viewed as a simultaneous reading of the world and a negotiation of

discourses that have significance for social action (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivancic, 2000). They

argue that, depending upon how texts are treated in the development of literacy, reading can

either be a force for cultural reproduction, in which dominant discourses are re-inscribed onto the

readers as passive objects, or for cultural production, in which the readers become active subjects

combing the texts for connections to their daily lives and experiences in order to forge individual

and collective self-determination (McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993).

They contend that in a society in which oppressed students are treated as objects rather than

subjects, cultural production can only be achieved through a conscious model of emancipatory

literacy.

Critical literacy theorists explain that traditional approaches to reading fail to help

students become the authors of their own experiences; in these approaches, texts are treated as

complete, self-sufficient entities that students need to passively consume and seek to

comprehend outside of their sociopolitical significance, in turn reproducing dominant ideologies

(Banks, 2003). In fact, Freire and Macedo specifically contend that the academic model of

reading organized around "the mastery of the great classical works" that takes precedence in the

majority of classrooms serves to "ignore the life experience, the history, and the language

practice of students" (p. 146). The emancipatory approach to reading, on the other hand, values

the multiple literacy practices that students from marginalized communities bring to school

contexts and sees them as the basis for collective self-determination (New London Group, 1996).

The ultimate goal in this model of literacy is not comprehension, or even interpretation and

critical analysis of texts, but social transformation; as such, reading becomes an imaginative act

that is the equivalent of writing – a form of creative dialogue with the world that has the potential to effect political change.

Importantly, critical literacy theorists see the development of a consciousness that has the potential for national reconstruction as a necessarily social endeavor; as a result, reading that begins with individual response must be shared with others in order to reach a level of transformative action. This view takes the popular view of the purpose of reading as a source of personal enlightenment and self-improvement and brings it to next level, arguing that a shared study of texts in a shared venue like the classroom is a necessary endeavor in order for individuals to realize that their individual improvement is embedded within a project of collective emancipation. In this sense, it provides a new and urgent purpose for teaching and critically responding to literary texts in the classroom.

In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Morrison (1992) extends Freire and Macedo's argument regarding the political power of the imaginative act by showing how response to and analysis of literary texts has the power to expose, and thereby transform, dominant narratives that countries are built upon. Morrison takes the assertion that texts reflect the world in which they are written and applies it directly to the concept of national literatures, the imaginative work that serves to define the cultural values and imperatives of countries; as she explains, these national literatures "end up describing and inscribing what is really on the national mind" (p. 15). She then takes America as her subject and explains how its literature reflects its national obsession with race and what she terms the "Africanist presence" in this nation (p. 6). She powerfully demonstrates the gravity of the imaginative acts of reading and writing by connecting them to political realities of racial oppression; as she puts it,

> Living in a nation of people who *decided* that their world view would combine agendas for individual freedom *and* mechanisms for devastating racial oppression

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presents a singular landscape for a writer. When this worldview is taken seriously as agency, the literature produced within and without it offers an unprecedented opportunity to comprehend the resilience and gravity, the inadequacy and the force of the imaginative act (p. xiii)

In this passage, Morrison demonstrates that because literature produced within America reflects a worldview with real social and political consequences, analysis of that literature is an important step in understanding and then working to change that worldview in the vision of "collective emancipation" that critical literacy theorists envision. This constitutes a purpose for reading, and reading literature in particular, that is socially transformative.

Morrison views authors as respondents to culture, constantly criticizing, valorizing, and transforming the world through their imaginative work, and she believes that through reading, readers become authors as well, engaging in the same political activities. In fact, Morrison argues that the purpose of reading national literatures in a way that exposes their cultural and political assumptions is to transform knowledge from a force of "invasion and conquest" to one of "revelation and choice" (p. 8). This type of reading, as she puts it, does not involve "merely looking or looking at," but "becoming" (p. 4). Thus, to Morrison, the study of literature is uniquely suited to fulfill the requirements of emancipatory literacy, largely because of the rewriting of society involved in critical acts of reading for members of oppressed and marginalized populations.

Literacy and Democracy in the Classroom

The conceptual bodies of literature that I have analyzed in this chapter – socio-cultural learning theory, civic identity, and critical literacy – formed the epistemological framework for my research. As I surveyed teachers about their civic identities and engaged in ethnographic

observation of urban high school English classrooms, I constantly returned to the insights gained from existing theory, while simultaneously building new, grounded theory based on what I learned from students and teachers. As I moved forward with my work, I stood on the shoulders of researchers who have already begun to translate these theories into empirical work in English classrooms.

In his classroom research, Morrell (2002) argues that the critical teaching of popular culture can help students acquire traditional academic literacies while also empowering them to deconstruct dominant narratives and challenge oppressive practices. He defines popular culture as the "terrain of ideological struggle expressed through music, film, mass media artifacts, language, customs and values" (p. 73) and argues that pedagogy of popular culture needs to be a critical one composed of authentic dialogue and centered on student experience. He describes several units that he designed and taught to his high school students focusing on hip hop music, film, and media analysis and shows how they were situated in the experiences of students, called for critical dialogue and critical engagement with texts, and related texts to larger political and social issues. He concludes by arguing that the teaching of popular culture is compatible with both the current educational climate and culturally relevant pedagogy.

Luke (2000) explores the sustainability of a socially critical, discourse and text-based approach to literacy in a conservative educational context – namely, Australia's states. Starting from the standpoint that literacy is not about individual skill acquisition, but about building access to literate practices and social fields of resources, Luke outlines how critical literacy became integrated into practice in Australia's schools. Luke explains the framework for literacy instruction in Australia based on four resources – Coding practices (Developing resources as a code-breaker), Text-meaning practices (Developing resources as a text participant), Pragmatic

practices (Developing resources as text user), and Critical practices (Developing resources as text analyst and critic). He shows how each of these resources resist hierarchy and can promote the values of critical literacy, and then gives an example of how an elementary school teacher used these resources in developing a lesson about textbook discourse analysis. Luke resists the idea that critical literacy is blunted by inclusion in state standards, noting the dual goals of helping students to define social futures and social transformation while insisting that the literacy agenda in Australia's schools has a strong emphasis on developing an analysis of power and an emphasis on the exchange value of mainstream texts in social fields.

Further empirical research has been conducted in English classrooms about the democratic potential of activities from auto-ethnography (Camangian, 2010) and spoken word (Fisher, 2005) to the analysis of film (Golden, 2007) and graphic novels (Carter, 2007). More work still needs to be done, however, in making explicit connections between literacy practices and the development of civic identity. My dissertation seeks to begin that conversation.

CHAPTER THREE – METHODOLOGY

In my study of urban high school English classrooms as sites of civic learning, my primary unit of analysis is classroom practice. The exploration of socio-cultural learning theory in the previous chapter illuminated the many levels of analytic complexity contained in the daily workings of classroom life. The interaction of teachers, students, and content within specific school contexts cannot be separated from the institutional contexts in which those classrooms are situated, as well as the understandings, beliefs and values that individuals bring to the classroom community; as a result, I examined classroom practice from several levels – the level of the social structure, the level of individual civic identity development, and the level of the classroom community. These levels are mutually constitutive, which means that data that I collected spoke to multiple levels of analysis simultaneously.

In this chapter, I explain how I approached these levels of analysis by describing the three phases of data collection and analysis through which I proceeded. I first provide a brief explanation of my positionality as a researcher and the ways that my identity influenced all phases of my research. I then provide an overview of my study and introduce my three research tools, which included an online survey, critical classroom ethnography, and reflection groups; for each tool, I provide an overview of its general methodological value, a description of my selection and recruitment rationale, and the specific steps that I took to gather data. I then turn to an exploration of how social structure, classroom community, and individual civic identity development structured my data analysis. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of my study.

Positionality of the Researcher

The best piece of advice that I ever received about completing a doctoral program was to choose a dissertation topic that I felt passionately about; considering the intellectual and emotional rollercoaster that is graduate school, I was told that love for my research would be the rock guiding me through the tumultuous journey. I took this advice to heart and developed a dissertation project for which I feel all of my educational and professional experiences prepared me.

I majored in English as an undergraduate at New York University because literature was my connection to the world; books shaped my identity, and I was (and am) forever thrilled by the power of the imaginative act. My desire to share this experience led me to ACORN Community High School in Brooklyn, New York, where I taught English for four years. Teaching literature to adolescents became the defining experience of my personal and professional life. Just before my last group of seniors graduated, one student asked me what I wanted them to remember about English as they continued on to the next phases of their lives. I realized then that it did not matter to me if they remembered the plot of *Hamlet* or how to diagram a sentence; instead, what I wanted most was for them to remember the power of language, to critically analyze its role in society and to use it to empower themselves politically and socially.

Once I was able to articulate this connection between literature and citizenship, I promptly dedicated my academic life to its study. I spent my Masters year at the Harvard Graduate School of Education analyzing the current state of literacy and civic engagement policy, and then moved on to UCLA to immerse myself in literature around democracy, literacy, and learning, all in preparation for pursuing my dissertation research. I have also spent the past three and a half years coordinating a civic engagement program that empowers urban high school

youth to become critical researchers of their own schools and communities, which I will explore in more depth in my description of my critical classroom ethnography.

All of these educational and personal experiences led me to this work; however, as I proceeded to solicit the ideas of teachers and students about democracy and literacy, I had to keep in mind the privileges that I have accrued and continue to benefit from as a white, middle-class woman in a society structured to facilitate my success. This was especially important when I worked with students of color and teachers in my classroom research; as an outsider inserting myself into classroom communities, I was constantly seeking to understand how individuals made sense of their world on their own terms rather than my own. While I worked to become a legitimate peripheral participant in these spaces, I always remained an outsider to some extent; as a result, I shared my insights with the participants in my research to make sure that I was accurately interpreting their words and actions. I am humbled and grateful to have earned their respect and support, and to know that I faithfully represented their work to the best of my ability. During every phase of my research, I drew from my personal and professional commitments to educational equity, my empowering experiences with literacy, and a commitment to civic agency.

Study Overview

In order to analyze how high school English classrooms functioned as sites of civic learning, I engaged in three phases of data collection. In the first phase, I developed an online survey designed to measure the personal civic knowledge, skills and beliefs of a purposeful sample of high school English teachers from across the country. While this phase of data collection informed my research largely at the level of individual civic identity development, it also possessed some implications for the levels of classroom community and social structure. In

the second phase, I undertook ethnographic participant observation in selected classrooms in three different schools in a large urban school district. The data collected from these observations directly informed my main unit of analysis (classroom practice) and engaged with all three analytic levels. Finally, I brought the three teachers who worked with me in the classroom context together at the mid-way point in my data collection to engage in three reflection group discussions. The subject of these reflection groups was civic learning in urban high school English classrooms, and they drew heavily from the classroom practices of each teacher in order to build new, shared understandings around the connection between literacy and democracy. The conversations that occurred during these meetings also informed my data analysis at all levels. I now explore each of these data collections strategies in greater depth.

Survey Methodology

Overview: According to Torney-Purta, Amadeo and Andolina (2010) in their review of methodologies employed in political socialization and civic engagement research, surveys "allow researchers to examine patterns and relationships among variables and to generalize the findings to the larger group being studied" (p. 508). They note the popularity of surveys in the fields of education and political science, from the International Education Association's Civic Education Study (which surveyed 140,000 students in over 30 countries) to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). One of the benefits of such a wealth of survey research is the extent to which measures have been tested and reliabilities assessed, which make many survey items "as relevant in a small set of schools as in multiple sites within or across countries" (p. 508). A drawback, however, is that surveys have a hard time capturing the processes experienced by individuals that lead to the acquisition of specific knowledge, skills and attitudes. A

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combination of survey and ethnographic methodology provided me with a wealth of data that approached my research questions from a variety of angles for a more holistic and detailed analysis.

The purpose of my survey was to learn more about how high school English teachers across the country conceptualized citizenship and the purposes of English education in the 21st century, as well as to measure their civic engagement and the practices that they employed most often in their own classrooms. I was particularly interested in exploring whether or not and how the types of civic activity in which teachers engaged was related to how they interpreted 'good' citizenship, and, in turn, if these beliefs influence how they thought about their discipline and the extent to which they provided students with civic learning opportunities in their English classes.

Survey Design: I constructed my survey questionnaire using the online survey tool, Qualtrix. While I understand the limitations of online surveys, particularly those targeting convenient, non-representative samples (Manfreda & Vehovar, 2008, p. 266), I chose to proceed with this format because of its ability to reach a nationwide population despite stringent financial constraints. Qualtrix permitted me to design a flexible questionnaire that met my needs in terms of format and item order – I reduced non-response error by using a feature of the program that prevented respondents from moving forward in the survey until all questions on the current page are answered, and I mitigated the possibility of multiple answers or write-ins by using the forced single response feature. The survey was designed to take no longer than 15 minutes to complete.

In order to capture possible correlations between teachers' civic identity and classroom practice, I constructed four variables for my survey: views of citizenship, teachers' experiences with civic engagement, views of English education, and classroom practices. The indicators for each variable were single-item and were expressed on a 4-point scale ranging from 'strongly

disagree' to 'strongly agree' in some cases and from 'never' to 'often' in others. Each is discussed below.

Views of citizenship. My literature review detailed the ways in which civic education is guided by assumptions about the nature of good citizenship; this led to my interest in exploring high school English teachers' conceptualizations of citizenship and the connections between these beliefs and the practices that they employed in their classrooms. The items for this variable drew from two existing survey instruments. I borrowed items from the student survey portion of the IEA Civic Education Study that were scaled to determine how respondents perceived the importance of "conventional citizenship" as opposed to "social movement-related citizenship." The items that correlated to conventional citizenship involved discussion of political issues, respect for political leaders, voting, and knowledge of national history; the items that correlated to social movement-related citizenship involved protest, involvement in environmental and human rights campaigns, and community engagement. I also borrowed items from the California Survey of Civic Education that were based on the work of Westheimer and Kahne (2004) and scaled to differentiate between personally responsible, participatory, and justice-oriented visions of citizenship. The items that correlated to personally responsible citizenship involved respect for laws, desire to help others in need, and moral character. The items that correlated to participatory citizenship involved community involvement and discussion of political issues, and the items that correlated to justice-oriented citizenship included protest, challenging of inequalities, and dissent.

Civic engagement. The current academic standards for English Language Arts at both the local and national levels make explicit reference to the importance of English classes in helping students to become active citizens; in my survey, I was interested in the nature of teachers' civic

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participation to gauge the extent to which they might model civic engagement for their students. The items for this variable drew from CIRCLE's Civic and Political Health of the Nation survey (Keeter, Zukin, Andolina & Jenkins, 2002). I borrowed items that were scaled to differentiate between charitable, civic and political involvement. The items that correlated to charitable involvement included volunteering and donation of time or money, while the civic involvement items involved membership in professional, labor, or religious organizations. The items that correlated to political involvement included campaigning, protesting, voting, and discussing issues.

Views of English education. Preparing students to become active citizens is just one of the rationales that local and national standards provide when asserting the importance of English education; considering the variety of purposes that English classes are pressed to fulfill, I was interested in how high school English teachers personally conceptualized the aims of their profession. I developed these items through analysis of the English Language Arts standards created by the National Governors Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the California State Board of Education. The items asked teachers to rank the importance of each of the following purposes of high school English education in terms of how they conceptualized their practice: developing skills needed for postsecondary education, developing skills needed for career advancement, developing skills needed for citizenship, developing student appreciation for literary and cultural heritage, and developing pleasure in reading and writing.

Classroom practices. I was interested in teacher practices that related specifically to the discipline of English Language Arts, as well as those pedagogical strategies that could be applied more broadly across disciplines. I explored the connections between how teachers saw the

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purpose of their discipline and the choices they made in terms of how they taught in order to gauge the extent to which they were offering civic learning opportunities to students in their classrooms. I developed items related to the domain of English Language Arts through referencing the aforementioned disciplinary standards, and I borrowed items from the survey that Kahne and Sporte (2008) developed in association with the Consortium on Chicago School Research to measure civic learning opportunities. In terms of literacy practices, items measured the amount of time spent focusing on various disciplinary areas such as grammar, composition, media literacy, response to literature, and new media production. The items from the Chicago survey that correlated to civic learning opportunities included discussion of current events, open classroom climate, focus on student voice and concerns, role play and simulations.

These variables, along with demographic information, provided a wealth of information that had not previously been explored about how high school English teachers interpret the vague connection between literacy and democracy that is so often promulgated in education policies and academic standards. The benefits of this survey design far outweighed its limitations due to its ability to provide insights that I will use to plan future research and begin a conversation about the civic potential of English classrooms.

Population of Reference, Sampling Frame & Units, and Representativeness: The population of reference for this survey was American high school English teachers. I chose to focus on teachers at the high school level because of the steep declines in achievement and engagement that have been demonstrated in both literacy and civics as students transition from elementary to secondary education, as well as the noted lack of consensus in the definition of adolescent literacy and civic education at this developmental stage. And while recent reforms focus on literacy across content areas, I chose to concentrate on English teachers because of their

sustained engagement with and expertise about the core discipline of literacy. I also found it compelling to target English teachers because they are often overlooked in favor of history teachers as purveyors of civic education; I was interested in exploring the extent to which English teachers identified with the mission of offering civic learning opportunities to students.

In selecting the sample frame, I acknowledge that a random sample of teachers would have been ideal; however, such procedures were not feasible for this study. Instead a sample was selected employing a purposive, convenience sampling technique that sought to represent a particular subset of the population of high school English teachers. Generally speaking, purposive sampling allows researchers to select samples based on specific characteristics (Black, 1999). Convenience sampling involves selecting cases that volunteer or are included in the research on the basis of availability.

The purposive, convenience sample for my survey was the population of high school English teachers who belonged to a particular online community of educators called the English Companion Ning. Created and operated by Jim Burke, an English teacher affiliated with the National Council of Teachers of English and the College Board, the site offers user-created resources to all members, including lesson plans, book clubs and message boards that address all aspects of English instruction, from primary to secondary and from composition to literary analysis. While the site is free to join, all membership requests must be approved by the web master and must indicate the prospective member's relationship to English teaching. The site currently boasts over 22,000 members and has been voted Best Use of a Social Network for two years in a row by members of EduBlog, a large educational blogging service. Demographic information about the site's users was not available, which means that I could not compare the

data that I collected about respondents' gender, race, number of years teaching, and educational attainment to that of the site's membership as a whole.

The survey went live on the English Companion Ning website on May 5, 2011 and responses were collected until July 25, 2011. The link to the survey was posted on the home page of the English Companion Ning that members saw when they logged into their accounts. Jim Burke also introduced the survey and shared the link in one of the weekly email updates that he sent to all members. The link to the survey was accompanied by a short introduction to my research and a statement of my positionality as a researcher. I specifically requested that only individuals who identified themselves as English teachers at the high school level take the survey; in addition, I created a screening question that prevented those who were not members of the target sample from completing the survey. I acknowledge that these steps did not preclude the possibility that individuals who were not high school English teachers had access to or filled out my survey, but they represented my best effort considering the limitations of online surveys. I posted on message boards on the site in order to publicize the survey, and I also sought feedback from teachers about the survey on those same message boards. Qualtrix created a basic data file of the responses that I then transferred to SPSS for analysis (see Data Analysis section later in this chapter).

A total of 332 high school English teachers completed the survey – 275 teachers from American public high schools, 29 from American private high schools, and 28 from English-speaking high schools outside of the United States. Because of the small number of teacher respondents hailing from international high schools, as well as the difficulty of obtaining any information about the student or teacher populations at these schools, these responses were excluded from my analysis.

Of my respondents from American high schools (n=304), 90.5% were public school teachers (n=275) and 9.5% (n=29) were private school teachers. Ninety-one percent of the teachers from public schools identified as white, along with 93% of the private school teachers (see Table 1 for a complete breakdown of respondents' racial identifications). The majority of respondents were female - 87% of public school teachers and 69% of private school teachers identified as female. The respondents were also relatively experienced in the classroom - only 8% of public high school respondents and 3% of private high school respondents reported teaching for three years or less. In terms of educational background, the majority of the teachers in my sample from both public and private high schools majored in English as undergraduates (55% public, 66% private). Another 22% of public high school teachers majored in English Education, while no private school teachers reported this major. Six percent of public school teachers and three percent of private school teachers reported majoring in Education alone. Seventeen percent of public school teachers and 31% of private school teachers majored in another subject altogether.

All respondents also provided the names and zip codes of the high schools where they taught during the 2010-2011 school year; this information allowed me to analyze school-level data and draw comparisons between the teachers in my sample. I used NCES school location codes to create categories of urban, suburban, and rural schools based upon proximity to urbanized areas. Of the public school respondents, 27% taught in urban schools, 44% in suburban schools, and 29% in rural schools; of the private school respondents, 38% taught in urban schools, 55% in suburban schools, and 7% in rural schools. I also used NCES data to create categories for low- and high-minority schools based upon percentages of white and non-white student enrollment. I identified schools as low-minority if non-white students represented

less than fifty percent of the student population, and high-minority if they represented more than fifty percent of the student body. Seventy-one percent of respondents from public schools taught in low-minority schools, along with 93% of private school respondents. In addition, only 40% percent of my respondents taught in low-income schools (defined as School-Wide Title I schools in which over 40% of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch). (See Chapter four for a more detailed analysis of the sample, including comparisons to the national teaching force).

Table 1: Survey Respondents' Racial Backgrounds by Percent

	Public High School Respondents (n=275)*	Private High School Respondents (n=29)
White	91	93
African-American	1	-
Hispanic/Latino	2	3.4
American Indian/Alaska Native	3	3.4
Asian/Pacific Islander	1	3.4
Other	1	-
Decline	5	-

*Percentages do not add up to 100% because some respondents indicated more than one race.

Despite the diversity that was captured in the sample along several dimensions, I openly acknowledge the inherent limitations of my sample methodology in representativeness and in allowing me to make generalizations to teachers nationally; however, I feel that my sample

allowed me to make important conclusions about a particular subset of teachers who were so committed to their professions that they pursued development opportunities and, in a sense, acted as a vanguard for the discipline. The members of this site represent a particular slice of the national high school English teacher population that is tech-savvy, proficient in social networking, and presumably interested in professional growth through either the sharing or pursuit of online resources. These teachers shared commonalities with the teachers with whom I was working as part of my classroom ethnography, and their views on the connections between literacy and citizenship helped to open new lines of research in teacher civic identity.

Critical Classroom Ethnography

Overview: The term 'critical ethnography' contains two distinct concepts that require explication before a succinct definition can be offered. The term 'ethnography' refers to the qualitative study of human societies and cultures, specifically through in-depth exploration of how individuals and groups make sense of their worlds. Importantly, ethnographers do not see culture as a static collection of linguistic, material, and spiritual resources, but as a collection of constantly shifting, active processes of meaning-making in particular situations; as such, Brian Street (1993) urges that ethnographers see "culture as a verb" rather than a noun. This view of culture demands close attention to the practices through which meaning is made. The term 'critical' refers both to a particular value orientation that researchers bring to their methodologies, as well as the methodologies themselves. As Phil Carspecken (1996) explains, those qualitative researchers who call themselves 'criticalists' are concerned about social inequalities and direct their work toward "positive social change" (p. 3). Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) lay out specific assumptions that guide the work of critical qualitative researchers:

> That all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations which are socially and historically constituted, . . . that the relationship between concept and object and signifier and signified is never stable or fixed and is often mediated by the social relations of capitalist production and consumption; that language is central to the formation of subjectivity; and that mainstream research practices are generally, although most often unwittingly, implicated in the production of systems of class, race and gender oppression (p. 139-140)

These assumptions serve to situate the inquiry of the ethnographic researcher and provide a lens through which to interpret data collected in the field about cultural practices.

Critical ethnography, then, is the in-depth, qualitative study of cultural practices that situates data within a methodological and theoretical framework focused on issues of power, hegemony, and resistance. The researcher plays a particularly important role in ethnography as an outsider to cultural practices who nonetheless studies and frames them for the consumption of a wider audience through two main data collection strategies: participant observation and semi-structured interviewing. The 'primary record' of the ethnographic researcher is the field note, in which the researcher writes detailed descriptions of every interaction with the research participants; the goal is to provide "thick description," in which everything from speech acts to body movements to the organization of space is recorded (Carspecken, 1996). This is usually accomplished by jotting shorthand notes into a notebook while in the research setting and then producing longer, more detailed narratives of the happenings shortly after leaving the setting. After a series of field notes have been written, analytic memos are produced that serve to draw out themes that have become apparent through observation (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). Importantly, this phase of data collection often involves what Carpecken calls "passive observation"; namely, creating a naturalistic record of social routines from the perspective of the researcher to establish a baseline before attempting more interactive forms of data generation (p. 52).

Once the thick record has been established, ethnographic researchers turn to different strategies in order to synthesize data and develop their analytic memos. The constant comparative perspective stresses the need for the researcher to move back and forth in their thinking as they focus simultaneously on what previous literature on the research topic has found and the new data that they are collecting in the field (Heath & Street, 2008). This simultaneous analysis of 'close' and 'distant' data allows for the researcher to notice patterns and draw on existing theory while also guarding against the pull of allowing value judgments or previous literature to cloud what the researcher is seeing in the field. Researchers then take this perspective into the coding process, in which they create categories in order to organize their data based on commonalities, differences, and patterns. Low-level codes stay very close to the objective features of the primary field notes, highlighting such features as the seating arrangements in a room, while higher-level codes involve abstractions that the researcher makes about the qualities of what is seen in observation, such as describing certain interactions as examples of conflict (Carspecken, 1996, p. 147-148).

The coding process begins during the construction of the primary field note record and continues throughout the next phase in ethnographic data collection, which involves what Carspecken calls "dialogical data generation" (p. 154). At this stage in the research process, the researcher invites participants to contribute their ideas on the topic of interest in direct fashion through semi-structured interviews or focus groups. This form of data collection is crucial to critical ethnography because it represents an attempt to "democratize" the research process through giving participants a voice and opportunity to challenge ideas of the researcher (Carspecken, p. 155). It is crucial to introduce this form of data collection once a primary record has been established because the future course of observations could very likely be changed as a

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result of directed, focused conversations with participants about the research topic. The goal of the ethnographic interview is to create a comfortable atmosphere in which participants can talk conversationally about the research topic; as a result, it is suggested that researchers craft several lead-off questions for each of the topic domains in which they are interested, and then base future questions on the responses received (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Interviews are subjected to the same analysis as field notes, from memo-writing to coding.

Critical ethnography is particularly suited to the exploration of literacy practices and civic identity development within urban contexts because of its interpretation of culture as an active process of meaning-making within the constraints of social and historical power relations. Heath and Street argue that ethnography is an ideal way to approach the study of literacy because of the "immense variability as well as stability in the ways [individuals] create, sustain, and adapt their modalities, including oral and written language" (p. 3). In fact, they argue that ethnographers seeking to study language and literacy must consider three variables: "individuals trying to be expert in something, groups in identity-making, and institutions of formal education" (p. 3). These situations match up perfectly with my three analytic levels. In addition, some scholars in the field of political socialization are beginning to argue that more qualitative methods are needed order to create a "research framework that will encompass multidimensional views of civic participation (not limited to voting), of political understanding (not limited to factual knowledge), of attitudes or dispositions (not limited to generalizable tolerance), and of context (not limited to the formal curriculum)" (Torney-Purta, Amadeo, & Andolina, 2010, p. 498). This view takes seriously the role of context and power relations in the development of civic identity and calls for interview and focus group methods that can illuminate how individuals who are situated in particular school and community environments conceptualize their citizenship.

Site Selection and Recruitment: For the purposes of my ethnography, I focused on public schools located in the city of Los Angeles. This city and school district presented an ideal case study for the analysis of how students and teachers developed civic identities within a social context riven by systemic inequalities. According to the 2007 UCLA Anderson Forecast, Los Angeles has had higher levels of income inequality than anywhere else in the nation since 1969 (Nickelsburg, p. 60). Scott and Soja (1996) explain that, "Los Angeles ... is deeply divided into two distinctive segments, as represented on the one side by an upper tier of highly-paid managers, professionals, and technicians and on the other side by a lower-tier composed of low-skill, low-wage workers" (p. 5). Importantly, economic inequality in Los Angeles is heavily racialized; as Bobo, Johnson, and Valenzuela (2000) explain in their summary of the Los Angeles Study of Urban Inequality, "members of different racial and ethnic groups often start out with different opportunities, resources and obstacles, and end with unequal outcomes in the quest for social and economic well-being" (p. 5).

These race and class-based inequalities are evident in the composition and performance of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) as compared to school districts throughout the state of California (and even the rest of Los Angeles County). Over 75% of the 670,000 students enrolled in LAUSD qualify for free and reduced price lunch, which far exceeds the percentage for Los Angeles County as a whole. Approximately 73.5% of students in LAUSD identify as Latino/a or Hispanic, compared to 49% of students in public schools throughout the state, and over one-third of LAUSD students are designated as English Language Learners (CBEDS, 2009). In terms of graduation rates, standardized test scores, percentages of highly qualified teachers and college preparatory courses, LAUSD is experiencing similar struggles as many other school districts in the state, but on a larger scale. The intransigence of these

inequalities has made LAUSD a laboratory for a variety of school reform efforts, from the emergence of charter schools to the development of government-school partnerships.

Considering the levels of familiarity and trust with research participants that is necessary to gather the in-depth, unfiltered data that is the hallmark of quality ethnographic work, I decided to identify teachers and classrooms for my study from the high schools in Los Angeles with which I have already established relationships. I became most familiar with five particular high schools across the city due to my involvement in the Council of Youth Research, a civic engagement initiative sponsored by the UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education and Access. The Council is a community of high school students, teachers, university professors, and graduate student researchers committed to conducting research aimed at improving the conditions in urban schools and injecting the voices of young people into conversations around education policy and reform. The students in the program, who all identify as Latino/a and African-American, hail from high schools in East Los Angeles, South Central Los Angeles, and Watts – all communities within Los Angeles that suffer disproportionately from concentrated poverty, systemic racism, and under-performing schools but also draw strength from deep historical traditions of protest and resistance.

The Council creates a supportive environment in which students can become critical researchers of their own schools and communities through offering intensive, graduate-level 5-week seminars over the summer and weekly meetings during the school year. The seminar guides students through the analysis of critical social theory and provides them with the tools necessary to conduct fieldwork and create multimedia presentations about research topics that matter to them. The Council presents their work several times a year to audiences of elected officials and community leaders throughout the state of California and across the country. In the

past year, students have presented at the Digital Media and Learning Conference in San Francisco and at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association in New Orleans, Louisiana. They also met with the state superintendent of public instruction in Sacramento. I have spent my entire graduate career coordinating the work of the Council. I organize all of the weekly and monthly meetings of the Council during the school year, doing everything from writing curriculum to leading meetings and mentoring groups. In addition to directing a team of 5 graduate students to support the students, I also visit students at their schools and make sure that they are not only succeeding within the Council, but also making progress with college applications and coursework.

Much of the work of the Council involves defining the characteristics of quality education and analyzing the extent to which students within LAUSD are receiving such an education, specifically within our five home schools. In their work two summers ago, students developed detailed visions of the pedagogy and curriculum that they felt all students in Los Angeles deserved. They demanded teachers who demonstrated ethics of genuine caring and commitments to Freirian principles of problem-posing education; in addition, they called for culturally relevant curriculum that encouraged students to think critically about society and take learning outside the classroom and into the community to promote social justice. Students came to see themselves as civic agents with a responsibility to share knowledge and skills with their fellow students and to advocate for resources to improve their educations, and this was largely accomplished through practices grounded in the ideas of critical literacy (Morrell, 2008).

Because the Council embodied so many of the pedagogical practices that I was interested in exploring in my own research, and because the students and teachers in the program had developed sophisticated skill in recognizing civically powerful teaching and learning as a result

of their research, I decided to organize the recruitment process for my ethnography around the input of the Council students. At this point, I had already made the decision that I wanted to pursue relationships with teachers who were actively thinking about the connections between literacy and democracy and introducing literacy practices to their students that attempted to make those connections; this was due to my interest in documenting what is working and what is possible in classrooms as opposed to bemoaning what is missing in urban education. My commitment to describing best practices, as well as my belief that students and teachers in the Council could identify educators who shared the value orientation of our community of practice, led me to engage in a process of community nomination (Foster, 1991) in order to construct a pool of teachers who could serve as potential research partners. I asked the five teachers and thirty students in the program to nominate English teachers at their high schools who they felt embodied powerful teaching according to the shared definitions that we had developed through our research – those who cared about their students, took seriously the beliefs of critical pedagogy, and connected the study of English to social action.

Once I received all of the nominations, I began to narrow the pool by first eliminating anyone who had not been nominated by both a student and a teacher from each school. I then furthered narrowed the list by deciding to choose classrooms from only three of the schools that we work with, instead of all five. This was a purely logistical decision based on my belief that I would not be able to produce quality ethnographic work during a limited period of time in five separate classrooms. I decided to tailor my study to one school in each of the three neighborhoods in which our students lived (East Los Angeles, South Central Los Angeles, and Watts). Once I had made this determination, I set up appointments with the nominated teachers at the selected schools in order to introduce myself and my research, discuss the process through

which they had been nominated, and ask if they would be willing to participate in my study. My search netted me one teacher participant at each of three high schools: Southwest, Southeast, and Eastside.

While my primary research interest was classroom practice, which would obviously vary from one class period and one day to the next, I was also interested in achieving some variability in institutional contexts and individual teacher identities for my study in order to learn more about the unique ways that classroom practice might be influenced by such factors as school organizational structure, demographics, or teacher racial identity. My choices in teacher participants and schools presented me with a richly complex set of environments that led to new and unexpected insights about literacy and civic identity.

At Southwest High School, which is located in South Central Los Angeles, I worked with 3rd year teacher, Mr. Prado. 'Mr. P', as his students called him, identified as Filipino-American and taught 10th and 12th grade English. He earned his state certification at the Teacher Education Program at UCLA, which he credited with introducing him to the ideas of critical pedagogy and critical literacy, and he was an assistant coach for the school's debate team. Southwest itself had endured several tumultuous years of struggling academic performance, decreasing enrollment, and political turmoil by the time I arrived to conduct my study. Of its 2000 students, 65% are African-American and 35% are Latino. Seventy-six percent of students qualify for free and reduced price lunch, and 13% are English Language Learners.

Virtually the last high school in LAUSD with a majority African-American student population, Southwest lost its accreditation in 2005 due in part to low test-scores, lack of standards-aligned curriculum, and rampant tardiness. Community outrage over the loss of accreditation led to the development of a parent organization, the Southwest Parent Coalition

(SPC), which drew hundreds of concerned parents and community members to its meetings and clashed with administrators and district officials over reform efforts at the school, at one point being locked out of the campus during a planned meeting time. Though accreditation was restored in early 2006, tensions continued to flare between the teachers union (UTLA), parents, administrators and district officials. As the political environment under Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa became more receptive to school reform partnerships, Southwest emerged as an obvious candidate. While still a traditional comprehensive high school, Southwest has now gained network partners. The Greater Southwest Educational Partnership (GSEP), which was formed in early 2008, brings together the Los Angeles Urban League, the Tom and Ethel Bradley Foundation, and the USC Rossier School of Education in a mission to not only improve the conditions and academic achievement within at Southwest, but to contribute to the renewal of the 70-block Park Mesa Heights neighborhood that surrounds it.

At Southeast High School, which is located in Watts, I worked with Ms. Nieto. Ms. Nieto identified as Chicana and taught 10th grade English. Ms. Nieto earned her state certification at San Francisco State University and was in her 10th year of teaching. She also sponsored an after-school writing club and took on leadership roles in a professional group for educators dedicated to social justice. Southeast gained national notoriety in 2008 when a large fight between black and Latino students brought police in riot gear to the campus, and its name became widely synonymous with violence and failure. The campus has had some of the highest drop out rates and lowest standardized test scores in Los Angeles for decades. In 2007, Achievement Public Schools, a charter management organization, successfully lobbied the school district to allow it to assume operation of the school, making it the first LAUSD school to become a charter in the district's history. The campus of 2600 students has been transformed

into a cluster of eight small charter schools. The school is the mirror opposite of Southwest in terms of student racial demographics – 65% of the student population is Latino and 35% is African-American. Sixty percent of students qualify for free and reduced price lunch and 29% are designated as English Language Learners.

At Eastside High School, which is located in East Los Angeles, I worked with 6th year teacher, Elizabeth Brown. Ms. Brown identified as white and taught 10th grade Humanities in the school's Law and Justice Academy. She earned her state certification through the Teacher Education Program at UCLA, as well as a Masters degree and administrative credential from UCLA's Principal Leadership Institute. She managed grants for her small learning community. Eastside, which is one of the largest high schools in Los Angeles, boasts over 4700 students, nearly 100% of whom are Latino/Hispanic. Eighty percent of students qualify for free and reduced price lunch and 36% are English Language Learners.

Formerly a comprehensive high school, Eastside has been transformed into a cluster of seven small learning communities through its involvement in a mayoral education initiative. Los Angeles mayor Antonio Villaraigosa spent much of 2006 attempting to win mayoral control of the LAUSD, and while he eventually gained the support of the city council, legislature, and governor, his plans were deemed unconstitutional in two levels of court review. In the wake of this defeat, he launched a non-profit organization that aimed to tackle the restructuring of LAUSD from another angle, this time through assuming the daily management of and accountability for 10 of the lowest performing elementary, middle and high schools in the district. This organization has adopted many of the hallmarks of mayoral control, including streamlined management, increased flexibility and accountability at the school-site level, and partnership with corporate and community-based organizations.

I worked with two tenth-grade classes (one 90-minute class at Southeast and one 54-minute class at Eastside) and one 90-minute twelfth-grade class at Southwest. The 10th grade class at Eastside was identified as an Honors class, while the classes in the other two schools did not have any special designations. Observing both 10th and 12th grade classes gave me the opportunity to explore the extent to which classes of differing grade levels incorporated discussions of citizenship and democracy into their literacy practices in meaningfully different ways.

Data Collection: I worked with each teacher to determine which period of the day worked best logistically for me to engage in participant observation. Once this was determined, I attended this class three days per week from February 2011 to June 2011. I supplemented these observations with some additional classroom visits that took place between September 2011 and December 2011. Since I was more interested in analyzing daily classroom practices than in creating a longitudinal study of student development over time, I did not consider it a limitation that I observed different students during portions of two different school years.

During classroom visits, I participated in all aspects of the classes as an active observer, taking note of teacher and student actions, speech and body language and assisting teachers with the facilitation of their lessons by visiting with student groups. I drew from my insider status as a former high school English teacher to assist students, while keeping in mind my continuing status as an outsider in the classroom communities. I wrote down 'jottings' in my field notebook about all interactions that I later expanded to full-length, detailed field notes. I also videotaped 3-4 classes at each site that were selected in consultation with the teachers and students, creating logs for each video that supplemented my field notes. Finally, I collected artifacts from the classrooms, including copies of handouts, assessments, and student work products.

While I will discuss how the analytic levels of the social structure, individual civic identity development, and classroom community will inform my data analysis later in this chapter, it is important to note that my data collection and coding of classroom practices drew from these levels. In terms of the social structure, I examined policy documents related to the schools and the school district and analyzed interactions in the classroom to see how systemic inequality influenced classroom practice. In terms of individual civic identity development, I thought about how the different aspects of the classroom context influenced the students' acquisition of civic knowledge, skills and attitudes. And in terms of the classroom community, I focused on dialogue and knowledge construction among students and teachers. In all cases, I focused this analysis on specific 'literacy events' in the classroom; Barton and Hamilton (2000) define these events as activities in which literacy has a role, usually mediated through the use of written, oral, or multimedia texts (p. 8). The roles that texts played in facilitating dialogue, fostering identity development, and mediating the social structure were key to my analysis.

In addition to gathering data through participant observation, I conducted interviews with teachers and selected students from each class; these interviews, which were recorded, lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and were based on semi-structured interview protocols. I interviewed each teacher 3 times during the course of the study and interviewed 3-5 students from each classroom. My goal in these interviews was to gather data in a naturalistic and conversational fashion; as a result, my questionnaires were brief and rather general and became more focused in the course of the interviews depending on the responses of the interviewee. All of the interviews sought to gather data about how individuals experienced classroom practice and how they interpreted the connections between literacy and democracy, drawing from the same analytic levels as my classroom observations; importantly, the interviews were grounded in the

events of the classroom. Both field notes and interview notes were coded inductively as I drew from specific classroom literacy events to create grounded theory.

Reflection Groups

<u>Overview</u>: According to Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Kelly Donnell (2006), practitioner inquiry refers to "the array of educational research genres where the practitioner is the researcher, the professional context is the research site, and practice itself is the focus of study" (p. 503). When teachers gather together, often with the assistance of university-based researchers, to analyze their classroom practice, they form teacher inquiry groups in which they "analyze their own assumptions, develop local knowledge by posing questions and gathering data, and . . . work for social justice" (p. 505). The primary aim of these groups is to improve teaching and learning, but they also serve to legitimate teachers as researchers and as professionals with the authority to construct knowledge to contribute to education theory, research and policy (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993).

Teacher inquiry groups are much more than simple collectives of teachers talking about their classrooms; Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) argue that they are grounded in systematicity and intentionality – organized processes for gathering and analyzing instances of student and teacher learning in planned and deliberate ways. As opposed to other forms of research, data in teacher inquiry groups often involves teachers' own "thinking, planning, and evaluation processes as well as their questions, interpretive frameworks, changes in views over time, issues they see as dilemmas, and themes that recur" (Cochran-Smith & Donnell, 2006, p. 511).

Through her review of relevant literature, Susan Lytle (2009) developed four thematic frames that have traditionally guided teacher research on literacy practice:

1. Classroom instruction, curriculum and assessment
2. Culture and community
3. Cultures of teaching in and out of schools
4. Access, equity, and democratic education (p. 700-701)

I aimed for group meetings with my focus teachers to touch upon each of these themes and shed light upon several pressing issues facing literacy educators committed to further developing practices geared toward critical civic learning and engagement. While the process in which the teachers and I engaged during our group meetings reflected that of teacher inquiry groups, I did not situate it as a pure example of teacher inquiry in action because we did not proceed through an entire cycle of developing research questions, systematically gathering data, and developing findings to guide further practice. The meetings that I organized were much more fluid and organic, but nonetheless owed a great debt to this literature. For this reason, I call these meetings reflection groups rather than inquiry groups.

Selection and Recruitment: My reflection groups were comprised of the three teachers involved in my classroom ethnography (and me). I acted as the facilitator of three 90-minute focus group meetings with Mr. Prado, Ms. Nieto, and Ms. Brown – these meetings took place on July 19th, July 28th, and November 13th of 2011.

Data Collection: The purpose of the reflection groups was to explore teacher perceptions of the connection between literacy education and civic education within the context of urban high school English classrooms in Los Angeles. While the three teachers in the group had not previously met each other, their shared commitment to the type of powerful pedagogy and curricula that the students and teachers of the Council identified provided a common value orientation and purpose to our discussions. The power of the discussions was based in the exploration of the different ways that teachers translated their beliefs about the purposes of literacy in democratic life to specific classroom practices; as such, the focus group meetings gave

the teachers the opportunity to share accounts of particular literacy events that took place during the previous five months in their classrooms as a springboard for conversation and brainstorming.

Prior to these meetings, I met individually with each teacher in order to introduce the format and to discuss some of the successes or challenges that they felt that they had experienced in developing and implementing civic-minded literacy practices. We came to consensus about the elements of their practice that they would like to present to the group in order to illustrate particular questions that they were interested in researching. Teachers did not present these questions during the first focus group meeting; instead, this meeting served as an introduction in which teachers got to know each other, I introduced texts that gave us a shared vocabulary to discuss literacy, democracy, and civic identity, and we collectively analyzed field notes about each teacher's practice. The next two meetings were devoted to the discussion and analysis of each teacher's practice. The meetings followed a protocol in order to provide structure to the discussions. The presenting teacher was given ten minutes to share their questions about an element of their pedagogy, introduce artifacts from their classroom, and direct the group regarding the feedback that they would like to receive. The group then spent approximately thirty minutes discussing the issue and relating it to their own practice, after which time the presenting teacher spent several minutes discussing what was heard. At this point, we would break from the protocol and have a more wide-ranging conversation about the issues that were raised.

The purposes of this protocol (and of the reflection group meetings more generally) were both to create another data collection opportunity for my study and to provide a structured opportunity for teachers to share their practices and benefit from the new knowledge and ideas that are produced through dialogue among peers. In addition to meeting with teachers prior to the series of focus group, I also debriefed with each of them afterwards. All of the focus group

meetings were recorded, transcribed, and coded using the same inductive process and analytic levels that guided the coding process for field notes and individual interview transcripts.

Data Analysis

The majority of the data that I collected from the classroom ethnography and reflection groups were field notes and transcripts from interviews and video recordings. I also regularly created analytic memos and debriefed with research participants in order to synthesize my findings. I analyzed this data through the lens of Barton and Hamilton's (2000) social theory of literacy, the components of which are practices, events, and texts. They define literacy practices as the "general cultural ways of utilizing written language which people draw upon in their lives" that exist in the social relations between people and involve "values, attitudes, feelings, and social relationships" (p. 7). Literacy events represent the observable manifestations of literacy practices that take place in both informal home settings and formal classroom spaces, and texts serve as the mediating artifacts that individuals manipulate in these literacy events (p. 8-9). This social theory of literacy was fruitful for my analysis because of its grounding in socio-cultural understandings of learning and literacy and its acknowledgement that "literacy practices are more usefully understood as existing in the relations between people, within groups and communities, rather than a set of properties residing in individuals" (p. 8). As a result, I was able to analyze the literacy events that occurred in my focus teachers' classrooms as dialogic events grounded in the process of communication.

Indeed, the importance of dialogue in literacy events was reflected in my use of the ethnography of communication – the application of ethnographic methods to the patterns of communication among groups – as another lens for data analysis. Littlejohn and Foss (2005), in

their exploration of Dell Hymes' theory, suggest, "all forms of communication require a shared code, communicators who know and use the code, a channel, a setting, a message form, a topic, and an event created by transmission of the message" (p. 312). Hymes (1974) stresses the importance of analyzing speech communities rather than individual utterances, which mirrored the way that I wanted to analyze classrooms as civic communities. The ethnography of communication is a form of discourse analysis, but I also drew upon critical discourse analysis (CDA) to inject an exploration of structural power relations into the treatment of my data. As Fairclough (1995) explains, "Discourse practice is a facet of struggle which contributes in varying degrees to the reproduction or transformation of the existing order of discourse, and through that of existing social and power relations" (p. 77). CDA helped me to focus on the ways that identity is negotiated through speech in the context of specific social contexts. Furthermore, Gee (2000) encourages researchers to examine identity through analysis of the institutional discourses with which individuals engage, which connected this level of analysis to the level of the social structure.

My initial data analysis of this data was guided by a simultaneous 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' coding approach. While I began my analysis by coding my field notes individually without any overarching conceptual categories, I continued to return to my primary unit of analysis and three analytic levels and used these concepts to re-organize my codes and create conceptual categories. All artifacts, such as student work and teacher-created lesson materials, were also coded. I largely coded by hand and then used ATLAS.ti to help me to organize the codes. I sought to find confirming data for the hypotheses that I developed in my analysis by looking for supplementary evidence in other data sources; in that sense, I was continually triangulating my data.

In terms of my survey data, I first constructed a data set by transferring my response data and data from NCES about each respondent's school from Qualtrix to SPSS. I then described my respondents by performing a univariate analysis of independent variables and correlating these variables. I finally performed univariate and bivariate analyses of my dependent variables. Since my analysis of the survey data took place during the summer break between my two phases of ethnographic classroom observation, the results informed some of my interviews with teachers, as well as the reflection group meetings and classroom observations.

As I analyzed my ethnographic, focus group and survey data, I constantly returned to the lenses of my three analytic levels – individual civic identity development, classroom community, and social structure – in order to understand classroom practice. Importantly, all of the data was analyzed from the perspective of each of these overlapping levels. I will speak to how each of these levels structured my analysis.

Individual civic identity development. My data allowed me to analyze both teacher and student civic identity development, partly in the context of literacy events in individual classrooms and partly in a more broad, national survey context. While it is extremely difficult to measure identity, I based my analysis on socio-cultural views of learning, which situate identity development within practice and the telling of narratives; as such, this level of analysis was intricately related to the level of community of practice. Sfard and Prusak (2005) remind us that identity is constructed through the stories that we tell about ourselves and that others tell about us that are reifying and significant, and that connect our designated identities (who we 'should' be or 'want to be') and our actual identities (who we say we 'are') (p. 18). As a result, I spoke to individual identity development by analyzing the moments in which teachers and students told stories about themselves or spoke back to how they were positioned in society in the context of

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literacy events. The civic aspect of identity became relevant when these narratives engaged with the social structure and with individuals' place in political and social systems. Importantly, I did not define identity development as the progression toward a fixed end point, but rather as a continuous process. I noted every narrative as an instance of identity development in constantly shifting contexts instead of trying to create a trajectory of development for any individuals. In terms of my survey data, I considered the responses given by respondents as statements of their identity at that particular moment; I used this data to draw connections between variables and make predictions about classroom practice as opposed to any pronouncements about fixed teacher identity.

Classroom community. For the purposes of my research, the extent to which what happened in the classroom influenced civic identity depended upon the extent to which the space became a community devoted to the cultivation of democratic dialogue around literary texts that opened up opportunities for civic thought and action. In keeping with socio-cultural learning theory, I spoke to this level of analysis by examining how students and teachers participated and interacted in the classroom context. I was particularly interested in how dialogue in the classroom created knowledge and fostered a community that was humanizing and socially empowering. I identified moments in which the classroom became a civic community by focusing on literacy practices that sought to connect students to a larger body of democratic citizens through simulations, project-based learning, community action, and authentic assessments. Focusing on dialogue was valuable to analyzing classroom communities in ways that connected to the levels of individual civic identity development and the social structure.

Social structure. Analysis of this level involved the analysis of documents related to the schools in which I was conducting my ethnographic research, as well as classroom interactions

themselves, in order to see how institutional discourses influenced action within local contexts. I was interested in how power relationships played themselves out within the classroom, as well as the ways in which teachers facilitated dialogue that makes social structure more transparent. When examining my survey data, I also analyzed the different discourses of citizenship with which teachers identified and explored their impact on the school environment and classroom practice. I was interested in the extent to which systemic inequality created a unique context for individual civic identity development among students of color and how it affected the types of civic learning that occurred in the classroom.

CHAPTER FOUR – SURVEY FINDINGS

While my review of the critical literacy and civic education literatures in Chapter two revealed general consensus among scholars about the close relationship between literacy and citizenship, it also exposed deep contradictions and tensions about how exactly to define and operationalize each of these concepts in the context of classroom practice. While these tensions have the potential to inspire productive dialogue about what it means to be literate and to be a citizen in the 21st century, my problem statement in Chapter one revealed that this potential has largely been stifled by the overwhelming dominance of neoliberal, market-based ideology over policy in both fields.

In their exhaustive review of eleven recent adolescent literacy reports, Faggella-Luby, Ware, and Capozzoli (2009) found that policymakers consistently operate from a narrow definition of adolescent literacy focused on academic reading skills that prepare students for postsecondary school and work (p. 469-470). While the authors of the review acknowledge the importance of providing students with necessary skills to succeed in a global economy, they express concern that policy is not engaging with more expansive perspectives on literacy; as they argue, "Broadening the definition of literacy does not eliminate the role of academic literacy but rather creates space for academic literacy to enhance how students think critically about the world they inhabit and develop their own alternative literacies" (p. 470). One consequence of the narrowing of the definition of literacy has been the construction of the 'struggling reader' and the marginalization of the literacy practices of students from non-dominant communities (Alvermann, 2006). Importantly, however, scholars are beginning to press the policy world to examine the ways that alternative, more robust and culturally responsive visions of literacy contribute to student success (Gutierrez, 2009; Moje, 2010).

Just as the definition of literacy is being contested at the policy level, so is the vision of the 'good citizen' in civic education programs. While many civic education programs focus on helping students to acquire factual knowledge and encourage them to enact individualistic, non-politicized forms of civic action, scholars from various disciplines have suggested a host of alternatives. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) offer models of personally responsible, participatory, and justice-oriented citizens that can be promoted in schools. Rubin (2007) categorizes possible student civic identities grounded in schooling experiences, ranging from aware and empowered to complacent and discouraged. Others offer "critical" (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007; Kirshner, Strobel, & Fernandez, 2003) or "practice-based" (Biesta, Lawy & Kelly, 2009; Nasir & Kirshner, 2003) models of civic education.

Amidst the whirlwind of possibilities for how literacy and citizenship can be conceptualized in classrooms, one undisputed claim emerges – classroom teachers act as crucial mediators who facilitate experiences for their students that embody multiple, contradictory and unavoidably politicized visions of the literate citizen. Indeed, reports in both disciplines provide recommendations for teacher education and preparation as necessary precursors to the implementation of their desired reforms. While policymakers, researchers and politicians often prod teachers to adopt particular stances toward literacy and citizenship, implementation of policies at the classroom level take on different forms based on the normative and political dimensions of each school and classroom (Oakes, 1992). Indeed, research has shown that the beliefs that teachers hold about their subject matter, their students, and their roles in classrooms has a role in influencing the practices that they engage in with their students (Fang, 1996; Pajares, 1992).

Despite the acknowledged importance of teacher beliefs to classroom practice and the implementation of policy reforms, particularly in the highly contested realm of literacy (O'Brien, Stewart, & Moje, 1995), there is very little research available that explores how teachers are making sense of the variety of directions in which their disciplines are being pushed and how their understandings of their mission translate into particular classroom practices. While teachers often enact practices in their classrooms that diverge from their stated beliefs (Raymond, 1997), it nevertheless remains important to explore how teachers conceptualize the civic dimension of schooling and how this may be reflected or contradicted in their classroom practice. Furthermore, it is important to include the voices of teachers in conversations about the future of their subject areas and seek out their opinions and ideas as professionals and public intellectuals.

This desire to privilege teachers' ideas about the purposes of literacy and the characteristics of good citizenship led me to develop of an online survey aimed at analyzing the beliefs and classroom practices of high school English teachers from across the country. I chose to focus on teachers at the high school level because of the steep declines in achievement and engagement that have been demonstrated in both literacy and civics as students transition from elementary to secondary education, as well as the noted lack of consensus in the definition of adolescent literacy and civic education at this developmental stage. And while recent reforms focus on literacy across content areas, I chose to concentrate on English teachers because of their sustained engagement with and expertise about the core discipline of literacy. I also found it compelling to target English teachers because they are often overlooked in favor of history teachers as purveyors of civic education; I was interested in exploring the extent to which English teachers identified with the mission of offering civic learning opportunities to students.

The Sample

The purposive, convenience sample for my survey was the population of high school English teachers who belong to a particular online community of educators called the English Companion Ning. Created and operated by Jim Burke, an English teacher affiliated with the National Council of Teachers of English and the College Board, the site offers user-created resources to all members, including lesson plans, book clubs and message boards that address all aspects of English instruction, from primary to secondary and from composition to literary analysis. While the site is free to join, all membership requests must be approved by the web-master and must indicate the prospective member's relationship to English teaching. The site currently boasts over 22,000 members and has been voted "Best Use of a Social Network" for two years in a row by members of EduBlog, a large educational blogging service.

The site does not collect demographic information about its members or the schools where they teach; as a result, I was not able to determine the representativeness of my respondent pool relative to the total membership of the English Companion Ning. Relatedly, I was not able to obtain data regarding the demographics of high school English teachers nationwide, which prevents me from making generalizations from my data to the national population of teachers in the discipline; nevertheless, I can make some comparisons with the national population of high school teachers. In addition, my survey results contribute to the creation of an evocative portrait of a small sliver of the national population of English teachers that raises important questions and invites further study. The members of this site represent a particular slice of the national high school English teacher population that is tech-savvy, proficient in social networking, and presumably interested in professional growth through either the sharing or pursuit of online resources. Those who chose to respond to the survey also took an explicit interest in the role of

citizenship in their profession; indeed, the advertisement for the survey indicated that those who chose to respond would "contribute to a better understanding of how high school English teachers think about citizenship in general and the field of English education in particular."

The survey was designed and administered online using Qualtrix and responses were collected from May 5, 2011 to July 25, 2011. The web-master publicized the survey and encouraged members of the Ning to participate using Twitter and the weekly email he sends to all members. As a member of the site, I also publicized the survey by posting information about it on various message boards and special interest groups within the community.

A total of 332 high school English teachers completed the survey – 275 teachers from American public high schools, 29 from American private high schools, and 28 from English-speaking high schools outside of the United States. Because of the small number of teacher respondents hailing from international high schools, as well as the difficulty of obtaining any information about the student or teacher populations at these schools, these responses were excluded from my analysis.

Of my respondents from American high schools (n=304), 90.5% were public school teachers and 9.5% were private school teachers. According to NCES, there were 1 million public high school teachers (93.9%) and 61,000 (6.1%) private high school teachers employed during the 2007-2008 school year; as a result, there is a slight over-representation of private high school teachers in the sample. Considering, however, that 8.3% of American high school students attended private high schools during the 2007-2008 school year, my sample is slightly more representative of enrollment trends.

In terms of racial demographics, white public high school teachers are significantly over-represented in my sample, while white private high school teachers are slightly over-represented

(see Table 2). While the percentages of Asian/Pacific Islander respondents from public and private high schools largely mirror national trends, my sample suffers from severe under-representation of African-American and Hispanic/Latino teachers from public and private high schools. Interestingly, my sample contains an over-representation of public and private high school teachers of American Indian/Alaskan Native descent.

Table 2: Public/Private School Respondents & Comparison to National Teaching Force by Percent

	Public High School Respondents (n=275)*	Public High School Teachers Nationwide (2007-2008)	**Private High School Respondents (n=29)**	Private High School Teachers Nationwide (2007-2008)
White	**91**	83	**93**	90
African-American	**1**	7	**-**	2
Hispanic/Latino	**2**	7	**3.4**	6
American Indian/Alaska Native	**3**	-	**3.4**	-
Asian/Pacific Islander	**1**	1	**3.4**	2
Other	**1**	-	**-**	-
Decline	**5**	-	**-**	-

*Percentages do not add up to 100% because some respondents indicated more than one race.
Source: NCES (2011)

The teachers in my sample, at both public and private high schools, have significantly higher levels of experience than teachers nationwide (see Table 3). Only 8% of public high school respondents and 3% of private high school respondents report teaching for three years or

less, compared to 17% and 16% nationwide, respectively. The teachers in my sample are also far more likely to have taught for between ten and nineteen years than their counterparts at the national level.

Table 3: Respondents' Teaching Experience & Comparison to National Teaching Force by Percent

	Public High School Respondents (n=275)	Public High School Teachers Nationwide (2007-2008)	**Private High School Respondents (n-29)**	Private High School Teachers Nationwide (2007-2008)
Three or fewer years	**8**	17	**3**	16
Four to nine years	**27**	28	**24**	27
Ten to nineteen years	**40**	27	**35**	25
20 or more years	**25**	28	**38**	31

Source: NCES (2011)

Female teachers are significantly over-represented in my sample from both public and private high schools. 87% of public school respondents and 69% of private school respondents identify as female, compared to 59% and 53% nationwide. Nevertheless, there was a difference in the number of male teachers who responded to the survey between public and private schools – more male respondents taught in private schools than public schools (31% to 12.7%) (p=.008). Importantly, I was not able to obtain data about the gender breakdown of high school English teachers in particular, despite anecdotal reports that this discipline attracts higher levels of female teachers than other disciplines.

The majority of the teachers in my sample from both public and private high schools majored in English as undergraduates (55% public, 66% private). Another 22% of public high school teachers majored in English Education, while no private school teachers reported this major (p=.019). Six percent of public school teachers and three percent of private school teachers reported majoring in Education alone. Seventeen percent of public school teachers and 31% of private school teachers majored in another subject altogether.

All respondents provided the names and zip codes of the high schools where they taught during the 2010-2011 school year; this information allowed me to analyze school-level data and draw comparisons between the teachers in my sample. I used NCES school location codes to create categories of urban, suburban, and rural schools based upon proximity to urbanized areas. According to this categorization, public and private high school teachers from urban schools were over-represented in my sample, as were teachers from suburban areas (see Table 4). Public and private teachers from rural schools were under-represented, but had a significantly stronger showing among public high school teachers overall (p=.034).

In terms of school racial demographics, I created categories for low- and high-minority schools based upon percentages of white and non-white student enrollment. I identified schools as low-minority if non-white students represented less than fifty percent of the student population, and high-minority if they represented more than fifty percent of the student body. Teachers from low-minority schools were over-represented in my sample based on nationwide statistics for both public and private schools (see Table 5); however, there were more public school teachers who taught in high-minority schools than private school teachers (p=.010).

Table 4: Respondents' School Locations & Comparison to National Teaching Force by Percent

	Public High Schools Represented in Sample	Public High Schools Nationwide (2009-2010)	**Private High Schools Represented in Sample**	Private High Schools Nationwide (2007-2008)
Urban	**27**	22	**38**	32
Suburban	**44**	39	**55**	42
Rural	**29**	39	**7**	26

Source: NCES (2011)

Table 5: Racial Demographics of Respondents' Schools & Comparison to Schools Nationwide by Percent

	Public High Schools Represented in Sample	Public High Schools Nationwide (2009-2010)	**Private High Schools Represented in Sample**	Private High Schools Nationwide
Low Minority	**71**	65	**93**	80
High Minority	**29**	35	**7**	20

Source: NCES (2011)

I found that the teachers in my sample from high-minority schools were more likely (53.2% to 16.8%) to teach in urban areas than those from low-minority schools and were less likely (6.5% to 38.2%) to teach in rural areas than their low-minority school counterparts (p<.001). Also, while 68% of all public school respondents taught in states that required students to pass exit exams to graduate, teachers from high-minority schools were more likely (86.1% to 59.2%) than their low-minority school counterparts to teach in an exit exam state (p<.001). Overall, 40% percent of my respondents taught in low-income schools (defined as School-Wide Title I schools in which over 40% of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch). There was

a significant relationship between teachers from low-income schools and high-minority schools in my sample – 76% of teachers from high-minority schools were also from low-income schools (p<.001). Also, teachers from low-income schools were more likely (36.4% to 21%) to teach in urban areas than their high-income school counterparts (p=.018).

Since English teachers often teach several different classes during the course of a school day with different grade levels of students or different subject matter, I faced the possibility that respondents to my survey would provide different responses to the questions for each of the classes they taught. In order to avoid confusion, the survey directed respondents to think about only one of their classes as they took the survey – specifically, the classes with which they felt most successful as educators. Presumably, the classes in which teachers felt most successful would feature the fullest use of their repertoires of classroom practices. Over 90% of both public and private high school respondents chose to focus on classes that were graduation requirements rather than electives, although teachers who taught in exit-exam states were more likely (96% to 83%) to choose a focal class that was a graduation requirement than those who did not teach in exit-exam states (p<.001). In addition, both groups of teachers chose to focus on classes at the 11th and 12th grade levels more often than those in 9th and 10th grades. In one interesting twist, 45% of public school respondents chose to focus on classes designated as honors compared to 59% of private school respondents.

Overall, my survey captures the ideas of a fascinating cross-section of veteran high school English teachers about the purpose of English education and the views of good citizenship that influence their classroom practice. Respondents hail from 46 states and manifest substantial diversity along almost every demographic measure, and analysis of their responses creates an evocative portrait of English teaching in the 21st century that raises important questions and

invites further study. Indeed, considering the commitment that they have to exploring issues of civic education in their literacy classroom practice, my respondents can be considered trailblazers and thought-leaders who can advance research and policy in both fields.

Variables

My interest in high school English teachers' beliefs and classroom practices as they related to literacy and civic learning opportunities led me to develop and analyze three main variables for the online survey. I constructed one variable aimed at measuring how respondents perceived the purposes of high school English education, another aimed at measuring the frequency with which respondents engaged their students in various classroom practices, and a final variable that measured respondents' levels of civic engagement and views of citizenship. A detailed explanation follows of what measures were used to construct each variable.

Variable #1: Purpose of High School English Education

I constructed this variable in order to explore how high school English teachers prioritize the multiple goals of their discipline as defined by two influential sets of national English Language Arts standards. I identified five discrete purposes for the study of literacy at the high school level through a close analysis of the Common Core State Standards for Literacy in English Language Arts, which were released by the National Governors Association in 2009 and, to date, have been adopted by the public schools in all but six states. I conducted a similar analysis of the Standards for the English Language Arts, a collection of voluntary standards which were released in 1996 in a joint effort by the two largest professional organizations of

English teachers in the nation – the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English – that represent over 120,000 literacy educators worldwide.

Two of the major purposes of high school English classes, according to the Common Core Standards, are college and career readiness; indeed, these two purposes are mentioned together in the document so often that they are provided with a special acronym – CCR standards. The six paragraph introduction to the literacy standards refers to the goals of college and career readiness six times (p. 3), and the standards for the four 'anchor' areas of literacy – reading, writing, speaking/listening, and language – are titled, "College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards" (p. 2). The dominance of college and career readiness goals is so prevalent in the standards that the authors claim that any vision of "what it means to be a literate person in the twenty-first century" is a "natural outgrowth" of the primary mission of preparing students for CCR (p. 3). Although college and career readiness are conflated in the standards, I chose to separate them into two distinct purposes in the survey in order to discover how high school English teachers weighed them in relation to each other; after all, the knowledge, skills and dispositions valued in college may not always match up to those valued in various workplaces, and teachers may interpret them differently.

While the Common Core Standards' intense focus on college and career readiness supports the dominant neoliberal concern with economic competitiveness as the primary purpose of schooling, the authors do briefly articulate three additional purposes for the study of English that I included in the survey. They indicate that literate people in the twenty-first century "readily undertake the close attentive reading that is at the heart of enjoying complex works of literature" (p. 3). Such people also "seek the wide, deep and thoughtful engagement with high-quality literary and informational texts that builds knowledge, enlarges experience, and broadens

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worldviews" (p. 3). Finally, the authors indicate that students who master the standards possess skills that are "essential to both private deliberation and responsible citizenship in a democratic republic" (p. 3). Tellingly, each of these additional purposes is mentioned only once in the introduction to the document; nevertheless, I found them crucial indicators of a more complex and possibly contested mission for high school English teachers.

I noted the interest expressed by the authors in the 'enjoyment' of literature and in engagement with text that 'enlarges experiences' and interpreted this affective language to create an item that explored how teachers prioritize the enjoyment of reading, writing, listening and speaking as a purpose for English classes. Similarly, I noted the language used in the standards around 'complex works of literature' and 'high-quality literary texts' and created another item that focused on the appreciation of 'great' works of literature as a purpose for English classes, intentionally leaving this term vague in order to mirror the loose definition provided by the standards themselves. Finally, I focused on the solitary mention in the document of democratic citizenship and created an item that asked teachers to prioritize the mission of high school English classes to developing skills needed to participate in political and civic life.

In striking contrast to the Common Core standards, the voluntary IRA/NCTE standards make no specific mention of college and career readiness as purposes for English classes; instead, the authors assert that the primary goal of English teachers is to "develop competencies in the English Language Arts that will prepare [students] for the diverse literacy demands that will face them throughout their lives" (p. 6). While many of these literacy demands will surely come from the workplace and from post-secondary institutions, the IRA/NCTE authors highlight the civic purposes of literacy far more than their Common Core counterparts. In their chapter-long

explanation of the rationale behind their standards, the authors continually point to the need to "ensure that all students become informed citizens and participate fully in society" (p. 2).

Indeed, this document uniquely attends to the crucial role of literacy in a democratic society; it tackles head-on discussions of equity and educational disparities predicated on race and class and warns of the dangers that result from a population that is unevenly prepared to employ literacy skills critically. The authors note with a hint of warning, "The consent of the governed is the basis of governmental legitimacy, and if that consent is not informed, then the foundations of government are shaky indeed" (p. 6). Raising a concern that predates the Faggella-Luby report by over a decade, they also criticize the narrow definition of literacy as basic reading and writing skills to be measured on standardized tests, calling instead for engagement with various forms of digital media and with the literacies that young people themselves bring to the classroom (p. 4-5). My analysis of this document led me to explore whether or not the teachers who prioritized the civic purpose of English teaching held views of the discipline that corresponded with critical literacy theory.

While teachers invariably engage with all five purposes of high school English education that I articulated on the survey in complex and overlapping ways, I was interested in teasing out which goals spoke most powerfully to my survey respondents; as a result, I required teachers to do a forced ranking of the purposes, with 1 indicating highest importance and 5 indicating lowest importance. Considering the limiting nature of this measure, I also decided to include an optional open response item in which respondents were given the opportunity to write about their own thoughts about the purpose of high school classes with no constraint. Since 277 of the 332 respondents chose to provide responses, I was able to analyze both measures and get a fuller

picture of how this sample of high school English teachers conceptualized the purposes of their discipline.

Variable #2: Classroom Practices

I constructed this variable in order to explore the frequency with which survey respondents engaged with the range of discipline-specific subjects and more general pedagogical activities presented in English content standards. In order to get a sense of how high school English teachers interpret their responsibilities, it is crucial to analyze the ways that classroom time is being spent. As English teachers tackle shifting definitions of literacy, the assignment of multiple goals for their discipline, and blossoming forms of digital and participatory media, I was interested in what is happening in today's English classroom. While there are often gaps between the class activities that teachers claim to implement and actually implement, I still found it important to elicit teachers' judgments of how they use their class time as a starting point for analysis.

Measure: Literacy-Specific Content Areas

I created two measures for this variable – one aimed at content areas specific to the discipline of literacy, and one aimed at general classroom activities. The literacy-specific measure, which consisted of nine content area items, was constructed through further analysis of the Common Core and IRA/NCTE English Language Arts content standards. Five of the content areas (fiction analysis, non-fiction analysis, vocabulary, grammar, and writing) were distilled directly from the wording of the standards themselves – these represent cornerstones of the discipline that received direct attention in both sets of standards.

I generated three additional content areas (popular culture analysis, media analysis, and new media production) by categorizing thematic codes generated from the standards; specifically, I focused on the way that standards treated new and popular media. The Common Core anchor standards in speaking and listening call for students to "integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats" and to "make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations" (p. 48). The anchor standards in writing encourages, "use of technology, including the internet, to produce and publish writing" and instructs students to gather data from "multiple print and digital sources" (p. 41). Similarly, the IRA/NCTE standards encourage students to read "nonprint texts" and to build understanding of various "cultures" through accumulation of information from "technological resources" (p. 3). The development of content areas focused on analysis of non-traditional and digital texts provided me the opportunity to explore the extent to which the concept of multiliteracies is influencing classrooms and teaching practice.

Test preparation represented the final content area; I created this item in response to the prevalence of standardized testing in literacy and the interconnected relationship between standards and the assessments created to measure students' progress toward them. Considering that 68% of my survey respondents teach in states with exit exam graduation requirements, and that the prevalence of testing in public schools has become such a hotly contested element of neoliberal education reform, I found it important to learn more about the frequency with which test preparation takes place in relation to the other English content areas. Respondents indicated how often they dedicated class time to each of the nine content areas in the measure using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "never" to "daily."

Measure: Classroom Activities

Because of my interest in exploring the civic potential of high school English classrooms, I constructed a measure that analyzed the frequency with which teachers facilitated activities with their students that have been identified as 'best practices' in classroom civic learning opportunities. These 'best practices' were drawn from the influential civic education report, "The Civic Mission of Schools," released in 2002 by the Carnegie Corporation and the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), as well as the California Survey of Civic Education, released in 2005 by the California Campaign for Civic Education. Importantly, I focused on activities that could be implemented across content areas and that drew upon literacy skills that fit the English Language Arts content standards.

"The Civic Mission of Schools" (CMS) identifies several research-based approaches to civic education that became items on my survey. CMS encourages teachers to incorporate discussions of current issues and events into their classrooms because young people who experience them have "greater interest in politics, improved critical thinking and communication skills, more civic knowledge, and more interest in discussing public affairs outside of school" (p. 6). CMS also supports the integration of role-plays or simulations into the curriculum due to their potential to stimulate "heightened political knowledge and interest" (p. 6). Finally, CMS suggests the implementation of classroom-based service learning projects that allow students to engage in "meaningful work on serious public issues" (p. 6). I changed the language of this item on my survey to "school/community action projects" because of the concerns raised by some scholars about the apolitical connotations of service learning projects as compared to action projects (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996).

I drew additional items from those employed on the California Survey of Civic Education related to exposure to civic role models, analysis of different perspectives on issues, and work with diverse peers. The authors assert the benefit of giving students the opportunity to meet "people who work to make society better" (p. 10), an experience that I translated into an item about field trips due to their focus on out-of-school community experience. The report also argues that students given the opportunity to research issues from different perspectives are more likely to encourage others to participate in the political process (p. 9). Instead of simply creating an item for research, I chose to focus on internet research, largely because of the increasing use of technology in the classroom and new research in digital civic engagement (CITE). I created items for group projects and oral presentations based on the report's finding that students who work on projects with people from different backgrounds are more likely to consider involvement in local and state issues "their responsibility" (p. 9).

The final item in this measure related to lectures, a much more traditional classroom activity that enjoys less support in the literature as compared to the extensive exploration of group work and project-based learning. I included the item in order to gauge the extent to which new ideas about best practices are dislodging or reinforcing traditional activities. Respondents indicated how often they engaged students in each of the eight activities in the measure using the same 7-point Likert scale ranging from "never" to "daily."

Sub-Measure: Classroom Discussions

While classroom discussions are touted in the civic education literature as one of the most powerful ways to spark young people's interest in politics, there is little evidence regarding specific topics that tend to emerge within such discussions. Understandably, the practice of

discussion is considered more important that the matter being discussed; however, an analysis of popular topics of conversation in classrooms has the potential to provide a fascinating window into the issues that teachers and students find compelling today, and also demonstrate the range of civic issues tackled in the context of English classrooms.

As a result of this interest, I created survey items that measured the discussion topics that arose most frequently in teachers' classrooms and the barriers that teachers faced in facilitating discussions with their students. I generated discussion topics for my survey items through analysis of election issues listed on non-profit, discussion-oriented websites such as ProCon.org and ControversialIssues.org, as well as on candidates' websites for the 2008 presidential election. I found it compelling to focus on issues that frequently became contentious during election campaigns because of their prevalence in the media and their importance in influencing political engagement (i.e. voting, campaign work/donations). I developed eight categories of discussion topics based on my analysis of the issues: Jobs/Taxes, Immigration, Crime/Punishment, Education, Environment, War/Peace, Healthcare, and Other. I asked teachers to provide a yes/no response regarding whether or not they planned classroom discussions on these topics, and then gave the option for respondents to provide more specific information about the topics they tackled within each of the categories provided.

Just as it is crucial to explore the topics that engage teacher and student interest in classroom discussions, it is equally as important to understand more about the barriers that prevent teachers from engaging in discussions with their students. I developed six barriers to classroom discussion based on analysis of "From Classroom to Citizen: American Attitudes on Civic Education," a report released in 2004 by the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools and the Alliance for Representative Democracy. The report summarized results of a public

opinion survey about various aspects of civic education; for my purposes, the survey question of

greatest interest explored barriers to the implementation of civic education programs. Barriers

that respondents were asked to consider included, "There is not enough classroom time,"

"Teachers are not sufficiently qualified," "Testing requirements . . . leave little room for other

subjects," and "Discussing political issues in the classroom is too controversial" (p. 8). I adapted

these statements to create items about barriers to discussion on my survey; these barriers ranged

from lack of administrative support and professional development for teachers to pressure to

move through curriculum or prepare for testing to the difficulty of facilitating discussions with

large classes or the threat of parent and community disapproval. I asked respondents to indicate

if any of these barriers had prevented them from engaging in discussions with their classes.

Variable #3: Civic Engagement and Views of Citizenship

I constructed this variable in order to explore how high school English teachers respond

to the call issued in national content standards to use literacy to prepare students for the rights

and responsibilities of democratic citizenship. The definition of citizenship is as highly contested

as that of literacy itself, and I found it crucial to tease out the ways that teachers interpreted

citizenship in their own lives in order to explore how they may interpret it in their classrooms.

The measures included in this variable gauge the civic and political activities in which

respondents participate, as well as the elements that respondents consider crucial to "good"

citizenship. I was interested in the extent to which these responses correlated to respondents'

views about the purposes of literacy and the activities they engaged in with their students.

Measure: Civic and Political Engagement

In order to explore how respondents engaged civically and politically, I developed survey items that adopted activities from CIRCLE's Civic and Political Health of the Nation survey (2002). The authors of the survey created a 'typology of engagement' that labeled individuals based on the types of activities in which they participated – they considered individuals "civically engaged" if they actively participated in volunteer or community work for "an organization other than a candidate or political party," while they considered individuals "electorally engaged" if they voted, encouraged others to vote, or volunteered or donated money to a political campaign (Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, & Jenkins, 2002, p. 24-25). Importantly, the authors made another distinction within the 'civically engaged' category, noting that many individuals who participate in religious or charity groups are driven by the desire to help others rather than finding solutions to social or political problems (p. 19).

Based on these distinctions, I included items in this measure that corresponded to help-oriented, civic-oriented, and political-oriented activities. The help-oriented activities included participation in religious or charity groups. The civic-oriented activities involved participation in recreational, community, cultural or professional groups, and the political-oriented activities involved participation in labor or political groups. I asked respondents to indicate the frequency with which they participated in each of these activities on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 'never' to 'daily.'

Measure: Views of Citizenship

I created items for this measure through analysis of two major surveys in the field that scaled for differences between qualitatively different visions of the 'good' citizen. Both of these surveys were designed for young people, but I applied some of the constructs to teachers because

of both the scarcity of surveys geared toward teachers' civic activities and beliefs and also my

interest in investigating possible connections between student and teacher civic views. The

International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) Civic Education

Study (2001), which represents the largest international study of civic education to date, asked

90,000 14-year old students in 28 countries to evaluate statements "that could be used to explain

what a good adult citizen is or what a good adult citizen does." According to the survey's

technical report (2004), these items were scaled to reflect either 'conventional' or 'social

movement' types of citizenship. The authors defined conventional citizenship as the desirability

of forms of participation that included voting, political parties, and seeking information, while

they defined social movement citizenship as the desirability of engagement with "new forms of

political participation as found in social movements aiming at the defense of human or civil

rights, the environment, etc." (p. 96).

The items correlated to conventional citizenship that appeared on my survey included

those related to voting, joining a political party, knowing about the country's history, and

following/discussing political issues. The items correlated to social movement citizenship

included those related to participating in peaceful protest and participating in activities that

benefit the community.

Additional items were drawn from the California Survey of Civic Education, which was

designed by Joseph Kahne and administered to 2,366 high school seniors in 2005. Items on this

survey were scaled to reflect either 'personally responsible,' 'participatory,' or 'justice-oriented'

types of citizenship based upon distinctions made in the influential journal article, "What Kind of

Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy" (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). According to

the authors, personally responsible citizenship emphasizes building character through focus on

traits such as "honesty, integrity, self-discipline, and hard work," while participatory citizenship emphasizes "preparing students to engage in collective, community-based efforts" (p. 241). By contrast, justice-oriented citizenship "calls explicit attention to matters of injustice and to the importance of pursuing social justice" (p. 242). Importantly, the authors criticize personally responsible citizenship despite its prevalence in the civic education discourse, arguing that in fact it "works against the kind of critical reflection and action that many assume are essential in a democratic society" (p. 244).

The items correlated to personally responsible citizenship that appeared on my survey included those related to obeying rules and laws and showing kindness to others. While not explicitly connected to this construct, I included an item related to being patriotic and loyal to the country in this category because of the personal nature of patriotic feelings. The items correlated to participatory citizenship included those related to following political issues and participating in activities that benefit the community, while those correlated to justice-oriented citizenship included those related to challenging inequalities in society, thinking critically about laws and government actions, and protesting. I asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they agreed with each statement regarding what 'good' adult citizens do using a Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree,' also giving respondents the opportunity to express no opinion or that they did not know how to respond.

Findings

Current Perceptions of English Teaching

The teachers I surveyed, when asked to rank five distinct purposes for high school English classes in order from most to least important, placed college preparation at the top of the

list (see Table 6). Considering the strong emphases within national content standards on college and career preparation, it is perhaps not surprising that teachers considered it their primary mission to help students develop the skills needed for post-secondary education. College readiness is consistently paired with career readiness in the standards; however, teachers assigned much less importance to career preparation when given the opportunity to consider it separately. Given the push for college preparation and the link between educational attainment and career advancement, teachers may associate the skills needed in the workplace with college attendance itself.

Table 6: Respondents' Rankings of the Purposes of Education by Percent
1=Most Important; 5=Least Important

Purpose of English Education	1	2	3	4	5	Mean Ranking
Developing skills for post-secondary education	27	22	21	18	13	**2.69**
Fostering enjoyment for reading, writing, listening and speaking	24	24	20	19	13	**2.73**
Developing skills to participate in political and civic life	22	23	19	20	15	**2.83**
Developing skills for career advancement	15	17	20	16	31	**3.32**
Instilling appreciation for great works of literature	13	13	19	27	28	**3.43**

Teachers also assigned strong importance to fostering enjoyment in students for the

foundational activities of English classes – reading, writing, listening and speaking. Respondents found this goal much more compelling than that of instilling appreciation in students for the canon of what is traditionally considered 'great' literature.

This finding may reflect the shift in approaches to teaching literature in the classroom over the course of the 20th century from cultural transmission, in which students were expected to absorb the 'greatness' of classic literature, to the models of New Critical close reading and reader-response, in which close textual analysis and the feelings and opinions of the readers themselves take precedence in literary study (Appleman, 2000). It may also reflect the broadening of the English curriculum from a narrow selection of canonical texts to a wider range of multicultural and alternative texts, which in turn deconstructs the very notion of great books.

The goal of helping students to develop the necessary skills to participate in political and civic life ranked solidly in the middle of the pack among survey respondents – seemingly on teachers' radars, but not the primary goal of high school English education. I hypothesize that this may be partially due to the fact that social studies classes are consistently given much more attention as sites for political and civic learning than English classes – civic standards are often paired with social studies standards, and the focus on explicit instruction in law and government as a best practice in civic education creates further connections with instruction in history. As a result, English teachers may not see political and civic education as subjects within their purview or receive as much professional support in making connections between English as civics. Nevertheless, preparation for civic life ranked high enough on the list of purposes to warrant further exploration of these connections. The fact that civic life ranked as high as it did may in fact reflect selection bias based on the way that the survey was advertised on the website.

I continued to analyze this measure by creating two categories of respondents based on

how they ranked the civic and political purposes of high school English classes. I labeled respondents as "Civic-Focused" if they ranked this purpose first or second, and "Non-Civic-Focused" if they ranked it third, fourth or fifth. 45% of respondents were civic-focused and 55% were not. Preliminary analyses revealed that civic-focused respondents were more likely (76% to 61%) than their non-civic-focused counterparts to teach in an exit exam state (p=.007). Civic-focused teachers were more likely (35% to 22%) than other teachers to have focused their responses on an 11th grade course (p=.007). This may be related to the fact that 11th grade English often focuses on American literature, thereby providing opportunities to think about political and civic themes. Since I did not perform regression analysis, it is difficult to make any definitive claims about this population of civic-focused teachers; nevertheless, these findings invite further study.

Because I acknowledge that forced ranking does not accurately capture the complex ideas that high school English teachers possess about the purposes of their discipline, I gave survey respondents the option to write open responses to the question, "In your own words, what do you think are the purposes of high school English classes?" Of the 275 public high school survey respondents, 227 chose to respond to this question – 88 from low-income schools, 64 from high-minority schools, and 47 from both low-income and high-minority schools. Of the 29 private high school respondents, 25 chose to respond to this question. (see Table 7).

Table 7: Characteristics of Respondents to Literacy Open Response

School Characteristics	Total Respondents	Respondents to Citizenship Open Response	Percentage of Total Respondents
Total	304	252	83
Public	275	227	83
Private	29	25	86
Low-Income	109	88	81
High-Minority	79	64	81
Low-Income and High-Minority	60	47	78

The open responses, while somewhat reflective of the forced ranking responses, added layers of complexity to my analysis of the ways that English teachers think about their profession. I analyzed the responses inductively, creating thematic categories based on repetition of words, phrases and ideas (see Table 8). The great majority of respondents provided responses that contained multiple themes. By far the most common of these themes was a focus on helping students develop literacy skills – 78% of open responses made specific mention of skills in general or of reading, writing, listening, or speaking skills more specifically. One teacher's response sums up this theme succinctly, "Increase the literacy of students. Teach strategies for close reading and comprehension of non-fiction texts/documents. Teach strategies for writing and grammar." English is arguably one of the more skill-based disciplines that students encounter in high school – unlike the disciplines of history and science, in which content is specific and crucial, English teachers have the choice of a myriad of texts with which to

reinforce literacy skills; indeed, standards give lists of suggested texts but provide English teachers with substantial discretion in terms of the content used to meet skill-based standards. In light of this situation, the focus on skills is quite expected. While college preparation received the highest ranking in the forced response measure, only 14% of open responses specifically mentioned college or the workforce in their open responses, usually in the context of literacy skills. Presumably the focus on skills would incorporate college and workforce preparation.

Table 8: Thematic Categories for Respondents' Open Responses about the Purposes of High School English Education

Category	Percentage of Open Responses
Literacy Skills	78
Life-long Learning	34
Love/Appreciation for Literature	34
Communication	26
Critical Thinking	21
Civic and Political Life	17
Good Personhood	14
College/Career Preparation	14
Digital Media/Technology	6
Critical Literacy	6
Ability Tracking	5
Critique of Standardized Testing	3

One major theme that emerged, often in tandem with a focus on literacy skills, was a desire

for students to engage in life-long learning and use skills to achieve personal success and

fulfillment. One teacher wrote about her students in a way that powerfully combined these

interests:

> They are all headed for adulthood and responsibility and the search to become what
> is important to them. I want to provide students with the hard skills to be successful
> and the soft skills to continually seek fulfillment. I want them to be to effectively
> read, write, speak and listen as they progress through the years and the changes (both
> inside them and around them) that time will bring.

Other teachers expressed similar goals for their students, expressing hope that they will

"continue their own learning in the absence of a formal classroom," "pick up a book again in the

real world," and "never stop learning." Thirty-four percent of open responses articulated goals

for their instruction related to life-long learning, which is a testament to the crucial connection of

literacy skills to our experiences of the world around us; indeed, this theme reflects socio-

cultural views on language and literacy as the vehicles through which we understand and act

upon our surroundings.

The concern with life-long learning also revealed a very important affective dimension to

the goals that high school English teachers have for their classes; in fact, more often than not,

teachers spoke of goals that they pursued for their students themselves as opposed to goals for

their practice more generally. This concern with the affective elements of literacy was reflected

in another of the major themes I found in the responses, which was a focus on love and

appreciation for stories and literature. Thirty-four percent of open responses expressed desire for

students to develop a "love of literature," to learn "how fun reading and writing and putting on

plays could be," and to generally "enjoy and value language as a form of expression." The study

of fictional text remains one of the cornerstones of the discipline, and many teachers expressed

the power of literature to transcend particular times and places and immerse students in analysis

of universal and enduring themes. As one teacher put it, "Classic literature is classic because the lesson or message is still relevant to the human experience." Another teacher wrote, "Through literature, students learn the struggles and triumphs of the individual human, the language (idioms, ideas, allusions) we share, the themes that define us as a people." Still another wrote that English classes "open the world of ideas to you and give you the skills to participate in the conversation that has been literature for the past 800 years."

Just as literacy skills were often connected to experiencing the world (often through literature), they were also linked to communication with others within that world as individuals and as citizens. Twenty-six percent of open responses expressed hope that the skills students gained in their classes would help them to communicate effectively; while the phrase "communication skills" often appeared in teachers' responses without any context or explanation, it sometimes was linked with another theme focused specifically on preparing students for civic and political life. Seventeen percent of open responses specifically made mention of civic and political goals for classes - outcomes that were usually linked to communication skills. As one teacher wrote, "I want my students to become knowledgeable, to be capable of thinking critically about the world around them, and to communicate their thoughts, opinions and feelings well in a democratic society. I believe I am to facilitate their success in becoming responsible and vital citizens in America." Another teacher echoed these themes, "High school English classes provide the means by which students can acquire the skills, understanding of human complexity through literary analysis, and communication acumen to become authentic citizens of the world." One teacher even quoted a Founding Father: "Like Jefferson, I agree that an educated citizenry is the most important tool we have to support our democracy."

One of the teachers above used the phrase 'thinking critically' in reference to how she

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wanted students to analyze their surroundings for the purpose of democratic participation. The phrase 'critical thinking' appeared in 21% of open responses, but it was often difficult to determine how respondents were interpreting the term. While some made explicit connections between critical thinking and citizenship (i.e. "Democracy needs citizens with critical thinking skills"), others simply used the phrase in a decontextualized way that made it impossible to tell if they intended societal analysis or simply habits of mind needed to analyze and deconstruct texts.

In a category that I deemed qualitatively different from the development of good citizens, some respondents expressed the development of good people as a purpose for high school English education. Fourteen percent of open responses spoke of the way that English courses could promote "compassion," "self-esteem," "empathy," and "understanding of our shared humanity." They articulated beliefs that English classes could "promote tolerance," "activate a love of beauty and virtue," and simply "help students become better people." I found it important to tease out separate themes for good personhood and good citizenship because of the more collective and politicized nature of the citizenship responses that, in the literature, are related to critical literacy and critical citizenship.

Several minor themes emerged that merit attention. Five percent of open responses indicated that their ideas about the purpose of high school English classes was dependent upon the ability level of the students they were working with; in effect, they argued that the purpose of English was different for different groups of students. In one particularly troubling response, a teacher wrote,

> I wish I could say literature is a top priority, but it depends on the level of the students in your district. Low-level students, sad to say, are not going to read or go to libraries once they graduate high school (this is supported by research, sadly).

Another teacher wrote, "Where I work the needs are more basic. It is unlikely that a young

person whose career goal is collision repair is highly motivated toward the nuances of Shakespeare or Poe." Several other respondents spoke of goals of college preparation for their honors or advanced students and goals of basic literacy skills for their "regular" or "at-risk" students. These responses indicate that tracking is still alive and well in some high schools, and that learning opportunities, particularly those that involve the study of literature, are sometimes denied to students based on their perceived ability or career goals in life.

Another minor theme that appears in the open responses and is reflected in other survey responses is a concern about the negative effects of standardized testing. Three percent of open responses criticized the impact of testing on their discipline, sometimes expressing disagreement with administrators and fellow teachers. One teacher responded, "I believe my principal would say that [the purpose of high school English classes] is to score well on standardized exams. I feel my purpose is to prepare my students for life beyond the high school classroom." Another teacher wrote, "Today, unfortunately, high school English classes (and teachers) seem to serve the purpose of making sure that students do well on standardized testing. That is NOT why I went into teaching."

Other teachers lamented the effect that the pressures of standardized testing had on their pedagogy. One teacher complained that, "our reading programs and endless testing are destroying the reading spirit in our students." Another wrote, "Many things stand in the way of my goal to instill this love in my students (i.e. high-stakes testing)." One teacher summed it up best: "My purpose seems to often be at odds with the system, which tells me multiple and conflicting things to do." Testing emerged at multiple points in the survey as an issue of contention for teachers, one that was sometimes seen as a barrier to engaging in other activities, such as classroom discussions, that are more civically engaging.

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During my analysis, I remained on the lookout for any responses that seemed to point toward a conception of literacy reflecting the tenets of multi-literacies or critical literacy. I found that only a small portion of respondents mentioned digital media or technology in their responses, and even fewer espoused views of literacy that involved awareness of social power relations and a commitment to literacy as a vehicle of personal and political empowerment. A few teachers expressed a desire for students to become "astute readers of media and visual text" and one teacher wrote that students required the ability to "reference from the huge body of ever-changing and ever-growing material available in the 21st century and to foster an ability to seek and respond through the use of technology." While many teachers may incorporate multimedia texts into their classrooms without explicitly mentioning it as a purpose of their instruction, very few respondents mentioned technology. Based upon responses to other measures on the survey, it is possible that use of technology is still a developing area for many teachers.

Critical conceptions of literacy were also in the minority among teachers' responses, but they represented a powerful strain of thought revealing how teachers are translating this theory into practice. Some teachers saw literacy in terms of student empowerment, speaking of "giving students a voice," "empowering students through various forms of communication," and "empowering our young people to believe in the power of their own personal and cultural stories." Some teachers focused on literacy as a guard against manipulation – one argued that students need literacy skills in order to recognize "truth, lies and bias," and another wrote that students need "knowledge of the power language so that they may protect and advocate for themselves." In an echo of Paulo Freire, several teachers spoke of enabling students to "critically read the world" and "effect change in the world." One teacher aptly summed up the relationship of literacy to political and social change:

> All of these skills are for the purpose of communicating effectively in personal, professional and civic life so that students are able to participate actively in political and civic life because ultimately, the goal of education is a transformative one and they'll need these skills to challenge long-held assumptions that keep things status quo.

In order to determine if the teachers who raised themes in their responses related to civic and political life and critical literacy differed in any substantial ways from other respondents, I created an analytic category of Critical Literacy Educators to compare to the rest of the sample. I included 54 teachers (49 public high school teachers and 5 private high school teachers) in this category based on their open responses (18% of the total sample). Among the public high school teachers, I found that critical literacy educators were more likely (56% to 37%) to teach in low-income schools than other educators (p=.013). I also found that critical literacy educators from were more likely (44% to 26%) to teach in high-minority schools than other educators (p=.015). Critical literacy educators were also more likely (59% to 42%) to be civic-focused educators and rank civic and political purposes of English education first or second than other educators (p=.024).

Current Perceptions of Citizenship

My exploration of teachers' views about citizenship included analyses of their current civic and political involvement, as well as their beliefs about what it means to be a good citizen. In terms of public engagement, a major finding was that my respondents generally did not involve themselves very frequently in any of the civic and political activities provided (see Table 9). I found that the groups in which respondents were most likely to participate after professional organizations were religious, recreational, and charity groups – all help- and civic-oriented groups rather than political ones. These memberships are the very ones that Westheimer and

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Kahne (2004) would characterize as indicative of personally-responsible citizenship, which

aligns closely with neoliberal views of democracy and education. On average, respondents

reported engaging in labor, political and cultural organizations less than once per month.[2]

Table 9: Frequency of Respondents' Involvement in Civic and Political Organizations by Percent

Organization	Frequencies (1=Never, 2=Less than once a month, 3=Once a month, 4=Two to three times a month, 5=Once a week, 6=Two to three times a week, 7=Daily)							
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**Mean Frequencies**
Professional Group	11	27	26	15	6	10	5	**3.27**
Religious Group	43	11	7	9	17	11	2	**2.88**
Recreational Group	42	17	16	10	6	8	1	**2.51**
Charity Group	34	27	23	8	6	1	1	**2.33**
Labor Group	42	29	16	8	2	2	1	**2.08**
Political Party	56	29	9	4	1	1	0	**1.70**
Neighborhood/ Community Group	65	19	11	3	1	1	0	**1.58**

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[2] While I was initially surprised by the relatively infrequent reports of participation, I gained some insight about possible reasons for these results in the open response that one teacher gave about citizenship. As she put it,

> As I look at the list of activities on the previous page, I wonder when we working parents are supposed to fit in all of these memberships. Teaching English makes for an exceptionally long, engaged day. I love it, but my personal life takes a major hit during the school year, which means any additional activities have to fit a very compressed schedule.

This teacher spoke of the 'engagement' that is involved in the very act of teaching itself, as well as the time commitment that may create barriers for some teachers to seek further civic and political involvement. Job commitments are largely not considered civic activities, but this response raises interesting questions about the uniquely civic nature of teaching and the extent to which this particular job represents a form of public engagement, as many critical theorists suggest (Giroux, 2005 Freire, 1998).

| Cultural Group | 85 | 9 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | **1.26** |

In order to compare sub-groups in my sample regarding the frequency of their civic and political participation, I re-coded the data for each respondent to create categories of 'frequent' and 'infrequent' participation. I determined that respondents engaged in activities frequently if they engaged in them two to three times per month or more. While I did not find significant differences in civic and political involvement among teachers with different school demographics, I did find that civic-minded educators were more likely (44% to 28%) to frequently engage in professional organizations than other teachers (p=.004). They were also more likely (31% to 21%) to frequently engage in recreational groups than other teachers (p=.045). It is possible that teachers who put a higher premium on the civic purposes of education also make more time to be involved in organizations that help them to improve their practice (and have fun).

In order to learn more about the extent to which teachers' civic and political involvement was rooted in specific ideas about the nature of good citizenship, I turned to the variable about types of citizenship. I found that the dichotomies between various models of citizenship were not reflected in teachers' responses; indeed, the respondents agreed that virtually all of the qualities presented were related to good citizenship (with the exception of joining political parties) (see Table 10). While showing kindness to others did receive the most support among respondents as an aspect of good citizenship (corresponding to the model of personally responsible citizenship), it was closely followed by support for voting, thinking critically about government actions, and challenging inequalities, qualities which were affiliated with participatory and justice-oriented models.

Table 10: Respondents' Views on Citizenship by Percent

Citizenship Quality	Frequencies (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, 4=Strongly Agree)					
	1	2	3	4	No Opinion/DK	Mean Frequencies
Shows kindness to others	0	0	20	78	2	**3.79**
Votes in local, state and national elections	1	1	21	77	0	**3.75**
Thinks critically about laws and government	0	1	32	66	1	**3.66**
Challenges inequalities in society	0	1	36	62	1	**3.60**
Knows about the country's history	0	3	37	58	2	**3.55**
Participates in activities that benefit people in the community	0	1	43	55	1	**3.54**
Follows political issues	0	7	54	37	2	**3.31**
Obeys rules and laws	0	5	61	30	4	**3.26**
Would participate in a peaceful protest against a law believed to be unjust	0	13	44	29	14	**3.17**
Is patriotic and loyal to the country	2	14	47	28	9	**3.09**
Engages in political discussions	2	16	47	27	8	**3.08**

Joins a political party	11	51	17	4	17	**2.18**

As would be expected, respondents' opinions about citizenship were clearly too nuanced and complex to fit neatly into categories, and the majority of the qualities presented fit into respondents' conceptualizations of good citizens. Nevertheless, it was noteworthy that joining a political party was the only quality with which, on average, respondents disagreed as a marker of good citizenship. Several teachers wrote open responses reflecting the sentiment that political party membership represented a certain level of closed-mindedness or partisanship that was deemed undesirable. As one respondent wrote:

> I do not think a person has to be affiliated with a particular political party to be a good citizen. In fact, it speaks more highly of a person who can hear both sides and keep an open mind, as opposed to someone who is firmly Republican or Democrat, but cannot fully explain why.

It appears that perhaps this respondent's strong agreement with the importance of critical thinking about government clashed with her perception of political party membership. In order to go beyond the categories and delve further into the individual ideas about good citizenship held by my respondents, I engaged in thematic coding of an open response question in which they had the opportunity to describe good citizens in their own words.

I asked teachers to respond to the question, "In your own words, what do you think are the qualities of a good citizen?" A total of 191 teachers from public and private high schools provided responses to the open response question. Of the public school respondents, 70 taught at low-income schools, 50 taught at high-minority schools, and 36 taught at schools that were both low-income and high-minority (see Table 11). While the majority of these responses contained

multiple themes, I teased out those that emerged most often for analysis (see Table 12).

Table 11: Characteristics of Respondents to Citizenship Open Response

School Characteristics	Total Respondents	Respondents to Citizenship Open Response	Percentage of Total Respondents
Total	304	191	63
Public	275	170	62
Private	29	21	72
Low-Income	109	70	64
High-Minority	79	50	63
Low-Income and High-Minority	60	36	60

Table 12: Thematic Categories for Citizenship Open Response

Category	Percentage of Open Responses
Action-Oriented	50
Informed	43
Independent	27
Moral	23
Interdependent	21
Critical	18
Voting	16
Patriotic	6
Political	6

The theme that emerged most frequently in the open responses was that citizenship requires active participation. Fifty percent of open responses indicated that good citizens participate in their local, state and national communities; as one teacher put it, a good citizen "actively looks for ways to make her country and community better places in which to live." Another stressed that good citizens need to "contribute to our communities, even if it is a minor contribution." Many respondents connected the success and happiness of communities to the extent to which citizens actively participated in them; as one put it, "unless we all make an effort to improve our community, then our country will ultimately fail." This perspective suggests that active engagement is key to membership in democratic society.

It was often difficult to clarify exactly how respondents were characterizing the 'communities' that they thought people should be involved in. Sometimes people specifically referred to local communities or national communities, but more often the term was presented without much context. Based on other themes that emerged in the responses, I infer that respondents were thinking of community in civic terms rather than political ones – only 6% of open responses specifically mentioned participation in the political process as characteristic of good citizenship, and the same number mentioned patriotism and love of country. Only 16% of open responses mentioned voting. It seems that respondents were thinking of citizenship on a relational level more so than a political level.

This concern with relationships was reinforced by another of the major themes, which connected good citizenship to an awareness of interdependence between individuals. Twenty-one percent of open responses expressed the idea that good citizens must think about the greater good in addition to their own personal interests. One teacher wrote, "Good citizens understand that they live in a global world and that what we do on a daily basis, as individuals and as a country,

affects people around the world." Another defined good citizens as, "thoughtful individuals engaged in the happenings of the world beyond their individual self-centered interests." As one respondent put it, "the goal is outward, rather than inward, focus." This concern with looking beyond one's interests often equated with taking a more global perspective on social and political issues; one teacher wrote, "I believe a good citizen in 2011 should be able to look beyond his or her country of birth and consider him or herself a citizen of the world." This interest in a more cosmopolitan view of global citizenship reinforced the seeming disinterest in national, or even local, politics.

Even though the responses did not give much attention to political participation per se, they did reflect a strong consensus that good citizens should be informed about current events and political and social issues. In addition to being aware of the issues, 27% of open responses indicated that good citizens should understand competing perspectives about those issues and be able to make independent decisions about them. One teacher defined a good citizen as someone who is "willing to listen to many opinions and views in order to best understand the issues and formulate one's own opinion." Another focused on the importance of being "open-minded and willing to change." Many respondents associated this quality of independence with critical thinking skills; one teacher said that citizens should "critically think about the role of government in society" and another said that they should "think critically about what is happening currently in our country and our culture." It appears that independent and critical thought was contrasted in the responses of some teachers with adherence to political rhetoric or punditry; as one teacher put it, "A good citizen needs to know enough context to be unswayed by wild-eyed rhetoric . . . and informed enough not to be a knee-jerk cynic or a thoughtless follower of some charismatic yelling pundit."

While these themes indicate that teachers had much more complex ideas about citizenship than could be encapsulated in any particular categories, elements of Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) personally responsible citizen were reflected in some responses. Twenty-three percent of open responses correlated good citizenship with being a good or moral person, focusing on being compassionate, obeying laws, and acting as a role model to others. One teacher highlighted the golden rule, defining a good citizen as someone who "treats others as she would like to be treated." Two teachers turned to the words of Atticus Finch from Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* in defining citizens as "people who do the best they can with what they have," which, considering the themes of the novel, calls to mind qualities of kindness, hard work, and altruism. Importantly, however, these statements were often expressed along with other themes related to being active and informed.

I mimicked my analysis of teachers' open responses about literacy and searched teachers' open responses about the purposes of citizenship for ideas that echoed the tenets of critical theory. Eighteen percent of open responses defined good citizenship in terms that highlighted the importance of questioning government, standing up against injustices, and creating transformative social change. One teacher asserted that good citizens are "prepared to speak up against injustices," while another claimed that citizens need to "question laws and leaders' decisions . . . and seeks justice for all members of society rather than a select few." Indeed, teachers who espoused these beliefs often claimed that true patriotism involves the willingness to speak out against injustice; one teacher claimed, "A good citizen loves their country, but questions it and even criticizes it in order to redress possible problems," and another believed that citizens show "true civic virtue by demanding that the government act justly." Some respondents also connected beliefs in social justice to independent thought; one teacher stated

that "the good citizen will not allow the majority to dictate what he or she says or does" and another defined a good citizen as "someone who is not worried about political correctness, but believes in justice." These responses bring to mind Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) model of the justice-oriented citizen and focus on the power of citizens to question structures of power and advocate for equality.

In order to determine if the teachers who raised themes in their responses related to critical visions of citizenship differed in any substantial ways from other respondents, I created an analytic category of Critical Civic Educators to compare to the rest of the sample. I included 35 teachers (32 public high school teachers and 3 private high school teachers) in this category based on their open responses (12% of the total sample). Among the public high school teachers, I found that critical civic educators were more likely (52% to 26%) to teach in high-minority schools than other educators (p=.004). Critical civic educators were also slightly more likely (59% to 42%) to be civic-focused educators and rank civic and political purposes of English education first or second than other educators (p=.069). Finally, critical civic educators were more likely (34% to 16%) to also be critical literacy educators than other respondents (p=.009).

Classroom Practices

I first analyzed the frequency with which respondents dedicated class time to literacy-specific content areas. In addition to reporting the frequency on a Likert scale from 'never' to 'daily,' I categorized respondents as having engaged in content areas 'frequently' if they reported doing so 2-3 times per month or more. Overall, I found that the content areas traditionally associated with high school literacy classes remain dominant and demand the majority of classroom instructional time (see Table 13) – writing is most commonly studied, followed

closely by the study of fiction. Fiction trumps non-fiction in terms of the texts that are studied in

English classes – a finding that becomes important when considering the tools that high school

English teachers use to provide their students with civic learning opportunities. Nevertheless, an

important difference emerged in this area between public and private high school teachers –

public high school teachers were more likely (78% to 48%) than their private school counterparts

to frequently study non-fiction texts (p<.001).

Table 13: Frequency of Respondents' Reported Class Time Spent on Literacy Subjects by Percent

Subject	Frequencies (1=Never, 2=Less than once a month, 3=Once a month, 4=Two to three times a month, 5=Once a week, 6=Two to three times a week, 7=Daily)							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Mean Frequencies
Writing/Composition	0	0	2	13	14	38	33	**5.85**
Fiction Study/ Analysis	0	7	4	10	9	45	25	**5.57**
Vocabulary	1	9	5	21	23	26	15	**4.92**
Non-fiction Study/ Analysis	2	11	12	25	21	20	9	**4.48**
Grammar	3	17	10	25	25	12	8	**4.21**
Popular Culture Analysis	10	22	18	26	15	8	2	**3.46**
Media Analysis	11	20	20	25	16	6	2	**3.38**
New Media Production	11	23	24	21	12	7	2	**3.30**
Standardized Test Preparation	17	26	12	20	13	8	4	**3.22**

I found that content areas associated with new media literacies do not receive large amounts of instructional time in the classes of my respondents. On average, students in these teachers' classes might engage with media/pop culture analysis or new media production slightly more than once a month. While I hypothesized that civic-minded teachers or teachers who espoused critical literacy and civics views might be inclined to use participatory forms of media in their classes on a more frequent basis, this idea was not borne out in the data. Nonetheless, this finding may speak to the still-developing status of new media studies as part of the high school English curriculum, or to the availability and comfort that teachers have with digital technologies. Public high school teachers were slightly more likely (50% to 31%) to frequently engage in media analysis than private high school teachers (p=.054).

Indeed, the only content area that elicited varied responses based on school demographics was standardized test preparation. Overall, teachers reported engaging in test preparation least frequently out of all given subjects, at just over once a month; however, teachers from low-income and high-minority schools engaged in this activity much more often. These differences were especially striking considering that the veteran, highly engaged teachers in my sample would be assumed to be best prepared to ward off the pressures of standardized testing. Teachers from low-income schools were more likely (61% to 35%) to frequently engage in test preparation than teachers from high-income schools (p<.001), and teachers from high-minority schools were more likely to do so (58% to 40%) than teachers from low-minority schools (p=.006). This finding is not surprising considering the pressure facing schools, particularly schools with high percentages of low-income and minority students, to improve scores on standardized assessments under penalty of sanctions; however, it becomes important when it comes to the time spent on this activity as opposed to others that could prove to be strong civic

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learning opportunities.

I next turned to an analysis of the instructional strategies that teachers employed in their classrooms (see Table 14). The teachers in my sample very rarely used three best practices of civic education (role plays, action projects, and field trips) at all. Internet research represented a relatively popular instructional strategy. While group projects emerged in the middle of the pack, I did find that teachers in urban and rural schools reported frequent use of group projects at higher rates (57% and 60%, respectively) than their counterparts in suburban schools (41%) (p=.011).

Table 14: Frequency of Respondents' Reported Use of Instructional Strategies by Percent

Strategy	Frequencies (1=Never, 2=Less than once a month, 3=Once a month, 4=Two to three times a month, 5=Once a week, 6=Two to three times a week, 7=Daily)							
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**Mean Frequencies**
Discussion of Controversial Social/Political Issues	1	11	13	22	26	20	7	**4.49**
Lectures	5	18	12	23	23	16	3	**4.02**
Internet Research	3	18	22	28	19	7	3	**3.75**
Group Projects	3	16	29	31	12	8	1	**3.57**
Oral Presentations	5	35	36	16	6	2	0	**2.92**
Role Plays/ Simulations	24	34	24	15	2	1	0	**2.40**
School/Community Action Projects	57	34	6	2	1	0	0	**1.57**

Field Trips	80	18	2	0	1	0	0	**1.25**

The most popular classroom strategy among respondents was discussion of controversial social and political issues, which on average occurred more than 3 times per week; in fact, only 16% of respondents indicated that they had not facilitated discussions in their classroom over the past school year. Breaking down the data even further, I found that civic-minded teachers engaged in frequent classroom discussions with their students at higher rates (82% to 69%) than other teachers (p=.011). Considering that classroom discussions are considered one of the most supported civic learning opportunities, the finding that they are happening so frequently in high school English classrooms spurred me to further analysis of this data.

I turned next to an analysis of the subjects that arose most often in classroom discussions. By far the most popular topic of conversation was education itself – 68% of teachers reported facilitating discussions about it (see Table 15). Furthermore, public high school teachers reported engaging in discussions about education more often (70% to 48%) than private high school teachers (p=.016), which could be attributed to the attention that current public education policies (i.e. Race to the Top) receive in the media and popular culture.

While war and crime proved popular discussion topics across all respondents, interesting differences emerged around immigration conversations. Teachers in high-minority schools report engaging in conversations about this topic at higher rates (51% to 35%) than teachers in low-minority schools (p=.017). In addition, teachers in urban schools also talked about this topic more often (49% to 31%) than teachers in rural schools (p=.03). Possible explanations for these results could include the fact that teachers in high-minority schools may teach students who are immigrants or the children of immigrants, and that higher proportions of immigrants live in

urban areas than rural ones. It appears that discussion topics may emerge based on their

relevance to the lives of the students that the teachers have in their classes.

Table 15: Classroom Discussion Topics

Topic	Percentage of Total Respondents who Discussed Topic
Education	68
War and Peace	54
Crime and Punishment	53
Immigration	41
Jobs and Taxes	38
Environment	34
Other	27
Healthcare	24

When respondents indicated that they had facilitated discussions about particular topics,

they were given the opportunity to provide open responses about the specific elements of those

topics that were discussed. 209 respondents provided valuable data about themes that emerge in

these classroom conversations (see Table 16 for school characteristics of respondents). The most

prevalent theme that I found across these responses was the use of literary texts as catalysts for

classroom discussions (see Table 17). Of the 18% of open responses that mentioned connections

to literature, many of them simply named literary texts for each topic – one teacher related

revenge in Poe's *The Cask of Amontillado* to the topic of crime while another related Steinbeck's

The Pearl to the topic of immigration. These findings provide support to the idea that the study of fiction can indeed become a powerful civic learning opportunity and that literary texts can serve as powerful tools for civic learning through an exploration of themes.

Table 16: Characteristics of Respondents to Discussion Open Response

School Characteristics	Total Respondents	Respondents to Classroom Discussion Open Response	Percentage of Total Respondents
Total	304	209	69
Public	275	190	69
Private	29	19	66
Low-Income	109	74	68
High-Minority	79	53	67
Low-Income and High-Minority	60	40	67

Table 17: Thematic Categories for Respondents' Open Responses about Classroom Discussion Topics

Category	Percentage of Open Responses
Connections to Literature	18
Illegal Immigration (including Dream Act and Arizona SB1040)	13
Racism/Discrimination/Inequality	11
Local Issues	7
Technology	6

Unemployment	5
American Dream	2

In some cases, the open responses that teachers provided showed that particular concepts or events spurred classroom discussion. Within the topic of immigration, illegal immigration emerged as a strong catalyst for discussion – 13% of open responses indicated that various aspects of this issue, from the Dream Act to Arizona's immigration law, sparked conversation in their classes. Similarly, unemployment emerged as the most pressing aspect of conversations about jobs. More support was added to the idea that classroom discussions frequently arise in response to events that students and teachers experience, as 7% of open responses named local issues as topics of discussion. One teacher noted that "current issues in the state of NJ" were the subject of education-related discussions. Another indicated that the discovery of a "bomb off SC [South Carolina] coast" led to a discussion about the environment. Still another related discussions of crime to "an arrest of a student at our school."

While unemployment emerged as a popular element of discussions about jobs, racism and discrimination was a strong theme among conversations about both immigration and crime. One teacher wrote that discussions of crime focused on "disproportionate African-American incarceration rates," while others focused on "unfair treatment" and "local bigotry" related to immigration.

While I was not able to gauge the extent to which teachers' beliefs facilitate or hinder classroom discussion, I did find that teachers experience a wide range of barriers to engaging in discussions with their students – barriers that often differ based on school characteristics. Only 36% of respondents reported experiencing no barriers to facilitating discussions in their classrooms. Pressure to move through curriculum was reported as the most common barrier to

discussion faced by teachers in my sample (see Table 18), but I found that teachers from low-income schools were more likely (56% to 38%) to experience this barrier than teachers from high-income schools (p=.004). This pressure to advance through subject matter, especially for teachers in low-income schools, may be related to the looming deadlines created by program improvement status and standardized tests; indeed, teachers from low-income schools were more likely (40% to 15%) to see test preparation as a barrier to discussion than teachers from high-income schools (p<.001). Teachers from high-minority schools were also more likely (39% to 19%) to face the test preparation barrier (39%) than teachers from low-minority schools (p<.001). These findings, coupled with the earlier results about the higher frequency with which teachers in low-income and high-minority schools spend on test preparation, indicate that these teachers often feel forced to abandon activities that could be considered civic learning opportunities in order to comply with the demands of the accountability movement.

Table 18: Barriers to Classroom Discussion

Barrier	Percentage of Respondents who Experienced Barrier
Pressure to Move Through Curriculum	44
Concern that Parents/Community Members would Object	27
Large Class Size	25
Focus on Standardized Test Preparation	23
Lack of Administrative Support	10
Lack of Professional Development	8

Teachers in high-income and low-minority schools experienced a different set of barriers. Teachers in high-income schools were more likely (12% to 4%) to report lack of professional development as an obstacle to discussions than teachers in low-income schools (p=.014). Additionally, teachers in low-minority schools were more likely (33% to 11%) to curb discussions based on concerns that parents or community members would object to them than teachers in high-minority schools (p<.001). I also found that teachers in rural areas saw lack of administrative support as a hindrance to class discussions at higher rates (16% to 4%) than urban teachers (p=.030).

Overall, however, it appears that teachers from low-income schools experienced the most barriers to engaging in discussions – teachers from high-income schools were more likely (40% to 28%) to report experiencing no obstacles than teachers from low-income schools (p=.042).

Implications/Questions for Further Study

While the size of the sample makes it impossible to generalize too far from the findings, the responses provided by this unique sub-set of educators have important implications for English teaching across the country and raise questions crucial to the future of the discipline. One of the most intriguing findings was that teachers who espouse beliefs connecting critical understandings of literacy to critical understandings of citizenship are more likely to teach in low-income and high-minority schools than other teachers. This is perhaps not surprising, considering that much critical literacy scholarship speaks back to definitions of literacy and of schooling that have historically marginalized low-income communities and communities of color, and is oriented toward using language to challenge systemic inequalities and empowering those who have traditionally been politically disenfranchised. Nevertheless, if the practices associated

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with critical literacy take hold only in schools serving marginalized students, the implications for the politicization and racialization of English education could be drastic. Intriguing questions are raised – does literacy mean different things based on the social groups to which individuals belong? Do overarching purposes for the discipline exist across lines of difference? What are the implications for the kinds of civic education that are offered in English classrooms?

The answers to these questions invite further analysis about the ways that the pedagogy of educators may differ based on their beliefs about literacy and citizenship and their school characteristics. The fact that teachers in low-income and high-minority schools were much more likely than other teachers to feel that pressure to prepare their students for standardized tests prevented them from engaging their students in civic learning opportunities such as classroom discussions speaks to one of the many ways that the high stakes accountability system prevents low-income students of color from receiving a high quality education that prepares them to effectively participate in public life.

Interestingly, many survey respondents expressed belief in many qualities of good citizenship that scholars often separate into dichotomous and sometimes contradictory categories. Clearly, ideas about citizenship are much more complex in practice than in theory, and these findings demand further inquiry into how citizenship is defined and enacted in the context of English classrooms.

Another major finding was that traditional civic learning opportunities are not being offered very frequently in English classes; instead, literacy activities fundamental to English classes seem to represent a discipline-specific form of civic education. Specifically, the fact that the appreciation for and study of literature was such a prevalent practice, acting as a catalyst for classroom discussions about controversial social issues, speaks to the potential for making more

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explicit links between literature and preparation for political and civic life. Still, the lack of civic or political activity among teachers themselves may speak to the need for new forms of teacher education and professional development so that they can provide students with more varied civic learning opportunities.

While the results of this survey will serve to raise more questions than they answer, these are questions crucial to the future of the discipline. Since preparation for civic and political life was seen as an important purpose of high school English education by many of my respondents, I set out to understand more about exactly how these connections are being made by turning to in-depth studies of three high school English classrooms in Los Angeles.

CHAPTER FIVE – CLASSROOM PORTRAITS

Survey results from the previous chapter hint that connections may exist between the beliefs that high school English teachers hold about literacy and citizenship and the curricular and pedagogical choices that they make in their classrooms. These findings are significant for the field of English education because, as sociocultural theory reminds us, learning in the classroom space is mediated not only by discourses circulating in society at large, but also by the personal experiences and ideas of the individuals who come together and interact in that space. How English teachers conceptualize the purposes and goals of literacy has implications for how students approach and understand the written and spoken word and see themselves as users of language. And how these teachers relate literacy to the practice of citizenship contributes to students' developing understandings of their potential roles as members of a democratic society.

The links between teacher beliefs, classroom practice, and student learning are complex and messy. The closest we can come to pulling apart these threads is to engage in sustained analysis of classroom spaces themselves and carefully observe how those within them construct and negotiate understandings – in this case, understandings about the relationship between literacy and citizenship. As a result, this chapter presents in-depth portraits of three classrooms in order to explore how my three focus teachers and their students make sense of themselves as literate individuals and civic actors. While all three teachers share a stated commitment to utilizing literacy knowledge and skills as means of personal and social empowerment for their students, they manifest this commitment in very different ways. By analyzing the subtle and dramatic differences between their approaches, I aim to demonstrate the various roles that English classes can play as crucibles of civic learning and highlight the necessity for teachers to define and clearly articulate purposes for literacy instruction that challenge dominant, narrow

discourses of economic competitiveness. I will accomplish this by exploring how each teacher's practice points to particular sets of understandings about what a civic community is, what action civic agents in this particular community can take, and how literacy can be a tool for enacting civic community and taking action.

The Warrior-Scholar

Before Ms. Nieto opens her mouth to speak to her students, she already expresses the way she defines literacy and her goals for her students through the organization of her classroom space. At the front of the room, above the white board, she has posted large pieces of chart paper listing the 'norms' for the class. In addition to those that call for students to "keep electronics away," "clean up," and "check your attitude," there is one that stands out; it reads, "Act like a scholar: It's about more than just you. We do this for our ancestors, our families, our hoods, and the future generation of our people." Indeed, ancestors seem to speak from every corner of the room – an American flag hangs next to the white board that features the face of a Native American man poking out from between the stars and stripes, posters with quotes from Edward Said, Harriet Tubman, and Franz Fanon line another wall, and the back of the room features a mural that depicts the Los Angeles skyline with the Watts Towers rising up in the center above a red heart covered in chains.

The front of the room also features a poster that lists the essential questions that Ms. Nieto has developed for the course that is presented as, "Critical Literacy, aka English 10." These include, "What causes injustice and inequality?" and "How do we use literacy to resist oppression and fight for justice in our communities?" Use of the pronoun "we" suggests that Ms. Nieto envisions herself and her students as possessing a collective identity rooted in struggle and

that this identity has implications for their relationship to literacy. Indeed, Ms. Nieto talked to me during an interview about experiences of race during her adolescence in Stockton, California, that shaped her developing understanding of herself; as she explained, "My first high school was a very white space, and very unsafe for me as a woman of color, and so I think what politicized me was just an awareness of how messed up things were." She added, "Everybody who looked like me, what ended up happening to us – most people didn't graduate from high school, people got pregnant – all those things politicized me." She said that while she did not have the language to name what she was experiencing at the time, she found her voice in undergraduate Chicana/o Studies classes at San Francisco State University; these classes led to her identification as Chicana and helped her to understand "the whole historical experience of my people."

The communities that Ms. Nieto chose to join during her first years of teaching helped to cement what she called her "politicization" and her commitment to education as a means of collective empowerment. She taught special education classes in a shrinking African-American community in Hunters Point, and then taught English classes in an alternative high school serving students who were on probation. She then spent five years teaching English at a high school affiliated with the San Francisco Organizing Project that she called an "amazing, teacher-led space" where she became committed to school and community organizing. She named the experiences of her students as formative elements of her teaching philosophy; as she put it, "In the end, I'm glad I chose those spaces, because you can't just teach the status quo. You have to really be in it and struggle alongside them in a way that's meaningful and think outside the box. Those spaces really helped me see the injustices." She explained, "How could you work in those spaces and not be critical? If you have your eyes open every day and know what's going on in kids' lives, you're going to be critical."

Ms. Nieto was drawn to teaching English because she believed that it was the subject that would best allow her to fulfill her justice-oriented teaching goals. She explained, "I felt like with English, it's just so open. The content standards are skill-based, so I can cover anything, and in terms of wanting kids to be empowered by a knowledge of self, I think that kind of literacy is what I got from the Chicano Studies program." This vision of literacy as a vehicle for self-knowledge and self-empowerment in a society characterized by dramatic social and economic inequalities, combined with a commitment to community organizing, provided the backdrop for Ms. Nieto's classroom practice.

During the first few minutes that I ever observed Ms. Nieto's first period class, as I was still taking in my surroundings and gazing at the image on the mural of that heart bursting forth from its shackles, I heard her instructions to students as they answered an introductory writing prompt; she said, "If your pen is not to your page, you are not handling your business as a warrior-scholar." I was immediately intrigued by this term and wrote a note reminding myself to ask Ms. Nieto what it meant – it seemed that students had become accustomed to it and understood its significance. Indeed, over the course of my 24 observations that spring, the term 'warrior-scholar' was said in Ms. Nieto's class 20 times – 19 times by Ms. Nieto herself, and 1 time by a student. It was used alternately as a form of encouragement ("You've gotta stand up and read it. That's real warrior-scholar status") and a form of praise ("I appreciate you stepping up like a warrior-scholar." Table 19 lists the behaviors that elicited the use of this term, which ranged from paying attention in class to struggling through challenging circumstances to accomplish academic goals.

Table 19: Behaviors of Warrior Scholars

Writing responses to prompts
Bringing books to class
Paying attention to a film
Volunteering to answer questions
Thinking through difficult questions
Working collaboratively on group activities
Completing homework
Sharing writing with the class
Writing essays the day before spring break
Coming to class on time
Completing academic work after an encounter with the police
Talking about injustices in the community
Being a role model in the community

When I asked Ms. Nieto about the origin and meaning of warrior scholarship, she explained that she developed this concept as a way to communicate to students her commitment to a "decolonizing pedagogy framework" in which literacy and learning is linked back to self and social empowerment. She described working with a self-organized group of like-minded educators the summer before the school year started to figure out ways to increase student engagement with these ideas; the group read Daniel Solorzano and Dolores Delgado Bernal's article (2001) about the various ways that marginalized students can resist the dominant logic of schooling and struggled to translate its message into practice in their classrooms. Ms. Nieto told me that she and her colleagues asked themselves, "How do we create a culture of transformative resistance instead of this self-destructive resistance?" She decided to identify students as warrior-scholars as "a culture piece that's establishing a sense of purpose." She elaborated forcefully about how she sees that purpose:

> What it did was it allowed me to communicate my philosophy of education. On the first day of school I was like, you know what, I'm not here to just teach. Screw that. What matters is that you're going to use this, you're going to fight for your people, and you're going to use this to change what's going on in your

communities. And that's why I'm here. So I think it has helped a lot for them to understand . . . why we're doing what we do, and the sense of urgency that they need to have.

Ms. Nieto articulates a very clear vision for student learning that is grounded in collective identity and community action. Students seemed to internalize the concept of warrior-scholarship over the course of the school year and played with the idea of truly seeing themselves as warrior-scholars. When I asked one student, Carlos, what the term meant to him, he responded, "I think it's about getting our education and helping our community instead of just trying to get out. To do better and give back." He grinned shyly when I asked him if he considered himself a warrior-scholar, responding, "I'm getting there." Another student, Stacia, told me that to be at that level, "you don't punk out on your community. You try your best with your work. You're the leader, and you try to do the right things." All of the students I talked to considered "warrior-scholar status" something to be aspired to and saw themselves getting closer to fulfilling its promise when they committed themselves to their academic work. The fact that mundane classroom behaviors such as bringing books to class and completing homework could be indicative of warrior-scholarship, just as much as challenging inequality, points back to the way that Ms. Nieto connected every aspect of academic success to a responsibility to the community – things we do for "our hood."

The "hood" that Ms. Nieto is referring to is Watts, the neighborhood in which Southeast High School is located. Watts provides a unique context in which to situate Ms. Nieto's concept of warrior scholarship because of its history of concentrated poverty, racial segregation, and forceful protest; indeed, for many, hearing the name "Watts" immediately brings to mind the riots of 1965 (often referred to by residents as the Watts rebellion). While some focus on the violence of the events, sparked by the arrest of a young black man by a white police officer,

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others point to the collective resistance to oppression as an enduring symbol of community pride. At one point during the school year, Ms. Nieto showed her students a documentary film about what she called "the uprising" that detailed the social conditions that provided the backdrop for the protestors' actions, focusing on the tradition of resistance and strength that students inherited from their predecessors as members of that community.

Many of the same problems that afflicted the Watts neighborhood in 1965 – joblessness, police brutality, unequal education – continue to plague the area, and are compounded by new issues of drug abuse, gang violence, and black/brown tensions. Southeast High School sits in the center of this community as a microcosm of its struggles – for many in Los Angeles, the school's name has been synonymous for years with systemic failure, despite the fact that it opened soon after the 1965 riots as a symbol of hope. As Ms. Nieto explained to me, "For many of the black youth in the school, their parents went to Southeast. It failed them, and now they're sending their children there, and it feels like nothing has changed." In addition to low test scores and abysmal graduation rates, the school has struggled more recently with the changing face of the community as an influx of Latino families have altered the make-up of the student body. In 2008, a fight between a group of black and Latino students led to chaos on campus and created headlines across the city characterizing Southeast as a hotbed of racial tension. Ms. Nieto understood this history and, when she moved to Los Angeles, was committed to teaching in a school serving both black and Latino students in order to promote a collective identity of empowerment through warrior scholarship. As she explained, "I feel that it's really important that we build a sense of common struggle across the black/brown community. It's something I try to do in my teaching."

Shortly after the much-publicized student fight at Southeast in 2008, Achievement Public Schools, a charter-management organization, gained control of the campus and divided it into a collection of small academies. This transition sparked controversy and Southeast became a symbol of the political divide between traditional public schools and corporate-sponsored charters. Private foundations contributed nearly $15 million to finance what was characterized as the school's "turnaround," a new security force was hired, and the school's faculty of 120 teachers were forced to re-apply for their jobs (only 40 were re-hired under a new contract that removed tenure provisions). Facing intense public scrutiny about its ability to raise test scores at Southeast after the transition, Ms. Nieto reported that Achievement maintains a narrow and strict focus on standardized testing and accountability amid what she calls a "corporate culture." This situation created a unique context within which Ms. Nieto attempted to implement critical civic pedagogy (see Chapter seven for a detailed discussion of the barriers Ms. Nieto faced).

Ms. Nieto translated her commitment to empowering education and social justice into concrete literacy practices in her classroom. Oftentimes, just a simple shift in the set-up or naming of an activity could turn a traditional academic literacy into one imbued with more critical meanings. For instance, Ms. Nieto told me that when she was in school, she loved to read; however, her teachers did not make her feel like her opinions about texts mattered. As she explained, "It wasn't in that way where I have something to bring to the table, to this conversation." As a result, when she got to college and was asked what she thought of a text, she described her reaction as "What do I have to say that's important?" These experiences contributed to the way she introduced texts in her class; as she stated,

> My conviction is to make sure that young folks don't feel that way. Young people have to access these dominant texts, but the vehicle has to be something that

speaks to them and humanizes them and makes them feel valuable, because otherwise, you'll never get them to read the difficult stuff.

One of these vehicles was something she called the "dialectical journal." In a sense, these journals could be easily compared to reader-response logs –students were meant to use them to record powerful quotes from texts that they could use as evidence when constructing essay arguments; however, in Ms. Nieto's class, they became representations of dialogue between students and texts. They were designed to signal to students that they approached published works on equal terms with their authors – that, in fact, students and authors existed in a dialectical relationship to each other.

Ms. Nieto further oriented the dialectical journals toward critical ends by asking the students to pull quotes from texts related to the overarching themes of the class, which invariably involved issues of marginalization and resistance. While reading the book, *Our America* (1997), an account of life in the Chicago housing projects, Ms. Nieto asked students to take out their "DJs" and record quotes from the section they just read that show "oppression, dehumanization, criminalization, exploitation or objectification." The book focused on the tragic murder of a 10-year old boy by two 12-year olds and raised complex questions about the roles of individual and social responsibility in the juvenile justice system. During another class session focusing on the book, Ms. Nieto asked students to pick quotes for their journals that they felt would support arguments for their final essay project about whether the boys who committed the crime should be held solely responsible for their actions or if society should share the blame. Lonnie argued that social conditions contributed to the boys' crime, citing the quote, "The whole Ida B. Wells [housing project] looks like a 1995 concentration camp" (p. 145). Debra agreed, pointing to another quote, "These kids didn't have the right ingredients to be good kids, so you can't just expect any more than what's happened" (p. 145). On the other hand, George maintained that the

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boys were solely responsible, citing a moment in the text when one of the murderers called his

brother "bad" and "crazy" (p. 144). In addition to helping students to master the very traditional

academic literacy practice of using evidence to support claims, these dialectical journals

provoked powerful classroom discussions about controversial social issues (the next chapter will

focus on classroom discussions as a form of civic learning across all three focus classes).

Another way that Ms. Nieto subtly tweaked traditional literacy activities was through her

re-conceptualization of the autobiographical essay assignment into the creation of auto-

ethnographies. This assignment represented the culminating assessment of the school year, and

Ms. Nieto paired it with exploration of the book, *Random Family*, a work of creative non-fiction

that utilized ethnographic methods to immerse readers in the lives and struggles of a Puerto

Rican family from the Bronx. She provided students a rationale for the auto-ethnography

assignment on the very first day of the unit as she introduced them to the book and its author,

Adrian Nicole LeBlanc – a white woman who did not come from the same racial or geographical

background as her subjects. She explained to students,

> It's really important to keep in mind that she's not from this community. But she
> lived with these people for ten years to write about their lives. How often do you
> think people write books about Watts? [*Students seem unsure.*] This is really
> important to think about as you read. It's not them telling their own story. It's
> somebody else from outside the community. One reason she was able to do it is
> because she has power and privilege that others don't. That's why we need to get
> educated so we can write our own stories. This book is research that was done
> about people growing up in the Bronx. You're going to write about your
> community and do some research in your own community.

Ms. Nieto presented this assignment as a form of counter-storytelling and couched it in

language that positioned it as a political act in addition to a literary one. Importantly, however,

she spent just as much time helping students acquire the academic literacies needed to write in

this genre as she did providing the critical rationale for it. She developed extensive pre-writing

activities that provided scaffolding for students every step of the way as they wrote narratives

about groups they belonged to that "have been misunderstood, mistreated, or oppressed in some

way." One handout offered a detailed guide for brainstorming:

A. Describe this group/culture in as much detail as possible. Who is part of it? What common beliefs, behaviors, and/or activities do people in this group share?
B. Why are you a part of this group/culture? How does it feel to be a part of this group?
C. What do people in this group/culture contribute to society?
D. Describe something that people in this group commonly experience.
E. How is this group viewed by society? What are things you know people say about this group?
F. Why is this group misunderstood?
G. How does being misunderstood, stereotyped, or oppressed impact you as part of this group? Describe an experience you've had where you were misunderstood or discriminated against as part of this group.
H. What is the group's relationship to power? In what ways do they have power? In what ways do they not have power?

Ms. Nieto guided students through each step of the process, ensuring that they understood

how to use these literacy skills across domains. She provided lessons about outlining their

projects, designing narrative leads to introduce powerful stories, and developing thesis

statements. She also provided model thesis statements and introductions from the texts that

students had read during the school year in order to give them a sense of the forms of expression

available to them.

The most powerful form of scaffolding that Ms. Nieto provided to students as they

developed their narratives was an auto-ethnography of her own about a very personal topic: the

conflicting feelings that she had growing up about her identity as a half-Mexican, half-white

woman. As she handed out copies of her story, she told students, "I'm going to be putting myself

out there today. I'm going to share with you a piece of writing I'm working on. It's got some

boo-boos. It's personal and I want you to keep this in the classroom." Ms. Nieto simultaneously

modeled the writing process and the level of soul-searching that she demanded of her students, all while reinforcing the sense of trust and community between them. Students were mesmerized as she shared painful experiences about her mother's disapproval of her dark skin:

> She began a violent complaint that my skin was getting so dark I looked burnt. "Pareces un negrita," she said, the words pushing their way through her clenched teeth and slapping me in the face. She continued, "It's embarrassing to have a daughter that looks like you do."

She alternated between reading her words and giving students mini-lessons about the ways she manipulated language to make her point ("Did you see how I personified the words, saying they slapped me in the face?"). She transformed the writing process into a meaningful and empowering exploration of self and community, highlighting the power of language and literacy.

Ms. Nieto furthered this commitment to collective identity by telling students that she was going to compile their completed auto-ethnographies into packets that would then be distributed to everyone in the class on the last day of school. While some students expressed nervousness about sharing personal stories in such a public way, Ms. Nieto held firm in her decision to create these collections of their writing. And on the last day of class, students eagerly received their copies of their classmates' stories, each featuring a cover drawn to mirror the mural in the back of the classroom, with the Watts Towers rising from a heart breaking free from its chains.

Multiple students wrote auto-ethnographies about their racial groups, although the affiliations described in the essays varied. Table 20 details the groups to which the students in Ms. Nieto's class belonged.

Table 20: Student Affiliations in Auto-Ethnographies

Black men/women
Mexicans/Latinas/Chicanas
Residents of the projects
Residents of South Central
Graffiti artists
Spanish-speakers
Gay men
Small athletes

Students largely succeeded in placing their personal experiences within a larger societal context and analyzing issues of power. As a resident of a housing project, Lonnie wrote,

> My group is misunderstood because we have all these obstacles that we have to grow through in our projects. When dangerous things happen in my community, it spreads around quickly like a disease, but when something good happens it just stays where we're at in the hood. Them other people out there don't care if we do good because they want to see us at the bottom of the hierarchy forever.

Importantly, students also expressed how they emerged from experiences of oppression with new perspectives on their own strength and the strengths of their communities. After describing the discrimination that she encountered from members of her own Latina community because of her light skin and analyzing the phenomenon of internalized racism, Stacia concluded triumphantly, "Overall, through these experiences I have learned that you should not let others tell you how you aren't Latina enough. I now see myself as a confident, light-skinned Latina who doesn't let negative judgments bring me down."

The freedom of the English Language Arts content standards permitted great flexibility in the nature of the texts that Ms. Nieto could introduce to her students and the types of writing projects that she could assign; indeed, as long as she could integrate explicit instruction in

literacy skills, she felt that she could utilize a great deal of discretion while still meeting those standards. Nevertheless, some literacy practices do not lend themselves to the exercise of quite as much creativity – activities like vocabulary practice, grammar review, and test preparation demand a certain level of direct instruction that seems to fly in the face of explicit messaging about empowerment and social justice. Ms. Nieto invested intensive time and effort into developing ways to make these activities more engaging and more critical for students – to make the demands of academic literacy achievement more humanizing.

For instance, Ms. Nieto integrated informational texts into her unit on juvenile justice by giving students news articles about the biological aspects of teenagers' developing brains that lead to impulsive behavior (and sometimes crime). She provided explicit instruction about the vocabulary words that students would encounter in these articles so that they would feel more confident as they read, as opposed to offering decontextualized lists of vocabulary words for students to memorize. Furthermore, she created a space in which students could explore the politics of language and analyze the relationship between language and power. For example, when she handed out a list of the vocabulary words the class would be studying, she encouraged students to use these in their writing, commenting, "If you sound smart by using fancy words, you will sound like you know what you're talking about." One particularly brave student, David, immediately challenged this logic of using 'fancy words,' asking, "Why is that considered proper language? Why can't we use language like, um, fuck?" While the class tittered with nervous laughter, Ms. Nieto paused, a pensive look on her face. She then smiled and acknowledged, "You're right, what is considered proper language is tied up in issues of power and inequality." She insisted, however, that students be able to "move around" with their language so that they could succeed in different contexts, telling David, "We use different language in the classroom

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than we use in the street." Through permitting this conversation to take place within a lesson on vocabulary, Ms. Nieto opened up a space that combined academic and critical literacies; in addition, she disrupted traditional notions of authority in the classroom by allowing students to question her.

She also aimed to integrate grammar review into the thematic units she taught in an attempt to keep the exercises meaningful. During the juvenile justice unit, warm-up questions would frequently appear on the white board similar to this one:

> Turn to page 97 in your reader. Connect these sentences below using a semicolon and transition word. Remember to use the transition to show the logical relationship!
>
> Lionel Tate is only fourteen. He might be sentenced to life in prison.

In another case, she integrated current events into grammar practice. She told students, "I'm going to show you a picture. You remember Oscar Grant. I was in the Bay Area when they were sentencing Johannes Meserle. He's going to be released in a few days." She was referring to events that took place in San Francisco on New Year's Day, 2009, when a white transit officer, Meserle, shot and killed a young, unarmed black man named Oscar Grant on a train platform. The story became national news, and Ms. Nieto's class had spent a great deal of time talking about the case earlier in the school year when the officer was being sentenced. When Ms. Nieto gave students an update on the officer's release, they spent a few minutes discussing the case and their feelings of anger. Ms. Nieto then showed students a picture of an Oakland storefront that was boarded up and covered in pictures of Oscar Grant's face in anticipation of looting in response to the officer's release. She explained, "Store owners covered their property like this to show that they were down with Oscar Grant and didn't want people to destroy the property." She then asked students to write sentences about the image using appositives. Students integrated

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writing practice with social commentary as they created sentences like "The art on the building, posters of Oscar Grant, protested against the verdict for Johannes Meserle" and "In Oakland, where Oscar Grant was murdered, store owners put up pictures of Oscar Grant so that people won't destroy their stores."

Ms. Nieto was most creative when it came to findings ways to turn standardized test preparation into opportunities for critical thinking and social analysis. As 10th graders, Ms. Nieto's students were subject to more testing than almost any other students in the school; in addition to completing periodic standardized assessments throughout the year, the students were under immediate pressure to pass the CAHSEE, the California High School Exit Exam. Ms. Nieto spent entire class periods in the spring reviewing practice test questions with students, but her frustration with losing time that could be spent on instruction led her to develop strategies to combine content with test preparation. One day, Ms. Nieto gave students a handout containing lyrics to the song, "Modern Day Slavery" by the hip-hop group Immortal Technique. She had typed up the lyrics to mimic the form and style of a passage of text on the CAHSEE, numbering each line. The themes of the song related to the issues that students were discussing in the juvenile justice unit about oppression and marginalization, and Ms. Nieto used the lyrics in order to review the concepts of theme, diction, tone, and mood for the exam. After playing the song for the students to hear, she instructed them to answer four CAHSEE-style multiple-choice questions that she had developed that required them to analyze the text. One question referred to particular lines in the song: "Our people are the product of genocide and slavery / Everything in the ghetto was how it was made to be / Designed in a process, Prison Industrial Complex / Niggaz transformed into number and objects." The question read:

In line 50 the author uses the words 'genocide' and 'slavery' to establish which mood:

A. Joyful
B. Suspenseful
C. Frustrating
D. Nightmarish

Ms. Nieto walked students through the thinking they would need to employ to answer this question correctly and attempted to defuse the tension and worry that students had about the test by explaining that these were the exact types of questions that they would see on test day; though of course, as Ms. Nieto did point out, "they would never give you this song."

Ms. Nieto attempted to make test preparation more engaging and relevant to students through the use of a cultural artifact to which she knew her students could relate; in this case, a hip-hop song. Through this choice, Ms. Nieto accomplished two goals – she gave a genre of expression that her students appreciated a privileged place in the classroom, and she leveraged their appreciation for song lyrics to help them understand literary devices. She used what researcher Carol Lee calls "cultural data sets" like song lyrics to "provide familiar models on which new learning can be anchored" and present "problems whose solutions mirror the demands of the academic task we want students to learn" (Lee, 2007; p. 35). The use of song lyrics provided a bridge between the informal literacy practices of students' everyday lives and the formal demands of academic literacy and provided students with a sense of competency and agency with language in the classroom space.

Ms. Nieto frequently employed cultural data sets in her classroom in the service of academic literacy learning. As students read *Our America* during the juvenile justice unit, Ms. Nieto wanted them to think about why two young black boys in the Chicago housing projects would take out their suffering and anger on another young black boy. In order to introduce the

concepts of sub-oppression and horizontal violence, she played the song, "Black Cop" by hip-hop artist KRS-One, which focuses on the hypocrisy of black people enforcing the laws of a society that continually criminalizes them. Students took notes as the song played, choosing lines that supported the main argument of the song. Dion chose the line "Black slave turned black cop is not logical" as indicative of the idea that "black cops are oppressing others like they were oppressed." A short class discussion followed in which students shared their thoughts about the possibility that black cops were oppressing their people.

Ms. Nieto also played the song, "Wolves" by Dead Prez, which likens the white power structure to a hunter preying on people of color, the wolves. The lyrics describe wolves licking the hunter's blade and cutting themselves, which Ms. Nieto connected to communities of color inflicting harm on each other. She asked students, "How are we licking the blade as a community?" David responded, "Drugs." Sean added, "Fancy clothes." George said, "They're making us kill ourselves."

At this point, Ms. Nieto made the connection to academic literacy by asking students to look for these same ideas in a much denser text – Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). She gave students an excerpt from the text that began, "But almost always, during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or 'sub-oppressors.'" (p. 45). When Ms. Nieto asked students to explain what it meant that the oppressed take on the mindset of the oppressor, Lonnie replied, "We want what white people want." Carlos added, "We learn from them. . . We can't see it because we're in it." Ms. Nieto responded, "That's what's up! You just broke down a college-level text." She praised students and reminded them that they would use the quotes that they analyzed from both the songs and the Freire text in their final essays for the unit. Indeed, each time Ms. Nieto pulled

from cultural data sets, she related the material back to academic reading and writing. When she incorporated clips from the television show, "Boondocks" and excerpts from graphic novels to help students understand the prison industrial complex, for instance, she connected them to informational texts and persuasive writing assignments. She maintained her teaching philosophy while providing students with the academic literacies students needed to access a wide range of dominant and more culturally specific forms of expression.

Finally, Ms. Nieto also strove to connect academic literacies back to critical social analysis by turning class assignments into opportunities for meaningful civic engagement. According to *The Civic Mission of Schools* (2003), a landmark report detailing best practices in civic education, simulations and contact with civic leaders represent two promising classroom activities that inspire student interest in public life. Ms. Nieto incorporated both into her class. She teamed up with another English teacher in her department for the juvenile justice unit, and after both classes read *Our America*, they each created a case for why the two young men who committed murder should be tried either as adults or as juveniles for their crime. Ms. Nieto and her colleague recruited other teachers in the school to serve as judges, and the classes engaged in a full mock trial, complete with student lawyers, witnesses, and jury members. Students learned how to support their claims with evidence in order to present compelling cases to others and how to pick apart counter-evidence for weaknesses. Students then translated these skills back to academic writing when they used their cases as the basis for persuasive essays, effectively bridging the realms of school and civic life.

Ms. Nieto also used the ELA standard related to business letters to develop an assignment bridging academic literacy, civic engagement, and social critique by having students write letters about their concerns with California's juvenile justice system to the state's governor, Jerry

Brown. For Ms. Nieto, this assignment gave students a chance to integrate what they had learned about the prison industrial complex with their literacy skills in order to take concrete action in the real world. These letters represented, in a sense, the fulfillment of Ms. Nieto's teaching philosophy – they combined a commitment to community empowerment with social awareness while showcasing students' literacy skills. It seems fitting to summarize the constructions of literacy and citizenship that Ms. Nieto and her students developed in "Critical Literacy, aka English 10" by sharing the content of one of these letters.

> Dear Honorable Jerry Brown:
>
> I have many concerns about the society we live in. I am truly disappointed with our juvenile justice system. You should take into consideration that with all the money being wasted in prisons, we could use it for something more important – for instance, our schools. With all that money we can motivate our children to stay in school instead of being guided into the wrong path.
>
> If it were up to me to make that difficult decision, I would recommend that we lower prison funds and raise the school fund. For example, to incarcerate a young person it costs $234,000 per year. Instead, we can be using all that money to help the youth become better people. You as the governor can provide us with rehabilitation programs so that teens can get the help needed.
>
> We as the community are trying to encourage you to spend that money on better school supplies, counselors to help guide the children, and after-school programs to give youth the tools to be successful in life instead of getting into a life full of crime and bad influences.
>
> Sincerely,
> Isobel

Ms. Nieto's pedagogical and curricular choices, as well as her own statements regarding her teaching philosophy, suggest that she conceptualized the national political and civic landscape in relatively adversarial terms. She characterized herself and her students as members of a collective comprised of people of color living in urban contexts ("us") engaged in a struggle to upend and transform a white-dominated social and political power structure ("them") through

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civic action. Her goals when engaging students in civic learning opportunities, from mock trials to letter-writing campaigns, seemed geared more toward pushing upon existing public institutions to acknowledge and respond to their interests than helping students to simply learn about or participate in those institutions. The rhetoric that she used in the classroom to motivate students to excel in their academic work did not reflect a meritocratic, rosy view of American society in which students would reap professional and civic benefits in proportion to the hard work and effort they invested; on the contrary, it acknowledged the challenges that they would face in a society in which people like them did not always receive equal treatment under the law, but still pushed them to succeed for themselves and their communities as a matter of pride.

This rhetoric reflects a vision of civic life that is very different from the one promoted by proponents of deliberative citizenship, a model that many scholars see as the basis for much traditional civic education in schools today (Levinson, 2003). In a deliberative model, all Americans are considered part of an inclusive community of citizens who, as Eamon Callan (1997) describes in *Creating Citizens,* should possess "imaginative sympathy" for those who hold political opinions different from their own, as well as "respect for reasonable differences" that leads them to seek consensus and compromise in public decision-making (p. 8). This model places commitment to the polity above the "particularistic political attachments" that individuals might have to specific social or political groups (including race-based groups) (p. 8). Iris Marion Young (1989) sums up this idea of "citizenship for everyone, and everyone the same qua citizen" as having two main principles – first, a focus on "what citizens have in common as opposed to how they differ," and second, a commitment to the idea that laws and rules are "blind to individual and group difference" (p. 250). Clearly, those ideas run counter to the experiences of Ms. Nieto and many of her students, who expressed feelings of difference from those they saw

represented by mass media as good citizens, as well as exclusion from the same legal protections that others enjoyed.

Young quickly points out the flaws in this model of universal, deliberative citizenship that Ms. Nieto and her students felt viscerally; as she explains, "now in the late twentieth century, when citizenship rights have been formally extended to all groups in liberal capitalist societies, some groups still find themselves treated as second-class citizens" (p. 250). She claims that equal citizenship has not led to social justice and equality because "where differences in capacities, culture, values, and behavioral styles exist among groups, but some of these groups are privileged, strict adherence to a principle of equal treatment tends to perpetuate oppression or disadvantage" (p. 251). Thus, in a society in which the culture of white, higher-income individuals is privileged, a stated commitment to equality continues to place people of color and low-income individuals at a disadvantage in public life. Young instead claims that achieving inclusion for all citizens, including those who are socially and politically marginalized, in public life, "requires the articulation of special rights that attend to group differences in order to undermine oppression and disadvantage" (p. 251). This model of differentiated citizenship acknowledges the cracks in the idealistic vision of deliberation; as Nancy Fraser (1990) argues, minority groups often face "informal impediments to participatory parity" in civic life, and bracketing social inequalities or pretending that they do not exist does not improve this situation (p. 64). She instead argues, "it would be more appropriate to unbracket inequalities in the sense of explicitly thematizing them" (p. 64).

Ms. Nieto's pedagogy sought to unbracket these inequalities by creating learning opportunities for students that honored the feelings of civic alienation they often harbored while still promoting civic action. She accomplished this through appealing to a community history of

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struggle for freedom and situating students as beneficiaries of this struggle who bore

responsibility to carry it on for future generations. The civic actions that she facilitated often

involved forms of protest expressed through literacy – letters critiquing the juvenile justice

system and unfair criminal sentencing practices, journals that spoke back to opinions expressed

by authors, and auto-ethnographies that presented counter-narratives to deficit portrayals of their

communities.

At the same time, however, she clearly wanted her students to succeed within mainstream

society in terms of graduating from high school, attending college, and obtaining jobs that would

support them and their families. She prepared them for standardized tests and provided explicit

instruction about the vocabulary and grammar of dominant language practices. On the surface,

this could be seen to represent a challenge; after all, in "Challenging Deliberation," Meira

Levinson (2003) notes that schools serving minority students find themselves in a bind when

trying to prepare students to participate effectively in the deliberative process because they must

"teach [them] that they are outsiders in the sense of having to learn and use a 'language of power'

that is initially not their own" (p. 40). Levinson argues that this could easily lead to "reinforcing

many students' already-strong sense of being excluded or discriminated against" (p. 40). Ms.

Nieto mitigated this issue through her commitment to critical literacy. She had explicit

conversations with her students about the politics of language (including the one with David

about the different ways people speak in the street as opposed to the classroom). She guided

students to master dominant language skills for the purpose of social analysis and critique. And

she continually returned to cultural data sets in order to demonstrate the value and complexity of

language forms with which students were most comfortable and familiar; in particular, she

employed strategies of hip-hop pedagogy (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Emdin, 2010). She

motivated students to engage civically not by invoking discourses of American meritocracy and triumphalism, but by calling upon black and brown communities' civic traditions of resourcefulness, commitment, and hope.

In this sense, Ms. Nieto's pedagogy seemed to envision a civic community characterized by what Jeff Duncan-Andrade calls "critical hope." In "Note to Educators: Hope Required when Growing Roses in Concrete," Duncan-Andrade (2009) argues that too many urban schools try to motivate students by appealing to a false, "hokey" hope promising success and "the American Dream" to those who pull themselves up by their bootstraps and work hard. He criticizes this vision of social mobility for "ignoring the laundry list of inequalities that impact the lives of urban youth long before they get to the under-resourced schools that reinforce an uneven playing field" (p. 182). He argues instead for urban classrooms to be guided by a critical, "audacious" hope that "boldly stands in solidarity with urban communities, sharing the burden of their undeserved suffering as a manifestation of a humanizing hope in our collective capacity for healing" (p. 190). Ms. Nieto's practice exhibits this solidarity and predicates literacy learning and civic action on a strong sense of community and struggle, in the process creating a unique and powerful civic classroom space.

The Bridge-Builder

It was only my third day of observation with Ms. Brown and her 5th period students; I was still learning students' names and trying to remember my way through Eastside High School's vast campus to get to the correct room. Ms. Brown's room was located outside of the main building within a maze of portable classrooms, and though it usually took students a few extra minutes to walk over to it, there was something refreshing about a classroom that opened up to fresh air and sunshine. Ms. Brown stood in the doorway and made a point of shaking hands

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with each of the students as they entered the room, looking them in the eye with a smile and saying hello. Students grinned shyly back at her and then made their way to their seats.

A nervous energy permeated the room on this particular day, for students were preparing to recite original poems in front of their classmates as the culmination of a poetry analysis unit. They mouthed words to themselves as they signed up on the performance list and fidgeted at their desks. Ms. Nieto began the class by reminding students that they would be providing feedback to each other after the poems were read, and then asked Frankie to serve as the MC for the day. He bounded to the front of the room with a smile and began calling students up to the 'stage,' exhorting his peers to applaud for each poet. It became apparent very quickly that students felt safe enough to share deeply personal feelings with the class; while some read upbeat poems about friendship or pride in themselves, many more tackled troubling issues ranging from loneliness to racism. After each reading, students praised each other's work, thoughtfully pointing out lines that they liked and images they found especially powerful. The caring atmosphere in the room immediately struck me; I was impressed by the way that students subtly supported each other emotionally. And then I caught my breath, because I saw Carolina making her way to the front of the room.

I had met Carolina the day before as she was struggling with a decision about whether or not to read a poem to the class that she had written about her father's death. She had told me then that Ms. Brown was encouraging her to share it, but I did not know what she had decided. Now she stood before her peers and, with quiet emotion in her voice, began speaking:

> You disappeared like a city on a foggy day,
> Strangely and disappointedly
> You were gone before I knew it,
> Before I said goodbye, before I knew why
> And till this day the tears haven't dried

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They're still strongly alive . . .

At one point in her performance, Carolina became overwhelmed and paused, tears welling up in her eyes. Her classmates were utterly absorbed, silently supporting her and willing her to continue. When she finished, the room erupted into applause and Carolina smiled, her eyes shining. Juan called out, "I can't even comment on it because it's too good!" Ms. Brown thanked Carolina for sharing and said gently, "It is very difficult to find words to describe loss. You were very brave." Students began clapping again.

While this group had already been working together as a class for six months by the time I met them, I found myself overwhelmed by the culture of caring and respect that Ms. Brown had created that offered a space in which students could share vulnerability and be validated for their thoughts and opinions. When I talked to Ms. Brown about my feelings later, she acknowledged her commitment to building a sense of classroom community; as she explained, "I think that my biggest strength as a teacher is that students, for the most part, see me as pretty loving and caring, and I feel that. Even when it's hard, I definitely feel like my capacity to love and care is big for them." She linked this capacity for caring to her practice of shaking hands with students each day, calling it "an obvious way of getting to connect with them and notice if anyone has barriers up, help them bring them down."

This idea of connection seemed key to Ms. Brown's teaching philosophy; as in the poetry assignment, in which students analyzed famous poems and then used the writing styles they had learned in order to construct their own original work, Ms. Brown consistently encouraged students to make connections between each other and between themselves and the outside world. Furthermore, she explicitly related this idea of connection to her view of citizenship; as she explained, "I think that probably the main thing I do as a good citizen is that I'm a bit of a

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bridge-builder. I definitely have the privilege of being in a few different communities at once, as far as being not a resident of, but a member of the Boyle Heights community." In both her teaching practice and her civic life, Ms. Brown manifested a commitment to caring deeply for her students and the neighborhood in which they lived, and carving out a role for herself as a "bridge-builder" to connect them with a larger community through literacy.

Ms. Brown acknowledged her membership in several communities, some of which differed substantially from the one in which she was teaching, and in conversations explained her personal trajectory toward her bridge-builder identity. Growing up in Laguna Beach, California, a relatively affluent beach community, she reported little socio-political awareness about the privileges she enjoyed as a member of a white, upper-middle class family; as she explained, "I was only aware of 'I'm privileged' in the sense that I have access to so much and so much more than my parents did and their parents did. But I didn't have a sense of what that meant in a political context or in a generational context." Her middle and high school experiences largely failed to alter her perceptions:

> I think my students are so amazing for being so socially aware. I love them. It tells me I would not want to work in a school like the one I went to. My teachers, like, you would learn about history disconnected from the political reality today. I can't believe it now. So no, I was really socially unaware.

While she had not yet encountered experiences that would expand her social and political worldview, she was beginning to appreciate the power of language and literacy as a means of connecting across differences. Reading Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* peaked her interest in literature ("I got really into the idea of thinking about what that book meant") and foreign language classes in high school excited her; as she explained, "I knew that I loved language, the fact that I could read and write in Spanish. I was pretty empowered by that."

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Indeed, Ms. Brown's interest in language led her to a high school summer study abroad program in Argentina where she became immersed in a culture different from her own; she said that this experience helped her to realize, "oh, there's a world beyond here and I definitely want at it, like, now."

She discovered more of that world during her undergraduate career at Brown University, where she taught ESL classes to women involved in activism around labor and immigrant rights and taught at what she described as a "socialist, Zionist youth movement summer camp" dedicated to exploring issues of social justice. Her socio-political development (and her interest in teaching) continued after graduation when she took a job teaching home ownership classes at a community development corporation. She realized that she had a talent for teaching and creating supportive classroom environments and decided to return to Los Angeles to pursue a teaching credential. Her desire to teach was deeply rooted in her belief in education as a force of social change; as she put it:

> I like working with kids, I like classroom dynamics, and I want to commit to transforming society through schools. That was the part of it that spoke to me the most, this part about schools as sites of social production that are essential to changing if we want to change society. I really bought into that. And I still feel that way.

After completing her credential, she began student teaching at Eastside High School, which is where I found her six years later. One of the largest high schools in Los Angeles, enrolling over 4500 students, Eastside has been hounded for years by a reputation for academic failure and high drop-out rates; indeed, the recently released education documentary, "Waiting for Superman," documents parents desperately searching for different school options for their children for fear of sending them to Eastside, which the narrator characterizes as a "drop-out factory." While Eastside shares many of the same problems as Southeast, its demographics differ

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starkly; the student body is almost 100% Latina/o, with over a third identified as English

Language Learners. These demographics mirror those of the surrounding Boyle Heights

community, which boasts a large Mexican immigrant population. It seems appropriate that Ms.

Brown would bring her concern for connection and bridge-building to this community,

considering the level of isolation from other parts of the city suffered by its members not only in

terms of racism and segregation, but with regard to language and immigrant status as well.

Ms. Brown reported a conscious interest in teaching in Boyle Heights as a way of

providing necessary resources and "reinvestment in the community," but also struggled in her

first years there to figure out how she could connect and fit in; as she described, "I was self-

conscious about what it meant to be someone from a white, middle-class background, and just an

outsider in general." She returned to her commitment to creating caring relationships as the key

that helped her to bridge the differences between herself and her students so that she could begin

to fulfill her obligation as a teacher to help transform society. She also returned to the importance

of language as a medium for creating connections/societal transformation when describing why

she felt compelled to choose English as the subject she wanted to teach:

> I think it's the language skills. Yeah, students having access to the language they
> need to negotiate different environments, to represent themselves, to have
> meaningful relationships, to experience the full depth of their own capacity. I'm
> really of the Gloria Anzaldua school of thought – we use language to translate our
> reality. I think that's my main approach to why English.

Especially because she encountered so many students who were learning English, Ms.

Brown was deeply concerned with the ways that language influenced different facets of students'

lives and considered it her charge to help them negotiate its various forms: "There's basic

communication, the ability to present yourself in general, to present yourself as an English

speaker, and then there's this whole realm of academic language development." She connected

students' mastery of English to their ability not only to succeed on standardized tests and in college, but also to their ability to access the "culture of power."

Ms. Brown and her colleagues strove to connect students to the culture of power not only through literacy instruction in the classroom, but through enriching experiences in the community as well. Ms. Brown taught in the Law and Government Academy, one of the six smaller schools into which the Eastside campus had been divided in order to provide students with more personalized instruction geared toward particular themes and career paths. She and her colleagues developed a focus on law and government by analyzing their philosophies of education, recognizing their shared commitment to social justice and noticing that in their teaching, "it was mostly about analyzing questions of power and justice and access." In their academy, this commitment to access was manifested through frequent field trips to educational sites around Los Angeles; indeed, Ms. Brown reported that one period per day she was relieved of teaching duties in order to organize extra-curricular events for students.

She organized mentoring for the 11th graders with local business leaders, as well as visits to City Hall during which students could shadow city officials. During my time in her classroom, she and her colleagues organized a new course to be taught in the following school year to juniors entitled "California Criminal Justice" – it was to be taught by a professor from the California State University of Los Angeles and would give students college credit in addition to elective credit. Over the span of three months, Ms. Brown's students had opportunities to sit in on criminal trials at the Los Angeles County Superior Court, visit a local law firm and the Forensics department at CSU-LA, and work with members of Heal the Bay in Santa Monica. In addition, Ms. Brown and her colleagues helped students to secure summer internships with

organizations around the city in order to provide opportunities for students to expand their horizons and make connections between Boyle Heights and the rest of Los Angeles.

While it may not initially seem that the creation of a caring classroom environment or the proliferation of out-of-school learning opportunities is necessarily related to literacy, or to the specific goal of providing students with the language skills needed to participate in academic and civic life, observations of Ms. Brown's class offered evidence to the contrary; indeed, it was through the development of humanizing relationships and bridge-building experiences that students gained the trust necessary to experiment with different forms of language and open themselves up to worlds outside their comfort zones.

One routine in Ms. Brown's class geared toward fostering positive relationships between students was something she called "good things." The idea was simple – Ms. Brown reserved a few minutes at the start of class about once per week for students to talk about good things that had happened to them recently. During one class period, Roberto talked about his sister's quinceañera. In another, Maria reported earning her driver's permit. Whenever people shared, the entire class applauded for them. This routine was one of many that contributed to trust between students – trust that Ms. Brown called upon for the more directly literacy-related activity of analyzing and assessing each other's poetry. At the conclusion of the poetry unit, Ms. Brown gave the students one of their peers' poetry anthologies and charged them with grading them and writing business letters to their classmates explaining their thoughts. She provided students with a rubric and spent almost an entire class period reviewing the personal and sensitive nature of poetry and the corresponding care that they should take when criticizing another person's work. At one point, Maria asked Ms. Brown why it was not a good idea to tell others that their poems were not very good, adding, "Wouldn't that encourage them to improve them?" Ms. Brown

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responded, "You will be putting yourself in the position of an editor editing a writer's work, and I'm also asking you to be a teacher. You can still say what you don't like. In life you have to be kind and respectful, but you can still be critical." This gentle guidance encourages constructive feedback, but also transmits a subtle message about the way students should interact with others.

In order to show solidarity with students who swallowed their fears to share their poetry, Ms. Brown agreed to perform an original poem of her own. Before she began, she told students that her poem was about "the feeling that as a teacher sometimes you can only do so much, [and] my love of language, but how sometimes it falls short." Students hung on her every word as she read, giving her a huge round of applause when she finished. They called out different lines that they liked, and Carolina said, "Words can mean anything, but when you say them in class you make them mean more. The way you say them shows us you really care." Indeed, when I talked to Carolina privately, she reiterated her view that Ms. Brown created a caring atmosphere in the class that made students feel safe to share personal feelings: "I think it is a safe space. I think we really do have the idea that we could all open up without worrying about the teacher judging us, first of all, and the students. Because we're all really close friends." Roberto agreed, saying, "I feel comfortable talking to everybody in there."

Ms. Brown leveraged these relationships in the service of other literacy practices as well. Just as students took on the role of teachers when they assessed each other's poetry, Ms. Brown also encouraged them to teach informational texts to their classmates. At one point, she split the class into groups and gave each group an article about the Holocaust related to Elie Wiesel's memoir, *Night*, which the class was reading together. After students analyzed their article and created a poster detailing its themes and pertinent information, Ms. Brown instructed one member of each group to stay with their poster and teach the rest of the students about their

article as the rest of the groups did a gallery walk around the room. The "teacher" explained particular concepts and answered questions as students moved from poster to poster. Ms. Brown assessed student knowledge of these concepts without ever providing explicit instruction herself, trusting students to take their responsibility to teach each other seriously.

The "author's chair" was another literacy practice that depended on respect and trust in order to function effectively. In this activity, students were sent to the front of the room one at a time to sit in front of their peers and read a piece of their writing to the class. All of the students have copies of their peers' writing and read along, afterwards providing guidance to the authors about how they can improve their pieces. During one class period, three students took their places in the author's chair and shared timed writing assignments about the role of Nazi propaganda in World War II. When it was Alma's turn to share, she grinned sheepishly, seemingly nervous at the prospect of exposing her writing for all to see. She read her essay and braced for the responses. After the applause died down and the conversation started, her tensed body relaxed as she absorbed the constructive, respectful comments of her classmates:

> *Gina*: I liked your academic vocabulary.
> *Ms. Brown*: (*to Gina)* Give some examples.
> *Gina*: Like the word "sought" and "glorified."
> *Gabriel*: Like she said, I liked the words you used. You were descriptive.
> *Ms. Brown*: More comments? Remember, talk to Abby, not to me.
> *Karla*: Maybe she can be a little more specific in the details.
> *Ms. Brown*: Can you give her some examples?
> *Roberto*: I got confused during that sentence in paragraph two when she said, "The Nazi party oppressed the Jews by ensuring that they were hated by the German community."
> *Ms. Brown*: (*to Alma)* I don't see evidence. Pick one of the pieces of propaganda and tell us in your own words how it oppresses Jews.
> *Alma starts her explanation.*
> *Ms. Brown*: Everything you just said needs to be in your essay. It's hard to use visual evidence – you have to describe it. Does everyone see that?

While it initially appeared that only Alma's writing was being assessed, this practice actually allowed Ms. Brown to assess the writing skills of multiple members of the class as she listened to the comments they made. During each of the "author's chair" sessions that I observed, I never witnessed any students making hurtful comments about another classmate's writing, or any authors becoming defensive about critiques of their work – the atmosphere encouraged transparency in the writing process.

Most of the literacy practices that I observed in Ms. Brown's classroom during the last few months of the school year revolved around the study of *Night* and its themes of oppression and resistance. Ms. Brown chose this text in collaboration with the 10th grade world history teacher as they planned an interdisciplinary humanities unit about World War II. Both teachers worked together using the Humanitas curriculum framework; as Ms. Brown described it to me, "Humanitas is really just thematic units that are interdisciplinary that get students writing across the curriculum and synthesizing and that are driven by essential questions that are important for life and to the world." Ms. Brown saw the integration of literacy and history curriculum as a way to further help students use their language skills to make connections between different subject areas and critically analyze their society. The essential questions that Ms. Brown and her colleague developed for this unit included:

- What is oppression, and how can we identify and recognize oppression?
- How do people resist oppression?
- What are the steps to genocide?
- Why do people bystand and why do they intervene?

Ms. Brown's goal in this unit was not simply to help students understand oppression and resistance in a historical context through the study of the Holocaust, but also to help them identify current examples of oppression and resistance in their lives in order to facilitate social

change. As a result, while the unit opened with the study of *Night*, it concluded with an analysis of a recent article by Daniel Solorzano that Ms. Nieto used to provoke discussion about the role of schools as institutions of either marginalization or empowerment for students.

Ms. Brown chose to introduce this unit with a simulation activity designed to provide students with a visceral experience to illustrate the complexities of bystanding and intervening in the face of oppression. My field notes for that day recount the dramatic event:

> Ms. Brown walks to the back of the room and picks up a small fish tank with two live goldfish in it. As she carries it to the front of the room, students start to comment on the goldfish. Ms. Brown says nothing – simply puts the tank down on a stool, opens the top, catches one of the fish with a net, and takes it out of the bowl, placing it on the ground. Students yell, "What are you doing?" Some gasp. Others ask what is going on. Gabriel says, "I'm going to save it." Others simply look on, dumbfounded and confused. He gets out of his seat and picks the struggling fish up off the floor, gently placing it back in the tank safely. Once Gabriel puts the fish back in the bowl, Ms. Brown tells everyone to give him a round of applause. Frankie asks, "Was this a joke?" Ms. Brown tells everyone not to say anything yet, instead motioning to the chart paper stand next to the white board, where the following questions are written down, "What were you thinking? What were you feeling?"

After students spent several minutes writing, Ms. Brown elicited their responses. Carolina said, "I hated you. I was wondering, what if no one saved it?" Gabriel said, "I was shocked." Roberto added, "I didn't think you would do something like that." As students recounted their feelings and discussed the reasons why they did not stand up to save the fish, instead waiting for someone else to do something, Brian noticed that the words "World War II" were written on the board and began to understand the rationale for the activity. He told the class, "This is about how people stood by as Jewish people were killed during the Holocaust."

At this point, Ms. Brown introduced the essential questions for the unit, as well as the final essay prompt that students would be tackling at the end of it about how Nazi oppression functioned and how Jewish people resisted. She told students that the purpose of the simulation

was to connect the events of the Holocaust to ongoing questions about "human psychology"; as she explained, "It's not necessarily that bystanding is bad and intervening is good. It's not that simple. You can think in life about when you should step in and when you should not. The goal is that next time you get into a situation you'll think about it." With this statement, Ms. Brown made an explicit connection for her students between the literacy practices they would engage in throughout this unit and the future choices that they would make in their everyday lives about universal themes of oppression and resistance. Indeed, students immediately began relating these themes to their lives, thinking about when they would get involved to stop wrongdoing and when they would hold back.

This unit provided multiple examples of Ms. Brown's teaching philosophy in action – moments when literacy skills were used in the service of helping students articulate their opinions and beliefs about ongoing social issues and how people should interact in a just society. Students analyzed primary documents, including pieces of Nazi propaganda, an American propaganda film, and articles drawn from the popular *Facing History and Ourselves* curriculum, not only as an academic exercise designed to help them develop evidence for their essay-writing, but also as a means of asking philosophical questions about human nature and our capacity for cruelty toward others perceived as different. Several weeks into the unit, pieces of chart paper covered the walls of the room containing questions that students had that could not be easily answered: How could humans do this? What if there was no Hitler? What happened to the survivors? How did the Nazis live with what they'd done?

As students read *Night*, Ms. Brown instructed them to pull quotes from the text that they found powerful as related to the themes of oppression and resistance and analyze their contexts, meanings, and uses of figurative language and imagery so that they could be incorporated into

their final essays. During one class session, Brian shared his analysis of an excerpt of the text in which the narrator and his father are discussing the importance of symbols like the Star of David. The quote begins in the father's voice and transitions to that of Elie: "The yellow star? Oh well, what of it? You don't die of it. (Poor father! Of what then did you die?)" (p. 9). Brian's classmates listened as he explained this quote's meaning:

> In this quote, people from the community are asking Elie's dad about the yellow star but he just says to ignore it. This demonstrates that his dad was ignorant and was too blind to see what the Nazis were doing. For example, like being branded with the Star of David. This is oppression because they were labeled and no one should be labeled because it is dehumanizing. The short-term effects were just being branded. The long-term effects were that now people could see they were Jews. In this quote, Elie says, "Poor father! Of what then did you die?" He is trying to imply that because he is being branded and labeled as a Jew he was taken away to the camp and killed.

This type of close textual analysis helped students to eventually produce strong analytic essays about oppression and resistance during World War II; in addition, it provided students with the skills needed to turn their lens on the current educational system and look for ways that similar themes of oppression and resistance emerged in their school.

Before introducing students to Solorzano and Delgado Bernal's academic article about forms of student resistance to oppressive schooling conditions, Ms. Brown asked students for their own opinions about how students could be marginalized in schools and what their responses could be. She set up pieces of chart paper around the room and asked students to walk around and write down their answers to these questions, putting a check mark next to another student's idea if they agreed. Students' responses revealed a great deal of critical thinking about the struggles students face in and out of the classroom:

What conditions oppress students in school?

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- No money (low budget) (two checks)   - Limited rights as students
- School vibe   - Limited voice/students are not heard
- Harsh punishment   - Peers being distracting
- Food   - Horrible education (four checks)
- Class schedule   - Not enough classes available
- Being not comfortable   - Bad teachers
- Racism   - Gangs/violence (five checks)
- Segregation   - Being bullied (two checks)

How do students resist these negative experiences and conditions?

- They find a hobby   - Strive for a better life
- Self-confidence   - Friends
- Ignore it   - Join extracurricular activities (two checks)
- Drugs and alcohol   - Communicate to people – open up
- Try harder   - Activities
- Give up   - Have other stuff to worry about
- Avoid it   - Set goals for their life

Students were able to identify social and institutional forces that negatively impact

student success, from racism to school resources to bad teachers, and then recognize the self-

destructive (drugs and alcohol) and empowering (self-confidence) ways that students could exert

agency over these forces. Ms. Brown used students' analyses to guide them through the dense

academic language of the journal article and explain the four types of resistance that the authors

offer as possible responses that students could take to oppressive school conditions. She then

provided students with further opportunities to translate these ideas to their own lives by asking

them to think of different ways they could respond to a negative interaction with a teacher.

I sat with one group as they puzzled through the four types of resistance, asking them

about the different responses they could have to a teacher who disrespected them. They argued

that a reactionary response might be throwing something at the teacher, a self-defeating response

might be failing the class, and a conformist response might be earning a good grade in spite of

the teacher's actions. They struggled a bit to articulate what "transformative resistance" to this

teacher would look like – a form of resistance that Solorzano and Delgado Bernal define as

"political, collective, conscious, and motivated by a sense that individual and social change is possible" (p. 320). As the students searched for a response that would meet these criteria, I realized that, in a sense, they were searching for ways to fulfill Ms. Brown's biggest wish for them – that they would use their language abilities to interact with others across various boundaries of different and create transformative change in their lives and in their society.

After a few more minutes, the group had a break-through. Gabriel said, "Couldn't transformative resistance be students teaching the class?" I cried out excitedly, "Yes, that's it! Tell me why." Roberto responded, "It's about changing the power in the classroom. Just like Elie Wiesel was being transformative by writing his book instead of just surviving." Ms. Brown was walking by just as Roberto made this revelation, and her face broke out into a huge smile.

In many ways, the civic community that Ms. Brown strove to create in her classroom could be characterized as drawing more from the deliberative citizenship model than from the more adversarial, differentiated model on display in Ms. Nieto's class. Ms. Brown did not manifest as much of an explicit focus on systemic inequality and the oppression that her racial minority students faced as Ms. Nieto did, and she spent far more time than her on explicit instruction aimed at helping students acquire dominant language practices. Indeed, she often spoke of her interest in helping students develop the language skills that they would need in order to express themselves and have their voices heard in a variety of settings. Furthermore, in keeping with her sense of herself as a bridge-builder, Ms. Brown provided students with many more opportunities than Ms. Nieto did to interact with traditional professional and civic leaders, largely through field trips to City Hall, non-profit organizations, and city businesses. It could be argued that these opportunities were geared toward preparing students for a future in which they could participate in mainstream public institutions on an equal playing field with citizens from

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culturally dominant groups, communicating with a common language and respectfully considering multiple points of view on social issues.

Ms. Brown's focus on providing students with opportunities to communicate with people from backgrounds different from their own resonates with some of Dewey's early ideas about the power of dialogue to bridge social divides and foster democratic life. Even in 1915 Dewey recognized deep divisions in society between the "rich and poor" and the "learned and unlearned" in society and attributed them to a lack of dialogue, arguing that these divisions were found, "wherever one group has interests 'of its own' which shut it out from full interaction with other groups" (p. 99). In *Democracy and Education*, he argued that the democratic ideal can be achieved only when two criteria are met – when interests are "consciously communicated and shared" between groups, and when the groups enjoy "varied and free points of contact" with each other (p. 97). Indeed, Dewey argued that communication and shared interests have the power to "break down those barriers of class, race, and national territory which keep men from perceiving the full import of their activity" (p. 101) In Dewey's view, it is this inextricable link between communication and democracy that leads to the full realization of citizens' potential and the resolution of social divisions and problems.

While connections to the deliberative citizenship model certainly exist, Ms. Brown's practice remained far too complex to simply be reduced to any particular category. For instance, while she did often attempt to draw connections between her students and other groups of citizens, these were often rooted in the exploration of oppression and resistance; her *Night* unit not only helped students to understand the behaviors and experiences of Germans and Jews during the Holocaust, but also encouraged them to think about modern-day instances of discrimination and transformative civic action that applied to their own lives in school.

Furthermore, the extreme care that she took to establish a classroom culture of trust, respect and acceptance helped her to make the process of learning dominant language practices a humanizing and positive one for her students. Levinson (2003) argues that minority students often have very negative experiences when learning the language of power, and that as a result, "it is likely to be harder to build the kind of trust that deliberative democrats correctly argue is required for deliberative democracy to function effectively and justly, since minorities will be consistently aware of working in a world that is partly not their own" (p. 43). Levinson concludes with a thorny question:

> Can a school successfully teach minority children that they are full civic beings who should try to function like 'insiders' in deliberative settings (i.e. they should join, speak up, vote, etc.), while simultaneously teaching them that they are 'outsiders' in the sense of having to learn and use a language of power that is not their own? (p. 46)

What made Ms. Brown's classroom practice so interesting is that she created a caring atmosphere that changed the terms of this question – she did indeed teach her students that they were full civic beings, and she did so while seemingly dismantling the sense that they were outsiders. Literacy practices including author's chair, peer editing, and creative writing assignments helped students to gain confidence in their work and develop trust in their peers, qualities that would serve them well in the larger public sphere and possibly help them to avoid feelings of alienation. Ms. Brown strove to create a civic community characterized by thoughtful dialogue in which all citizens' voices would be honored and respected.

The Consciousness-Raiser

Three seniors stood in front of the white board, upon which they had posted a large piece of chart paper containing their summary and analysis of Chapter three of *The Kite Runner*. They

presented evidence from the text that demonstrated the tension between Pushtuns and Hazaras in

Afghanistan, identifying quotes that contributed to the exposition of the novel. After they

finished speaking, Mr. Prado returned to the subject of discrimination:

> *Mr. Prado*: Does anyone ever have the right to put someone down?
> *Students: (in chorus)* No.
> *Mr. Prado:* What about the police? If someone is stealing something, do they have the right to put them down?
> *Students: (unsure)* Yes?
> *Mr. Prado:* But what if they pull you over because of how you look?
> *Ana:* That's wrong.
> *Mr. Prado*: What about the dean of Southwest?
> *Antonio*: Remember that time the AP brought sniffing dogs into class?
> *Mr. Prado*: Do deans have the right to do that?
> *Valerie*: Yes. If they have reason to believe that someone has something in class, they can do it.
> *Mr. Prado*: How many of you say no, the dean never has the right even if he has suspicions?
> *Maria*: What if they're not doing anything, not bugging anybody?
> *Mr. Prado*: That's what I want you all to think about. Does one group ever have the right to keep another group down?

I was intrigued by the connections that Mr. Prado drew for students between ethnic strife

in Afghanistan and power relationships in school and society. He seemed to be familiarizing

students with the politics of a country unfamiliar to most of them through invoking situations

with which they were much more aware (i.e. dogs sniffing for drugs and weapons in their

classroom) in order to draw out common themes and broaden their scope of analysis about the

world. When I asked Mr. Prado about the rationale behind his choice of topics to tackle in class,

he explained:

> I'll bring in different personal and local and global issues and have them be the ones to break those down. I never want to provide them with answers. I'll show my viewpoints on things, but not for them to hang onto it or believe that it's truth, but to question all of that. I think that's where I'm really trying to push them.

This commitment to "breaking down" issues and identifying relationships between local and global problems is related to his larger goals for his students; as he put it, "What I'm trying to do in my classroom, it's culturally relevant, it's engaging, it's fun, it's something where they're basically learning about themselves in a way that helps them learn about the world, too."

Mr. Prado's own educational trajectory reflects this journey toward personal and social discovery and informs his philosophy of teaching. Growing up in the suburbs outside of San Francisco, he reports that he was not especially socially aware as a student, but was very in touch with his Filipino-American identity as a result of his parents' active involvement in cultural community organizations. He joined a multicultural club started by some friends at the private high school he attended that he identified as a site where his sociopolitical development began to develop; as he explained:

> Ever since I can remember there was always something there for me about Filipino or being Filipino-American. There was always some sort of pride. In high school, that club kind of grew out of the fact that people wanted to show their pride or get more culturally aware. So I think it was the beginning. I wasn't necessarily hard-core politicized at that point, but I was beginning to understand that I came from a different place than a lot of the students there at the high school. And I began to own that.

It was during his college years at San Francisco State University that his cultural pride transformed into an educational and political commitment. While he initially enrolled as a mechanical engineering major, he quickly lost interest in his studies because "there was no connection for me, no deeper connection." He became so alienated from his course work that he stopped attending classes, ending up on academic probation and at risk of being pushed out of school. At this point, he realized that "the only classes I was really into, or being fully engaged in, were my Asian-American Studies classes that I was taking." He quickly changed his major and developed strong relationships with professors and peers involved in ethnic studies that altered

his view of himself and his career path. He identified strongly with the students who had come before him who had established SFSU as the birthplace of ethnic studies in higher education, explaining, "I connected it to my high school experiences . . . there was a divide between the majority and the minority, and their experiences as minorities were being kept silent or hidden, and that's what motivated them to push for ethnic studies." He continued:

> I think understanding that history and knowing that I was at the school where all of that happened with the actual people who started it was a huge awakening for me and motivating factor for me to continue learning that history, to continue sharing it through being a good student and even wanting to become a teacher.

Mr. Prado's involvement in teaching began when he joined a program started by one of his professors that brought a Filipino-American Studies class to a local high school. It was through this experience that he learned about lesson-planning strategies and about constructing engaging educational opportunities for students to help them "connect on multiple levels with learning." After graduation, he continued to work for several years with after-school enrichment programs until deciding to move to Los Angeles and pursue his teaching credential at UCLA.

Mr. Prado said that his credential program "raised my consciousness toward social justice issues" and helped him to connect his college experiences to his teaching philosophy. He explained, "If it wasn't for Asian-American studies and those professors connecting with me through my culture, through my history, and allowing me to use my personal talents as a way to learn their material, I think I might have just fully got kicked out of college." Indeed, the lack of interest that he felt in his academic work before discovering ethnic studies had led him to under-perform in classes and get placed on academic probation, a precursor to being dismissed from the university. In turn, because of the drastic changes he was able to make in his education, he found it his responsibility as an educator to provide students with "relevant opportunities for them to

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learn about themselves and to grow." As he put it, "There's no way you can separate where the students are coming from, where I'm coming from, and where I feel like we have to go, or where we're trying to go, you can't separate it from social justice."

Mr. Prado turned to English as his subject area of choice because of the flexibility that it offered in terms of the content he could use ("I felt I was freer to do what I wanted through English in terms of skill-based learning.") He was able to connect his social justice goals to helping students use the English language to articulate their goals and "be stronger citizens or participants in society."

When I began to observe Mr. Prado's class, he was in his third year of teaching at Southwest High School, a turbulent site in South Los Angeles roiling with struggles over leadership, reform efforts, and a changing student body. The school made headlines in 2005 when it lost its accreditation due in part to low test scores, lack of standards-based curriculum, and rampant tardiness. While the community organized to help the school regain accreditation, deep divides remain between stakeholders over a vision for the school and the reforms that should be implemented. Mr. Prado has reported to a new principal during each year of his tenure at Southwest, and tensions have been reported as student enrollment continues to drop. While the school remains one of the last high schools in Los Angeles with a majority African-American student population, an increasing Latina/o population is forcing administrators and community members to re-evaluate its culture and decision-making structures in the face of complaints from the Latino community about feeling alienated and unwelcome. Southwest provides a unique context in which Mr. Prado can help raise his students' consciousness about the way that local issues can reflect themes of much larger social import.

Because he taught seniors, Mr. Prado was required by his administration to be the facilitator of the "senior portfolio" project; in order to graduate, all seniors were required to turn in portfolios to their guidance counselor containing autobiographical essays, cover letters, resumes, two letters of recommendation, and descriptions of their mandatory service learning projects. According to the handout that Mr. Prado provided to his students, the portfolios were intended to help students share their accomplishments during high school with colleges and prospective employers; as it explained, "Though most of you have completed the college application process, if you need to re-send anything or refer back to anything, you know where to look." This claim was immediately put into question when Mr. Prado asked his students how many of them were planning to attend college in the fall and only about a third of them tentatively raised their hands. When I walked around the room asking students about their future plans, the great majority of them seemed unsure and had not met with their counselors to formulate plans. As a result of these troubling realities, Mr. Prado made an effort to transform this required assignment that he had no control over into something that could empower students as they entered the "real world." He repeatedly told students, "You can take this after graduation and turn it into a job and it will be legit – you can use it."

A scan of the autobiographical essays that students wrote for their portfolios revealed the depths of the challenges that many of them faced to academic achievement, including physical abuse, stays in foster care, and parental abandonment. Mr. Prado acknowledged his desire to alter this required assignment in ways that would connect students' personal struggles to larger social issues in an effort to re-connect with his consciousness-raising goals, but expressed frustration with the constraints that he faced from his administrators; as he expressed:

Every single year I've tried to make it something more meaningful. Even going through it this year, I was trying to look at ways to tie it to the prison-industrial complex, or just help them realize, where are students like yourselves going after high school? Are they even making it outside of high school? What are the opportunities? I was just trying to play with different ideas. But with the timeline, and there's a deadline that the school has given us that they have to all be in, and with the current schedule, I don't know, I just felt like I'll go and do it with them and just offer guidance even if it wasn't necessarily too engaging. It's tough. Those things are tough.

In this case, school policies interfered with Mr. Prado's teaching philosophy and had ripple effects on what he was able to accomplish during the remainder of the school year (the barriers that teachers experienced to realizing their teaching goals will be explored in more depth in Chapter seven). Responsibility for the senior portfolio assignment was thrust into his hands during the last months of the year when he was planning to explore the themes of friendship, loyalty, and discrimination in *The Kite Runner*. Between this assignment and the variety of senior activities that took students out of class for days at a time, Mr. Prado was not able to complete the unit he had envisioned. Instead, he felt pressured to resort to academic literacy activities divorced from his commitment to culturally relevant teaching and learning. Students' final project involved the completion of study guide questions about the novel, a storyboard of the novel's plot, character analysis, vocabulary practice, and a final essay about major themes.

While Mr. Prado was committed to providing students with the academic literacy skills needed to complete these assignments, he felt that his responsibility involved more than he was able to give as the days slipped away leading to graduation. This sense of responsibility was rooted in the fact that he was trying to get Southwest's Social Justice Academy off the ground with his faculty colleagues. Southwest, in another attempt at reform, had divided the campus into small learning communities (SLCs) based on theme the previous year, placing students (often without their input) into various academies with a dedicated group of faculty members. Mr.

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Prado acknowledged that the reform had happened quickly and without much support, making it more difficult for the small academies to find their footing; as he admitted, "It's not cohesive yet, of even what our academy's mission is." While teachers in the academy were supposed to have a common planning period to work out their goals, Mr. Prado reported that the entire group never had the opportunity to meet because teachers were consistently assigned to other tasks. He explained, "I think we have an understanding of what we want to work towards with our students, but it just needs time to become concrete." He and his colleagues took it upon themselves the previous summer to attend a lesson design seminar, but were not compensated for their efforts by the school.

When I returned to Southwest to re-visit with Mr. Prado the following fall, I saw signs that the Social Justice Academy was beginning to find its footing and that Mr. Prado's teaching goals were starting to be realized. Various pieces of chart paper were posted around his classroom (with identical ones hanging in the classroom of each Social Justice Academy teacher) identifying the roles and responsibilities of teachers and students in the academy, who are described as "critical." The teacher poster read:

SJLA Critical Teacher Identities and Habits of Mind

Identity: Modeler
Habit of Mind: Modeling meta-cognition and explaining how/why we are doing activities

Identity: Collaborator
Habit of Mind: Collaborating

Identity: Connector
Habit of Mind: Connecting to students' cultures and schemas, and connecting to issues of social justice

Identity: Apprenticer
Habit of Mind: Apprenticing

The student poster, in addition to calling on students to be careful readers and observers, charged them with being "Connectors and Agents of Change" by "questioning" and "making connections."

Working with a class of 10th graders, Mr. Prado introduced a unit about stereotypes and the ways that individuals can become "self-fulfilling prophecies" or "anomalies" based on their responses to how others characterize them. He challenged students to think about the ways stereotypes are formed by referring to the racial group to which he belonged. He wrote on the board, "Asian people can't _____" and then asked students what stereotype comes to people's minds. Students call out, "They can't drive." Mr. Prado smiled and asked students how many had come across an Asian person who they thought was a bad driver. Students raised their hands, a few calling out examples. Mr. Prado then reminded them of the dangers of generalizing from individual experiences: "If you know 5 Asians who can't drive, or 500, or 5 million, does that mean that all Asians can't drive?" Students respond, "No" in unison. Mr. Prado used this as a jumping off point for students to explore the stereotypes that they often faced as members of particular social groups and the ways that they were subverting those stereotypes in their daily lives.

As Mr. Prado led students in discussion about stereotypes and explained that they would be analyzing the effects they could have on young people as they begin to read the book, *Our America*, he continued to point at another piece of chart paper hanging on the wall that listed the essential question that all of the faculty members in the Social Justice Academy agreed would be the focus of the 10th grade cohort: "How does the space a person occupies (environment) affect individuals, groups, leaders, societies, and laws?" He asked students to list the various environments they are a part of, eventually creating a list on the blackboard from local to global:

"school, home, neighborhood, city, state, country, world, universe." As he pointed at the various environments on the list, indicating the relationship that each had to the other, I heard echoes of his teaching goals in my mind and witnessed his latest attempt, in a chaotic teaching environment, to raise his students consciousness about themselves and their world through the power of language and literacy.

It is difficult to draw too many conclusions about the civic community that Mr. Prado was trying to create in his classroom, largely because of the barriers that he faced in translating his pedagogical vision into practice. During our private conversations, he expressed viewpoints about society grounded in understandings of systemic inequality and community struggle that he gained from ethnic studies courses. These views seemed similar to those expressed by Ms. Nieto and suggested that he might employ some of the same strategies that she used in her classroom, including conversations about oppression and resistance and activities employing cultural data sets; however, this was largely not the case. While Mr. Prado developed ideas for assessments that would involve students in telling counter-stories about their neighborhoods, and provided rationales for the literary texts that he chose based upon goals of critical social analysis, he felt that the expectations placed upon him by administrators and the many events that took his seniors out of the classroom frustrated his efforts. Nonetheless, he exhibited hints of a unique view of civic community through his commitment to raising students' consciousness about the similarities of struggle among different communities around the world; for instance, drawing connections between the discrimination faced by people of color in the United States and that suffered by minorities in Afghanistan.

The literacy activities that Mr. Prado did implement in his classroom – five-paragraph essays, plot summaries, character analyses – focused on the development of students' traditional

academic reading and writing skills. Like Ms. Brown, Mr. Prado wanted his students to gain

fluency with the language of power and be prepared to succeed within dominant social

institutions while simultaneously maintaining their racial and cultural identities. Unlike Ms.

Brown, however, Mr. Prado still seemed unsure about how to make academic literacy a critical

endeavor. He was the most inexperienced of my three focus teachers and was still finding his

footing; as such, I suggest that he was in the same position as countless teachers (including those

I surveyed) who considered citizenship education an important part of their practice but, because

of a lack of quality professional development opportunities and test-focused administrators,

resorted to traditional activities instead of experimenting with new ways of bridging their

teaching philosophies and transformative uses of literacy for civic purposes.

Translating Civic Identities and Philosophies of Literacy into Critical Classroom Practice

This chapter aimed to explore how three high school English teachers in Los Angeles

conceptualized "good" citizenship and the purposes of literacy in the 21st century and then to

examine possible connections between these beliefs and the literacy practices they introduced to

students in their classrooms. The goal of this analysis was to learn more not only about how

teacher beliefs translate into classroom practice generally, but also about how beliefs about

literacy and citizenship in particular can be harnessed by teachers to produce transformative

learning opportunities for students from communities traditionally marginalized in social and

political life. The findings offered here provide evidence that, for my three focus teachers,

imbuing literacy instruction with a civic purpose and situating language as a crucial tool students

needed to participate in public life led them to introduce activities to their classrooms that strove

to empower students personally, academically and politically. I suggest that these teachers'

practices demonstrate the practical applications of critical literacy in action and the potential of high school English classrooms as powerful sites of civic learning.

The findings presented here share similar themes that suggest several conclusions. First, the views about literacy and citizenship that my focus teachers expressed were invariably rooted in their personal histories – particularly their evolving understandings of their racial identities and their schooling experiences. Both Ms. Nieto and Mr. Prado highlighted their developing understandings of themselves as members of racial minority groups as crucial to the way they came to view society and pointed to their undergraduate experiences with ethnic studies classes as formative moments in their sociopolitical development. Both tapped into histories of shared struggle and enjoyed transformative educational experiences that helped them to see literacy as a tool of collective as well as personal empowerment; in turn, they used these experiences to ground their approaches to the teaching of racial minority students. Both spoke of identifying with their students in very personal ways and of the impossibility for them of not taking a critical stance to literacy when considering the barriers their students encountered.

Even Ms. Brown, whose identity as a white woman provided her with a very different world-view and set of experiences, recognized her willingness to struggle with the implications of her racial identity in the classroom as key to her successful efforts to connect with students across boundaries of race and class. The educational experiences she sought out provided her with opportunities to see social inequities through the eyes of those suffering from them; in turn, these experiences influenced the way she viewed herself as a citizen and as a literacy teacher.

The fact that these teachers' personal identities and histories followed them into the classroom and influenced the way they saw their students, their subject matter, and their roles as educators implies that current policies seeking to characterize the ideal teacher as an objective

conduit of subject-area knowledge are flawed and misguided; indeed, it was precisely because these teachers engaged in sustained reflection about how their teacher identities related to the other aspects of their lives that they were able to develop complex curriculum and pedagogy that engaged their students both academically and civically. They realized that the veneer of objectivity is simply a manifestation of a subjective commitment to a particular view of education (one that critical theorists argue maintains a systemically unequal society), and instead chose to make a conscious commitment to one rooted in the democratic power of literacy.

These findings suggest that much more attention should be paid in teacher education programs, and in education policy discourse at large, to helping aspiring teachers articulate and clarify their values and beliefs as guiding touchstones for the practices they introduce in their classrooms, regardless of their subject area. For English teachers in particular, it seems crucial to explore the complicated intersections of race, literacy, citizenship and education that have characterized American history as the context within which classroom interactions are taking place. And the field of civic education should broaden its scope to include teachers across disciplines as civic educators providing valuable learning opportunities that prepare students for their roles in democratic life.

This is not to say, of course, that critical literacy and critical civic education should be considered monolithic entities that dictate particular viewpoints and classroom activities for future generations of English teachers. The findings presented in this chapter indicate that teachers who share conscious commitments to literacy as a tool for civic empowerment nevertheless manifest these commitments in myriad ways. The warrior-scholar, Ms. Nieto, focuses on the ways that literacy can help students to understand forms of oppression in their lives and speak out in protest and resistance, whereas the bridge-builder, Ms. Brown, commits

herself to the less confrontational practice of helping students gain access to codes of power through language, develop skills to support the sharing of private stories within the quasi-public space of the classroom, and connect with dominant communities. The consciousness-raiser, Mr. Prado, works to connect students' personal experiences to issues on a global scale. Each take on unique civic identities as educators that lead them to gravitate toward particular literacy practices – Ms. Nieto's classroom highlights the use of cultural data sets, Ms. Brown's classroom is committed to an ethos of caring, and Mr. Prado attempts to cultivate an atmosphere of inquiry. Of course, there is a great deal of overlap between the three teachers' practices, as well; my point is that each maintain strong and identifiable points of view to the classroom that can be traced to their unique personal and social contexts.

This chapter has demonstrated that the school and community contexts in which these teachers work also influences the shape that their literacy practices take. The Watts community's history of political agitation is compatible with Ms. Nieto's brand of warrior scholarship, whereas Ms. Brown's commitment to the bridge-building power of language is especially fitting to the immigrant, Spanish-speaking community in which she teaches. The struggles that Mr. Prado experiences in translating his teaching goals into practice is directly related to policies and practices put in place by his administrators and speaks to the ways that classroom and school priorities can often come into conflict when it comes to literacy and civic learning. These findings indicate that the entire eco-system of classroom, school and community should be taken into account in the design and implementation of classroom practices.

The next chapter will delve further into a particular literacy practice that reached across all three focus classrooms and created unique opportunities for civic learning; namely, classroom discussion of controversial social issues.

CHAPTER SIX – CLASSROOM DISCUSSIONS

As soon as the bell rings signaling the start of first period, Ms. Nieto welcomes students

to class and flips on the projector, displaying a question onto the white board at the front of the

room. It reads,

> What crimes do people commit as a result of living in poverty or being poor? If someone grows up poor and commits a crime as a result of their poverty, should they be held accountable for their crime? Or should society be held accountable? Explain your thinking using details and examples.

As students continue to trickle into the room, Ms. Nieto reminds them that their responses

to this prompt will prepare them for the next day's Socratic seminar focusing on the book the

class is reading - *Our America*, a first-hand account written by two teenage boys about life in the

Chicago housing projects. She sets a timer, prodding them to write continuously for the next ten

minutes with the admonishment, "If your pen is not to your page, you are not handling your

business as a warrior scholar."

When the timer rings, Ms. Nieto asks students to share their responses with a partner.

After several minutes of walking around the room, coaxing students to talk and reminding them

to make eye contact with each other, she shifts the attention back to her and opens the floor to

comments. What starts as an orderly call and response involving raised hands quickly morphs

into a lively exchange of ideas.

1   *Ms. Nieto*: What are some crimes that poor people commit?
        Patricia: People rob because they're poor.
        Carlos: They do what they have to do for survival.
        Dion: No!
5   *Christopher*: Sometimes they have no choice because they have to survive.
        Ms. Nieto: Why don't they just go get a job?
        Christopher: They might not have papers.
        Ms. Nieto: Well, what if they have papers?
        Dion: Are you kidding me? I'm ashamed right now. You wanna survive?

10 Go to school. (*turning to Ms. Nieto*) You're basically saying that if people are broke you should legalize crime. Everyone is responsible for themselves.
  Stacia: White people don't go through what we go through.
  Ella: Amen.
  David: How come white people get to live and we have to survive?
15 *Ms. Nieto*: You're asking some deep questions about why the experiences of white folks are considered the norm, about their privileges.
  David: What if we get their privileges and we do a crime and get away with it?
  Ms. Nieto: That's a hard question.
20 *Christopher*: White folks have money. They have privileges.
  Ms. Nieto: Do you both get the same education?
  Multiple Students: No!
  Dion shakes his head in exaggerated fashion.
  Ella (*to Dion*): It's not only about your opinion.
25 *Dion (to Ella)*: I'm different from you? We all live in poverty!
  Trisha: Some people don't have food in the house.
  Ms. Nieto: A former student of mine was hit by a car and had to go to the hospital. Her mom lost her job because she had to travel 2 hours each way by bus to get to the hospital. This is a situation that poor people have to deal
30 with that can put them at a disadvantage.
  Dion: I disagree. Not everybody gets an equal chance, but they get a fair chance. My chances are not bad at all. None of us. Why are we complaining?
  Trisha: They know what they're doing. You can't blame it on society.
  Ms. Nieto: These are difficult issues that as voting citizens you're going to
35 have to think about.

The classroom discussion presented above showcases the multiplicity of meanings that students create about themselves and their society when tackling a timely social issue. What started as a conversation about 'poor people' in general very quickly transformed into a deeply charged debate involving students' personal identities and feelings. Students struggled to locate the balance between individual agency and social determinism, not only as they related to other people's lives, but also as they impacted their own hopes and dreams as low-income students of color. Indeed, students alternated between viewing themselves as individuals and as members of particular race and class groups – a tension that Ms. Nieto pushed students to consider. She also managed the discussion with an eye toward constantly providing counter-arguments and pushing students to clarify their opinions, thereby offering a vision for how citizens should interact

during public deliberation. Importantly, all of these processes took place in an English classroom and drew upon the themes of a literary text, demonstrating that literacy classrooms can be powerful sites for exploring civic and political issues.

Classroom discussions about controversial social issues have long been praised as best practices in several related branches of education research, including student-centered learning, critical pedagogy, and sociopolitical development (Duff, 2002; Gutmann, 1999; Freire, 1970). Discussions are touted for their potential to foster engagement with curriculum, hone critical thinking skills, and spark long-lasting interest in public life (Hess, 2009; Campbell, 2005). Oftentimes, however, researchers approach classroom dialogue as a *means* to these ends rather than a transformative practice on its own terms – as useful yet artificial practice for the *real* discussions that young people will engage in once they become adult citizens (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999). Educators often puzzle over how to facilitate discussions rather than deeply exploring the conversations themselves as spaces in which students experiment with a multiplicity of civic identities and directly engage with the complexity and power of language. This chapter will analyze discussions that took place in the classrooms of my three focus teachers over the course of the study in order to demonstrate the critical ways in which students and teachers used language to express viewpoints about important social issues.

The analysis of classroom discussions is crucial to my exploration of urban high school English classrooms as sites of civic learning because these discussions are often both disciplinary activities in which students learn literacy skills *and* instances of civic engagement. Clearly, many discussions occur in English classrooms that do not rise to the level of engagement with social issues; however, I argue that discussions represent instances of civic dialogue when they: 1. Encourage students to identify themselves as members of local, state or national communities of

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citizens; 2. Engage with complex issues of public concern that involve multiple possible viewpoints; and 3. Include processes for deliberating that foster collaboration and mutual respect across lines of difference. My definition of civic dialogue draws from Diana Hess's (2009) explanation of controversial issue discussions, which she describes as, "public discussions that in their process include, nurture, and honor diverse views, and in their content, focus on authentic political issues" (p. 13). Key for my purposes are the terms 'public,' which implies that the dialogue is inclusive of all citizens, and 'authentic,' which references the fact that the subjects being discussed have relevance in the world outside the classroom. The discussions from my focus teachers' classrooms that will be explored in this chapter tackled subjects ranging from juvenile justice, violence, and racism to existential questions about oppression and resistance and the limits of individual agency. Because these topics did not always lead to explorations of formal political structures, I choose to call this dialogue 'civic' rather than 'political' in nature to stress its concentration on general issues of public concern.

While I acknowledge that not all discussions in English classrooms represent civic dialogue, I do maintain that many discussions involving the disciplinary content of literacy (i.e. response to literature, persuasive writing, close reading) that many may assume have no relevance outside of the field do often resonate as civic in nature. I argue in this chapter that discussions of literary texts (or even discussions about grammar and vocabulary) can become instances of civic dialogue when teachers draw explicit connections for students between literacy skills and participation in public life, showing them, for instance, how their ability to draw evidence for their point of view from a novel is applicable to their ability to analyze political rhetoric as citizens.

The dialogue introduced above from Ms. Nieto's classroom will serve as the anchor for this chapter as a means of introducing and analyzing the civic dialogue that emerged across classroom discussions in my three focus high school English classes. The first section will tackle two main elements of civic dialogue – the way that students identity themselves through discussion as members of various civic communities and engage with controversial social issues. I will demonstrate how students' identities as low-income students of color influence their experiences as citizens, their civic attitudes, and their feelings of civic agency. The next section will explore the third element of civic dialogue – the processes that my focus teachers set up to encourage collaborative deliberation in their classrooms as a model for how citizens should interact when approaching complex social problems. The final section will delve into the ways that literature – the foundational texts of English classes – can act as unique catalysts for civic dialogue by giving students access to imagined worlds in which they can exert agency over new visions of democracy.

The Personal is the Political in Classroom Discussions

The students in my three focal teachers' classes, because of their teachers' commitments to utilizing literacy as a form of social and political empowerment, frequently discussed issues directly related to their status in society as low-income students of color living in urban contexts. As a result, the opinions that students espoused in these discussions were not formulated in fulfillment of some decontextualized academic exercise of civic learning; instead, they emerged in response to very real social barriers and pushed students to articulate how they understood and responded to their positions in society. In a sense, these discussions can be analyzed as moments in which students are exploring their identities as citizens in a systemically unequal society.

Returning to the discussion in Ms. Nieto's class that anchors this chapter, it is instructive to note both the ways in which students identify themselves, individually and collectively, and how these identifications structure the opinions they express. When Stacia introduced the word "we" in line 12, she identified the class as a collective existing in opposition to "white people," thereby racializing poverty (the original subject of the discussion) and invoking a set of shared experiences involving her and other students in the class related to struggle. Some students in the class, including Ella and David, echoed this identification; in line 14, David repeated it when he asserted that "white people" get to "live" while "we" have to "survive." In the context of the discussion, David implied that people of color living in poverty experience struggles that put them at a disadvantage in society as compared to white people, who in his view are largely not defined as poor. At this point, Ms. Nieto pushed students to identify differences in privilege and power related to race in society, namely in terms of education.

While the majority of the participants in the discussion seemed in agreement that as students of color they did not receive equal resources as white students, Dion expressed a dissenting opinion. At this point, Ella attempted to preserve the collective identity that had been established in the class by telling Dion that his individual opinion was not more important than the group's. Dion responded in line 25, "I'm different than you? We all live in poverty!" Dion re-affirmed the collective identity that the class had constructed as low-income students of color, but simultaneously attempted to validate his differing individual opinion. Even after Trisha and Ms. Nieto offered examples about the struggles facing poor people, Dion insisted that individuals could succeed regardless of their social class, arguing in lines 31 and 32, "Not everybody gets an equal chance, but they get a fair chance. My chances are not bad at all. None of us." Again, Dion seemed to vacillate between viewing himself as an individual and part of a collective, and he

makes a distinction between equality and fairness in order to rationalize his commitment to individual autonomy. Indeed, another student also exhibited conflicting opinions during the discussion; Trisha, who at one point attempted to outline the social conditions oppressing low-income people, abandoned this view by the end of the conversation, stating in line 33, "You can't blame it on society."

This conversation demonstrates the ways in which students' personal and civic identities interact, as well as the different ways that students respond to these interactions. While all of the participants in the discussion adopted a collective identity as low-income students of color, individual students struggled with what this identity meant in society for their future chances in life. Dion seemed staunchly opposed to the idea that social constructions such as race or poverty could impinge upon individuals' decisions or life outcomes - not simply in principle, but in his personal worldview. He reassured himself that he and his classmates had the opportunity to succeed based on their own actions, presumably in order to avoid the possibility that they could struggle (and possibly fail) against forces greater than themselves. In this sense, the conversation revolved around issues of racism and poverty in society that are intimately important to how students view themselves and their life trajectories.

Over the course of my study, all three of my focus teachers consciously developed and implemented curricular units that were conducive to discussions about issues of race and/or class. All exhibited a concern with having their students critically analyze power structures and confront injustice, in the process constructing particular visions of the kinds of citizens they wanted their students to become. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) argue that educators have different models of citizenship to draw from in their classrooms, including a personally-responsible version based on the cultivation of values like honesty and compassion, and a

participatory version committed to engaging with community structures. My focus teachers came closest to embodying the third model of citizenship presented by Westheimer and Kahne – that of justice-oriented citizenship, which "calls explicit attention to matters of injustice and to the importance of pursuing social justice" (p. 242). The teachers were more interested in encouraging students to examine the root causes of social problems and interrogate public institutions than to simply participate within them.

For instance, Ms. Brown taught a unit about oppression and resistance that connected World War II and the Holocaust to current forms of marginalization. She found her inspiration by using a curriculum model that encouraged collaboration with colleagues in the history department to create humanities courses based on, as she put it, "essential questions that are important for life and to the world." Mr. Prado taught a unit focusing on the politics of war and of ethnic strife through *The Kite Runner* and spoke candidly about his commitment to "bringing in personal and local and global issues and having [students] be the ones to break them down." And Ms. Nieto, who made perhaps the most explicit connections to discussions of race and class in her curriculum, taught units about juvenile justice, social reproduction and transformative resistance because, as she put it, she wanted students to "use this to change what's going on in our communities." Each of these units engaged with issues situated at different historical and social distance from students' lives, ranging from those felt personally to those occurring decades beforehand to people unlike themselves; nevertheless, the teachers mined these issues for similar themes that spoke to enduring civic problems facing diverse populations living in unequal societies.

Indeed, as discussed in the last chapter, the teachers were very aware of the low-income, racially segregated school and community contexts in which they were teaching and readily

discussed how these contexts shaped their curriculum. As a result, students received multiple opportunities to explore their identities and experiences in society through discussions rooted in literacy course content. These opportunities were not lost on students, who recognized and appreciated the fact that their lives were taken seriously and considered worthy of study. As one student, Stacia, said in praise of Ms. Nieto, "She teaches us about real stuff, like what happens around this community." Instead of feeling demoralized by talking about struggle, students (and teachers) saw it as a step toward empowerment.

Of course, the make-up of these classes, filled with racial minority students from economically depressed communities, influenced both the topics of conversation that came up for discussion, as well as the nature of those conversations. Analysis of these conversations reveals the tensions and struggles that urban youth are dealing with as they develop their civic and political identities. Roderick Watts and Constance Flanagan (2007) argue in their research that socially marginalized youth experience a unique trajectory of political socialization because they do not identify with the prevailing social order; as they ask, "Are young members of marginalized groups as likely as more socially integrated youth to replicate or buy into a system where they feel excluded?" Answering with a resounding 'no,' they instead offer a model of socio-political identity development centered on critical analysis of society as a means of empowering students politically – a model that I see reflected in these conversations.

As Ms. Nieto's students continued to read *Our America*, they became increasingly curious about the length of the prison sentences that the two boys received for their crime. This led Ms. Nieto to ask students for their opinions about whether or not life sentences for juveniles constituted "cruel and unusual punishment." The following conversation began:

> *Ella*: I think it's cruel and unusual because they don't get a chance to live life. Adults, like the guy that killed Oscar Grant, they get two years and kids get life.
> *Lonnie*: I agree.
> *Christopher*: We don't trust the children, what they're doing. I saw proof when I was hanging out yesterday – the police were looking at this little kid like he was doing something wrong.
> *Lonnie*: I have a question for George. Do you feel the same after what Ella said?
> *Ella*: That kids should go to jail for life after what I said about Oscar Grant?
> *George*: Well, he's a police officer – of course the judge is going to go on his side. I don't think it's right, but you can't really change it.

Students' responses revealed the ways that they analyzed personal experiences and social events to construct a worldview based on their identities as young women and men of color. The discussion question immediately led Ella to recall the murder of Oscar Grant, which she used as evidence of hypocrisy and inequality in the criminal sentencing of adults and young people. Ms. Nieto's class had spent a great deal of time at the beginning of the school year discussing Oscar Grant, the young black man who was shot in the back and killed by transportation police in San Francisco on New Years Day in 2009, largely because the story had returned to the news in the fall of 2010 as his killer was being sentenced. Due to students' interest in the case and outrage about what they perceived as police brutality, Ms. Nieto had used a lesson about business letter formatting to have students write letters to the judge in the case, urging him to give the police officer involved the maximum possible sentence. Instead, the officer who killed Grant was sentenced to two years in prison in November 2010. Ella's comment in this discussion months later demonstrates the effect that this event had on her views about fairness (or the lack thereof) in the criminal justice system in this country.

Both Lonnie and Christopher shared Ella's belief that young people of color were abused at the hands of the police. In support, Christopher shared a personal experience about a police officer looking suspiciously at a young boy in his community. The students in Ms. Nieto's class,

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particularly the young men, shared many stories about unfair treatment at the hands of the police – experiences that contributed to the view expressed by Christopher that they were not "trusted" by people in positions of authority. Indeed, George's comments highlighted how these experiences lead students to believe in the inevitability and immutability of systemic inequality – with a sense of resignation, he reminded his classmates that judges will always side with police officers, saying "I don't think it's right, but you can't really change it." Students used the experiences connected to their race and class identities during class discussions as evidence to express (often negative) attitudes about the society in which they lived and their sense of agency within it.

Both Ms. Nieto and Mr. Prado taught *Our America* at different points in the school year, and both teachers used it as a catalyst for class discussions about stereotypes and social power structures in ways that led students to think about their own identities in society. Ms. Nieto pushed students to think about the relationships between different social groups, such as "white people/people of color," "rich people/poor people" and "heterosexuals/LGBTQ people" in order to tease out the ways in which white supremacy, capitalism, and heterosexism operated in society to maintain inequality. During this discussion, students continually referred back to the ways that their family members or they themselves were stereotyped. David brought up a new social relationship between citizens and undocumented immigrants, explaining, "People think we're taking their jobs." When talking about the rich/poor relationship, Felix said, "My mom can't go to Paris" and Christopher added, "They have better houses in their neighborhoods, and we don't have good houses."

Similarly, Mr. Prado pushed students in his class to think about the ways that different social groups, including immigrants and teenage moms, were stereotyped, and how these

stereotypes could influence individuals' behavior. At one point he asked the class, "Say I am a Mexican and for whatever reason, because I'm Mexican, when I come across people who don't know me, I always hear that all Mexicans are immigrants. Could this affect how I see myself?" Some students said yes, while others said they would just shrug it off. One student, Jose, said, "Hispanics were the original people here, and then Europeans came over, so who's the immigrant?" Mr. Prado used these opinions to teach students that while some individuals internalize stereotypes and allow them to become a "self-fulfilling prophecy," others fight back against them to become "anomalies." This dichotomy echoes the tension in Ms. Nieto's class over the power of individual agency vs. social determinism that resonated with so many students because of their status as members of marginalized groups trying to make a path toward success in society.

Mr. Prado asked students to think about the social groups to which they belonged and the extent to which they saw themselves as self-fulfilling prophecies or anomalies. Students overwhelmingly identified themselves as anomalies out to prove stereotypes wrong. They wrote statements in which they spoke back to stereotypes that had been applied to them and posted them around the room, creating a conversation of counter-stories about students of color:

> "My Dad doesn't sell corn!"
> "I don't sell drugs."
> "Not all blacks are poor!"
> "I am not ghetto."
> "I'm not on welfare."
> "I will not end up dead or in jail."
> "I did not jump over the border."

In this case, students rejected discourses in society that sought to identify them in negative ways and made a strong case for individual agency, arguing for identities of their own choosing;

however, other discussions indicate that these choices are not always so easy to make or so clean cut, reminding us of students' constantly shifting views about themselves and their society.

The book, *Random Family*, which Ms. Nieto taught to her class, provided rich opportunities to discuss the ways in which social reproduction operates in society. Members of the family at the center of the book often made self-destructive choices, and individuals with dreams of a better life often found themselves in the same situations as those who came before them. Students often identified with these characters and deeply understood the forces keeping them where they were, but also tried to re-assert the power of individuals to create their own destinies in society because of their hopes for their own futures. After reading a passage in *Random Family* in which a young woman follows in her mother's footsteps and becomes a teenage mom herself, Ms. Nieto asked students to think about whether or not social reproduction was inevitable. George immediately responded, "There is no social reproduction. People choose that." Lonnie, however, introduced a different perspective:

> Lonnie: People in the projects see people getting shot in the head, you don't even know.
> Ms. Nieto: You're saying that affects people's ability to choose?
> Lonnie: Yes.
> David: They adapt to it.
> Ms. Nieto: How many of you have friends who, if you say you're doing homework, they're like, "what?"?
> Lonnie: When you get home, you're in a whole different state of mind. I have to worry about people harassing me.
> Nakia: You forget about it.

This exchange indicates the extent to which students' experiences provide a unique context in which to think about issues like social reproduction. Lonnie analyzed how living in the projects colored the way he thought about success in school and in society in general. The kind of civic learning that Lonnie and his classmates experienced here was intimately related to their

identities as urban students of color, and classroom dialogue allowed them to experiment with different ways of understanding these identities. They were able to make connections between the way success is structured in both school and society at large. Attention to the relationship between individual agency and social structure meets my criteria for civic dialogue because this dichotomy impacts how students come to see themselves as citizens and how they interpret and experience social issues like gang violence and teen pregnancy.

Ms. Brown's students also examined the way that individual agency and social determinism related to how students performed in school. After reading *Night* and analyzing the different ways that Jewish people experienced oppression and engaged in resistance during the Holocaust, they turned their attention to the current day and issues of oppression and resistance in school. They read an academic article by Daniel Solorzano and Dolores Delgado Bernal about the forms of resistance that students of color often exhibit to unequal schooling conditions and returned to the same debate about the extent to which success and failure is determined by individuals or by social forces.

Brian referred to the academic success that he and his classmates enjoyed as evidence for individual agency, saying, "We're getting good grades because we do our work. Other kids can get good grades just the way we do – they just have to do their work." Carolina echoed his opinion, adding, "We just know that we earned that grade and we deserved it." Quickly, however, Karla took issue with this viewpoint, arguing, "It's not just that we do our work and they don't. They probably just need a little more attention." Ms. Brown encouraged students to think about the social conditions that structured their ability to succeed in school, from their home lives to their teachers to their resources. At this point, Carolina contradicted her earlier statement, instead claiming that perhaps, "The way society treats us makes us act the way we do." Again, students

used discussion to try out different ways of viewing the world and their places within it. The space of the classroom proved to be a fruitful location in which to have this discussion, considering the ways in which individual agency and social forces applied to success both in school and in society. This again points to the unique and powerful role that classrooms can play as sites of civic learning.

In analyzing these classroom discussions, it becomes apparent that shared identities among students in these three classes as low-income students of color did not necessarily imply shared viewpoints about school, society, and success; indeed, the opinions expressed by students in these discussions were not monolithic or static simply because they shared membership in particular race or class groups. Nevertheless, the common identifications that they did share provided a unique context for dialogue that shaped the issues being discussed and the attitudes being expressed. Importantly, their teachers held different opinions about the extent to which a common identity as students of color was important to how they saw themselves as citizens and how they approached language and literacy. Mr. Prado maintained that while he had a common goal for students of color as a whole to become critically thinking, politically motivated adults, he felt that individual students had differing needs when it came to how literacy could help them get there; as he explained, "There's different levels of emancipation for students. Emancipation for one student could really be, it's not a struggle to read out loud in class. On a greater level, for another student, it's, "I'm not going to be in this gang anymore."" For Mr. Prado, critical literacy could involve activities ranging from word decoding to social analysis.

Ms. Nieto, on the other hand, maintained that critical literacy needed to remain rooted in a sense of collective identity for students of color; as she put it, "I do think for black and brown youth in our country that it is important that we have a collective identity of struggle that is

conscious of the ways we are oppressed." She argued that this identity was necessary because "it will lead to transformative resistance if they're able to access the tools and if they're motivated by social justice." While Mr. Prado and Ms. Nieto saw the relationship between collective identity and critical literacy in different ways, the discussions in their classrooms clearly demonstrated that, for their students, reading the word and reading the world could not be separated from reading themselves and their complicated, always shifting identities.

Classroom Discussions as Models for Democratic Deliberation

The previous section highlighted the sensitive nature of many of the discussions that emerged in my focus teachers' classes; because they revolved around politically charged content and took place within a social context of marginalization and inequality, they often had the potential to alienate participants or devolve into yelling matches. This potential is realized often in current public discourse; indeed, Harry Boyte (2003) laments the prevalent "distributive politics of left and right" (p. 3) in which groups of citizens "demonize their opponents and proclaim their own virtues and blamelessness for society's troubles" (p. 4). Cornel West (1998) warns of the danger our society faces when "we do not even respect each other enough to listen to each other" (p. 10). As a result, it is important to consider the processes that the teachers in these classes put in place to facilitate the expression of deeply personal opinions in a way that humanized everyone involved and encouraged the interplay of diverse points of view. The facilitation of classroom discussion can be interpreted as a model for public deliberation that students take with them into their adult lives as citizens.

The conversation in Ms. Nieto's class that anchors this chapter was preceded by some writing that Ms. Nieto asked students to do at the start of the period. Before opening up a whole-

class discussion, she asked students to turn to a partner and talk about their responses to the prompt. This was a routine in Ms. Nieto's room – students were required to "pair-share" at least once during every class period I observed. On this day, Ms. Nieto reminded students of her rationale for asking them to talk to each other: "You have more to teach each other than I have to teach you." Over the next two days, she repeated this rationale again and again, telling students, "I want you to actually teach each other" and, "Remember, y'all got more to teach each other than I could ever teach you." She told me that the focus of her class was "to open up those critical conversations" and "trying to get at these counter-stories."

Ms. Nieto stressed the educative nature of discussion – the idea that students learn not from passively absorbing a single point of view, but from actively engaging with multiple ideas. Her commitment to eliciting counter-stories also points to the way that knowledge is created through the process of communication. Her views echo John Dewey's (1916) ideas about the democratic nature of communication; as he explains, "democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" (p. 101). The dialogue in Ms. Nieto's classroom was aimed at creating these 'conjoint experiences' through communication and did not focus on arriving at a pre-determined end-point; this allowed students freedom in their analyses of language and society.

Ms. Nieto believed that facilitating freedom of expression actually required the censorship of certain forms of speech in order to preserve a safe and welcoming environment in the classroom. Students were not permitted to use personal insults during any of their discussions. For example, during one of his passionate defenses of individual agency, Dion asserted that Ms. Nieto's interest in social reproduction was "ignorant." Ms. Nieto immediately stopped the conversation, asking him, "Are you calling my argument ignorant?" She reminded him, "You

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can always disagree, but you cannot call someone ignorant." At another point, a group of boys, including George, Lonnie, and Dion got into a heated discussion about the appropriate sentencing for young people who commit crimes, and Lonnie said to George, "That's dumb." Ms. Nieto praised the students for the passion they brought to the discussion, but insisted that they use different words to express their opinions; as she explained, "I want you to be so skilled at arguing that you never need to call someone dumb."

Ms. Nieto maintained in this explanation that students needed to know how to make passionate arguments in clever, respectful ways so that they could advocate for themselves without having their opinions dismissed; indeed, she constantly managed classroom conversations with an eye toward preparing students for political discussions with people unlike themselves. One of the reminders that she gave students when they engaged in pair sharing was, "You need to look each other in the eye when you are speaking." She acknowledged that "in the street" this could be construed as an insult, but insisted that they needed to know how to do this to get their points across in other public settings. This concern with being able to utilize multiple communication strategies in order to interact with a variety of audiences is key to democracy; Beth Rubin (2007) cites Dewey's work directly in order to make her claim that, "communication across all axes of difference is critical to democratic life and democratic education" (p. 65). She argues that democratic life is based on students' ability to "work with diverse peers" and "discuss issues" (p. 66).

Another way that Ms. Nieto got students to use language that could facilitate discussion across boundaries of difference was by taping a list of "sentence starters" to each student's desk that she asked them to use when they were engaging in classroom dialogue. These included phrases such as "I agree because" and "My evidence is" that pushed them to listen and respond

to classmates instead of simply stating their own views. During another class discussion, Lonnie responded to George's assertion that young people were in control of their own actions by saying, "I disagree with George – you could have a blackout." Ms. Nieto immediately praised him for using the sentence starter instead of calling George 'dumb.'

Another strategy that Ms. Nieto used in order to encourage students to listen to each other was student peer assessment during Socratic seminars. While the class engaged in multiple informal discussions, Ms. Nieto occasionally organized formal seminars in order to assess students on their mastery of conversation skills. She organized these seminars by arranging the desks in the class into two concentric circles. The students sitting in the inside circle with Ms. Nieto engaged in conversation, while the students sitting in the outside circle were assigned to one of their peers on the "inside" and were responsible for tracking their contributions to the discussion. The grading sheet required students to track the number of times their assigned student spoke, the ideas that they shared, and the ways that they expressed their ideas. Halfway through the seminar, the students would switch roles, enabling everyone the opportunity to discuss and assess their peers. These strategies speak to Ms. Brown's attempts to foster a particular kind of civic community through dialogue; as discussed in the previous chapter, she demonstrated through her pedagogy a commitment to deliberation in which citizens with different identities and interests could come together respectfully and thoughtfully to discuss social problems. The norms that she put in place for classroom discussion reflected this commitment.

The peer assessment was meant not only to encourage students to listen to each other, but also to reinforce the importance of using evidence when expressing ideas. Ms. Nieto organized the Socratic seminars around discussion of focus texts and required students to use evidence

from these texts to support their opinions. When students assessed the ideas of their peers, they gave each opinion a score of 3, 2, or 1. Ms. Nieto reminded them, "You cannot give someone's idea a grade of 3 if they do not use evidence." This focus on evidence-based reasoning represented both a literacy skill and a civic habit of mind. Ms. Nieto expected students to use the evidence that they presented for their ideas in the essays that they wrote for class, but she also found it crucial for her students to be able to defend their points of view in a public arena that often sought to marginalize them and their opinions. At one point, when students wondered if they had the power to stop social reproduction, Ms. Nieto made the connection between dialogue and resistance; as she put it, "I think it's changing every day with you being in school and talking about it." She also took every opportunity to praise students for expressing their counter-stories and speaking back to power through discussion; as she told them, "I want everybody to hear these brilliant ideas."

Ms. Brown shared Ms. Nieto's concerns with creating a safe, humanizing environment for discussion in her classroom, and also utilized peer feedback as a way to break down the teacher/student power divide and get students focused on each other. She explained, "I constantly remind them to talk to each other and not to me, which is hard – they still need to be reminded for some reason. I value it – I see it as a certain kind of intellectual dialogue." By naming student dialogue as an intellectual activity, Ms. Brown echoes Dewey's argument that individuals need social interaction to achieve self-actualization - that others are "the indispensable conditions of the realization of [our] tendencies" (p. 14). In order to create this sense of communal development in her classroom, Ms. Brown stressed that she "prioritizes giving feedback safely and verbally as important."

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This focus on respectful, humanizing dialogue was reflected in the ways that students interacted in Ms. Brown's class. When students were required to write original poems, recite them to the class, and receive feedback about them, they realized that conversations about their personal works of art put them in very vulnerable positions that forced them to trust their classmates with their innermost thoughts and feelings. As students were signing up to present their poems, Gina became very nervous and expressed reluctance to share her work. She appealed to Ms. Brown, asking, "Miss, but what if I mess up and they laugh at me?" Ms. Brown looked at her, a smile creeping onto her face, and then turned to the class. "Guys, will we laugh at Gina?" she asked. The class responded as one: "No!" Emily called out, "We will support you even more!" Gina smiled shyly and signed up to recite her poem. At the end of class, Ms. Brown asked everyone to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses as a class when discussing each other's poems. The students agreed that they made it "comfortable" for their classmates to talk and that no one was "afraid" while reading. Ms. Brown agreed that they had created a "safe space" for each other. The caring atmosphere in the room reflected the work that Ms. Brown had put in to creating a democratic space for sharing ideas.

Students responded positively to the classroom environment, expressing to me in interviews the ease they felt speaking in class because of the multiple opportunities they had to talk to their classmates, whether it be through teaching each other or through getting feedback on their essays. Roberto explained the relationships that he had forged with others: "Yeah, I feel like I know pretty much everybody. Even if I don't talk to them outside class, in the class I feel comfortable talking to everybody in there." Carolina echoed this point of view, telling me, "We really do have the idea that we could all open up without worrying about the teacher judging us, first of all, or the students." These opinions highlighted the ability of classroom dialogue to

create a democratic space in which different opinions are treated with respect and citizens feel included in something greater than themselves. Dewey argues that discussion pushes us to "treat those who disagree – even profoundly – with us as those from whom we may learn, and in so far, as friends."

Mr. Prado developed a signal for his classroom that he used whenever he felt that classroom discussion was getting out of hand or that individual students' voices were being excluded or overshadowed. He would stand at the front of the room, make a peace sign with the fingers of his right hand, and call to the class, "Peace signs up!" When students heard this, they responded by making peace signs with their hands and turning their attention back to the teacher. Over the course of 14 class sessions that I observed in the spring of 2010, Mr. Prado used this signal 12 times to re-focus classroom discussions. This tool served to maintain an orderly, safe atmosphere in which students could share their opinions, and use of the word "peace" connected the classroom to a larger concept to remind students of the necessity to listen to and respect others in society.

At the start of the 2011-2012 school year, Mr. Prado changed the signal to the word "Solidarity" and used the symbol of a fist to manage classroom conversation. He used this signal three times during the course of one class period to focus the class when someone's voice was not being heard. This change was linked to an effort on the part of all teachers in Mr. Prado's small learning community, the Social Justice Academy, to communicate to students the kind of democratic interaction they wanted to encourage. A common set of class guidelines was posted in every teacher's room reminding students that they were expected to be "respectful observers and empathizers" – this was to be accomplished through "listening to each other," "taking turns speaking," and "not engaging in racist, sexist, homophobic, or other bigoted behavior."

The strategies employed by all three teachers to facilitate classroom discussions emphasized the extent to which they were preparing their students to participate in an inclusive, critical vision of democratic life. They focused on the necessity of individuals to learn from each other, advocate for themselves, and treat those with whom they experience conflicts with genuine respect. While our current political culture may remain divisive and exclusionary, teachers were preparing their students with the critical literacy skills they believed they needed in order to transform the system and foster humanizing communication amongst a diverse group of citizens. Importantly, the models of civic engagement that my three focus teachers envisioned foregrounded various discursive practices, which relates to the importance of English as a discipline geared toward civic learning.

The Unique Power of Imaginative Texts as Catalysts for Classroom Discussion

The discussion from Ms. Nieto's classroom at the start of this chapter about individual and societal responsibility for crime took place as part of a juvenile justice unit organized around the essential questions, "Should juveniles ever be tried as adults?" and "Why don't people stand up and fight back in the face of injustice?" As discussed previously in this chapter, these questions provoked what I call civic dialogue because they referenced students' identities in society along with pressing issues of social concern. The ways that Ms. Nieto facilitated discussions about these issues added another civic dimension because it set parameters for dialogue among citizens over contentious issues. In this section, I will discuss another element of the discussions that was unique to the fact that they took place in English classrooms; namely, the frequent use of imaginative texts as catalysts for conversation. I argue that English teachers' use of both fiction and non-fiction imaginative texts represent a unique disciplinary advantage

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that make English classrooms potentially powerful sites of civic learning, largely because of the ways that they spur imaginative thinking about social issues and provide students with agency to think about new possibilities for our society.

The question of what qualifies a text as "imaginative" or "literary" is a loaded one that has occupied scholars and educators from the inception of the written word; indeed, it is a question that has historically led to the exclusion of various forms of cultural production from dominant perceptions of "high" art (Graff, 2007; Guillory, 1995; Scholes, 1999). During my research, I found that divisions of prose and poetry, of fiction and non-fiction, and of 'high' and 'low' art did not help me to clarify what made a text imaginative; indeed, the texts being used in my focus teachers classrooms included films, memoirs, and pieces of journalism alongside novels and poems, and all produced creative thinking about society in students. As a result, I base my definition for imaginative texts in my research on the one developed by philosopher Maxine Greene (2000), who argues that imaginative literature "resonates" because "the words mean more than they denote, evoking in those willing to pay heed other images, memories, things desired, things lost, things never entirely grasped or understood" (p. 44). This definition helps me to avoid jumping back into the culture wars over the canon and instead maintains a focus on the habits of mind that creative work can inspire, regardless of its form.

I also call upon Maxine Greene's work in order to define the imaginative thinking produced by texts that I argue is a unique part of civic dialogue in English classes. She argues that reading allows young people to "discover ordinarily unseen and unknown dimensions of their own experiences" and that, as a result, "Not only may there be a pull toward new relationships, toward community, but such readers may be moved also to new modes of self-definition, new beginnings arising from an emerging awareness of both difference and possibility"

(p. 42). Greene sees these new beginnings as social as well as personal, suggesting possibilities for changing the world and ourselves. She explains that classroom dialogue about texts releases the "social imagination," which she defines as "the capacity to invent visions of what should be and what might be in our deficient society, on the streets where we live, in our schools" (p. 5). I argue that the text-based discussions in my focus teachers' classrooms activated this social imagination through civic dialogue. Storytelling is key to the civic power of imaginative texts, for it is through interaction with stories that provoke personal identification that students can analyze the social, historical and political discourses that structure both their societies and their lives.

Ms. Nieto explained that after establishing the theoretical focus for a unit, she immediately turns to choosing the texts that will ground it; as she put it, "I start there, what are the theories that I want to expose them to, and then kind of work backwards from there. What are the texts that I feel strongly about? I feel strongly about all the texts that I've used." One such important text for her was *Our America*, which was at the core of this unit. The epigraph for the book, written by one of its teenage authors, reads, "You must learn our America as we must learn your America, so that, maybe, someday, we can become one." In the preface, Cornel West praised the book for providing counter-narratives to prevailing stereotypes about young black men, noting how infrequently society hears "the poignant and powerful voices of these fellow citizens." Throughout my observations, the students in Ms. Nieto's class were thoroughly absorbed in the narratives of the authors, LeAlan and Lloyd, as they sought to understand the death of a 5-year old boy from their neighborhood at the hands of two boys only a few years older than him. The structure of the narrative, in which the authors wrote in the first person and

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described what they saw and heard directly to the readers, seemed to invite identification with the characters and their struggles in ways that qualified it as an imaginative text.

As Ms. Nieto's students began their discussion about the relationship of poverty and crime, they had just finished reading a chapter the day before entitled "From the Outside, Looking In," in which LeAlan and Lloyd explorde the different perspectives of individuals living within and outside of their Chicago housing project. The question that Ms. Nieto posed to her students that morning did not require students to think back to that chapter or talk about their own perspectives; indeed, it was phrased in the third person and referenced "people" in general. Nevertheless, by line 12 of the conversation, Stacia abruptly breaks from speaking in abstractions and invokes the collective "we," contrasting the experiences of white people to those of racial minorities. This represented a key moment in the conversation because it suggested the extent to which students personally identified with this text and with the issues that it raised. This identification transformed the classroom discussion from a distanced analysis of a social issue to a deep exploration of an urgently relevant topic, suggesting a possible relationship between imaginative texts and civic understandings.

During the Socratic seminar that took place the next day in Ms. Nieto's classroom, students had multiple opportunities to connect with *Our America* in ways that helped them articulate opinions on social issues. As was discussed earlier in this chapter, the very way that Ms. Nieto constructed these seminars envisioned a particular model of deliberation among citizens – one in which knowledge is created collaboratively through dialogue and questioning and no one individual possesses ultimate authority to make truth-statements. Tellingly, Ms. Nieto phrased the essential question for the seminar using a collective pronoun that invited identification with the text; she asked students, "Are we products of our environment, or do we

have the power to shape our lives?" While students were using evidence from the text to explore the context of poverty and violence within which two young boys killed Eric Morse, they were also analyzing the societal factors that influenced their own lives. Carlos made a personal connection to the text and to the oppressive circumstances facing children living in Chicago's South Side when he said, "I think that we have a choice. I grew up in a rough neighborhood as well as they did and I'm not out killing people or gang-banging." Dion made a similar connection to the text as he vehemently rejected the idea that social forces could have an impact on his choices in life: "You won't hear me on the street saying it's because of my environment that I'm doing the stuff I'm doing. It really does not matter." In both cases, the students not only demonstrated personal connections to the text by distinguishing the choices they make from those the characters made, but also wrestled with the impact that discourses about poverty and its possible consequences could have on their own lives through their references to their 'rough neighborhood.'

The finding that suggests a relationship between engagement with imaginative texts and civic understandings among Ms. Nieto's students is that students often went beyond creating simple text-to-self connections to engaging with the bigger social problems raised by these texts. This was due to conscious choices made by Ms. Nieto to choose texts that she found relevant to what students experienced around them; as she explained, "I thought it would engage students to talk about things going on in the community, and to read some things about what's going on in the community." In fact, all three of my focus teachers shared this commitment to choosing texts that addressed social issues facing their students. Ms. Brown described the questions that she would ask herself while planning units and the texts that she selects: "What will engage their diverse reading levels and interests? And then also what will make them more socially aware?

Texts that will make them more critical of the world and critical of society, but also texts that reflect their own life enough that they are engaged by it." Mr. Prado explained his commitment to choosing books for his classes based not on a list of canonical works, but on the interests of his students: "I think that's what I'm trying to do in my classroom, where it's culturally relevant, it's engaging, it's fun, it's something that, they're basically learning about themselves in a way that helps them learn about the world, too."

At first, it may seem as if the teachers are simply choosing texts that they believe highlight 'urban' issues and assuming that students will relate to them because they also live in an urban environment. This process would correlate with a simple reader-response approach to teaching texts, which focuses on the enjoyment that readers gain from reading and the meanings and personal connections that they create with characters or themes, regardless of what the author of a text intends or what interpretive possibilities a text's language offers. To be sure, there were moments in each of the classes when students made personal connections to texts that did not involve any social analysis or commentary. For example, when the students in Ms. Brown's class wrote and performed poems for their peers after analyzing and mimicking the styles of famous poems, they often experienced visceral reactions to each others' words based solely on personal connection, commenting that they "liked" or "loved" the images or emotions that the poems evoked or becoming visibly emotional. In another instance, students in Ms. Nieto's class were reading *Random Family*, a creative non-fiction account of the life of a family in the Bronx, when one student, Trisha, related to the way that a female character in the book flirted with boys; she laughed and told the class, "That sounds like me." These moments of simple personal connection were surely important to students' identities and indicative of the power and value of imaginative texts; however, students and teachers often pushed these

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moments past mere reader-response into a deeper engagement with underlying social problems that created a unique atmosphere of civic learning, thereby opening up new possibilities for how the texts of English classes can support students' civic identity development.

For instance, take the poetry readings in Ms. Brown's class. One student, Karina, walked to the front of the room and, in a halting, quiet voice brimming with emotion, read an original poem expressing her frustration with the menial jobs that her parents worked that kept them away from her and her sisters; her voice quavered as she recited:

> Leaving at 4:30 to
> Work cleaning
> Toilets
> Offices
> Vacuuming
> Picking up trash
> Mopping
> Coming back at 5 in the morning
> Why?
> Por que mami y papi se van?
> Leaving daughters alone
> Getting from work tired
> Please God take care of mi padres
> Being a janitor
> Not a job for you ma y pa

Some of the students in the class nodded in seeming recognition of this situation as Karina spoke; after she had finished reading, Roberto told her quietly, "I can really relate because I don't see my parents as much as I want to." This personal connection reached a different level of meaning as the two students, who both identified as Latina/o and lived in the same East Los Angeles community, wrestled with feelings related to the employment opportunities offered to their parents.

Another student, Frankie, stood up to read his poem after Karina, and his words engaged even more directly with issues of race and marginalization in American society. He giggled and shuffled nervously as he spoke, but forcefully read:

> "One nation under god"
> but that nation doesn't exist
> because the segregation,
> between the nation
> between the browns, blacks,
> whites, and yellows
> it's all based on race.
> The whites get best,
> yellows get second
> blacks get third,
> while the browns are last
> ………….
> I wish the world were gray
> pale and everything unnoticeable
> it would all be simple.

Frankie's poem raised multiple social issues and shed light onto some of his developing ideas about civic life – the way that he organized racial groups into a hierarchy of privilege and expressed an ideal of color-blindness as a solution to racial inequalities. Students' discussion of his poem raised even more issues – one student referred to Frankie's light skin tone when responding, "It's funny that you said 'browns are left behind' because you're, like, white!" Frankie quickly responded, "I'm Latino" – an exchange that revealed tensions within racial groups over authentic membership, and that clearly represented something more than simple text-to-self connection. Whereas a piece of literature with a Latino protagonist does not necessarily qualify as engaging with social issues, a piece of literature that promotes discussion about race and inequality as related to the experience of being Latino promotes civic dialogue according to my definition. The key is engagement with students' identities as they relate to their positions in civic life and to complex social issues.

A return to Ms. Nieto's class and the response to *Random Family* reveal similar instances of literary response that clearly engage public issues. While Trisha at one point made a simple personal connection to the character, Jessica, she soon made a different connection after reading a section of the text about Jessica and her boyfriend being stopped and searched by the police. She explained, "Where I live, the police, you can be walking down the street as a young black boy, and the police will pull you over for no reason. When they take your name and your name don't pop up in the system, they'll think you're lying and take you down to the station for no reason." Another student, David, chimed in about a time that the police questioned him and his friends while they stood in a park. This discussion involves personal experience, but also draws connections between race, urban neighborhoods, and policing that reveal how these young people are interpreting their society. In this case, civic dialogue is happening because the personal is being tied to issues of social inequality and race in society.

Clearly, imaginative texts are sparking discussions in these classrooms that go beyond simple text-to-self or text-to-world connections. Indeed, Freire and Macedo (1987) argue that simple reader-response approaches to text are flawed because they "view meaning as being generated by the reader and not occurring in the interaction between reader and author via text." For them, critical literacy involves interrogation of texts and the social context in which they are written – the kind of interrogation that I argue is occurring in my focus teachers' classes. Richard Beach (2005) explains the ways in which students' interactions with literary texts reflect their interactions with society: "In experiencing characters interrogating ideological forces limiting their development, students began to examine forces in their own lives limiting their own development (p. 1). He argues that critical response to literature should involve an emphasis on

"the ways in which the reading transaction is mediated by discourses, genres, narrative, language, and intertextuality operating in particular historical and cultural contexts" (p. 2).

In each of the examples above, the students were not simply reading and discussing imaginative texts; instead, they were analyzing them as social and cultural artifacts transmitting ideas about race and class that they then re-interpreted themselves based on their lived experiences in society. Ms. Nieto recognized the importance of reading as a transaction in which her students were critical analyzers and participants: "It's a conversation. It's not just about what the text says, which is important, but what you think . . . I think that students have to access all the dominant discourse, but I think the vehicle really has to be something that speaks to them and humanizes them and makes them feel valuable."

Imaginative texts, through their creative form, draw students into compelling narrative worlds. These imaginative worlds hold up a mirror so that students can analyze the real world in which they live. This analysis helps them to think about social problems and gives them creative license to think about changing the world for the better because they can project hopes and desires onto an imaginative world more malleable than the one in which they live. It is this sense of possibility and linguistic play that leads classroom literacy researchers like Jeffrey Wilhelm (2008) to see imaginative texts as profoundly democratic works of art; as he explains, "[Literature] questions the way the world is and offers possibilities for the way it could be. It offers a variety of views, visions, and voices that are so vital to a democracy. Literature helps us to define ourselves as we are, and to envision what we want ourselves and the world to be" (p. 53). Imaginative texts gave students like Karina and Frankie the opportunity to both grapple with challenges facing them in their worlds and also imagine different possibilities through language. Their engagement with poetry, rather than the factual content of a social studies class, helped

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them release their social imaginations and picture different possibilities for society and themselves.

Oftentimes texts helped students to place their own experiences within a larger social context so that they had a touchstone from which to begin critically analyzing language and society. Within the juvenile justice unit that featured *Our America*, Ms. Nieto also showed students a film in order to get them thinking about the murder of Eric Morse as "horizontal violence" – a phenomenon in which members of marginalized groups take out their frustrations on each other rather than uniting to challenge their oppression. The film, "Crips and Bloods: Made in America," tackled the issue of gang violence in Los Angeles from a historical perspective, explaining the social and political forces that led to the formation of street gangs. The film begins with a rolling panoramic view of Los Angeles from the sky, starting downtown and moving through South L.A. As students recognized the city as their own, they began calling out, "I see my house!" and "I see Southeast!" This recognition deepened as images flashed across the screen showing victims of gang violence. One of the people being interviewed argues that if this many people were being killed in any other country in the world, the United Nations and the international community would get involved. At this point, Ms. Nieto paused the film in order to allow this statement to sink in; she then asked the class, "Why do you think no one does anything about it here?" The following conversation ensued:

> *Sean*: They don't want us here.
> *Ms. Nieto*: Who?
> *Sean*: White people.
> *Ella*: Not all white people.
> *Ms. Nieto*: You mean people in power? There are people of color in power. The president . . .
> *Carlos*: He's not all black.

In this case, Sean analyzed the statement made in the film about the lack of appropriate responses to gang violence in Los Angeles and expressed an opinion focusing on the marginalized status of African-Americans in a white dominated society. Carlos adds another layer of complexity by associating whiteness with political and social power. While these thoughts represent spur-of-the-moment reactions rather than reasoned positions, they are important and indicative of the ways that texts can take us from personal responses to civic dialogue.

These connections are also important because of the relationship between literary reasoning and the reasoning necessary for public deliberation about civic and political issues. Carol Lee (2007) argues that response to literature involves tackling "interpretive problems" through making inferences and drawing upon patterns of knowledge. Just as critical analyses of society often necessitate reading between the lines, Lee explains that literary reading "involves understanding meanings that are not explicitly stated (p. 47). Furthermore, Marjorie Garber (2011) boldly states that literary studies has "unapologetic freestanding power to change the world by reading what is manifest, and what is latent, within and through the language of text" (p. 57).

Oftentimes students' literary reasoning led them to tackle complex and troubling questions about human nature and forces that threaten democratic life. Toward the end of the school year, Ms. Brown introduced her students to a unit about oppression and resistance that revolved around Elie Wiesel's Holocaust memoir, *Night*. Before students read the book, Ms. Brown showed them "The Death Mills," a 1945 American propaganda film detailing the atrocities committed by the Nazis. Students gasped as they viewed the disturbing images of

human cruelty and suffering, and their discussion afterwards raised fundamental questions about

the ways that ordinary citizens can become implicated in the dehumanization of others.

> *Ms. Brown*: Why would the Germans just continue with their daily lives?
> *Jessica*: They probably didn't want anything to happen to them.
> *Gabriel*: What kind of person would do this to people? What went through their heads? How much hatred do you have to have?
> *Emily*: Obviously the Nazis said all the right things to get all this power.
> *Ms. Brown*: This is a real question for you to ask as historians. When is it people's responsibility to get involved?

Indeed, through their subsequent study of *Night* and various forms of propaganda,

students had multiple opportunities to learn more about the ways that language was (and is)

crafted in order to manipulate citizens. An emotionally resounding text offered students an

entryway into this analysis and allowed them to move fluidly from textual to social commentary

by attempting to imagine the thought processes that people used to rationale cruelty.

Toni Morrison (1992) echoes Freire and Macedo's assertion that texts reflect the world in

which they are written and applies it directly to the concept of national literatures - the

imaginative work that serves to define the cultural values and imperatives of countries; as she

explains, these national literatures "end up describing and inscribing what is really on the

national mind" (p. 15). Appreciating texts as catalysts for civic discussion positions English

teachers as civic educators and positions literary studies as integral preparation for citizenry,

ultimately strengthening the crucial bond between literacy and democracy.

Classroom Discussion as Democratic Literacy Classroom Practice

In *The Civic Mission of Schools* (2003), a distinguished collection of scholars and policy-

makers highlight discussion of controversial issues as one of six promising approaches to civic

education; as they explain, "When young people have opportunities to discuss current issues in a

classroom setting, they tend to have greater interest in politics, improved critical thinking and communications skills, more civic knowledge, and more interest in discussing public affairs out of school." While this statement focuses on the desirable outcomes of classroom discussion, it does not offer insight into the ways in which discussions contribute to these outcomes in practice. This chapter has concentrated on the discussions occurring in three classrooms in order to analyze the micro-processes through which students grapple with political issues, situate themselves as civic actors, and interact with diverse peers; my aim has been to illuminate the unique role of English classrooms in helping students to critically utilize language for the purposes of civic engagement and empowerment.

Central to my analysis is the idea that the way students are positioned in society in terms of their race and class identities is central to an understanding of their developing civic political and civic identities. The social context in which they live – one that, for urban students of color, is often characterized by marginalization and alienation – inevitably influences their attitudes toward social institutions and democratic governance. Each of my focus teachers integrated this social context into the curriculum and pedagogy of their classes – it influenced the texts they introduced to students, the topics they offered for discussion, and the ways they moderated classroom talk. Most importantly, however, this social context influenced the ways that the teachers viewed the purposes of literacy instruction. They based their pedagogy in the idea that language represented a tool that could help students to not simply understand themselves and their society, but to transform them as well. As students toyed with opinions about social issues and struggled with the inequalities of our current world, we could clearly see them imagining the ideal selves they wanted to become and the ideal society they wanted to inhabit. Discussion

allowed students to construct visions of a better democracy that teachers hoped language would help them to achieve.

CHAPTER SEVEN – TEACHER REFLECTION GROUPS

The data presented in previous chapters highlights the various literacy practices that my focus teachers engaged in with their students in efforts to transform their classrooms into communities of civic learning. From writing counter-narratives that spoke back to dominant portrayals of communities of color to discussing controversial social issues, these teachers strove help their students explore the power of language as a tool to navigate and transform their personal lives and social contexts. Studying these practices, both the philosophies behind them and the ways that they played out in the classroom, offers a window into the ways that these teachers interpret theories of critical literacy and civic engagement and make them relevant and empowering for students at crucial stages in their socio-political development.

This chapter aims to builds upon this characterization of teachers as crucial mediators of theory and practice by delving further into the ways that my focus teachers engaged in reflection in order to clarify their pedagogical goals and negotiate the challenges that they faced in implementing them. I draw data from three group meetings in which my focus teachers came together to interrogate their classroom practices and share their diverse perspectives on literacy and citizenship. Each group meeting lasted 90 minutes and took place outside of school hours at a local café. These group meetings served two discrete functions (though in practice these functions became inextricably linked) – first, they served as further opportunities for me to collect data from my focus teachers; and second, they created a context in which teacher learning and reflection could take place.

I developed agendas and discussion prompts for the meetings by analyzing major themes that emerged across all three teachers' classrooms. Considering the intriguing differences that I observed over the course of my study regarding how the teachers interpreted critical literacy

practice, I organized the first 90-minute meeting to explore various philosophies of literacy and the ways that these philosophies manifested themselves in teachers' everyday classroom practice. To this end, I provided teachers with copies of various field notes that I had written about my experiences in each of their classrooms so that we could engage in shared analysis of particular pedagogical moments. This session concluded with teachers developing questions that they wanted to explore about their practice. The next two sessions revolved around exploration of these questions – teachers brought in artifacts from their classrooms to share and engaged in dialogue aimed at helping each other improve. I supplemented these discussions with excerpts from scholarly texts and state standards documents in order to introduce new ideas to our ongoing conversations, ranging from the role of literature in English classrooms to the development of assessments to the facilitation of classroom discussions.

My facilitation and exploration of these group meetings was grounded in the teacher research literature, which Susan Lytle (2009) argues encompasses several strands of literacy scholarship including "action research, practitioner inquiry, and teacher inquiry" (p. 691). In the broadest sense, this field examines what emerges when groups of teachers engage in systematic interrogation of classroom practices for the purposes of improving instruction, facilitating student learning, and situating practitioners as valued producers of knowledge. Through her review of relevant literature, Lytle developed four thematic frames that have traditionally guided teacher research on literacy practice – 1. Classroom instruction, curriculum and assessment 2. Culture and community 3. Cultures of teaching in and out of schools 4. Access, equity, and democratic education (p. 700-701). Group discussions with my focus teachers touched upon each of these themes and shed light upon several pressing issues facing literacy educators committed to further developing practices geared toward critical civic learning and engagement.

While the process in which the teachers and I engaged during our group meetings reflected that of teacher inquiry groups, I do not situate it as a pure example of teacher inquiry in action because we did not proceed through an entire cycle of developing research questions, systematically gathering data, and developing findings to guide further practice. The data presented in this chapter reflects a much more fluid and organic process that nonetheless owes a great debt to this literature.

Much of the learning (and data) that was generated focused upon how the teachers negotiated barriers to the development and implementation of critical civic pedagogy. The dialogue that took place between the teachers revealed how the unique school contexts in which they each taught provided particular sets of opportunities and challenges in realizing their differing visions of emancipatory literacy; simultaneously, concerns emerged that reached across school boundaries and spoke to the ways that national education policies often frustrated teachers' attempts to connect English to meaningful civic learning opportunities for their students. Indeed, much of what wound up being explored through these meetings was the difficulty of implementing a form of critical literacy education geared toward civic engagement within an educational system increasingly guided by neoliberal ideology and better suited to social reproduction than social transformation.

As introduced in my first chapter, neoliberalism has become a dominant political discourse in America over the past several decades, bringing with it a focus on deregulation, economic competitiveness and globalization; in turn, the free market has supplanted social democratic policies as a driving force in many areas of public life (Hursh, 2007). Foucault (1979) argues that this market focus has led to a concentration on personal responsibility and individualism in which people become "entrepreneurs of themselves" (p. 198). David Hursh

(2007) argues that neoliberal ideas have manifested themselves in education policy from the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) through *No Child Left Behind* (2001) as a result of discourse connecting schooling to economic success (or failure) and using globalization as a rationale for implementing reforms focusing on job skills and the basics. Hursh identifies several educational trends rooted in neoliberal ideology that my focus teachers would come to identify during our meetings as barriers to realizing their pedagogical goals for their students. He explains, "High stakes testing and accountability requirements are promoted as necessary under globalization to increase efficiency, accountability, fairness and equality" (p. 499). He adds that standardized testing is also presented as "a quality indicator to the consumer" in ways that contribute to the "de-professionalization of teachers" (p. 500). Indeed, the teachers frequently cited grading and testing as major sources of frustration that lowered their morale as professionals and interfered with their unit and lesson planning.

Hursh argues that while neoliberal reforms are often touted for their potential to close the racial achievement gap through a stated focus on providing rigorous curriculum to all students across the board, they have instead increased educational disparities and contributed to a narrowing of the curriculum while pushing to privatize education by focusing on charter schools and voucher programs (p. 502). Indeed, the teachers' discussions often touched upon the impact of corporate charter management organizations on the school district and the pressures that came with teaching at schools in which administrators were more concerned about making sufficient progress on standardized assessments than looming lay-offs or significant cuts in resources. The teachers also discussed the ways that literacy was defined on these assessments as narrow sets of marketable skills, thereby making it more difficult for them to find ways to inject culturally relevant or civically engaging content into their English classes. Their concerns about the

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disparities between the type of literacy education that low-income, minority students in urban schools received compared to their higher-income counterparts in suburban contexts echoed the findings of social reproduction theorists who sought to expose the way that school curriculum, pedagogy, and policies often tracked students into different academic and career trajectories (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Anyon, 1980; Oakes, 1985; MacLeod, 1987; Finn, 1999).

Henry Giroux (2009) laments the impact of these neoliberal education policies as "students seem to be valued more as consumers and test-takers than they do as potential critical citizens" (p. 9). He warns of the dangers to democracy when "the young, poor, immigrants or people of color are excluded from the operations of power, the realm of politics, and crucial social provisions" (p. 9). He argues that it is rare to hear conversations about schools on the national level "that suggest that they embody society's commitment to a democratic future and offer students a space in which they can be honored, critically engaged, and nurtured with a sense of dignity and hope." While this may be true, my focus teachers strove to revive these conversations at our small meetings as they explored ways to tackle these barriers and develop transformative pedagogical experiences to their students.

Indeed, dialogue between the teachers provided extremely fertile ground for the creation of new knowledge and the sharing of diverse perspectives. This chapter, after exploring the content of the teachers' reflections, will conclude by analyzing the process of engaging in collective dialogue as a fundamentally democratic one – one that has the potential to re-define the educational field's traditional perceptions of expertise and re-envision collaborative relationships between practitioners that can produce transformative learning experiences for all young people.

Negotiating Conflicting Definitions of Empowerment in Critical Literacy Practice

Students and colleagues nominated my focus teachers for inclusion in this study because they considered them "powerful" English teachers who connected literacy instruction to student empowerment and social transformation. While these characterizations hinted at the tenets of critical literacy theory, they were broad enough to encompass a wide variety of ideas, beliefs and practices not necessarily related to this line of thought. It was not until I began working with these teachers that I learned that they had each been exposed to this body of literature in their teacher credential programs and had incorporated much of its language and ideology into the ways that they discussed literacy. References to "critical consciousness," "culture of power," and "culturally relevant pedagogy" peppered their speech, and all had read Paulo Freire's two definitive texts in the field – *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World* (1987).

While these discoveries brought me closer to acknowledging the relationship between these teachers' classroom practices and critical literacy, my experiences in their classrooms reminded me that each of them continued to translate this theory into practice in unique ways based on their personal educational and civic histories and the particular school and community contexts in which they taught (see Chapter five). As a result, I found it useful to re-introduce excerpts of Freire's work to the teachers during our first inquiry meeting as a common text that would allow us to further explore the similarities and differences between their points of view.

I provided the teachers with a handout containing brief snippets of text from *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World* that described what Freire and Donaldo Macedo considered four traditional approaches to reading and literacy – academic, utilitarian, cognitive, and romantic. Each of these approaches presented different purposes for literacy, from acquiring

knowledge of "great works" to functioning in contemporary society to achieving personal fulfillment. I then juxtaposed these snippets with Freire and Macedo's description of "emancipatory literacy" and quotes from Henry Giroux and Teresa Perry that provided some language for teachers to chew on about the relationship of literacy to freedom. After spending some time discussing the merits and drawbacks of traditional approaches to literacy, I steered the conversation toward an analysis of what emancipatory literacy meant to each of them.

Ms. Brown began the conversation by saying, "No matter how engaged my room can feel – how caring – I still feel like this emancipatory thing is a bit elusive for me." Her statement triggered recognition among the other teachers about the difficulty of measuring success when it comes to raising students' consciousness about society through the medium of language. Mr. Prado echoed Ms. Brown's sense of uncertainty, confirming, "It is. Sometimes it can be frustrating because you don't see instant results." He maintained a belief, however, in the process of emancipation, making a personal reference to the ways that Asian-American Studies classes in college started him on a journey of self-discovery that continues indefinitely. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that, "As a teacher, you want to feel like you're there. That you're comfortable with this student graduating and that they're going to handle it – they're going to critically break down everything and liberate themselves from all of it." In this statement, Mr. Prado not only speaks to the universal desire of teachers for confirmation that their efforts were successful, but also provides some examples of what success looks like to him; namely, students who critically analyze society and "liberate themselves" from presumably unjust systems of power.

Ms. Nieto built upon Mr. Prado's point, explaining, "In a society like the one we live in, it's going to be a lifelong struggle to liberate ourselves." She then articulated what she believed to qualify as success for instruction oriented toward liberation: "If we're raising their

consciousness about the way that they are oppressed in our society and the way that oppression works, and then what struggle against that looks like, and how their communities have struggled, I would say that's what the emancipatory approach is." In this case, Ms. Nieto defines success as understanding oppression and strategies for community resistance. She referred back to the traditional approaches to reading, dismissing them as possible models for powerful English instruction; as she claimed, "None of this is about freedom, and literacy as a practice of freedom." Ms. Brown quickly agreed, "They're more about different ways to approach the act of reading as opposed to the purpose of reading." In this case, both teachers characterized emancipatory literacy as providing an appropriate guiding philosophy for literacy instruction based in student social empowerment.

Up to this point, the teachers seemed mostly in agreement about their commitment to emancipatory literacy, though their explanations of how this emancipation successfully manifested itself in students remained rather vague. The conversation shifted when Ms. Brown brought up a difficulty that she encountered in translating her vision for literacy into classroom reality; as she explained,

> Looking at this makes me realize how at risk I am as a literacy teacher of giving the kids who are struggling more the academic approach. It's easier for me to give kids [the emancipatory experience] who are already at grade level and have their foot in the reading door and are more engaged.

She continued, "I've been thinking more and more that it's problematic that there's not more decoding and vocabulary development in my classroom. There are so many students who need help with that so that reading is not so arduous. What do I do?" In this case, Ms. Brown brings up the struggles of her students, particularly those who are English Language Learners, to expose a tension between providing students with academic skills in attempts to bring them up to grade

level and engaging in critical literary and social analysis. In essence, Ms. Brown is raising a crucial question about the dual roles that critical educators attempt to fulfill and struggling to determine how students can best be empowered. In response, Ms. Nieto argued that the binary between academic skill instruction and critical analysis was a false one and that critical literacy educators had to engage in both to fulfill their goals; as she explained, "I think it really does have to be both because otherwise you're denying them access one way or the other. So I totally agree with what you're saying that you have to have that."

Mr. Prado picked up on Ms. Brown's concern about skill-building and began to wonder if pushing students toward constructing meaning about their society really constituted empowerment for them; as he claimed, "That's really idealistic, and it forgets really basic skills." He then presented a differentiated view of emancipatory literacy:

> I have to take a step back and realize that there are different levels of emancipation for students. Like you said, emancipation for that student could really just be that it's not a struggle to read out loud in front of the class. On a greater level for another student, it's that I'm not going to be in this gang anymore. I critically broke down how this is trouble for me. I kind of have to remind myself of that. There are different levels, and how are you going to juggle all of that, you know?

Mr. Prado's assertion that success in critical literacy could manifest itself in different ways for different students – that academic success on its own, divorced from social critique or action, could constitute emancipation – reflected his attempts to reconcile theory with the messy reality that he faced in his classroom each day when confronted with students at a wide variety of points in their personal, academic, and socio-political development.

In turn, Ms. Nieto took some issue with Mr. Prado's idea that emancipatory literacy could take place without recognition and interrogation of social inequalities, particularly in the low-income communities of color in which all three teachers taught. She argued instead that teaching

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students from these communities required making conscious connections between literacy and collective civic empowerment. She argued, "I do think that for black and brown youth here in our country, it is important that we have a collective identity of struggle that is conscious of the ways we are oppressed. I think that is a salient feature for me of the emancipatory approach in the urban context where I work right now." She continued, "Because oppressed people have been denied literacy, and continue to be in so many ways, it is a practice of freedom and it is inherently political to teach where we teach and teach literacy."

The disagreements that arose during this discussion about how to measure and assess emancipatory literacy demonstrates how critical literacy theory can be interpreted in different ways depending on teachers' civic identities. Ms. Nieto's explicit invocation of and focus on racial identity as a crucial component of critical literacy hearkens back to her philosophy of aggressive warrior-scholarship, while Ms. Brown and Mr. Prado's willingness to divorce critical literacy from overtly political ends reflects their own beliefs in the importance of connecting students' experiences more harmoniously to the dominant culture of power. Despite their different views, however, all three teachers identified through dialogue the fact that their students often come to them years below grade level in their academic literacy development as a factor that complicated their efforts to translate critical literacy into their classrooms and develop civic learning opportunities for them; in this way, they contributed valuable new knowledge to the field. And it was through the process of dialogue with other educators that teachers were able to articulate some aspects of their teaching philosophies that they had not previously considered in order to continue reflecting upon and refining their classroom practices.

Indeed, teachers immediately began reflecting on the ways that their beliefs about emancipatory literacy translated (or failed to translate) into their practice when I gave them the

opportunity to review field notes from my previous classroom observations. When I asked

teachers to explain to the group what they noticed when reflecting upon particular class sessions,

they quickly zeroed in on the moments that they saw themselves deviating from their professed

beliefs; in fact, they were often quite critical of their own perceived shortcomings and slow to

acknowledge their strengths. While the teachers initially criticized themselves, the conversations

that arose from these reflections on classroom moments eventually revealed systemic barriers to

critical literacy pedagogy that teachers constantly strove to mitigate – barriers erected through

the influence of dominant discourses in education involving grading, testing, and restrictive

school policies.

The next sections will treat each of these barriers in turn, exploring how they manifested

themselves in my focus teachers' classrooms, how the teachers worked to minimize them in

order to provide their students with empowering learning experiences, and how reflecting upon

them in an inquiry group setting led to new understandings and strategies.

Barriers to Empowering Learning

Grading

As Ms. Brown read a field note describing a class session in which her students reviewed

vocabulary words and performed poetry for their peers, she shook her head and exclaimed,

> This illuminates why there is a sense of patchiness for my students about purpose.
> I'm doing a lot of, "C'mon guys, this is important for your grade." I'm telling
> them why they should be feeling this is important, and it's clearly because I'm
> panicking that they don't think this is important or they don't have the same stake
> in their grade that I do.

Indeed, Ms. Brown did invoke grades as a rationale for student engagement with assignments at

several moments in the field note. When one student said that he did not want to perform his

poem for the class, Ms. Brown responded, "It's a big part of your grade, so you shouldn't be trying to get out of it." At another point, she warned students that their grades would suffer if they did not complete their independent reading homework, saying, "You have to get serious." Finally, when reminding students about the due date for their poetry anthologies, she urged students to turn them in on time by stating, "It's a big part of your grade."

The data in this field note revealed a broader trend in Ms. Brown's practice to rely on grades as a form of extrinsic motivation. During a different class meeting, she gave out awards to students who had achieved a certain number of points in the independent reading program that the school used called Accelerated Reader. Students gained points for taking comprehension quizzes after reading books and were required to meet weekly point goals. She gave the first award to Emily, who had the highest reading score, and then distributed more awards to the other students who met their goals. As the students walked to the front of the room to accept their awards, the rest of the class applauded. After she had finished rewarding students, she told the class, "First period beat you guys – they got the pizza party." She pointed to the scores, which were posted prominently on the wall, and encouraged students to keep reading so that they could win the next party. Clearly, the connection here between student work, grading, and reward could not have been more pronounced, and the Accelerated Reader point system for independent reading was an established routine in Ms. Brown's class.

Grade reports were another consistent feature of Ms. Brown's class. Every few weeks, Ms. Brown printed out slips for students listing their assignments, indicating the ones that students had completed (or not) and their grades on each. She required students to get these grade reports signed by their parents and return them to her to ensure that everyone was informed about student progress. Students consistently studied these grade reports intently and appeared

very invested in the importance of their grades. When I asked Frankie about how important grades were to him, he quickly replied, "Oh yeah. Because I really want to go to college and grades are one of the most important things in being able to go to college." Carolina expressed similar sentiments when I spoke to her, explaining, "It's not that [grades] say who you are, but they say some of the educational part of what you do and what you are and if you try. When you try, it pays off with that little slip."

During individual interviews, Ms. Brown reflected on her reliance on grades; as she put it, "I hate that I fall back on grades as this extrinsic motivator all the time. And I totally do." Referencing the grade reports, she explained,

> Yeah, I think I exploit their sense of competition, I think I do that. I put the class rank on their grade reports that I print because I am exploiting the system of rewards and feedback that they are used to, because I haven't taken the time to figure out something better. And I'm not comfortable with it. In general, I feel like grading is one of the ways in which I feel pretty underdeveloped.

While critical of her practice, Ms. Brown located the root of her preoccupation with grades in the school system itself; she stated, "I think it's something that's been normalized for me through the school environment over the years." She lamented the fact that she had not been given opportunities to connect grading in any meaningful way with the literacy goals she had for her students - with, as she put it, "the values that I care about." Nevertheless, she constantly sought to find ways to reconcile an arbitrary grading system with authentic learning outcomes. One effort aimed at accomplishing this goal was her decision to make classroom participation the largest percentage of students' grades in order to emphasize its importance. She explained her rationale: "Mostly it's because I started realizing that someone could be learning, growing and contributing without turning in a lot of work. I needed a grading scale that would reflect that." Ms. Brown expressed a deep commitment to the idea of grades as tools that student could use to

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measure personal growth in their learning that meant more to them than, as she put it, "Am I passing or am I failing? Am I the best or am I the worst?"

In addition to attempting to mitigate the inauthenticity of the grading system through focusing on growth and participation, Ms. Brown also tried to make the assessment process more meaningful by conceptualizing it as a form of communication, both between students themselves and between students and their parents. She described the grade reports and her requirement that they be signed as an initial attempt on her part to increase communication between students and parents. She also encouraged students to evaluate their own work and the work of their peers "because it involves a lot more meta-cognition." She connected this practice to an authentic personal and civic outcome, explaining, "That's a habit of mind, a skill that you need in life, is being able to evaluate." Indeed, during one class session, Ms. Brown had students sit in pairs and required them to grade each other's binders, telling them, "Use your own judgments about what points you think that person deserves."

Nevertheless, Ms. Brown continued to recognize the inherently arbitrary nature of points and grades; at one point, she expressed her desire to develop classroom situations "where students were critical of the grading system." And on one occasion, she achieved some success in doing so. In an attempt to encourage students to develop the habit of mind of evaluating each other, she required them to grade a classmate's poetry anthology; however, when the anthologies were returned to her, she noticed that many students had written comments but had not assigned grades. She opened up a space for dialogue by asking students why they had not scored the work. The responses indicated students' developing ideas about the difficulty (and possibly inappropriateness) of giving grades to meaningful, authentic forms of expression. Gabriel explained, "You can't grade someone's poem. You can't say, 'it sucks' when it's personal."

Maria agreed, saying, "Everybody has a point of view." Frankie added, "I didn't want to judge it because it has a lot of emotion." When Ms. Nieto told them that they did not have to criticize each other but simply decide if the work was "good" or especially "polished," students asked, "What if someone else thinks it's polished but I don't?"

At this point, Ms. Brown asked the class, "Is anyone morally opposed to assigning a grade?" Gabriel responded, "Me. I'm a nice person. I don't want to judge." Ms. Brown attempted to assert her progress-based philosophy of grading, protesting, "It's not a judgment. It's a scale by which I can tell you about your growth." The conversation then took a turn when she asked students if they had the same objections when she graded their work and they responded, "it's different." Ms. Brown asked, "Would anyone get mad if they got an 80?" To her apparent surprise, several students say yes. Gabriel called out, "I'm a 90!" Ms. Brown relented and allowed students to turn in anthologies without grades if they felt uncomfortable, but she remained troubled by both the ways that her students' school identities were wrapped up in grades and also the way that they characterized teachers as "different" individuals with the power to judge them. Her discomfort speaks to the systemic nature of the grading barrier to the development of civically empowering classroom practice.

Ms. Brown was not alone in her struggles with grading. Just after she explained what happened in her classroom to the other teachers during the group meeting, Ms. Nieto reassured her that she was dealing with similar issues. She pointed to the field note that she was examining about her own practice and said, "I say some really messed up things." She directed everyone's attention to a moment described in the field note when she reprimanded students who had not turned in an essay assignment by saying, "Half of you haven't turned in your essays, and that means half of you aren't doing well in this class. You need to turn that in." She turned back to

the other teachers and asked, "Where's my messaging? How am I humanizing them if I'm starting off with that?" While using slightly different language, Ms. Nieto shared Ms. Brown's concern that grading systems stand opposed to the process of consciousness-raising that they saw as key to emancipatory literacy.

References to grading and the importance of grades emerged at several points in my observations of Ms. Nieto's class. On one occasion, she told students to find certain assignments in their notebooks and show them to her "so that you can get full credit." At another point, while giving students a deadline for an essay assignment, she told them, "What if you have a teacher next year who will not take papers late? If you come after school and finish this, it will be on time. Every day after that it will be ten points off the top for being late." Finally, she invoked grades again when talking to students who had not participated in the class mock trial by telling them, "That means you have an 'F' for fifty percent of your summative assessment. You can make that up by writing this essay, but you've really got to bring it in this essay." In this case she attempted to forge a tenuous connection between grades and authentic life situations; as she said, "The real problem with what you did was that it affected your group. Their grades were affected. It's like life – your decisions affect five to ten other people. You need to handle your business."

Like Ms. Brown, Ms. Nieto connected her messaging about grades to the entrenched ideology of the school system; as she explained, "I think I say those things about grades because I have dominant thinking . . . And I know that it's wrong and I try not to, but it comes out because I live in a society that values certain things and I'm caught up in that consciousness, too, and it's a huge contradiction." She described the way that this ideology seeps into her classroom:

> That's not the right message. You're not doing this for a grade. I think that it's actually counter-productive for me to even say because that's exactly the opposite

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message that I'm trying to get across with everything else. But it's an easy way to get them to be motivated to do it. So I get lazy and I'm like, c'mon, your grade.

Ms. Nieto shifts between recognition of deeper structural forces and self-blame, which speaks to the ways that she tries to exert and accept agency for her practices within the larger system. Some of the ways that she described working against the arbitrary motivation of grades were through explicitly talking to students about her emancipatory goals for them of achieving personal and collective empowerment and using cultural data sets to connect literacy to their lives. She explained to me how she felt when she showed students a film about gang violence in their neighborhood: "That video I showed them, like, screw a grade, this writing is so you can understand your own oppression. I think that when I can't say that is when I'm like, do it for the grade. But I think we can challenge that." She also described rubrics as another strategy that she used to make her assessments more about students' academic development than a number grade; as she described, "On all their pieces of writing, I give them a rubric back and they're like, 'what's my grade?' But then it's not about their growth."

Like Ms. Brown, Ms. Nieto described the ways she manipulated the grading system to give credit to students who may not always have completed all of the required assignments, but made strides and were engaged in "the intellectual space." She also shared Ms. Brown's worry about the extent to which students were truly empowered if they did not leave her classroom with grade-level academic skills. During our group conversation, the two of them tried to tackle this assessment dilemma together. Ms. Brown began by claiming that grading could be more aligned with the goal of civic engagement if assessments were more related to concrete civic outcomes; as she explained, "If we're saying that [literacy is a way to reclaim humanity,] there have to be more classroom experiences where they're feeling more human and feeling more free. It has to go beyond a piece of paper or a discussion." Ms. Nieto agreed and shared some of the activities

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that she had engaged in with her students in attempts to offer more meaningful forms of assessment, including the letter-writing campaign to the governor about juvenile justice, the auto-ethnography assignment, and the mock trial judged by teachers.

Despite her efforts, Ms. Nieto returned to the inevitable challenges, claiming, "In an ideal world, I would be able to figure out how to make every paper have an authentic audience and have it be an audience that's geared toward change." And she returned to the academic skills/social consciousness-raising divide:

> It's really difficult to balance those discussions that are going really great with, okay, now we have to stop and I have to teach you sentence combining. It definitely has to be both, but I feel a tension. Like, I had these kids who came out of jail and came to class to write this essay with me. They were really into it. But then when I looked at the writing, it was like, the grammar was bad, the paragraph structure. And this was at the end of a year with me. I was like, dang. I questioned myself. Where were those moments when I should have not had that important discussion activity that was humanizing?

By the end of this conversation, the teachers did not make any dramatic breakthroughs to solve this dilemma; in fact, its main contribution was mainly to bring the tensions they were facing into greater focus. Nevertheless, the continued elusiveness of all-encompassing solutions did not represent a failure of group reflection and inquiry, but a success. The stories that the teachers shared highlighted the power of dialogue to reveal common instructional struggles and provide opportunities for the dissemination of strategies aimed at slowly dismantling persistent and systemic barriers to critical literacy instruction. The teachers' voices remind the field of the need for continued conversations about the value and uses of assessment and the need for meaningful culminating activities that take into account both students' academic and socio-political development. In addition, they revealed and reflected upon an inherent tension between the practice of grading and an authentic civic space.

Testing

Another concern that the teachers raised during our group meetings (one that is closely related to struggles with assessment and grading) was the pressure of standardized testing. All three of my focus teachers taught at least one 10th grade class – the classes I observed with Ms. Brown and Ms. Nieto were 10th grade classes, while Mr. Prado taught a 10th grade class in addition to the senior class that I observed. This grade level is significant because it is one in which students are subjected to more testing than at almost any other time in their schooling. In addition to taking the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE), passage of which is a requirement for high school graduation, students must also take the California Standards Test (CST) in English and several required periodic assessments mandated by the Los Angeles Unified School District as a means of measuring students' grasp of the California English Language Arts standards. As Ms. Nieto told me at one point, "All together we're testing them more than a month – more than thirty days of testing – and then there are all the days to prepare them for the testing."

The teachers' frustrations with testing were twofold – they took issue with the content and skills being measured by the tests itself as poor benchmarks for assessing powerful English instruction, and they resented the fact that the tests were considered so important by administrators and district officials that they had to take large chunks of time away from their instruction to engage in preparation for them with their students. In terms of the tests themselves, the teachers brought them up while discussing Freire and Macedo's description of the academic approach to reading. This model posits "a dual approach to reading – one level for the ruling class and another for the dispossessed majority." While those with means concentrated on mastery of the "great works," the rest of the population focused on the acquisition of basic

functional literacy skills. Upon reading this description, Ms. Brown said, "The academic approach is so classist. It's this idea of, as long as you get the basics you can be a good citizen. Which really means, do what we tell you. And for me, this is what the CST is. This is what they're being tested on." This comment reflects a belief in a wide socio-economic and cultural divide between those whose interests are represented by test-makers, who are equated with positions of social power, and students, who are expected to be followers. Ms. Nieto turned to Ms. Brown after she made this comment and said, "Yeah, I think last year there was a technical document about how to wash dishes." Ms. Brown gasped and then shook her head in resignation, and the two commiserated about what forms of knowledge were being valued on these tests.

The conversation soon turned toward the pressures they faced from administration to show improvement on these assessments. Ms. Brown asked Ms. Nieto, "How is your school measuring improvement? I'm sure they're pointing to test scores." Ms. Nieto responded, "It doesn't matter what amazing relationships, what passionate culture – what matters at the end of the day is your test scores." Indeed, Ms. Nieto had told me earlier that the sheer amount of time dedicated to test preparation and testing itself precluded her from fully implementing what she found to be more engaging "inquiry-based pedagogy" in her classroom; as she explained, "I feel like I can't do that in the classroom because – part of it is resources, part of it is pacing, and part of it is testing." Her frustration indicated a tension between what she found to be the artificial nature of testing and more authentic forms of project-based learning that could better empower students.

In turn, the inflated importance of testing as the primary indicator of teacher and administrator success made its way into the teachers' classrooms despite their objections. While reading the same field note in which she criticized herself for her focus on grading, Ms. Nieto

suddenly groaned and looked guiltily at her fellow teachers – she had identified a moment in which she attempted to use testing as motivation for students to learn how to make predictions about an unfamiliar text. She exclaimed in dismay, "The purpose that I say is that you have to make predictions on the CST next week!" The other teachers shared a knowing laugh with her.

While data from Chapter five indicated that Ms. Nieto often employed innovative strategies to transform test preparation into meaningful instruction through the use of cultural data sets, evidence also existed that she sometimes resorted to simple test drills to prepare students for the exam and made statements emphasizing the importance of passing the exam. Students were scheduled to take the CST exam in the middle of May, and field notes show that Ms. Nieto's rhetoric about the test steadily increased in urgency throughout that month. On May 4th, Ms. Nieto reminded students that they would be taking the test in a week and a half, saying, "We have to make sure that everyone does well on the CST." She later reiterated her statement and appealed to students, "I need you all to shine on this test we're about to take." She told students that they needed to do well so that "when you apply to colleges and they see that you went to Southeast, they'll say, dang, that's a good school." In this case, her statements imply that students' performance on the test was important because of the way it would reflect on the school. The next day, May 5th, Ms. Nieto turned to a different motivation for student success; when students suggested that some of their peers were absent because it was Cinco de Mayo, Ms. Nieto responded, "What we're going to do today for Cinco de Mayo is celebrate by preparing for the CST so that everyone knows how smart we are." In this case, Ms. Nieto drew connections between race, intelligence and test scores that blatantly contradicted her stated views about standardized assessments.

Ms. Nieto was not the only one who exhibited stress in response to the impending test. On May 9th, just one week before the exam date, students began to worry as well. At the beginning of a review session, Ella told Ms. Nieto, "I feel pressured." Other students agreed. Ms. Nieto responded, "I feel pressured about you doing well on this test." The pressure only increased as Ms. Nieto continued, "They could shut down the school if students don't do well – everyone can get fired. But I know you know this stuff. You've just got to take it seriously." Ms. Nieto again pointed to the risk to the teachers and the school that would come with low test scores, underscoring her belief that the charter school placed an inordinate amount of importance on test scores that caused staff to fear for their jobs. On May 12th, just days before the exam began, Ms. Nieto made her final appeal to students exhorting them to do their best: "I need you to do well. You need to do well." It seems appropriate that she phrased this as something *she* needed as much as *they* did considering the amount of pressure that she sensed for the test scores to validate her worth as a teacher in the eyes of her superiors. While Ms. Nieto expressed embarrassment during the group meeting with her attempt to motivate students through reference to the CST, her continued focus on it reveals tension between her personal teaching philosophy and the demands of the accountability movement that has swept through schools nationwide.

Ms. Brown faced similar tensions – she lost almost a full week of instruction in the middle of March when she was required to administer a district periodic assessment measuring expository writing skills to her students. As she passed out test packets to students, she attempted to make the topic of the exam sound relevant, telling them, "Do your best and write a powerful essay about teen obesity, which actually is a real issue." Some of the students did not see the connection between the assessment and the poetry unit they had just completed. Maria asked, "What is all this going to do?" Ms. Brown explained that they would be assessed on their ability

to synthesize information and write informational essays. In a tone of voice that suggested her understanding of students' reluctance to complete the exam, Ms. Brown encouraged them weakly, "Alright, let's do this. Let's get it done." Roberto called out in a semi-joking tone, "I refuse to do this." A few students giggled, but within a few minutes the students had resigned themselves to the task and diligently began writing their essays. As the students wrote, Ms. Brown told me that the "academic jargon" in which the essay questions were couched made students uncertain of their own abilities to complete the task. She explained that she would need to take more class time away from her next unit in order to focus on deconstructing academic language.

Just before her students lost another week of instruction to the CST in May, Ms. Brown learned how they had performed on the CAHSEE exam. During one class session, while students were organizing their binders, she called them up to her desk one by one to give them index cards that listed their scores. When Gabriel took a seat next to her, Ms. Brown told him, "Not only did you pass – you got a 400. That's great!" Gabriel grinned and waved the index card in the air. When he pointed it in Maria's direction, she laughed and told him that she earned a higher score than him on one part of the exam. He denied it and the two engaged in some joking banter about who did better.

Just as Ms. Brown worried about the weight that students gave to grades as measures of how "good" or "bad" they were, she saw test scores as extensions of that push for students to be assessed (and to assess themselves) by numbers. While she expressed a desire to provide students with authentic assessments that would allow them to demonstrate their learning in meaningful ways, she still held her breath when she looked at her students' pass/fail rates and tailored her instruction to some degree to accommodate the exams. Again, this struggle exposes

the tension that these teachers faced as they attempted to succeed on their own terms and on the terms of a school system driven by standardized testing. And, just as in their discussions of grading, the teachers' reflections engaged with the tension between testing and authentic civic space.

School Policies

While concerns about grading and testing reached across schools, teachers also experienced different opportunities and barriers to engaging in literacy instruction geared toward civic learning that were structured by their unique school site contexts. Just as national school reform discourse around accountability and testing influenced teachers' action in the classroom space, so did school policies enacted by districts and administrators. For instance, during one group meeting, Ms. Brown mentioned in passing that some English department meetings in her academy dragged on for hours because she and her colleagues were committed to building consensus on all major decisions. Ms. Nieto saw this statement as indicative of the importance of a shared commitment among teachers to helping students enjoy critical learning opportunities across classes; as she responded, "I think you have an amazing opportunity because you have a coherent culture and staff. It's really hard to find a place where everybody shares the same purpose, and I feel like that's another challenge to [emancipatory literacy]." She then explained her belief that Southeast's status as a member of a charter school network led to the development of a very different school culture in which decisions were imposed upon teachers rather than negotiated with them. She told Ms. Brown that she wished she could experience consensus-building at her school, adding, "I have autonomy over what I teach, but there's no school site council."

Ms. Nieto, by drawing connections between her teaching goals and school decision-making structures, seemed to suggest that the extent to which students receive powerful English instruction linked to civic outcomes is related not only to what happens in the classroom, but what happens in the school as an institution as well. Ms. Brown, referring to the lack of shared decision-making at Southeast, asked Ms. Nieto, "Do you notice how that lack of democracy affects the culture of the school?" Her choice of the word, "democracy" indicated that she saw a relationship between school decision-making policies and larger political discourses around freedom and self-governance. Ms. Nieto seemed to share this perspective when she responded, "Absolutely. The culture has almost completely fallen apart. It's really toxic. There was a mass exodus of teachers."

Ms. Brown then suggested, "As these charter schools grow, they have this model. And they say, 'we're going to bring it to you and you're going to replicate it,' as opposed to the idea of a school developing from the ground up, with teachers and students creating the school they want to create." While perhaps not applicable to all charter schools, these sentiments reflected opinions about the particular charter school network to which Southeast belonged that manifested a specific culture perceived as being narrowly focused on raising test scores and restricting teacher autonomy. Both teachers saw this culture as antithetical to democratic decision-making. As Ms. Nieto explained, "I know that test scores matter everywhere, but I think it's different in a corporate charter." She had also spoken to me during an earlier interview about the ways that the school discouraged teacher voice and how these policies negatively impacted her teaching:

But the culture of the school in terms of checking on teachers the way they do – checking our grade book, making us do these elaborate lesson plans that we don't get feedback on that we're writing for somebody else – all of that takes away from the quality of my teaching, I feel. They're arbitrary policies, they weren't created in collaboration with teachers, and they don't actually serve their intended outcome. And they won't be revised. It's almost like a power thing. I'm going to make you keep turning in these lesson plans, or I'm going to keep checking your grades in this way to hold you accountable, but you're not really being held accountable to anything – anything that matters in terms of really powerful instruction.

Ms. Nieto's statement highlighted the ways in which school policies that are designed to only affect teachers in fact trickle down to students by impacting teachers' perceived ability to develop and successfully implement critical literacy instruction. Her experience suggests that a commitment to literacy as a means of civic engagement requires involvement from multiple stakeholders both inside and outside of the classroom - teachers as well as students need to feel valued as participants in a shared endeavor that gives them voice and a sense of agency.

District policies can also impinge upon teachers' perceived agency to effect change in their classrooms. Mr. Prado began his career in the Los Angeles Unified School District just as the ripple effects of the global economic crisis were beginning to decimate education budgets across the country. California was particularly hard hit, and LAUSD experienced tremendous budget shortfalls that led to repeated rounds of cuts to the teaching force. As a new teacher, Mr. Prado was subject to the "last in, first out" seniority rules mandated by the teachers union, and, as a result, his job was continuously in jeopardy. As he explained, "I've gotten laid off every single year since I started at LAUSD." He described the hardships that he experienced personally, including "not having income over the summer, not knowing where my rent money is going to come from for those three months." He also talked about the negative effect that the constant instability had on his teaching; as he shared, "I find out about [the layoffs] in the middle of the year, so that makes the day-to-day going in difficult, too, because there's always this uncertainty

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about what's going to happen next year." He talked about not being able to gain momentum in the development of his pedagogy and curriculum under the constant strain of looming unemployment, adding, "It's made me definitely question how much longer I feel like I can endure these experiences." While this situation affects a large number of teachers regardless of their teaching philosophies, Mr. Prado indicated that the weariness induced by job instability sometimes discouraged him from putting in the extra effort required to push beyond traditional literacy instruction and develop emancipatory learning activities.

Mr. Prado found it especially discouraging when job instability was compounded by lack of support from his administrators for his curricular choices. Previous chapters have indicated that my focus teachers invested a great deal of effort in picking texts that would expose their students to both literary language and social justice themes. Both Ms. Nieto and Mr. Prado were drawn to the book, *Our America,* because of its focus on thorny issues of juvenile justice and its commitment to sharing the voices and research of young people. Mr. Prado learned about the book from a mentor teacher that he worked with when he began his teaching career at Southwest and decided to teach it himself after that teacher left the school. He told the other teachers during a group meeting about his surprise when he suddenly encountered objections from his supervisors; as he explained, "The principal would come in at different times, or the assistant principals, they would hear the cussing [the characters use in the book], and then I got written up." Ms. Brown and Ms. Nieto expressed shock; Ms. Nieto said, "Cursing? Huckleberry Finn has cursing!" Mr. Prado agreed, explaining that he tried to demonstrate the ways that the book had literary value and related to the mission and goals of the Social Justice Academy, but to no avail: "I came at it, like, this is social justice. It's all relevant to our academy and to what our students are going through. It was still an ordeal." He said that he was forced to Xerox the entire book

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during his first two years of teaching because the administrators would not buy copies for him, and only obtained copies during his third year because his literacy coach "bought copies for me on the down low."

The fact that Mr. Prado's supervisors objected to the use of strong language in *Our America* and took disciplinary action against him for teaching it without considering the philosophy behind his choice highlighted the way that a lack of shared vision about emancipatory literacy between teachers and administrators could frustrate teachers' instructional goals. The administrators' concerns about the possible ramifications of exposing students to controversial material led them to fall back to a position of wanting Mr. Prado to teach more traditional texts that remained objective and did not assert a political point of view.

While Ms. Nieto did not experience explicit pushback from her administrators about her curricular choices, she did share with Mr. Prado her experience of having students push back against critical material, and she attributed their discomfort to years of school policies that discourage teachers from ever veering from dominant forms of thinking about literacy. She explained, "I've had kids going to other teachers saying that I'm biased because I'm teaching about institutional racism and because of the themes I'm teaching about." While she acknowledged that she did not want to force students to shift from one static way of viewing the world to another, she maintained, "If this is the only critical space, the only counter-narrative that they will be exposed to while they're being educated in the K-12 system, I think it's really important that I take a stand." She explained that she always presented multiple sides of every issue ("I keep it all discussion-based, I'm problem-posing) in order to avoid forcing her political views onto her students, but she insisted, "when it comes to all forms of oppression, I have to draw the line. I have to say homophobia, racism, sexism – it's wrong." Mr. Prado acknowledged

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that he had a difficult time determining what to say when a student in his class expressed virulently homophobic beliefs during a class discussion as he tried to reconcile his commitment to critical consciousness with giving students freedom to express themselves. Ms. Nieto agreed that this was a continuous tension for critical educators, but she expressed the belief that they had a responsibility to struggle with it because if not, "it makes my colleagues feel comfortable saying, 'I'm just going to teach the benchmark and that's enough.'"

This conversation demonstrates the challenge of engaging with controversial social issues in a school context in which teachers and administrators are concerned about avoiding charges of bias and remaining as non-political and objective as possible. Ms. Nieto's comments demonstrate the belief that this commitment to objectivity is actually a bias in and of itself that serves to reinforce dominant thinking and reinforce systemic inequality. Nevertheless, as Mr. Prado's case shows, teachers who want to go beyond traditional forms of literacy instruction to imbue their practice with critical civic consciousness must tread carefully in order to avoid disciplinary actions or charges of impropriety.

Indeed, beyond the threat of repercussions at the school level, the issue of how teachers understand the meaning of democratic education when they hold different views from their students raises thorny questions for the field at large. Is Ms. Nieto's insistence on banning racist, sexist and homophobic language from her classroom an affront to the rights of her students to espouse their own political beliefs? Did Mr. Prado establish a more or less democratic atmosphere in his classroom when he allowed a student to express homophobic beliefs? These are questions about freedom of speech and the extent to which a democratic space requires that teachers assume equality among various forms of speech, even those that may hurt or offend others. Education theorist Megan Boler (2004) claims that all speech is not equal (or free)

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because "power inequities institutionalized through economies, gender roles, social class, and corporate-owned media ensure that all voices do not carry the same weight" (p. 3). In turn, she proposes that teachers who recognize that all citizens do not enjoy equal protection under the law and are interested in facilitating critical discussions in their classrooms embrace what she calls an "affirmative action pedagogy" aimed at "ensuring that we bear witness to marginalized voices in our classrooms, even at the minor cost of limiting dominant voices" (p. 4). Boler situates classrooms as unique because they provide "a public space in which marginalized and silenced voices can respond to ignorant expressions rooted in privilege, white supremacy, or other dominant ideologies" (p. 4). She calls upon educators to develop pedagogy that respects not only the 1st Amendment, but also the 14th Amendment and Title IX, to ensure that classroom discussions do not "replicate the social inequities of the 'real' world" (p. 5). While Boler conceptualized affirmative action pedagogy as a tool for higher education classrooms, both Ms. Nieto and Mr. Prado could be seen as enacting different forms of it at the high school level in their classrooms, either by silencing speech that contributes to the further marginalization of already oppressed groups, or by allowing it in order to critically interrogate it further.

Meira Levinson (2011) notes that because public K-12 schools are some of the most inclusive institutions in the nation, often including students who belong to groups whose civic or political membership in American society is questioned (i.e. undocumented students), they frequently find themselves "in the unenviable position of acknowledging diverse voices (many within the school's own walls) raised against some of the very students they are attempting to serve" (p. 5). Levinson, like Boler, argues that in cases of speech aimed at further marginalizing members of oppressed groups, schools should not remain "neutral" or "silent," but instead should assert respect for these students "even if this is denounced as 'advocacy' by those who

oppose such inclusion" (p. 5). She asserts that in diverse schools, it may sometimes be necessary and beneficial for members of civically or politically marginalized groups to separate from the majority in order to create spaces that "promote civic solidarity rather than an all-encompassing diversity" (p. 27). While the classrooms and schools explored in my study, due to *de facto* segregation, do not boast the kind of racial or class diversity that Levinson envisions, they can be seen as representing spaces of civic solidarity within the greater social landscape. As such, they may reflect Levinson's view that "an emphasis especially on politically minority perspectives may sometimes be necessary for promoting students' equal capacities to engage in diverse democratic settings" (p. 27). Clearly, these pedagogical theories are grounded in a particular vision of democracy – one committed to social justice within a context of systemic inequality; nevertheless, they seem to resonate with the political and educational views held by both Ms. Nieto and Mr. Prado and put the choices that they made about classroom discussions into context.

Dialogue and Reflection as Democratic Practice

During our group meetings, my focus teachers spent a substantial amount of time struggling to negotiate barriers that they felt frustrated their attempts to achieve their pedagogical goals. In this sense, they embodied one of the major characteristics of teacher research groups; as Susan Lytle (2009) describes, most such groups "embody a critique of prevailing social and political arrangements of schools and schooling" (p. 24). Importantly, however, in keeping with the productive, improvement-oriented goals of this work, talk of struggle was balanced with talk of resilience and the development of new classroom activities. Substantial portions of each meeting were dedicated to discussions of teachers' ideas for new lessons and units and the sharing of suggestions and resources.

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When Ms. Nieto told the group that she was working on planning a unit exploring the themes of beauty, race, and the media in Toni Morrison's novel, *The Bluest Eye*, she shared some of the essential questions she wanted students to tackle, including "What would media look like if it was doing justice to women?" and asked for suggestions about creative forms of assessment. Ms. Brown offered a sample essay prompt that situated students as media producers instead of consumers in order to highlight their agency. Mr. Prado encouraged her to seek out examples of critical media; to this, Ms. Nieto responded gratefully, "I like that – finding counter-narratives." A brainstorming session began, with references to potentially useful articles and films flying across the table; teachers shared assessments that they had developed, including the creation of "anti-ads" and "counter-fashion shows" that could be paired with analytic writing assignments. The atmosphere was filled with hope and possibility as the teachers worked to develop new ways to imbue literacy instruction with critical consciousness and social critique.

Both Mr. Prado and Ms. Brown strategized about ways to engage students in participatory action research projects in order to fulfill their desires to offer more authentic forms of assessment that would involve students in their local communities. Mr. Prado explained his plan to transform the mandated senior portfolio assignment into neighborhood ethnographies in which students "break down what's going on within where they live" and use photography and digital filmmaking to explore concepts of hegemony, oppression and marginalization. Ms. Nieto suggested that he develop a town hall meeting in which his students could present their findings to community stakeholders in order to advocate for change. Ms. Brown discussed using the novel, *The Hunger Games* as a catalyst for action research about "the role of government in society and its ability to grant or deny access to resources." Ms. Nieto suggested connecting students with

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community organizations in the Boyle Heights neighborhoods that are working to influence local and state policy in order to show them that "organizing is the only way that change ever comes about." Ms. Brown pounced upon this idea and talked excitedly about developing community asset maps to show students the wealth of resources available around them. As the teachers talked, more and more possibilities emerged and barriers seemed, at least temporarily, to fade away. The teachers' conversations strove to embody what Lytle calls the defining characteristic of teacher research; namely, "its primary commitment to improving the life chances of urban students and schools in a complex, embattled, and continually restructuring system . . . through a critical social and political analysis of the educational system at many levels" (p. 40).

The findings that emerged suggest several possible conclusions. First, the teachers' descriptions of the various school, district, and national policies that influenced their classroom instruction reminds us that, as sociocultural theory argues, practice is constantly mediated not only by the individual histories of those involved, but by the institutional and social contexts in which they are situated. This complex interaction implies that the enactment of emancipatory literacy involves consideration not only of curriculum and pedagogy, but also of school-based decision-making structures and broad discourses around accountability and testing.

Second, reflecting about classroom practice seemed to situate teachers as what Henry Giroux calls "public intellectuals" – professionals who see themselves involved in a collective struggle with their students to actively produce knowledge that privileges their lived experiences and provides counter-narratives to deficit portrayals of urban education. This was largely accomplished through dialogue, which Dewey argued was the indispensable precondition for democratic life; as he described, "Society not only continues to exist *by* transmission, *by* communication, but it may fairly be said to exist *in* transmission, *in* communication" (p. 5). In

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other words, communication is not a precondition for democracy – the process embodies democracy itself. Dewey argued that "democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" (p. 101). Dialogue defined democracy for Dewey because he saw the communicative process as the source of all knowledge, meaning and identity, the essence of shared collective life; for him, knowledge did not exist independently, but was created through dialogue between individuals.

Through dialogue, my focus teachers sought to forge new understandings about the relationship between literacy and democracy – both the possibilities and the barriers. As Susan Lytle explains, "teacher researchers have immediate access to some of the most intractable problems in urban education and, with opportunities for self-critical analysis and the infusion of appropriate resources, are well situated to determine what might lead to equity and meaningful change" (p. 40-41).

This focus on the use of dialogue to guide educational inquiry in ways that privilege the knowledge of students and teachers and reflect a commitment to transformative social change marks teacher inquiry groups as uniquely democratic spaces. John Dewey (1937) reminds us that democracy is not a fixed entity, but something that must be "enacted anew in every generation . . . in the living relations of person to person in all social forms and institutions." The inquiry process reflects this vision of democracy as a living and constantly changing way of life; as Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) argue in *Inquiry as Stance*, taking an embracing inquiry as a form of teaching and learning involves "a continual process of making current arrangements problematic; questioning the ways knowledge and practice are constructed, evaluated, and used; and assuming that part of the work of practitioners individually and collectively is to participate in educational and social change" (p. 121). Teachers who engage in inquiry themselves push

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students to do so as well, which ensures that both groups have the ability and the means to confront challenges that do not yet exist and to continually remake and improve democratic society by creating new knowledge and skills. Each of the focus teachers in my study encouraged students to take an inquiry stance in their own literacy learning by asking them to critically analyze what counts as literature and what it means to be literate in today's America. Their goals were not simply to engage in inquiry for its own sake or to help students succeed within the educational and social system as it exists today; as Cochran-Smith and Lytle explain, the overarching goal that guides practitioner inquiry work is "education for social change and social justice."

In this sense, teacher inquiry relates to participatory social inquiry on a larger scale, which Dewey saw as a powerful tool to challenge social inequality and promote progressive change, particularly in an era when the advent of mass communication provided those with political power with the means to manipulate the masses (Putnam, 1992). As Jeannie Oakes and John Rogers (2006) explain in *Learning Power*, Dewey pointed to the values of the scientific method (i.e. testing beliefs, considering alternatives, engaging in analysis) as valuable tools that groups of citizens could use to assess and critique social policies and organize to push for change (p. 37). He saw participatory social inquiry as a way to translate the tools of the classroom into society at large in pursuit of equality. It seems that teacher inquiry groups exist in a space between the classroom and society at large, but they nonetheless speak to the civic potential of inquiry for transforming education and democracy. Oakes and Rogers present four principles for how participatory social inquiry could lead to democratic school reform, inklings of which were evident in my teacher group meetings. First, they argue that these groups must engage those most affected by inequality, highlighting the role of "common people" and downplaying the role of

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experts. As discussed above, teachers speak back to traditional notions of educational expertise through engaging in practitioner inquiry; extensions of this work might directly engage students and parents as well. Second, these groups must ensure access to knowledge and its construction. The dialogue between teachers in our meetings led to the creation of new knowledge about what emancipatory literacy looks like in the classroom that was grounded in practice. Third, these groups must adopt a critical stance by asking of current practices, "How did things come to be this way?" and "Whose interests are (and are not) being served by the way things are?" The teachers in my study surely took this stance and interrogated not only their own practices, but also those of the educational system in which they and their students were embedded. Finally, these groups must develop transformative goals that foster a sense of collective identity among participants. The teachers I worked with were not interested in simply providing their students with basic literacy skills, but in giving them access to codes of power that would allow them to become civically engaged and drastically alter the ways in which their communities were perceived.

Sitting around a table, sharing hopes and struggles, the teachers in my study embodied their own civic community that offers powerful lessons about the transformative potential of critical literacy and teacher research and demonstrates the connections between inquiry and democracy.

CHAPTER EIGHT – CONCLUSION

Several overarching themes emerged when analyzing the findings from my online survey, ethnographic classroom observations, and teacher reflection groups. I developed these themes by analyzing findings from all three of my interconnected data sets. The online survey provided a macro frame within which I could engage in micro analysis of classroom practice; for instance, while the survey results indicated that classroom discussion was a popular instructional practice across many contexts with many teachers, my ethnographic data allowed me to delve further into this quantitative finding in order to explore how and why this popular practice could be used in classrooms as a civic learning opportunity. The qualitative data from classroom case studies and reflection groups fleshed out the exploratory data from the online survey, and triangulating the findings from all three data sets allows me to present analyses and recommendations that speak to classroom teachers, teacher educators, researchers, and policymakers.

In this final chapter, I explore these themes and discuss the implications of this study for theory, practice, and policy in English Language Arts and civic education. I conclude by discussing the limitations of the study, providing suggestions for further research in these fields, and offering final thoughts.

Major Themes

The first theme that emerges from this study is that the high school English Language Arts teachers I studied characterize language and literacy as key elements in helping students understand, analyze, and transform themselves and society. They keenly understand the need to prepare students for the professional demands of a globalized, 21st century world, but they do not confine themselves to simply transmitting a set of necessary skills to students for post-secondary education; instead, they also think critically when planning their curriculum about the ways that

students will use language to forge their personal identities in a complex world and participate in civic life. While dominants strands in literacy policy increasingly seeks to narrow the field to a set of standardized, tested concepts and skills, these teachers insist upon an expansive and irreducibly multifaceted view of their discipline.

Findings from all three of my data collection phases justify this claim. The teachers who responded to my survey, while choosing preparation for post-secondary education as the primary purpose of high school English education, also listed personal enjoyment of literacy and participation in civic life as important aims; indeed, their open responses indicated the overlap that many of them found between these three goals. Their interests in inspiring lifelong learning and critical thinking demonstrated commitment to literacy as a tool for identity development and social analysis. The study of my three focus teachers provided more in-depth exploration of how philosophies about the meaning and purpose of literacy develop through personal experiences with the power of language, and how literacy can be used in the classroom as means of community uplift, bridge-building, consciousness-raising, and civic action. And the teacher reflection groups lent insight into the ways that my focus teachers pushed back upon forces seeking to constrain their critical literacy practices, from grading to testing to school accountability policies, and insisted upon a vision of literacy oriented toward the struggle for a more authentically democratic society.

In a related theme, I found that just as the teachers in my study maintained complex and expansive views of literacy, they also exhibited similar thoughtfulness when discussing the kinds of citizens they hoped literacy would help their students become. Many civic education programs today conceptualize citizenship as consisting mainly of individual acts like voting and understanding facts about the political process, and they often promote a universal model of civic

identity that encourages a patriotic, triumphalist view of American life. The teachers I studied introduced a broader set of ideas in their perceptions of civic actions and attitudes, ideas that were often rooted in their personal civic experiences and in the civic experiences of their students. Their views demand re-evaluation within the field of civic education of both what it means to be a citizen and what kinds of learning opportunities inspire meaningful participation in public life so that civic education can speak powerfully to the attitudes, beliefs and experiences of all young people.

While my survey included scaled items meant to measure the extent to which teachers' views skewed toward personally responsible, participatory, justice-oriented, conventional, or social movement models of citizenship, results indicated that respondents consistently rejected binaries and, when given the chance to provide their own definitions of citizenship, cobbled together more organic and fluid views on the subject than any of the models allowed. These views stressed the need for informed action on social problems, the need to develop independent opinions without succumbing to pundits' sound bites, and a sense of interdependence that connected individuals across lines of difference - all of which speak to a need for civic education grounded in critical social analysis rather than mere instruction about the three branches of government. Similarly, analysis of my three focus teachers and their classrooms indicated the complex ways that personal experiences contribute to the development of civic beliefs and attitudes, and the ways that classroom practices and interactions can move fluidly between invoking various models of citizenship, from deliberative models aimed at achieving inclusion and consensus to more radical ones highlighting difference and confrontation.

The complex views that the teachers in my study held about literacy and citizenship were important in my study precisely because of the ways that I hypothesized that these views would

manifest themselves in their classroom practice, thereby influencing the literate and civic identity development of their students. One of the most important themes that emerged from this study was the idea that literacy practices specific to the discipline of English Language Arts, from instruction in vocabulary and grammar to literary response and essay writing, could serve as civic learning opportunities; that is, civic education was not a separate or extra responsibility that English teachers took on, but something that was intrinsic to their discipline and that makes high school English classes uniquely powerful sites of civic learning. I argue through this study that civic education is not the province of history teachers alone, but squarely within the purview of English teachers as well. As the group of educators with the most responsibility for students' literacy development, English teachers have the greatest levels of opportunity and responsibility for making connections between literacy and civic life.

My focus teachers' classrooms provided myriad examples of literacy practices imbued with civic significance – activities that encouraged students to think about the ways that literacy was related to larger social issues and to use their literacy skills to contribute to these discussions. Vocabulary lessons in Ms. Nieto's class became opportunities for dialogue about the power dynamics involved in defining academic language and the ways that the linguistic repertoires of minority communities were often marginalized in public life. Business letters became opportunities to lobby state officials on issues ranging from the juvenile justice system to police brutality. Creative writing in Ms. Brown's class became a means by which students could analyze personal experiences of marginalization and discrimination and develop the skills needed to raise their voices and share their stories with broader audiences. And autobiographical essays in Mr. Prado's class were re-positioned as counter-stories in which students spoke back to

stereotypes about their communities and asserted themselves as individuals with agency and power.

In addition to re-casting traditional literacy activities as instances of civic learning, my focus teachers also integrated more innovative literacy practices into their classrooms that were grounded in critical literacy theory and that explicitly sought to connect language to analysis of social critique and struggle for social justice. Ms. Nieto incorporated cultural data sets, from hip-hop songs to films to television shows, into her instruction in order to make her instruction more culturally relevant, highlight the literary merits of popular culture forms of expression, and tackle social problems relevant to her students' lives, from violence to drugs to racism. Ms. Brown took literacy learning out of the classroom and into the community by organizing field trips aimed at helping students gain access to dominant codes of power, encouraging them to analyze the norms and routines at private businesses, City Hall, and community non-profit organizations. And Mr. Prado worked to re-envision his school's community service requirement for seniors into youth participatory action research projects in which students conducted ethnographies of their communities in order to challenge stereotypes. All three teachers embraced the idea of literacy as a means of both individual and collective empowerment – the idea that literacy is not only important for personal success in college and career, but also for educating and uplifting entire communities through analyzing societal power structures and articulating hopes and ideas for a more just future.

My focus teachers seem to be at the vanguard of the field of English education in terms of their use of critical literacy practices. My survey results indicated that respondents largely did not integrate pop culture and new media analysis/production in their classroom practice, and that they very rarely engaged their students in civic learning opportunities like simulations,

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community action projects or field trips. These results speak to the need for professional development that gives teachers strategies for both re-conceptualizing traditional literacy activities as instances of civic learning and incorporating new methods into their repertoires.

Nevertheless, one classroom practice emerged in the classrooms of both my survey respondents and my focus teachers as a particularly popular and powerful way for English teachers to engage students in civic learning; namely, discussions about controversial social issues. Survey respondents indicated that they used discussion in their classrooms more often than any other teaching strategy, including lectures and group projects, and discussions occurred so frequently in my focus teachers' classrooms that I devoted an entire chapter to describing and analyzing them. Discussions are considered a best practice of civic education because of their utility in helping students learn and formulate evidence-based opinions about issues that they will consider as adult citizens, but I argue in my study that they also serve as formative experiences for young people's civic identity development and allow students to translate their personal experiences in society into broader civic beliefs and attitudes.

Survey respondents indicated that their discussions with students often touched on an entire range of social issues, from crime and war to education and jobs, both at local and national levels, and that these discussions frequently ventured into the thorny territory of racism and discrimination. The situation was the same in my focus teachers' classrooms, and the deeper analysis that I was able to do in those settings revealed that these discussions were often rooted in students' personal experiences and in response to the study of imaginative texts. Clearly, fiction and non-fiction texts maintain a privileged place in the English classroom, and my study revealed the unique role that they can play in fostering civic dialogue.

Teachers in my survey indicated that they engaged students in the study of fiction more often than in almost any other literacy activity, and when given the opportunity to describe the topics of discussion in their classrooms, explained that they were frequently linked to literary texts. For instance, teachers referenced the themes of revenge in Poe's *The Cask of Amontillado* in discussions about crime, or the plot of Steinbeck's *The Pearl* to issues of immigration. Similarly, my focus teachers drew themes from texts like *Our America, Night,* and *The Kite Runner* to inspire discussions about issues ranging from oppression and resistance to stereotypes and crime. I argue that imaginative texts, defined as texts that resonate beyond their stated denotations and encourage exploration of broader social issues, are invaluable tools for civic identity development because their creative form invites students to identify with characters and themes and see their personal experiences in a broader social context. Students have the license and agency with such texts to imagine alternative forms of society, suggest new ways of interactions between citizens, and hope for a more just future. Clearly, many discussions occur about texts in English classrooms that do not rise to the level of engagement with social issues; however, I argue that discussions represent instances of civic dialogue when they: 1. Encourage students to identify themselves as members of local, state or national communities of citizens; 2. Engage with complex issues of public concern that involve multiple possible viewpoints; and 3. Include processes for deliberating that foster collaboration and mutual respect across lines of difference.

My analysis of classroom discussions led me to another major theme that runs across my entire study – the idea that classroom practices are influenced not only by the personal civic identities that individuals bring to the room, but also by the school, community, and broader social contexts in which those practices are situated. In keeping with socio-cultural views of

learning, I hypothesized that the race and class backgrounds of students, the policies and cultures of the schools they attended, and the broader issues facing the society in which they lived would all impact the literacy and civic lessons that they received in their classrooms; and indeed, I found evidence for these claims in my data.

During my ethnographic classroom observations, I found that the ways in which students are positioned in society in terms of their race and class identities is central to understanding their developing civic identities. During class discussions, as well as other literacy activities, students continually turned to experiences that were based on their identities as members of low-income communities of color in order to construct opinions about social issues. They recalled negative encounters with police as they talked about racial profiling, or described the constant threat of violence in their communities as they thought about the reasons for social reproduction. In many cases, their racial identities (and the instances of marginalization in society that came with them) forced them to grapple with the paradoxical experiences of being people of color in a democratic society characterized by systemic inequality. While this tension could have led to civic disengagement or alienation, the exemplary teachers in my study found ways to channel students' conflicting feelings into civically engaging literacy activities like the ones described above. Instead of ignoring or downplaying students' racial identities in order to foster their civic identities, these teachers found ways to powerfully draw connections between the two.

Interestingly, my survey results indicated that respondents teaching in low-income and high-minority schools across the country, similar to those I analyzed in my ethnographic work, were more likely that those teaching in high-income and low-minority schools to espouse critical beliefs about literacy and citizenship oriented toward analyzing power relations in society and pursuing social justice. It is impossible to generalize from my ethnographic work and my small

survey sample about these findings, but they do raise interesting questions about the extent to which teachers' beliefs and classroom practices are influenced by what they see happening to the students and in the communities where they teach. They speak to the importance of context in the development of civic identity and the designing of literacy learning opportunities, as well as the ways that prevailing political ideologies in communities may shape teacher practice.

Because context appears so important to classroom practice, I argue that it is essential for teachers to have opportunities to join professional communities of inquiry that allow them to ask questions and reflect upon the complex contexts in which they teach. While traditional professional development models involve the transmission of set strategies or pieces of knowledge to teachers across sometimes wildly different situations, teacher inquiry allows questions to emerge from the classroom and encourages teachers to research and experiment with strategies aimed at making instruction work better for all of their students. Dialogue between teachers permits the sharing of resources and situates teachers as professionals, intellectuals, and leaders in their disciplines rather than mere conduits of standardized content knowledge. In order to establish democratic relationships in classrooms between teachers and students, in which all members of the community are included in ongoing, productive communication about shared interests, relationships must first be established between adult colleagues within schools through the purposeful construction of respectful, supportive learning environments.

Often, however, such dialogue reveals enduring tensions between teachers' goals for critical civic and literacy pedagogy and the policies and norms that structure life in schools. My survey results revealed that teachers in high-minority and low-income schools spend substantially more class time on test preparation than their counterparts in low-minority and

high-income schools, and they report that the pressures to move quickly through curriculum and prepare for these tests prevents them from engaging in activities like classroom discussion as much as they would prefer. Similarly, my focus teachers pointed to tests as barriers to the implementation of their preferred pedagogies, as well as grading and school accountability policies. Their dialogue pointed to the inherent contradictions in establishing authentic classroom communities geared toward meaningful democratic participation within a system structured by arbitrary letter grading and the required participation in standardized assessments, thereby raising important questions for the field about the gaps between the outcomes we desire for students and the means that we are currently using to achieve those outcomes. These questions are particularly crucial to address in urban school districts serving large numbers of low-income students of color since they are most affected by the sanctions of the test-based accountability movement and are serving students from communities that have been academically and civically under-served and marginalized for too long.

It is to these questions that I now turn as I seek to offer some of the implications of my study for policy, practice and theory in the fields of literacy and civic education.

Study Implications

Policy

One step toward imbuing literacy education with a stronger civic purpose and connecting students' reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills to the ability to participate effectively in democratic society is a thorough re-evaluation of the explicit and implicit goals expressed in policy documents about literacy and civic education. In many cases, explicit language exists that touts the relationship between literacy and democracy; for instance, the Common Core standards mention (albeit briefly) the need for citizens to possess strong literacy skills. Unfortunately,

however, these goals are often contradicted by the implementation of policies that present mandates for curriculum and assessment, strip schools and teachers of decision-making power, and impose sanctions that reduce social and educational equity. These policies suggest implicit goals for literacy education far more oriented toward free-market economic competitiveness than the flourishing of democratic life.

Bringing educational policy in line with a more socially just and democratic vision requires several major changes. First, testing must be utilized judiciously as a means of providing teachers with data to inform their instruction rather than as an ultimate measure of student learning and teacher success. The teachers in my study indicated that testing negatively impacted their ability to implement civic learning opportunities and other forms of instruction into their classes, and that the frenzy caused by looming sanctions forced them to spend many days and weeks on test preparation rather than meaningful literacy practices. In addition to reducing the stakes of standardized tests, the field would be improved by the development of formative, performance-based assessments that allow students to demonstrate growth and mastery of skills through engagement in authentic activities. Such a change would elevate examples of civic learning like the letters that Ms. Nieto's students wrote to the governor or the field trips that Ms. Brown's students took to City Hall as respected and encouraged forms of assessment. Importantly, these assessments would have to be carefully designed to ensure that they promote dialogue that is specifically civic in nature (as I defined above in my description of classroom discussions) as opposed to simply allowing students to participate in non-school spaces.

Considering the rich learning that emerged from the teacher reflection groups in my study, I advocate for the development of professional development communities that prioritize practitioner inquiry. Such communities of practice encourage dialogue between teachers and

situate them as public intellectuals and instructional leaders. Basing professional development in problems of practice within teachers' classrooms instead of offering one-size-fits-all prescriptions honors the complexity of the classroom environment and supports democratic relationships within the school building between administrators and teachers and between teachers and students.

Policymakers in both literacy and civic education should also support the creation of learning environments that integrate digital technology, social media, and popular culture into instruction in order to respond to the changing means of communication in 21st century life. The teachers who responded to my survey indicated infrequent use of these tools, which robs students of opportunities to take advantage of the new forms of personal expression and civic engagement made available by the digital world. Similar measures would have to be taken to ensure that the use of digital technology was related to civic learning opportunities rather than simply the acquisition of a set of technological skills.

Finally, civic education policy should re-focus its attention on teachers across all subject areas rather than maintaining a strict allegiance to history teachers alone. Civic education standards and curriculum are often situated with history departments, sending the message that all other teachers do not share responsibility for providing students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to participate in public life. The teachers in my study provided strong evidence that the discipline of English language arts is uniquely positioned to explore the democratic power of language and literacy, and they need support to take the field in that direction. A broadened perspective on civic education across subject areas necessitates commitment to the development of authentic civic learning opportunities rather than the mere transmission of facts about history and government, and policies should support initiatives that help connect classrooms to the

communities in which they are situated to increase potential for communication and the development of partnerships (i.e. senior portfolios with civic components).

Practice

My study indicated that teachers' personal, educational, and civic experiences contributed to the development of their teaching philosophies and the ways they conceptualized both the purposes of the literacy and the qualities of citizenship that they wanted their students to adopt. These findings suggest that much more attention should be paid during pre-service teacher education programs to the articulation and analysis of teacher candidates' personal and social identities. Apprentice teachers should be given opportunities to reflect on the experiences and attitudes that they bring to the classroom and to develop goals for their instruction that go beyond success on standardized assessments. They should also be guided to develop relationships with members of the communities in which they will be teaching. I found that each of my focus teachers tailored their instruction to maximize the resources that students' communities offered, which engaged students and contributed to making their pedagogy more civic-oriented.

English teachers in particular need instruction that helps them understand the role that language and literacy has played historically in both maintaining institutional and social inequality and also in struggling for justice and freedom. My focus teachers developed sophisticated social and cultural analyses through powerful educational experiences in fields like ethnic studies and critical theory, and exposing all teachers to such experiences has to potential to encourage reflection that can influence teachers' philosophies and pedagogies. English teachers also need guidance in transforming traditional literacy practices into civic learning opportunities and integrating innovative activities into their professional repertoires. While the

Common Core standards urge English teachers to place more emphasis on instruction based upon non-fiction texts, the unique and powerful role of imaginative texts in fostering civic learning and dialogue demands that English teachers find ways to continue to privilege them in their classrooms.

Teachers also need opportunities to learn how to take on identities as reflective practitioners – they need guidance about how to approach their classrooms as researchers and how to utilize teacher inquiry groups to dialogue about what they observe and gain strategies to improve their instruction. My focus teachers appreciated the opportunities that our reflection groups provided for them to reflect upon enduring tensions like grading, testing, and accountability policies and to develop strategies to mitigate these barriers in order to provide their students with critical and empowering literacy education. Teachers can benefit from working in collaborative teams in order to integrate more civic learning opportunities into their classes.

Theory

My study has aimed to build grounded theory about critical civic literacy pedagogy by connecting literature from the fields of democratic education, civic identity, and critical literacy and applying them in unique ways to the study of urban high school English classrooms. While theorists of democratic education often focus (and rightly so) on decision-making processes in schools and classrooms and on engaging students in community activities, I am attempting to infuse analysis of how discipline-specific instructional practices can be recast as civic learning opportunities as well. And conversely, while critical literacy has made a strong theoretical case for the connection between literacy and social justice, my work has sought to translate this theory

into practice by analyzing how exemplary teachers build units and lessons and activities that help students to analyze language in order to analyze their world.

My study has also contributed to advances in the study of civic identity development by focusing not only on survey measures, which are the standard in the field, but also on ethnographic analysis and qualitative interviews in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of how individuals understand and interpret their roles and agency in civic life. I have built upon the work of psychologists studying socio-political development by trying to tease apart the ways that personal, community, classroom, and institutional discourses interact to influence civic identity. Overall, I have found that theories of democracy and literacy have always been inextricably linked – my goal was to make these connections transparent and apply them to everyday classroom practice to show that democracy is constantly being negotiated in the daily interactions of teachers and students around literacy content.

Study Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The design for this study was limited in a variety of ways, each of which speak to the need for further research. In terms of the online survey, I had a small sample size that made it impossible for me to make more than the most cautious of conclusions about my findings; in addition, the sample was comprised of a self-selected population of high school English teachers who already belonged to an online professional development community and volunteered to take a survey about their practices. While the responses from this sample produced fascinating data and offered an evocative portrait of a slice of the high school English teaching population, they were necessarily limited in scope and in applicability to the national teacher population. Furthermore, a lack of valid and reliable survey items about teacher civic attitudes and beliefs

forced me to adapt items originally designed for use with students; indeed, surveys geared toward eliciting the views of English teachers in general were sorely lacking.

These limitations suggest several opportunities for future research that would be of value to the field. A survey of a larger, representative sample of high school English teachers from across the country, one possibly designed under the auspices of national content area associations like NCTE or the International Reading Association (IRA), would provide a much more in-depth and compelling portrait of the state of the discipline today. Such a study would be able to clarify the extent to which meaningful differences exist between teachers in terms of how they view the purposes of English Language Arts based on a variety of factors, from the race and class composition of their schools to their own race and class backgrounds to their years of experience or school organizational structures. A more comprehensive survey would also provide greater clarity about the content areas and teaching strategies most prevalent in English classrooms across the country, as well as the barriers that teachers perceive to achieving their pedagogical goals; in turn, this information could be used to inform adolescent literacy policy, teacher education programs, and professional development.

My ethnographic work was limited by time constraints that affected the extent to which I could immerse myself in each teacher's classroom. Because of the length of time necessary to complete my study proposal and achieve human subjects clearance from the Los Angeles Unified School District, my classroom observations did not begin until March 2011; as a result, I was not able to witness and document the processes through which the teachers established classroom cultures and began to communicate their pedagogical goals to their students. I entered classrooms in which routines and norms had been set long before my arrival, which prevented me from providing data about the early stages of building democratic classroom environments,

and from making any claims about student civic identity development over the course of a school year. In addition, I only observed one class taught by each of my focus teachers, which prevented me from analyzing the ways that particular class periods manifest their own unique communities and take up similar subject matter or teaching strategies in different ways. Finally, I was not able to observe students or teachers for significant amounts of time outside of the classroom space (either in other subject area classes or after school hours) to observe other opportunities for literacy and/or civic learning.

As a result, I envision further ethnographic studies that examine the development of critical civic literacy pedagogies in urban high school English classrooms over entire school years and across multiple class periods; in fact, it would be useful to document what these pedagogies would look like in suburban and rural settings as well in order to document the influence of those social contexts on the classroom space. Considering the fact that classroom discussion emerged as a particularly powerful classroom practice in my study, and that imaginative texts played such crucial roles in these discussions, future studies could illuminate in more depth the ways that response to literature manifests itself as a form of civic learning. Ethnographic studies that followed students throughout their school days (and beyond) and documented the different discourses about citizenship that they encountered in different class periods and in various school, home and community spaces would also provide valuable insight about the influences on youth civic identity development. Since students' identities as low-income students of color played such central roles in their civic experiences and attitudes, further exploration of the ways that individual students from specific racial backgrounds experienced literacy and civic learning opportunities would further contribute to socio-cultural understandings of learning and identity development.

Finally, my study lacked sophisticated analysis of the school organizational structures and cultures in which teachers worked, as well as sufficient exploration of teacher inquiry groups. While teacher dialogue in my reflection groups offered some insight into the ways that working in charters, small learning academies, and comprehensive high schools provided different opportunities and challenges when pursuing their pedagogical goals, I did not spend more time in faculty meetings and other teachers' classes in order to flesh out the ways that school policies and faculty and administrator interactions transmit discourses about literacy and citizenship. Also, time constraints prevented me from conducting a full cycle of teacher inquiry with my focus teachers and documenting the changes in identity, learning and pedagogy that would have taken place over a longer period of reflection and experimentation in the classroom.

Future studies might focus on a particular school setting to examine the discourses about literacy and citizenship that circulate throughout the building and provide civic learning lessons to students. Further exploration of teacher inquiry groups that focus on the civic dimensions of literacy pedagogy and that trace changes in teachers' learning and identity over time would provide evidence of how the learning process takes place in communities of practice. Such groups could involve multiple teachers from a single school or teachers from various schools in order to provide different perspectives on the influence of context on the development of practice.

Final Thoughts

> One's-Self I sing – a simple, separate Person;
> Yet utter the word Democratic, the word *En-masse*.

- "One's-Self I Sing" Walt Whitman
   (1900)

Walt Whitman's poetry reminds us of the central characteristic of democratic life – we are many, but we are one. Our lives are our own, but they are also weaved into those of countless

others we know well or have never met. Public institutions constantly navigate the tension between securing the individual and the collective good, but it seems recently that the pendulum of public schooling has swung too far toward a focus on individual success that is defined as primarily economic in nature. Standardized, one-size-fits-all models of curriculum and pedagogy ignore students' membership in various communities, including those of geography, race and class, as well as the funds of knowledge contained in those communities, and demand individual performance on high-stakes exams that correspond to individual success in higher education and the job market. The language of education policy today is one of competitiveness rather than one of collaboration, and the individuals on the privileged side of entrenched, systemic inequalities of race and class consistently emerge as the victors in this zero-sum game.

But what if we change the conversation, and, like Whitman, 'utter the word Democratic'? I stand on the shoulders of generations of educators and poets and theorists and researchers who see education, and literacy education in particular, as a revolutionary activity that breaks down structures of inequality and lifts up communities both discursively and in practice, constantly striving toward a future in which democracy is fully realized and the individual and collective good co-exist harmoniously. Language is at its essence a tool of communication, a tool that takes us from being individuals to being part of a collective; as a result, literacy classes have the power to help students, particularly from marginalized backgrounds, find their voice and demand a place at the civic table. When students are engaging with texts in English classes led by powerful, critical educators, they are communicating with the wider society through the common medium of language and trying on civic identities, developing the skills and agency needed to bypass the divisive rhetoric that often characterizes public discourse and truly connect with their fellow citizens to tackle some of the most pressing issues facing our society in the 21st century.

In an address to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference on August 16, 1967, Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "Let us realize the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice." I hope that my research can contribute to the development of more critical and democratic classroom spaces in which students from marginalized communities use language to empower themselves and those around them to take civic action and move us ever closer toward that just future.

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